

# THE STORY

## Act I

### Rome, June 17, 1800 Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle

Cesare Angelotti, an escaped political prisoner, enters the church and hides in his family chapel. A painter, Mario Cavaradossi, comes in to work on his portrait of Mary Magdalene, inspired by a woman he'd observed praying in church the day before—Angelotti's sister, the Marchesa Attavanti. While an old Sacristan performs his duties cleaning the church, Cavaradossi compares the blonde Magdalene he is painting to the raven beauty of the woman he loves, the singer Floria Tosca.

When the Sacristan leaves, Angelotti emerges from hiding and asks for Cavaradossi's help. They are interrupted by the entrance of Tosca, who has come to see her love. Cavaradossi conceals Angelotti's presence from Tosca out of fears the pious Tosca may tell her Catholic confessor about Angelotti's escape. Cavaradossi also attempts to calm Tosca's jealousy of the blond Magdalene he has painted. With her departure the two men begin to make a plan, only to hear a cannon shot—a signal that Angelotti's escape has been discovered. They flee to hide Angelotti at Cavaradossi's villa.

The Sacristan and the acolytes enter, excited about late-breaking news of their triumph and Napoleon's defeat. Baron Scarpia, chief of police, enters, having tracked Angelotti to the church. Tosca returns to find her lover gone. Scarpia sows seeds of jealousy in Tosca, suggesting that her lover is having an affair with the Marchesa. Tosca rushes out to find the painter before her anticipated performance that evening. Scarpia sends his minions to follow her, hoping that Tosca will lead them to Cavaradossi and Angelotti. He anticipates punishing the rebels and enjoying Tosca for himself. A joyful crowd fills the church to celebrate Napoleon's defeat.

## INTERMISSION

### Act II

#### Farnese Palace, Scarpia's headquarters

At dinner, Scarpia awaits Tosca. When his men bring in Cavaradossi, Scarpia interrogates the painter about Angelotti's whereabouts. He gets nowhere and sends him off to the torture chamber adjacent to his office. Tosca appears after her evening's performance, and Scarpia makes her listen to Cavaradossi's torture. She can't bear it and tells Scarpia where Angelotti is hiding. Scarpia's men rush off to capture Angelotti. A message arrives, correcting the earlier news: Napoleon has won, not lost, at Marengo. Cavaradossi, weakened by torture, explodes with a defiant cry of victory, praising the Republic and the people's hero. His words are treason, and Scarpia has him dragged off to prison.

Tosca is left to bargain with Scarpia for her lover's life. Scarpia suggests that he will exchange Cavaradossi's life for a moment of Tosca's love. Tosca fights him off and prays to God for help. But, eventually, she yields to Scarpia's demands in exchange for a mock execution and a safe-conduct pass for her and Cavaradossi. As he is writing the pass, Tosca's eyes light upon a dinner knife, and she figures out an alternative solution to her dilemma.

## INTERMISSION

## Act III

### Atop Castel Sant'Angelo

Before dawn Cavaradossi remembers a night of bliss in his garden with Tosca. Tosca arrives at the prison with the safe-conduct letter and tells Cavaradossi how she dealt with Scarpia. She explains to him that they must proceed with the farce of a fake execution, and she instructs Cavaradossi on how to fall and pretend to be dead. But when the soldiers come for the firing squad, Scarpia has the last laugh. With no other options, Tosca takes matters into her own hands, committing the ultimate act of defiance for love.

### Historical Footnote

In the years following the French Revolution, the liberal and irreligious First French Republic went to war against conservative Catholic empires and monarchies including Hapsburg Austria (who controlled what later became northern Italy) and the Kingdom of Naples (who controlled southern Italy, including the Papal States). Cavaradossi's liberal sympathies have earned him a police dossier and made him a person of interest to the authorities in Rome, ancient seat of the papacy.