

Noli Me Tangere: The Opera

Synopsis

ACT I

This is the town of San Diego (Calamba) at the turn of the century. Spain having been in the Philippines since the fifteen hundreds and the Spaniards are the social elites. A reception is given by **Kapitan Tiago** at his mansion in honor of **Crisostomo Ibarra**, a young and rich Filipino who had just returned after seven years of study in Europe. Ibarra is the only son of *Don Rafael*, a friend of Kapitan Tiago, the father of the beautiful **Maria Clara**, and the fiancée of Crisostomo Ibarra.

Among the guests at this reception are **Padre Damaso**, a Franciscan friar who had been parish priest of San Diego (Calamba), for 20 years. **Padre Salvi**, a young Dominican parish priest of Binondo; **Señor Guevarra**, an elderly and kind lieutenant of the Guardia Civil; **Don Tiburcio de Espanada**, a bogus Spanish physician, lame and henpecked husband of **Doña Victorina**, a vain and vulgar woman; and several ladies. In earlier conversations, it was learned that *Don Rafael* defended a helpless boy from the brutality of an illiterate Spanish tax collector. He was thrown in prison where he died. He was buried on consecrated ground, but his enemies, accusing him of being a heretic, had his body unearched. Ibarra and Maria Clara find some private time together, and she teasingly says that he has probably forgotten her because the girls in Europe are very beautiful. Ibarra replies that he has never forgotten her. Because the following day will be All Saints' Day, Maria Clara picks some flowers and asks Ibarra to lay them on his fathers' grave.

ACT II

Scene 1

Ibarra is at the San Diego Square on his way to visit his father's grave, he meets some gravediggers. They tell Ibarra that his father's corpse was removed upon the order of the parish priest to be reburied in the Chinese cemetery. The corpse was cumbersome, and because it was dark and rainy they decided to throw it into the lake. This anger's Ibarra, and he leaves. In the meantime, the **Gobernadorcillo** runs into **Pilosopo Tasio**, (the town's old wise man). Pilosopo Tasio warns the Gobernadorcillo of an impending storm, a metaphor for the soon-to-come disaster. The onset of thunder frightens the Gobernadorcillo who scurries away. Pilosopo Tasio then encounters the brothers **Crispin** and **Basilio**, children of **Sisa**, formerly affluent but whose circumstances has been reversed, after marrying a gambler and a loser. The brothers are hurrying home for vespers. The crack of a whip and the ensuing cries of the two kids are heard. Basilio is seen running for cover of darkness, whereupon a civil guard's shouting "who's there?" prompts him to flee. A gunshot stabs the air.

The following morning, Sisa, unable to sleep upon seeing a wounded Basilio return home, goes out in search for her younger son, Crispin. She is accosted by civil guards who demand the return of the money allegedly stolen by Crispin. The stress of these accusations and her life's circumstances are too much for Sisa, and she descends into madness. The guards decide to leave her alone.

The scene shifts and the spotlight is on Pilosopo Tasio with a quill pen in hand and an open book. He appears to be observing the people who are preparing the next day's town fiesta in honor of the patron saint San Diego de Alcala. Ibarra enters and engages the old man in conversation. He voices his desire to build a school to teach. He also deploras the inhuman treatment accorded his father, and while he wants justice, he also realizes the need for caution.

Scene 2

This is a picnic by the lake. **Kapitan Tiago, Maria Clara,** and **Aunt Isabel** (Kapitan Tiago's cousin who took care of Maria Clara after her mother's death) arrive. Ibarra and his friends are hosting the picnic. Also present at Maria Clara's friends: The merry **Sinang**, the grave **Victoria**, the beautiful **Iday** and the thoughtful **Neneng**. **Aunt Kapitana Tika** (mother of Sinang), **Andeng** (foster sister of Maria Clara) and **Albino**, the ex-theological student who is in love with Sinang. One of the boatmen is a strong and silent young man named **Elias**.

At this picnic, Maria Clara, on the insistent request of her friends, obliges with a song, "**Life is Sweet in One's Native Land**". But one dreadful incident mars the occasion. A crocodile suddenly pulls up from the lake, sending everyone in panic. Elias bravely grapples with the crocodile but cannot subdue it. Ibarra jumps into the water, kills the crocodile, saving Elias. The picnic goes, joined by the vice mayor **Don Filipino**, break out into a rousing triumphant song. Sisa appears, now completely mad, in tattered clothing, with sharp and darting looks. Ibarra shouts an order to have her fed.

Scene 3

At a sumptuous dinner under a decorated kiosk in **Kapitan Tiago's** house, attended by **Maria Clara, Don Filipino, the Alferéz**, lieutenant of the Guardia Civil, the town scribe, **Miguel Guevarra**, and **Padre Damaso** among others. An unexpected fracas flares up. The arrogant Padre Damaso, speaking in the presence of guests, insults the memory of Ibarra's father. Ibarra bolts out of his seat, grabs the friar by the neck, then seizes a sharp knife. He could have killed the friar, except for the timely intervention of Maria Clara. As a consequence, Ibarra is excommunicated.

ACT III

Scene 1

In her bedroom Maria Clara lies in bed ill. She is attended by her **Aunt Isabel**, her friend **Andeng, Kapitan Tiago** and **Sinang**. She is in tears because Padre Damaso wants her to break her engagement with Ibarra and marry **Linares**, a cousin of **Dr. de Espadana** instead. Enter **Padre Salvi**, (the Franciscan curate of San Diego), **Dr. De Espadana** and his wife **Dona Victorina**, Padre Damaso and Linares himself. Dr. de Espadana approaches Maria Clara, takes her pulse, and tells her she will be fine, and needs some rest. Padre Damaso also approaches Maria Clara intending to comfort her, and then turns to Linares to tell him that he will make sure he finds a suitable wife. Maria Clara sinks into deep despair and tells Sinang to inform Ibarra that it is best if he forgets her. Ibarra appears with great news informing them that the Archbishop may nullify his excommunication through the intercession of the Captain General. He also learns of the marital arrangement with Linares. To allay his fears, Kapitan Tiago makes light of the situation in song about the sacredness of marriage and that it should not be taken in jest. The merrymaking is jolted by sounds of gunfire and shouts of "mga tulisan!" (bandits). Singing by the revolutionaries follow, and soon voices demanding entrance to the house are heard. The Alferéz enters and arrests Ibarra on a vague charge. Ibarra is escorted away by two guards. After hearing gunshots, Maria Clara faints, thinking that Ibarra was killed.

Scene 2

In the same bedroom, Maria Clara is seen praying, asking God why love is being denied her. Padre Damaso enters, and upon seeing her, asks what is ailing her. She bares her distress on the marriage arrangement with Linares, to which the friar reacts upset with disbelief, telling her that the noble Linares is a thousand times superior to Ibarra. Maria Clara repudiates his arguments and tells Padre Damaso that with her true beloved dead, she has only two choices: death or life in a convent. Hearing her miserable and wretched, he is anguished and in agony begs God's forgiveness for his sins. ***It is revealed here that Padre Damaso and not Kapitan Tiago is Maria Clara's biological father. The truth about her parentage was contained in letters she recently discovered, from her mother, Pia Alba, to Padre Damaso, alluding to their unborn child.*** Left shortly by Padre Damaso, Maria Clara hears some noise and peers out the window. She is overjoyed to see Ibarra. Ibarra tells her that Elias helped him escape from prison and that he is now a fugitive. He expresses his profound regret over the situation and explains that it will be difficult for him to be with her again. That he does not desire to make life miserable for her. She tells him that it is already miserable having discovered the secret to her true parentage. They profess their undying love for each other, before Ibarra takes off. Gunshots are heard again, and Maria Clara collapses in despair.

Scene 3

It is night in the San Diego woods. The madwoman Sisa appears aghast and disheveled, running back and forth erratically. She then breaks out into an intense song of lamentation. Soon Basilio, her older son rushes haltingly into the woods calling out his mother's name. Sisa remains in a wild, impassive state not recognizing her son. She hides behind a slab of stone, that Basilio raps repeatedly. When his mother does not come out, the boy clambers up an adjoining tree where he is able to slide down into the spot where his mother lies. He hugs her tight and kisses her and drops unconscious from exhaustion. At the sight of her fallen and bloodied son, Sisa gains lucidity and wails over his body. Consciousness returns to Basilio who finds his mother dead. He gives voice to a haunting son of grief before weeping intensely.

It is now midnight, and the singing of a Christmas carol can be heard in the distance. When Basilio lifts his head he sees a seriously wounded Elias standing before him. He instructs Basilio to make a pyre on which his body and that of Sisa were to be burned. Thereafter to dig at a spot where he will unearth huge loads of treasures to use for his studies and to pursue his life's goals.

It is Christmas eve and the moon gleams softly in the sky. Basilio prepares the funeral pyre. As life breath slowly leaves his body, Elias looks toward the east and murmurs:

"I die without seeing the dawn brighten over my native land. You, who have to see it, welcome it! And forget not those who have fallen during the night".