

M. BUTTERFLY

ACT ONE

SCENE I

M. Gallimard's prison cell. Paris, 1988.

Lights fade up to reveal Rene Gallimard, 65, in a prison cell. He wears a comfortable bathrobe, and looks old and tired. The sparsely furnished cell contains a wooden crate upon which sits a hot plate with a kettle, and a portable tape recorder. Gallimard sits on the crate staring at the recorder, a sad smile on his face.

Upstage Song, who appears as a beautiful woman in traditional Chinese garb, dances a traditional piece from the Peking Opera, surrounded by the percussive clatter of Chinese music.

Then, slowly, lights and sound cross-fade; the Chinese opera music dissolves into a Western opera, the "Love Duet" from Puccini's Madame Butterfly. Song continues dancing, now to the Western accompaniment. Though her movements are the same, the difference in music now gives them a balletic quality.*

Gallimard rises, and turns U.S. towards the figure of Song, who dances without acknowledging him.

GALLIMARD. Butterfly, Butterfly . . . (He forces himself to turn away, as the image of Song fades out, and talks to us.) The limits of my cell are as such: four-and-a-half meters by five. There's one window against the far wall; a door, very strong, to protect me from autograph hounds. I'm responsible for

* See Special Note on Copyright page

the tape recorder, the hot plate, and this charming coffee table.

When I want to eat, I'm marched off to the dining room — hot, steaming slop appears on my plate. When I want to sleep, the light bulb turns itself off — the work of fairies. It's an enchanted space I occupy. The French — we know how to run a prison.

But, to be honest, I'm not treated like an ordinary prisoner. Why? Because I'm a celebrity. You see, I make people laugh.

I never dreamed this day would arrive. I've never been considered witty or clever. In fact, as a young boy, in an informal poll among my grammar school classmates, I was voted "least likely to be invited to a party." It's a title I managed to hold onto for many years. Despite some stiff competition.

But now, how the tables turn! Look at me: the life of every social function in Paris. Paris? Why be modest? My fame has spread to Amsterdam, London, New York. Listen to them! In the world's smartest parlors. I'm the one who lifts their spirits! (*With a flourish, Gallimard directs our attention to another part of the stage.*)

SCENE 2

A party. 1988.

Lights go up on a chic-looking parlor, where a well-dressed trio, two men and one woman, make conversation. Gallimard also remains lit; he observes them from his cell.

WOMAN. And what of Gallimard?

MAN 1. Gallimard?

MAN 2. Gallimard!

GALLIMARD. (*To us.*) You see? They're all determined to say my name, as if it were some new dance.

WOMAN. He still claims not to believe the truth.

MAN 1. What? Still? Even since the trial?

WOMAN. Yes. Isn't it mad?

MAN 2. (*Laughing.*) He says . . . it was dark . . . and she was very modest! (*The trio break into laughter.*)

MAN 1. So — what? He never touched her with his hands?

MAN 2. Perhaps he did, and simply misidentified the equipment. A compelling case for sex education in the schools.

WOMAN. To protect the National Security — the Church can't argue with that.

MAN 1. That's impossible! How could he not know?

MAN 2. Simple ignorance.

MAN 1. For twenty years?

MAN 2. Time flies when you're being stupid.

WOMAN. Well, I thought the French were ladies' men.

MAN 2. It seems Monsieur Gallimard was overly anxious to live up to his national reputation.

WOMAN. Well, he's not very good-looking.

MAN 1. No, he's not.

MAN 2. Certainly not.

WOMAN. Actually, I feel sorry for him.

MAN 2. A toast! To Monsieur Gallimard!

WOMAN. Yes! to Gallimard!

MAN 1. To Gallimard!

MAN 2. Vive la différence! (*They toast, laughing. Lights down on them.*)

SCENE 3

M. Gallimard's cell.

GALLIMARD. (*Smiling.*) You see? They toast me. I've become patron saint of the socially inept. Can they really be so foolish? Men like that — they should be scratching at my door, begging to learn my secrets! For I, Rene Gallimard, you see, I have known, and been loved by . . . the Perfect Woman.

Alone in this cell, I sit night after night, watching our story play through my head, always searching for a new ending, one which redeems my honor, where she returns at last to my arms. And I imagine you — my ideal audience — who come

to understand and even, perhaps just a little, to envy me. (*He turns on his tape recorder. Over the house speakers, we hear the opening phrases of Madame Butterfly.*) In order for you to understand what I did and why, I must introduce you to my favorite opera: *Madame Butterfly*. By Giacomo Puccini. First produced at La Scala, Milan, in 1904, it is now beloved throughout the Western world. (*As Gallimard describes the opera, the tape segues in and out to sections he may be describing.*) And why not? Its heroine, Cio-Cio-San, also known as Butterfly, is a feminine ideal, beautiful and brave. And its hero, the man for whom she gives up everything, is — (*He pulls out a naval officer's cap from under his crate, pops it on his head, and struts about.*) — not very good-looking, not too bright, and pretty much a wimp: Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton of the U.S. Navy. As the curtain rises, he's just closed on two great bargains: one on a house, the other on a woman — call it a package deal.

Pinkerton purchased the rights to *Butterfly* for one hundred yen — in modern currency, equivalent to about . . . sixty-six cents. So, he's feeling pretty pleased with himself as Sharpless, the American consul, arrives to witness the marriage. (*Marc, wearing an official cap to designate Sharpless, Enters and plays the character.*)

SHARPLESS/MARC. Pinkerton!

PINKERTON/GALLIMARD. Sharpless! How's it hangin'? It's a great day, just great. Between my house, my wife, and the rickshaw ride in from town, I've saved nineteen cents just this morning.

SHARPLESS. Wonderful. I can see the inscription on your tombstone already: "I saved a dollar, here I lie." (*He looks around.*) Nice house.

PINKERTON. It's artistic. Artistic, don't you think? Like the way the shoji screens slide open to reveal the wet bar and disco mirror ball? Classy, huh? Great for impressing the chicks.

SHARPLESS. "Chicks"? Pinkerton, you're going to be a married man!

PINKERTON. Well, sort of.

SHARPLESS. What do you mean?

PINKERTON. This country — Sharpless, it is okay. You got all these geisha girls running around —

SHARPLESS. I know! I live here!

PINKERTON. Then, you know the marriage laws, right? I split for one month, it's annulled!

SHARPLESS. Leave it to you to read the fine print. Who's the lucky girl?

PINKERTON. Cio-Cio-San. Her friends call her *Butterfly*. Sharpless, she eats out of my hand!

SHARPLESS. She's probably very hungry.

PINKERTON. Not like American girls. It's true what they say about Oriental girls. They want to be treated bad!

SHARPLESS. Oh, please!

PINKERTON. It's true!

SHARPLESS. Are you serious about this girl?

PINKERTON. I'm marrying her, aren't I?

SHARPLESS. Yes — with generous trade-in terms.

PINKERTON. When I leave, she'll know what it's like to have loved a real man. And I'll even buy her a few nylons.

SHARPLESS. You aren't planning to take her with you?

PINKERTON. Huh? Where?

SHARPLESS. Home!

PINKERTON. You mean, America? Are you crazy? Can you see her trying to buy rice in St. Louis?

SHARPLESS. So, you're not serious. (*Pause.*)

PINKERTON/GALLIMARD. (*as Pinkerton*) Consul, I am a sailor in port. (*As Gallimard.*) They then proceed to sing the famous duet, "The Whole World Over." (*The duet plays on the speakers. Gallimard, as Pinkerton, lip-syncs his lines from the opera.*) To give a rough translation: "The whole world over, the Yankee travels, casting his anchor wherever he wants. Life's not worth living unless he can win the hearts of the fairest maidens, then hotfoot it off the premises ASAP." (*He turns towards Marc.*) In the preceding scene, I played Pinkerton, the womanizing cad, and my friend Marc from school . . . (*Marc bows grandly for our benefit.*) played Sharpless, the sensitive soul of reason. In life, however, our positions were usually — no, always — reversed.

SCENE 4

Ecole Nationale, Aix-en-Provence. 1947.

GALLIMARD. No, Marc, I think I'd rather stay home.

MARC. Are you crazy?! We are going to Dad's condo in Marseille! You know what happened last time?

GALLIMARD. Of course I do.

MARC. Of course you don't! You never know . . . They stripped, Rene!

GALLIMARD. Who stripped?

MARC. The girls!

GALLIMARD. Girls? Who said anything about girls?

MARC. Rene, we're a buncha university guys goin' up to the woods. What are we gonna do—talk philosophy?

GALLIMARD. What girls? Where do you get them?

MARC. Who cares? The point is, they come. On trucks. Packed in like sardines. The back flips open, babes hop out, we're ready to roll.

GALLIMARD. You mean, they just—?

MARC. Before you know it, every last one of them—they're stripped and splashing around my pool. There's no moon out, they can't see what's going on, their boobs are flapping, right? You close your eyes, reach out—it's grab bag, get it? Doesn't matter whose ass is between whose legs, whose teeth are sinking into who. You're just in there, going at it, eyes closed, on and on for as long as you can stand. *(Pause.)* Some fun, huh?

GALLIMARD. What happens in the morning?

MARC. In the morning, you're ready to talk some philosophy. *(Beat.)* So how 'bout it?

GALLIMARD. Marc, I can't . . . I'm afraid they'll say no—the girls. So I never ask.

MARC. You don't have to ask! That's the beauty—don't you see? They don't have to say yes. It's perfect for a guy like you, really.

GALLIMARD. You go ahead . . . I may come later.

MARC. Hey, Rene—it doesn't matter that you're clumsy and got zits—they're not looking!

GALLIMARD. Thank you very much.

MARC. Wimp. *(Marc walks over to the other side of the stage, and starts waving and smiling at women in the audience.)*

GALLIMARD. *(To us.)* We now return to my version of *Madame Butterfly* and the events leading to my recent conviction for treason. *(Gallimard notices Marc making lewd gestures.)* Marc, what are you doing?

MARC. Huh? *(Sotto voce.)* Rene, there're a lotta great babes out there. They're probably lookin' at me and thinking, "What a dangerous guy."

GALLIMARD. Yes—how could they help but be impressed by your cool sophistication? *(Gallimard pops the Sharpless cap on Marc's head, and points him offstage, Marc Exits, leering.)*

SCENE 5

M. Gallimard's cell.

GALLIMARD. Next, Butterfly makes her entrance. We learn her age—fifteen . . . but very mature for her years. *(Lights come up on the area where we saw Song dancing at the top of the play. She appears there again, now dressed as Madame Butterfly, moving to the "Love Duet." Gallimard turns u.s. slightly to watch, transfixed.)* But as she glides past him, beautiful, laughing softly behind her fan, don't we who are men sigh with hope? We, who are not handsome, nor brave, nor powerful, yet somehow believe, like Pinkerton, that we deserve a Butterfly. She arrives with all her possessions in the folds of her sleeves, lays them all out, for her man to do with as he pleases. Even her life itself—she bows her head as she whispers that she's not even worth the hundred yen he paid for her. He's already given too much, when we know he's really had to give nothing at all. *(Music and lights on Song out. Gallimard sits at his crate.)* In real life, women who put their total worth at less than sixty-six cents are quite hard to find. The closest we come is in the pages of these magazines. *(He reaches into his crate, pulls out a stack of girlie magazines, and begins flipping through them.)* Quite a necessity in prison. For three or four dollars, you get seven or eight women.

I first discovered these magazines at my uncle's house. One day, as a boy of twelve. The first time I saw them in his closet . . . all lined up—my body shook. Not with lust—no, with power. Here were women—a shelfful—who would do exactly as I wanted. (*The "Love Duet" creeps in over the speakers. Special comes up, revealing, not Song this time, but a pinup girl in a sexy negligee, her back to us. Gallimard turns U.S. and looks at her.*)

GIRL. I know you're watching me.

GALLIMARD. My throat . . . it's dry.

GIRL. I leave my blinds open every night before I go to bed.

GALLIMARD. I can't move.

GIRL. I leave my blinds open and the lights on.

GALLIMARD. I'm shaking. My skin is hot, but my penis is soft. Why?

GIRL. I stand in front of the window.

GALLIMARD. What is she going to do?

GIRL. I toss my hair, and I let my lips part . . . barely.

GALLIMARD. I shouldn't be seeing this. It's so dirty. I'm so bad.

GIRL. Then, slowly, I lift off my nightdress.

GALLIMARD. Oh, god. I can't believe it. I can't—

GIRL. I toss it to the ground.

GALLIMARD. Now, she's going to walk away. She's going to—

GIRL. I stand there, in the light, displaying myself.

GALLIMARD. No. She's—why is she naked?

GIRL. To you.

GALLIMARD. In front of a window? This is wrong. No—

GIRL. Without shame.

GALLIMARD. No, she must . . . like it.

GIRL. I like it.

GALLIMARD. She . . . she wants me to see.

GIRL. I want you to see.

GALLIMARD. I can't believe it! She's getting excited!

GIRL. I can't see you. You can do whatever you want.

GALLIMARD. I can't do a thing. Why?

GIRL. What would you like me to do . . . next? (*Lights go down on her. Music off. Silence, as Gallimard puts away his magazines. Then he resumes talking to us.*)

GALLIMARD. Act Two begins with Butterfly staring at the ocean. Pinkerton's been called back to the U.S., and he's given his wife a detailed schedule of his plans. In the column marked "return date," he's written "when the robins nest." This failed to ignite her suspicions. Now, three years have passed without a peep from him. Which brings a response from her faithful servant, Suzuki. (*Comrade Chin enters, playing Suzuki.*)

SUZUKI. Girl, he's a loser. What'd he ever give you? Nineteen cents and those ugly Day-Glo stockings? Look, it's finished! Kaput! Done! And you should be glad! I mean, the guy was a woofer! He tried before, you know—before he met you, he went down to geisha central and plunked down his spare change in front of the usual candidates—everyone else gagged! These are hungry prostitutes, and they were not interested, get the picture? Now, stop slathering when an American ship sails in, and let's make some bucks—I mean, yen! We are broke!

Now, what about Yamadori? Hey, hey—don't look away—the man is a prince—figuratively, and, what's even better, literally. He's rich, he's handsome, he says he'll die if you don't marry him—and he's even willing to overlook the little fact that you've been deflowered all over the place by a foreign devil. What do you mean, "But he's Japanese?" What do you think you are? You think you've been touched by the whitey god? He was a sailor with dirty hands! (*Suzuki stalks offstage.*)

GALLIMARD. She's also visited by Consul Sharpless, sent by Pinkerton on a minor errand. (*Marc enters, as Sharpless.*)

SHARPLESS. I hate this job.

GALLIMARD. This Pinkerton—he doesn't show up personally to tell his wife he's abandoning her. No, he sends a government diplomat . . . at taxpayer's expense.

SHARPLESS. Butterfly? Butterfly? I have some bad—I'm going to be ill. Butterfly, I came to tell you—

GALLIMARD. Butterfly says she knows he'll return and if he doesn't she'll kill herself rather than go back to her own people. (*Beat.*) This causes a lull in the conversation.

SHARPLESS. Let's put it this way . . .

GALLIMARD. Butterfly runs into the next room, and re-

turns holding — (*Sound cue: a baby crying. Sharpless, "seeing" this, backs away.*)

SHARPLESS. Well, good. Happy to see things going so well. I suppose I'll be going now. Ta ta. Ciao. (*He turns away. Sound cue out.*) I hate this job. (*He exits.*)

GALLIMARD. At that moment, Butterfly spots in the harbor an American ship — the *Abramo Lincoln*! (*Music cue: "The Flower Duet." Song, still dressed as Butterfly, changes into a wedding kimono, moving to the music.*) This is the moment that redeems her years of waiting. With Suzuki's help, they cover the room with flowers — (*Chin, as Suzuki, trudges onstage and drops a lone flower without much enthusiasm.*) — and she changes into her wedding dress to prepare for Pinkerton's arrival. (*Suzuki helps Butterfly change. Helga Enters, and helps Gallimard change into a tuxedo.*) I married a woman older than myself — Helga.

HELGA. My father was ambassador to Australia. I grew up among criminals and kangaroos.

GALLIMARD. Hearing that brought me to the altar — (*Helga exits.*) — where I took a vow renouncing love. No fantasy woman would ever want me, so, yes, I would settle for a quick leap up the career ladder. Passion, I banish, and in its place — practicality!

But my vows had long since lost their charm by the time we arrived in China. The sad truth is that all men want a beautiful woman, and the uglier the man, the greater the want. (*Suzuki makes final adjustments of Butterfly's costume, as does Gallimard of his tuxedo.*) I married late, at age thirty-one. I was faithful to my marriage for eight years. Until the day when, as a junior-level diplomat in puritanical Peking, in a parlor at the German ambassador's house, during the "Reign of a Hundred Flowers," I first saw her . . . singing the death scene from *Madame Butterfly*. (*Suzuki runs offstage.*)

SCENE 6

*German ambassador's house. Beijing. 1960.
The U.S. special area now becomes a stage. Several chairs face U.S., representing seating for some twenty*

guests in the parlor. A few "diplomats" — Renee, Marc, Toulon — in formal dress Enter and take seats.

Gallimard also sits down, but turns towards us and continues to talk. Orchestral accompaniment on the tape is now replaced by a simple piano. Song picks up the death scene from the point where Butterfly uncovers the hara-kiri knife.

GALLIMARD. The ending is pitiful. Pinkerton, in an act of great courage, stays home and sends his American wife to pick up Butterfly's child. The truth, long deferred, has come up to her door. (*Song, playing Butterfly, sings the lines from the opera in her own voice — which, though not classical, should be decent.*)

SONG. "Con onor muore/ chi non puo serbar/ vita con onore."

GALLIMARD. (*Simultaneously.*) "Death with honor/ Is better than life/ Life with dishonor." (*The stage is illuminated; we are now completely within an elegant diplomat's residence. Song proceeds to play out an abbreviated death scene. Everyone in the room applauds. Song, shyly, takes her bows. Others in the room rush to congratulate her. Gallimard remains with us.*) They say in opera the voice is everything. That's probably why I'd never before enjoyed opera. Here . . . here was a Butterfly with little or no voice — but she had the grace, the delicacy . . . I believed this girl. I believed her suffering. I wanted to take her in my arms — so delicate, even I could protect her, take her home, pamper her until she smiled. (*Over the course of the preceding speech, Song has broken from the U.S. crowd and moved directly upstage of Gallimard.*)

SONG. Excuse me. Monsieur . . . ? (*Gallimard turns U.S., shocked.*)

GALLIMARD. Oh! Gallimard. Mademoiselle . . . ? A beautiful . . .

SONG. Song Liling.

GALLIMARD. A beautiful performance.

SONG. Oh, please.

GALLIMARD. I usually —

SONG. You make me blush. I'm no opera singer at all.

GALLIMARD. I usually don't like *Butterfly*.

SONG. I can't blame you in the least.

GALLIMARD. I mean, the story —

SONG. Ridiculous.

GALLIMARD. I like the story, but . . . what?

SONG. Oh, you like it?

GALLIMARD. I . . . what I mean is, I've always seen it played by huge women in so much bad makeup.

SONG. Bad makeup is not unique to the West.

GALLIMARD. But, who can believe them!

SONG. And you believe me?

GALLIMARD. Absolutely. You were utterly convincing. It's the first time —

SONG. Convincing? As a Japanese woman? The Japanese used hundreds of our people for medical experiments during the war, you know. But I gather such an irony is lost on you.

GALLIMARD. No! I was about to say, it's the first time I've seen the beauty of the story.

SONG. Really?

GALLIMARD. Of her death. It's a . . . a pure sacrifice. He's unworthy, but what can she do? She loves him . . . so much. It's a very beautiful story.

SONG. Well, yes, to a Westerner.

GALLIMARD. Excuse me?

SONG. It's one of your favorite fantasies, isn't it? the submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man.

GALLIMARD. Well, I didn't quite mean . . .

SONG. Consider it this way: what would you say if a blonde homecoming queen fell in love with a short Japanese businessman? He treats her cruelly, then goes home for three years, during which time she prays to his picture and turns down marriage from a young Kennedy. Then, when she learns he has remarried, she kills herself. Now, I believe you would consider this girl to be a deranged idiot, correct? But because it's an Oriental who kills herself for a Westerner — ah! — you find it beautiful. (*Silence.*)

GALLIMARD. Yes . . . well . . . I see your point . . .

SONG. I will never do *Butterfly* again, Monsieur Gallimard. If you wish to see some real theatre, come to the Peking

Opera sometime. Expand your mind. (*Song walks offstage. Other guests exit with her.*)

GALLIMARD. (*To us.*) So much for protecting her in my big Western arms.

SCENE 7

M. Gallimard's apartment. Beijing. 1960.

Gallimard changes from his tux into a casual suit. Helga Enters.

GALLIMARD. The Chinese are an incredibly arrogant people.

HELGA. They warned us about that in Paris, remember?

GALLIMARD. Even Parisians consider them arrogant. That's a switch.

HELGA. What is it that Madame Su says? "We are a very old civilization." I never know if she's talking about her country or herself.

GALLIMARD. I walk around here, all I hear every day, everywhere is how *old* this culture is. The fact that "old" may be synonymous with "senile" doesn't occur to them.

HELGA. You're not going to change them. "East is east, west is west, and . . ." whatever that guy said.

GALLIMARD. It's just that — silly. I met . . . at Ambassador Koenig's tonight — you should've been there.

HELGA. Koenig? Oh god, no. Did he enchant you all again with the history of Bavaria?

GALLIMARD. No. I met, I suppose, the Chinese equivalent of a diva. She's a singer in the Chinese opera.

HELGA. They have an opera, too? Do they sing in Chinese? Or maybe — in Italian?

GALLIMARD. Tonight, she did sing in Italian.

HELGA. How'd she manage that?

GALLIMARD. She must've been educated in the West before the Revolution. Her French is very good also. Anyway, she sang the death scene from *Madame Butterfly*.

HELGA. *Madame Butterfly*! Then I should have come. (*She*

begins humming, floating around the room as if dragging long kimono sleeves.) Did she have a nice costume? I think it's a classic piece of music.

GALLIMARD. That's what *I* thought, too. Don't let her hear you say that.

HELGA. What's wrong?

GALLIMARD. Evidently the Chinese hate it.

HELGA. She hated it, but she performed it anyway? Is she perverse?

GALLIMARD. They hate it because the white man gets the girl. Sour grapes if you ask me.

HELGA. Politics again? Why can't they just hear it as a piece of beautiful music? So, what's in their opera?

GALLIMARD. I don't know. But, whatever it is, I'm sure it must be *old*. (*Helga exits.*)

SCENE 8

*Chinese opera house and the streets of Beijing. 1960.
The sound of gongs clanging fills the stage.*

GALLIMARD. My wife's innocent question kept ringing in my ears. I asked around, but no one knew anything about the Chinese opera. It took four weeks, but my curiosity overcame my cowardice. This Chinese diva—this unwilling Butterfly—what did she do to make her so proud?

The room was hot, and full of smoke. Wrinkled faces, old women, teeth missing—a man with a growth on his neck, like a human toad. All smiling, pipes falling from their mouths, cracking nuts between their teeth, a live chicken pecking at my foot—all looking, screaming, gawking . . . at her. (*The U.S. area is suddenly hit with a harsh white light. It has become the stage for the Chinese opera performance. Two dancers enter, along with Song. Gallimard stands apart, watching. Song glides gracefully amidst the two dancers. Drums suddenly slam to a halt. Song strikes a pose, looking straight at Gallimard. Dancers exit. Light change. Pause, then Song walks right off the stage and straight up to Gallimard.*)

SONG. Yes. You. White man. I'm looking straight at you.

GALLIMARD. Me?

SONG. You see any other white men? It was too easy to spot you. How often does a man in my audience come in a tie?

(*Song starts to remove her costume. Underneath, she wears simple baggy clothes. They are now backstage. The show is over.*) So, you

are an adventurous imperialist?

GALLIMARD. I . . . thought it would further my education.

SONG. It took you four weeks. Why?

GALLIMARD. I've been busy.

SONG. Well, education has always been undervalued in the West, hasn't it?

GALLIMARD. (*Laughing.*) I don't think that's true.

SONG. No, you wouldn't. You're a Westerner. How can you objectively judge your own values?

GALLIMARD. I think it's possible to achieve some distance.

SONG. Do you? (*Pause.*) It stinks in here. Let's go.

GALLIMARD. These are the smells of your loyal fans.

SONG. I love them for being my fans, I hate the smell they leave behind. I too can distance myself from my people. (*She looks around, then whispers in his ear.*) "Art for the masses" is a shitty excuse to keep artists poor. (*She pops a cigarette in her mouth.*) Be a gentleman, will you? And light my cigarette. (*Gallimard fumbles for a match.*)

GALLIMARD. I don't . . . smoke.

SONG. (*Lighting her own.*) Your loss. Had you lit my cigarette, I might have blown a puff of smoke right between your eyes. Come. (*They start to walk about the stage. It is a summer night on the Beijing streets. Sounds of the city play on the house speakers.*) How I wish there were even a tiny cafe to sit in. With cappuccinos, and men in tuxedos and bad expatriate jazz.

GALLIMARD. If my history serves me correctly, you weren't even allowed into the clubs in Shanghai before the Revolution.

SONG. Your history serves you poorly, Monsieur Gallimard. True, there were signs reading "No dogs and Chinamen." But a woman, especially a delicate Oriental woman—we always go where we please. Could you imagine it

otherwise? Clubs in China filled with pasty, big-thighed white women, while thousands of slender lotus blossoms wait just outside the door? Never. The clubs would be empty. (*Beat.*) We have always held a certain fascination for you Caucasian men, have we not?

GALLIMARD. But . . . that fascination is imperialist, or so you tell me.

SONG. Do you believe everything I tell you? Yes. It is always imperialist. But sometimes . . . sometimes, it is also mutual. Oh — this is my flat.

GALLIMARD. I didn't even —

SONG. Thank you. Come another time and we will further expand your mind. (*Song exits. Gallimard continues roaming the streets as he speaks to us.*)

GALLIMARD. What was that? What did she mean, "Sometimes . . . it is mutual"? Women do not flirt with me. And I normally can't talk to them. But tonight, I held up my end of the conversation.

SCENE 9

Gallimard's bedroom. Beijing. 1960.

Helga Enters.

HELGA. You didn't tell me you'd be home late.

GALLIMARD. I didn't intend to. Something came up.

HELGA. Oh? Like what?

GALLIMARD. I went to the . . . to the Dutch ambassador's home.

HELGA. Again?

GALLIMARD. There was a reception for a visiting scholar. He's writing a six-volume treatise on the Chinese revolution. We all gathered that meant he'd have to live here long enough to actually write six volumes, and we all expressed our deepest sympathies.

HELGA. Well, I had a good night too. I went with the ladies to a martial arts demonstration. Some of those men — when they break those thick boards — (*She mimes fanning herself.*) whoo-whooh! (*Helga exits. Lights dim.*)

GALLIMARD. I lied to my wife. Why? I've never had any reason to lie before. But what reason did I have tonight? I didn't do anything wrong. That night, I had a dream. Other people, I've been told, have dreams where angels appear. Or dragons, or Sophia Loren in a towel. In my dream, Marc from school appeared. (*Marc enters, in a nightshirt and cap.*)

MARC. Renel! You met a girl! (*Gallimard and Marc stumble down the Beijing streets. Night sounds over the speakers.*)

GALLIMARD. It's not that amazing, thank you.

MARC. No! It's so monumental, I heard about it halfway around the world in my sleep!

GALLIMARD. I've met girls before, you know.

MARC. Name one. I've come across time and space to congratulate you. (*He hands Gallimard a bottle of wine.*)

GALLIMARD. Marc, this is expensive.

MARC. On those rare occasions when you become a formless spirit, why not steal the best? (*Marc pops open the bottle, begins to share it with Gallimard.*)

GALLIMARD. You embarrass me. She . . . there's no reason to think she likes me.

MARC. "Sometimes, it is mutual"?

GALLIMARD. Oh.

MARC. "Mutual"? "Mutual"? What does that mean?

GALLIMARD. You heard?

MARC. It means the money is in the bank, you only have to write the check!

GALLIMARD. I am a married man!

MARC. And an excellent one too. I cheated after . . . six months. Then again and again, until now — three hundred girls in twelve years.

GALLIMARD. I don't think we should hold that up as a model.

MARC. Of course not! My life — it is disgusting! Phooey! Phooey! But, you — you are the model husband.

GALLIMARD. Anyway, it's impossible. I'm a foreigner.

MARC. Ah, yes. She cannot love you, it is taboo, but something deep inside her heart . . . she cannot help herself . . . she must surrender to you. It is her destiny.

GALLIMARD. How do you imagine all this?

MARC. The same way you do. It's an old story. It's in our

blood. They fear us, Rene. Their women fear us. And their men — their men hate us. And, you know something? They are all correct. (*They spot a light in a window.*) There! There, Rene!

GALLIMARD. It's her window.

MARC. Late at night — it burns. The light — it burns for you.

GALLIMARD. I won't look. It's not respectful.

MARC. We don't have to be respectful. We're foreign devils. (*Enter Song, in a sheer robe. The "One Fine Day" aria creeps in over the speakers. With her back to us, Song mimes attending to her toilette. Her robe comes loose, revealing her white shoulders.*) All your life you've waited for a beautiful girl who would lay down for you. All your life you've smiled like a saint when it's happened to every other man you know. And you see them in magazines and you see them in movies. And you wonder, what's wrong with me? Will anyone beautiful ever want me? As the years pass, your hair thins and you struggle to hold onto even your hopes. Stop struggling, Rene. The wait is over. (*He exits.*)

GALLIMARD. Marc? Marc? (*At that moment, Song, her back still towards us, drops her robe. A second of her naked back, then a sound cue: a phone ringing, very loud. Blackout, followed in the next beat by a special up on the bedroom area, where a phone now sits. Gallimard stumbles across the stage and picks up the phone. Sound cue out. Over the course of his conversation, area lights fill in the vicinity of his bed. It is the following morning.*) Yes? Hello?

SONG. (*Offstage.*) Is it very early?

GALLIMARD. Why, yes.

SONG. (*Offstage.*) How early?

GALLIMARD. It's . . . it's 5:30. Why are you —?

SONG. (*Offstage.*) But it's light outside. Already.

GALLIMARD. It is. The sun must be in confusion today. (*Over the course of Song's next speech, her upstage special comes up again. She sits in a chair, legs crossed, in a robe, telephone to her ear.*)

SONG. I waited until I saw the sun. That was as much discipline as I could manage for one night. Do you forgive me?

GALLIMARD. Of course . . . for what?

SONG. Then I'll ask you quickly. Are you really interested in the opera?

GALLIMARD. Why, yes. Yes I am.

SONG. Then come again next Thursday. I am playing *The Drunken Beauty*. May I count on you?

GALLIMARD. Yes. You may.

SONG. Perfect. Well, I must be getting to bed. I'm exhausted. It's been a very long night for me. (*Song hangs up; special on her goes off. Gallimard begins to dress for work.*)

SCENE 10

Song Liling's apartment. Beijing. 1960

GALLIMARD. I returned to the opera that next week, and the week after that . . . she keeps our meetings so short — perhaps fifteen, twenty minutes at most. So I am left each week with a thirst which is intensified. In this way, fifteen weeks have gone by. I am starting to doubt the words of my friend Marc. But no, not really. In my heart, I know she has . . . an interest in me. I suspect this is her way. She is outwardly bold and outspoken, yet her heart is shy and afraid. It is the Oriental in her at war with her Western education.

SONG. (*Offstage.*) I will be out in an instant. Ask the servant for anything you want.

GALLIMARD. Tonight, I have finally been invited to enter her apartment. Though the idea is almost beyond belief, I believe she is afraid of me. (*Gallimard looks around the room. He picks up a picture in a frame, studies it. Without his noticing, Song Enters, dressed elegantly in a black gown from the twenties. She stands in the doorway looking like Anna May Wong.*)

SONG. That is my father.

GALLIMARD. (*Surprised.*) Mademoiselle Song . . . (*She glides up to him, snatches away the picture.*)

SONG. It is very good that he did not live to see the Revolution. They would, no doubt, have made him kneel on broken

GALLIMARD. I like you the way you are right now.
SONG. You are a cad.

GALLIMARD. What do you expect? I'm a foreign devil.
(*Gallimard walks D.S. Song exits. To us.*) Did you hear the way she talked about Western women? Much differently than the first night. She does—she feels inferior to them—and to me.

SCENE 11

The French embassy. Beijing. 1960.
Gallimard moves towards a desk.

GALLIMARD. I determined to try an experiment. In *Madame Butterfly*, Cio-Cio-San fears that the Western man who catches a butterfly will pierce its heart with a needle, then leave it to perish. I began to wonder: had I too, caught a butterfly who would writhe on a needle? (*Marc enters, dressed as a bureaucrat, holding a stack of papers. As Gallimard speaks, Marc hands papers to him. He peruses, then signs, stamps or rejects them.*) Over the next five weeks, I worked like a dynamo. I stopped going to the opera, I didn't phone or write her. I knew this little flower was waiting for me to call, and, as I wickedly refused to do so, I felt for the first time that rush of power—the absolute power of a man. (*Marc continues acting as the bureaucrat, but he now speaks as himself.*)

MARC. Rene! It's me!

GALLIMARD. Marc—I hear your voice everywhere now. Even in the midst of work.

MARC. That's because I'm watching you—all the time.

GALLIMARD. You were always the most popular guy in school.

MARC. Well, there's no guarantee of failure in life like happiness in high school. Somehow I knew I'd end up in the suburbs working for Renault and you'd be in the Orient picking exotic women off the trees. And they say there's no justice.

GALLIMARD. That's why you were my friend?

MARC. I gave you a little of my life, so that now you can give me some of yours. (*Pause.*) Remember Isabelle?

GALLIMARD. Of course I remember! She was my first experience.

MARC. We all wanted to ball her. But she only wanted me.

GALLIMARD. I had her.

MARC. Right. You balled her.

GALLIMARD. You were the only one who ever believed me.

MARC. Well, there's a good reason for that. (*Beat.*) C'mon. You must've guessed.

GALLIMARD. You told me to wait in the bushes by the cafeteria that night. The next thing I knew, she was on me. Dress up in the air.

MARC. She never wore underwear.

GALLIMARD. My arms were pinned to the dirt.

MARC. She loved the superior position. A girl ahead of her time.

GALLIMARD. I looked up, and there was this woman . . . bouncing up and down on my loins.

MARC. Screaming, right?

GALLIMARD. Screaming, and breaking off the branches all around me, and pounding my butt up and down into the dirt.

MARC. Huffing and puffing like a locomotive.

GALLIMARD. And in the middle of all this, the leaves were getting into my mouth, my legs were losing circulation, I thought, "God. So this is it?"

MARC. You thought that?

GALLIMARD. Well, I was worried about my legs falling off.

MARC. You didn't have a good time?

GALLIMARD. No, that's not what I—I had a great time!

MARC. You're sure?

GALLIMARD. Yeah. Really.

MARC. 'Cuz I wanted you to have a good time.

GALLIMARD. I did. (*Pause.*)

MARC. Shit. (*Pause.*) When all is said and done, she was kind of a lousy lay, wasn't she? I mean, there was a lot of energy there, but you never knew what she was doing with it. Like

when she yelled "I'm coming!" — hell, it was so loud, you wanted to go "Look, it's not that big a deal."

GALLIMARD. I got scared. I thought she meant someone was actually coming. (*Pause.*) But, Marc?

MARC. What?

GALLIMARD. Thanks.

MARC. Oh, don't mention it.

GALLIMARD. It was my first experience.

MARC. Yeah. You got her.

GALLIMARD. I got her.

MARC. Wait! Look at that letter again! (*Gallimard picks up one of the papers he's been stamping, and rereads it.*)

GALLIMARD. (*To us.*) After six weeks, they began to arrive. The letters. (*Upstage special on Song, as Madame Butterfly. The scene is underscored by the "Love Duet."*)

SONG. Did we fight? I do not know. Is the opera no longer of interest to you? Please come — my audiences miss the white devil in their midst. (*Gallimard looks up from the letter, towards us.*)

GALLIMARD. (*To us.*) A concession, but much too dignified. (*Beat; he discards the letter.*) I skipped the opera again that week to complete a position paper on trade. (*The bureaucrat hands him another letter.*)

SONG. Six weeks have passed since last we met. Is this your practice — to leave friends in the lurch? Sometimes I hate you, sometimes I hate myself, but always I miss you.

GALLIMARD. (*To us.*) Better, but I don't like the way she calls me "friend." When a woman calls a man her "friend," she's calling him a eunuch or a homosexual. (*Beat; he discards the letter.*) I was absent from the opera for the seventh week, feeling a sudden urge to clean out my files. (*Bureaucrat hands him another letter.*)

SONG. Your rudeness is beyond belief. I don't deserve this cruelty. Don't bother to call. I'll have you turned away at the door.

GALLIMARD. (*To us.*) I didn't. (*He discards the letter; bureaucrat hands him another.*) And then finally, the letter that concluded my experiment.

SONG. I am out of words, I can hide behind dignity no longer. What do you want? I have already given you my

shame. (*Gallimard gives the letter back to Marc, slowly. Special on Song fades out.*)

GALLIMARD. (*To us.*) Reading it, I became suddenly ashamed. Yes, my experiment had been a success. She was turning on my needle. But the victory seemed hollow.

MARC. Hollow?! Are you crazy?

GALLIMARD. Nothing, Marc. Please go away.

MARC. (*Exiting, with papers.*) Haven't I taught you anything?

GALLIMARD. "I have already given you my shame." I had to attend a reception that evening. On the way, I felt sick. If there is a God, surely he would punish me now. I had finally gained power over a beautiful woman, only to abuse it cruelly. There must be justice in the world. I had the strange feeling that the ax would fall this very evening.

SCENE 12

Ambassador Toulon's residence. Beijing. 1960.

Sound cue: party noises. Light change. We are now in a spacious residence. Toulon, the French ambassador, Enters and taps Gallimard on the shoulder.

TOULON. Gallimard? Can I have a word? Over here.

GALLIMARD. (*To us.*) Manuel Toulon. French ambassador to China. He likes to think of us all as his children. Rather like God.

TOULON. Look, Gallimard, there's not much to say. I've liked you. From the day you walked in. You were no leader, but you were tidy and efficient.

GALLIMARD. Thank you, sir.

TOULON. Don't jump the gun. Okay, our needs in China are changing. It's embarrassing that we lost Indochina. Someone just wasn't on the ball there. I don't mean you personally, of course.

GALLIMARD. Thank you, sir.

TOULON. We're going to be doing a lot more information-gathering in the future. The nature of our work here is changing. Some people are just going to have to go. It's nothing personal.

GALLIMARD. Oh.
TOULON. Want to know a secret? Vice-Consul LeBon is being transferred.

GALLIMARD. (*To us.*) My immediate superior!

TOULON. And most of his department.

GALLIMARD. (*To us.*) Just as I feared! God has seen my evil heart —

TOULON. But not you.

GALLIMARD. (*To us.*) —and he's taking her away just as . . . (*To Toulon.*) Excuse me, sir?

TOULON. Scare you? I think I did. Cheer up, Gallimard. I want you to replace LeBon as vice-consul.

GALLIMARD. You —? Yes, well, thank you, sir.

TOULON. Anytime.

GALLIMARD. I . . . accept with great humility.

TOULON. Humility won't be part of the job. You're going to coordinate the revamped intelligence division. Want to know a secret? A year ago, you would've been out. But the past few months, I don't know how it happened, you've become this new aggressive confident . . . thing. And they also tell me you get along with the Chinese. So I think you're a lucky man, Gallimard. Congratulations. (*They shake hands. Toulon exits. Party noises out. Gallimard stumbles across a darkened stage.*)

GALLIMARD. Vice-consul? Impossible! As I stumbled out of the party, I saw it written across the sky: There is no God. Or, no — say that there is a God. But that God . . . understands. Of course! God who creates Eve to serve Adam, who blesses Solomon with his harem but ties Jezebel to a burning bed — that God is a man. And he understands! At age thirty-nine, I was suddenly initiated into the way of the world.

SCENE 13

Song Liling's apartment. Beijing. 1960.

Song Enters, in a sheer dressing gown.

SONG. Are you crazy?

GALLIMARD. Mademoiselle Song —

SONG. To come here — at this hour? After . . . after eight weeks?

GALLIMARD. It's the most amazing —

SONG. You bang on my door? Scare my servants, scandalize the neighbors?

GALLIMARD. I've been promoted. To vice-consul. (*Pause.*)

SONG. And what is that supposed to mean to me?

GALLIMARD. Are you my Butterfly?

SONG. What are you saying?

GALLIMARD. I've come tonight for an answer: are you my Butterfly?

SONG. Don't you know already?

GALLIMARD. I want you to say it.

SONG. I don't want to say it.

GALLIMARD. So, that is your answer?

SONG. You know how I feel about —

GALLIMARD. I do remember one thing.

SONG. What?

GALLIMARD. In the letter I received today.

SONG. Don't.

GALLIMARD. "I have already given you my shame."

SONG. It's enough that I even wrote it.

GALLIMARD. Well, then —

SONG. I shouldn't have it splashed across my face.

GALLIMARD. —if that's all true —

SONG. Stop!

GALLIMARD. Then what is one more short answer?

SONG. I don't want to!

GALLIMARD. Are you my Butterfly? (*Silence; he crosses the room and begins to touch her hair.*) I want from you honesty. There should be nothing false between us. No false pride. (*Pause.*)

SONG. Yes, I am. I am your Butterfly.

GALLIMARD. Then let me be honest with you. It is because of you that I was promoted tonight. You have changed my life forever. My little Butterfly, there should be no more secrets: I love you. (*He starts to kiss her roughly. She resists slightly.*)

SONG. No . . . no . . . gently . . . please, I've never . . .

GALLIMARD. No?

SONG. I've tried to appear experienced, but . . . the truth is . . . no.

GALLIMARD. Are you cold?

SONG. Yes. Cold.

GALLIMARD. Then we will go very, very slowly. *(He starts to caress her; her gown begins to open.)*

SONG. No . . . let me . . . keep my clothes . . .

GALLIMARD. But . . .

SONG. Please . . . it all frightens me. I'm a modest Chinese girl.

GALLIMARD. My poor little treasure.

SONG. I am your treasure. Though inexperienced, I am not . . . ignorant. They teach us things, our mothers, about pleasing a man.

GALLIMARD. Yes?

SONG. I'll do my best to make you happy. Turn off the lights. *(Gallimard gets up and heads for a lamp. Song, propped up on one elbow, tosses her hair back and smiles.)*

SONG. Monsieur Gallimard?

GALLIMARD. Yes, Butterfly?

SONG. "Vieni, vieni!"

GALLIMARD. "Come, darling."

SONG. "Ah! Dolce notte!"

GALLIMARD. "Beautiful night."

SONG. "Tutto estatico d'amor ride il ciell"

GALLIMARD. "All ecstatic with love, the heavens are filled with laughter." *(He turns off the lamp. Blackout.)*

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

*M. Gallimard's cell. Paris, 1988.
Lights up on Gallimard. He sits in his cell, reading from a leaflet.*

GALLIMARD. This, from a contemporary critic's commentary on *Madame Butterfly*: "Pinkerton suffers from . . . being an obnoxious bounder whom every man in the audience itches to kick." Bully for us men in the audience! Then, in the same note: "Butterfly is the most irresistibly appealing of Puccini's 'Little Women.' Watching the succession of her humiliations is like watching a child under torture." *(He tosses the pamphlet over his shoulder.)* I suggest that, while we men may all want to kick Pinkerton, very few of us would pass up the opportunity to be Pinkerton. *(Gallimard moves out of his cell.)*

SCENE 2

*Gallimard and Butterfly's flat. Beijing. 1960.
We are in a simple but well-decorated parlor. Gallimard moves to sit on a sofa, while Song, dressed in a chong sam, Enters and curls up at his feet.*

GALLIMARD. *(To us.)* We secured a flat on the outskirts of Peking. Butterfly, as I was calling her now, decorated our "home" with Western furniture and Chinese antiques. And there, on a few stolen afternoons or evenings each week, Butterfly commenced her education.

SONG. The Chinese men — they keep us down.

GALLIMARD. Even in the "New Society"?

SONG. In the "New Society," we are all kept ignorant equally. That's one of the exciting things about loving a

Western man. I know you are not threatened by a woman's education.

GALLIMARD. I'm no saint, Butterfly.

SONG. But you come from a progressive society.

GALLIMARD. We're not always reminding each other how "old" we are, if that's what you mean.

SONG. Exactly. We Chinese — once, I suppose, it is true, we ruled the world. But so what? How much more exciting to be part of the society ruling the world today. Tell me — what's happening in Vietnam?

GALLIMARD. Oh, Butterfly — you want me to bring my work home?

SONG. I want to know what you know. To be impressed by my man. It's not the particulars so much as the fact that you're making decisions which change the shape of the world.

GALLIMARD. Not the world. At best, a small corner. (*Toulon enters.*)

SCENE 3

French embassy. Beijing. 1961.

Gallimard moves D.S., to Toulon. Song remains U.S., watching.

TOULON. And a more troublesome corner is hard to imagine.

GALLIMARD. So, the Americans plan to begin bombing?

TOULON. This is very secret, Gallimard: yes. The Americans don't have an embassy here. They're asking us to be their eyes and ears. Say Jack Kennedy signed an order to bomb North Vietnam, Laos. How would the Chinese react?

GALLIMARD. I think the Chinese will squawk —

TOULON. Uh-huh.

GALLIMARD. — but, in their hearts, they don't even like Ho Chi Minh. (*Pause.*)

TOULON. What a bunch of jerks. Vietnam was *our* colony. Not only didn't the Americans help us fight to keep them,

but now, seven years later, they've come back to grab the territory for themselves. It's very irritating.

GALLIMARD. With all due respect, sir, why should the Americans have won our war for us back in '54 if we didn't have the will to win it ourselves?

TOULON. You're kidding, aren't you? (*Pause.*)

GALLIMARD. The Orientals simply want to be associated with whoever shows the most strength and power. You live with the Chinese, sir. Do you think they like Communism?

TOULON. I live in China. Not with the Chinese.

GALLIMARD. Well, I —

TOULON. *You* live with the Chinese.

GALLIMARD. Excuse me?

TOULON. I can't keep a secret.

GALLIMARD. What are you saying?

TOULON. Only that I'm not immune to gossip. So, you're keeping a native mistress? Don't answer. It's none of my business. (*Pause.*) I'm sure she must be gorgeous.

GALLIMARD. Well . . .

TOULON. I'm impressed. You had the stamina to go out into the streets and hunt one down. Some of us have to be content with the wives of the expatriate community.

GALLIMARD. I do feel . . . fortunate.

TOULON. So, Gallimard, you've got the inside knowledge — what *do* the Chinese think?

GALLIMARD. Deep down, they miss the old days. You know, cappuccinos, men in tuxedos —

TOULON. So what do we tell the Americans about Vietnam?

GALLIMARD. Tell them there's a natural affinity between the West and the Orient.

TOULON. And that you speak from experience?

GALLIMARD. The Orientals are people too. They want the good things we can give them. If the Americans demonstrate the will to win, the Vietnamese will welcome them into a mutually beneficial union.

TOULON. I don't see how the Vietnamese can stand up to American firepower.

GALLIMARD. Orientals will always submit to a greater force.