

START **I**

(He looks around the room, confirming in an instant that TITO isn't there.)

MAX. (over the music) Maggie - !

MAGGIE. Shhh!

MAX. Did he call?!

MAGGIE. No. Now will you wait!

(MAX sighs. He looks at his watch. Then he notices MAGGIE's reaction to the music; she's swaying in rapture. The aria ends and MAGGIE falls backward)

RADIO ANNOUNCER. The magnificent voice of Tito Merelli, brought to you in honor of his live appearance this evening with the Cleveland Grand Opera Company-

(MAX turns off the radio.)

MAX. He wasn't on the train.

MAGGIE. Oh my God. He is so wonderful. When he does that last note, I almost can't breathe.

MAX. Maggie, he wasn't there!

(The phone rings. MAX grabs it.)

Hello?!...No, sir, I couldn't find him.

SAUNDERS. (through the phone) God dammit! Where the hell is he?!

MAX. (to MAGGIE) It's your father. (into the phone) I don't know! I looked everywhere. I asked the conductor. I had him paged. I - I - I'm sorry, I just -

(the sound of SAUNDERS hanging up)

Sir?...Sir? (MAX hangs up) He's gonna kill me.

MAGGIE. He will not. He'd have nobody to yell at. At least nobody who takes it the way you do.

MAX. Maggie, the man is two hours late! The rehearsal starts in ten minutes!

MAGGIE. He'll be here, Max. This is Tito Merelli. He's a genius. They just don't think like other people.

MAX. So what are you saying? He's a grown man and he can't tell time?

MAGGIE. I'm just not worried, okay? (pause) Oh, Max, think of it. Tonight. The curtain rises and he was onstage. And suddenly there's nothing else in world but that...that voice.

(pause)

MAX. I can sing too, you know.

MAGGIE. Oh, Max - (She laughs out loud.)

MAX. I can! What are you - "Oh, Max."

MAGGIE. You don't sing like Tito Merelli.

MAX. Not yet. Okay?

MAGGIE. You don't.

MAX. In your opinion. It's a matter of taste.

MAGGIE. It is not! I wish you wouldn't fool yourself. I a star, Max. He sings all over the world. He's in magazine!

MAX. So is Mussolini.

MAGGIE. And he's very sensitive.

MAX. How do you know that?

(Beat. She realizes she's caught.)

MAGGIE. (casually) Because I met him. Last year.

MAX. You did? You never told me that.

MAGGIE. It was no big thing. When I was in Italy - Daddy, we went to La Scala and he was in *Aida*. Afterwards we went backstage and...well, there he all by himself, behind the curtain. He was wearing sort of...loincloth and his whole body was pou with sweat. Anyway, he looked up and saw us and you know what he did, Max. He kissed my palms.

MAX. Yeah. So what?

MAGGIE. It was romantic.

MAX. He's Italian! They kiss everything!

MAGGIE. Fine, forget it.

MAX. Meatballs. Cheese. Cold cuts.

MAGGIE. Max -

STOP

2 Saunders and

charming.) Madam Chairman, how very kind of you to c - ...No. No, he hasn't quite arrived yet...Julia... Jul - ...Juli - ...Julia! Will you calm down!...What?... *(He sighs.)*...I see...Well, if I may, I will leave that decision in your capable hands. Right. Goodbye. *(He hangs up.)* It appears that the Opera Guild Collation Committee has decided to serve shrimp mayonnaise at the intermission, the refrigerator has broken down and the temperature backstage is a hundred degrees.

MAX. So what do we do?

SAUNDERS. We play it by ear. If the shrimp stays pink, the audience gets it. If it turns green, we feed it to the stagehands.

MAX. Shall I call the station?

SAUNDERS. No. I've changed my mind. I want the line open. *(to MAGGIE)* And I want you out of here.

MAGGIE. Why?

SAUNDERS. Because I said so.

MAGGIE. Daddy!

SAUNDERS. Max and I have some business to discuss.

MAGGIE. I won't say a word.

SAUNDERS. Out.

MAGGIE. I'll wait in the bedroom.

SAUNDERS. Wrong.

MAGGIE. But I want to see him! You said I could. You promised!

SAUNDERS. Well I lied, you nitwit! Now get out!

MAGGIE. Max thinks I should stay. Don't you, Max?

(pause)

MAX. I - I think he's right.

MAGGIE. I see.

SAUNDERS. Goodbye, my dear.

MAX. *(to MAGGIE)* I'm - I'm sorry.

Max

(MAGGIE spots the key to the room on the table next to her. Without them seeing it, she picks up the key and takes it with her, with her handbag.)

MAGGIE. *(at the door, ignoring MAX)* See you later...Daddy.

(She exits to the corridor, closing the door behind her. MAX feels like a crumb.)

START

SAUNDERS. I've got a thousand of Cleveland's so-called cognoscenti arriving at the theatre in six hours in black tie, a thirty-piece orchestra, twenty-four chorus, fifteen stagehands and eight principals. Backstage. I have approximately fifty pounds of rotting shrimp mayonnaise which, if consumed, could turn the Gala Be-A-Sponsor Buffet into a mass murder. All I don't have is a tenor. Time.

MAX. One-fifteen. *(pause)* I'm - I'm really sorry, sir. I wish there was something I could do to help.

SAUNDERS. It's not your fault, Max. I wish it was. The question now is what to do if that irresponsible Italian jackass doesn't arrive.

MAX. I - I have an idea about that, actually.

SAUNDERS. You do?

MAX. Yeah. I mean, sort of.

SAUNDERS. Well, spit it out, Max.

MAX. The thing is - I mean, I was just - just thinking that - well - I mean - I could do it.

SAUNDERS. Do what?

MAX. Sing it. *Pagliacci*. Sort of...step in. You see, I - I've been to all the rehearsals and I know the part and I - I mean, I could do it. I know I could.

SAUNDERS. *Pagliacci*? The Clown of Tragedy?

MAX. Yes, sir.

SAUNDERS. *Pagliacci*, Max. He's huge. He's larger than life. He loves with a passion that rocks the heavens. His jealousy is so terrible that we tremble with irrational fear for our very lives. His tragedy is the fate of



tortured greatness, facing the black and gaping abyss of insensible nothingness. It isn't you, Max.

MAX. It – it could be. I mean, if I had the chance.

SAUNDERS. (*turning directly front, addressing the audience:*

"Ladies and gentlemen. May I have your attention, please. I regret to inform you that Mr. Tito Merelli, the greatest tenor of our generation, scheduled to make his American debut with the Cleveland Grand Opera Company in honor of our tenth anniversary season, is regrettably indisposed this evening, but...BUT!...I have the privilege to announce that the leading role tonight will be sung by a somewhat gifted amateur making his very first appearance on this, or indeed any other stage, our company's very own factotum, gopher and all-purpose dogsbody...Max!" Do you see the problem?

MAX. I guess so.

SAUNDERS. Old women would be trampled to death in the stampede up the aisles.

MAX. I see what you mean.

SAUNDERS. Time.

MAX. One-twenty.

(A depressed silence. SAUNDERS picks up a grape and starts chewing. Then he realizes and spits it out and starts stamping on it in his fury. Meanwhile, the phone rings. MAX picks it up.)

Hello? What? Could you speak more slowly, please.

SAUNDERS. If it's Julia, tell her she can take the shrimp and stuff it up her –

MAX. (to SAUNDERS) Sir! It's him! He's in the lobby!

(SAUNDERS runs to the phone and grabs it.)

SAUNDERS. (*into the phone, all charm*) Signor Merelli! Benvenuto a Cleveland! I will be down *immediamente*. Presto. (*He hangs up.*) All right, Max. This is it. You have your instructions. Key word, Max.

MAX. Glue.

SAUNDERS. Glue. You will stick to him like

MAX. glue.

SAUNDERS. and you will not let him out of your

MAX. sight.

SAUNDERS. You will drive him to the rehearsal and then drive him back. You will give him whatever he wants except

MAX. liquor and women.

SAUNDERS. At the performance, you will lead a spontaneous

MAX. standing ovation

SAUNDERS. then return him to the reception, keeping him

MAX. sober

SAUNDERS. with his hands

MAX. to himself

SAUNDERS. at which point he can

MAX. drop dead

SAUNDERS. for all we care. Good.

MAX. Good.

(Break. SAUNDERS crosses to the corridor door, pauses.)

SAUNDERS. Max!

MAX. Sir?

SAUNDERS. Get rid of that fruit bowl.

(SAUNDERS exits, pulling the door closed behind him. Simultaneously, MAGGIE enters quickly through the bedroom/corridor door and closes it quietly. Then she darts to the bathroom and enters it, slamming the door behind her in her haste. As MAX is entering the kitchenette with the fruit, he hears the door slam and stops, puzzled. Still holding the fruit, he walks into the bedroom and looks around. He opens the closet door. No one there. He goes to the bathroom door, opens it, and MAGGIE, who was holding the doorknob inside, is yanked into the room.)

MAX. (*horrified*) Maggie!

STDF

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Max,
Saunders,
Maria, TITO
and Bellhop

MAGGIE. Is he here?

MAX. No! But he's coming up!

MAGGIE. (excited) Oh, Max!

MAX. Maggie, do you realize what this looks like? I mean, waiting for him in the bathroom!

(a knock at the sitting room/corridor door)

He's here!

MAGGIE. (in raptures) Oh, Max!

MAX. With your father!

MAGGIE. 'Bye, Max.

(She steps back into the bathroom and closes the door.)

MAX. Maggie!

SAUNDERS. (offstage) Ma-ax. The door is locked, Max.

MAX. Coming! (He heads for the sitting room. Stops.) Fruit!
(Which he is still holding. Back to the bathroom.) Maggie!
Door!

(MAGGIE comes out, annoyed.)

MAGGIE. Max!

MAX. Fruit! (he hands it to her)

MAGGIE. (touched, accepting it) Thank you, Max.

(She steps back in and MAX slams the door.)

SAUNDERS. (offstage) Ma-ax! Open the door, please!

MAX. Coming!

(He rushes into the sitting room, closing the connecting door. At the corridor door he stops abruptly. Adjusts himself. Opens the door. SAUNDERS enters.)

SAUNDERS. (offstage - then on) MAX!!

MAX. Hi.

SAUNDERS. (glaring murderously, then smiling broadly): Thank you.

(He steps aside, permitting MARIA and TITO MERELLI to enter the sitting room. MARIA is the Sophia Loren type:

bustly, proud and excitable. TITO is imposing. Both of them speak, not surprisingly, with Italian accents.)

SAUNDERS. My friends, your suite.

MARIA. So are you, I'm a-sure.

(She flings her fur stole at MAX.)

SAUNDERS. Thank you. I'll make the introductions, shall I? Signora Merelli, whom we did not expect, but could not possibly be more pleased to have with us. And Signor Tito Merelli, who needs no introduction. My assistant, Max.

MARIA. Ciao.

TITO. (handing his hat and coat to MAX). How do you do, John.

MAX. Uh, Max.

SAUNDERS. (enunciating) Max.

TITO. John!

MAX. (shrugging) He can call me John, if he wants -

MARIA. My husband would like a-the john. He throws up.

(MAGGIE sticks her head out of the bathroom. During the following, she tiptoes across the bedroom to listen.)

SAUNDERS. Oh, the john. Yes, of course. Right this way.

TITO. Grazie.

(TITO and SAUNDERS head for the john.)

MAX. (to MARIA) The john. We - we misunderstood, you see, we usually say the STOP!!!

(MAGGIE freezes. SAUNDERS and TITO stop. They haven't entered the bedroom yet, but TITO has opened the connecting door partway.)

There - there - there's one in the lobby. It's much - much nicer. Cleaner.

SAUNDERS. Are you all right, Max?

MAX. Me? Fine. I just - they've got this terrific bathroom in the lobby. It's incredible.

SAUNDERS. I'm sure that this one is peachy, Max.

START

MAX. No. No it isn't. Trust me.

TITO. John!

SAUNDERS. This way. I'm awfully sorry...

(SAUNDERS leads TITO into the bedroom by which time MAGGIE has caught on and disappears into the closet, closing the door behind her.)

TITO. Grazie.

MARIA. *(to MAX)* Forgive a-my husband, eh? *(She shouts.)*

He's a-stupid!

TITO. SHUT UP!

MARIA. SHUT UP A-YOUSELF!

(TITO enters the bathroom and slams the door. During the following, SAUNDERS listens at the bathroom door, concerned.)

MARIA. *(to MAX)* He eats a-like a fat a-pig. We have a-food on the train. He eats a-too much. Then we arrive, he wants a-lunch. "Don't eat," I tell 'im. "You get a-sick. You wone be happy." He eats a-like a pig. Two plates. Why, eh? Why?! Because he wants a-bosoms.

MAX. Bosoms?

MARIA. He wants a-bosoms. Is that normal? You tell me. Eh?

MAX. Well, it's - it's - it's - I'd say it's unusual.

SAUNDERS. *(returning to the sitting room, jovial)* What is so unusual, Max?

MAX. Mr. Merelli, apparently, he - he'd like to have bosoms.

SAUNDERS. Well...that's wonderful.

MARIA. The waitress - eh? - she leans a-way over. "You wanna seconds?" He likes a-bosoms, he says a-sure. He's not hungry! He wants a-more bosoms.

MAX. Oh.

SAUNDERS. I see. *(a knock at the corridor door)* Excuse me.

(SAUNDERS opens the door to find the BELLHOP, who enters carrying two suitcases and a vanity case.)

Max,
Saunders
and
Tito

MAX. Pride?

SAUNDERS. Personality?

MARIA. All men, they got this thing. It starts a-small, it gets a-big and it makes a-trouble.

SAUNDERS. P?

MAX. Power?

MARIA. Passion! He's got a big a-passion!

MAX. Oh.

SAUNDERS. I see.

(TITO enters the sitting room.)

MAX. Mr. Merelli!

SAUNDERS. Are you all right?

TITO. Me? I'm a-fine. *Perfetto.*

MARIA. *(derisively)* Hoo!

TITO. I'm a-okey-dokey. I feel like ten bucks.

MARIA. Look at 'im, eh? He looks a-like a sick dog.

TITO. I'm tip a-top.

MARIA. Liar!

TITO. Shut up!

MARIA. Phh!

TITO. A little stomach. It's nothing. I'm a-fine. A few more minutes, I'm gonna be even better.

SAUNDERS. Better?

MARIA. That's what I thought. I'll get a-you pills.

(She gets up.)

TITO. *(a familiar argument)* I done take pills.

MARIA. You need a-pills!

TITO. No! I'm a-Merelli! Merelli says a-no!

MARIA. What's a-matter? You got a girl in there?

TITO. Yeah. Sure. I got a girl. In fact, I got two girls. Both a-naked. Go ahead! Look!

MARIA. Some day, you gonna wake up in a-you bed, you gonna be a soprano!

TITO. *(to MAX)* Jealousy, eh? Jealousy! It's a-terrible.

MARIA. *(overlapping, to SAUNDERS)* In my heart, he makes a-me sick.

TITO. *(overlapping)* She's a crazy woman.

MARIA. *(overlapping)* Because he's a-stupid. He's got a-no brains.

TITO. *(overlapping)* All the time it's a-jealousy, jealousy: jealousy -

MARIA. SHUT UP!

TITO. SHUT UP A-YOUSELF!

(MARIA slams into the bedroom. Huffing unison, TITO and MARIA both sit, he on the sofa, she on the bed. During the following, MARIA calms herself, then lies on the bed and slips through a copy of Vogue.)

SAUNDERS. So...I uh, I don't mean to be pushy, but I really do think we ought to be going.

TITO. Sure. Okay. Thanks a-for everything. See you tonight.

SAUNDERS. No. Sorry. I meant all of us. To the rehearsal.

TITO. Me?

SAUNDERS. Right.

(TITO considers it.)

TITO. No. No, I done think so. You want the truth, I'm not so good.

SAUNDERS. You're not?

TITO. No.

SAUNDERS. What's the matter?

TITO. I'm a-sick. I eat too much. I'm a-stupid.

SAUNDERS. Signor Merelli. I don't think you understand. You see, I have a hundred people at the theatre. *Centu persona.* They're waiting for you.

TITO. Hey. You done get it. I'm gonna sing right now, I'm gonna throw up on the soprano.

START

SAUNDERS. I don't believe this.

TITO. Hey! Done worry, okay? Tonight I'm gonna be there.
I'm a-Merelli. I done miss performance.

SAUNDERS. But you don't know the stage directions! The –
the tempos!

TITO. I sing *Pagliacci* fifty times. Is no big deal.

SAUNDERS. And what about the costume fitting?

TITO. I bring a-my own. It's in the suitcase. You wanna see?
In fact, I bring a-two costumes. Just in case.

SAUNDERS. You can't do this.

TITO. I wear my own costume at Vienna Staatsoper, Covent
Garden. You think in Cleveland I'm gonna suffer?

(The phone rings. SAUNDERS grabs it.)

SAUNDERS. *(into the phone)* Yes?...OH MY GOD!!!...I'll be
right there. Just keep looking!...Jul – ...Juli – ...JULIA,
DON'T PANIC!

(He hangs up.)

MAX. Trouble?

SAUNDERS. They lost the music. All of it.

TITO. That's not good.

SAUNDERS. All right, now listen. I want an answer and I
want it now. Are you coming or not?

TITO. Not.

SAUNDERS. Right. That's settled. Max!

MAX. Sir?

SAUNDERS. If there's a problem of any kind, I want you to
call me. Immediately.

MAX. Yes, sir.

SAUNDERS. I'll be at the theatre.

MAX. Right.

(TITO groans.)

SAUNDERS. Max!

(He motions for MAX to join him at the door.)

MAX. Sir?

SAUNDERS. He needs some sleep. Do whatever you have to.

MAX. Yes, sir.

*(SAUNDERS exits. TITO leans back on the sofa. He
doesn't notice at first that MAX is still there. Then he
does.)*

TITO. You stay here?

MAX. Yes. I – I – I mean if you don't mind.

TITO. Sure. Help a-yoursel. *(He belches, pats his stomach.)*
Scusi.

MAX. You really are sick, aren't you?

TITO. It's okay. I'm gonna live. In my village, they got a
saying – "Nobody ever dies from a-gas." And believe
me, they know.

MAX. Yeah, but – but maybe you should take those pills. I
mean, they might help.

TITO. Thanks, a-no. I need sleep, not a-pills. I gotta relax.
Take a deep breath. It's not so easy, eh?

MAX. Why not?

TITO. Why not. Today it's a-Cleveland, Monday New York.
Rushing every place. I live in hotels. I'm gonna have
children, they gonna look like bellhops.

MAX. I see.

TITO. I get tense, I feel a-sick – then I can't sing nothing.

MAX. Nothing?

TITO. Singing. It's like a-life, eh? You gotta relax, take it
easy. You get a-tense, you finished.

MAX. I know what you mean. I – I sing myself, a little.

TITO. You?

MAX. Yeah. I – I – I mean, not like you. I wish I could.

TITO. Hey. Done knock yourself down. It's no good. To
sing, you need a-confidence. You gotta say, "I'm a-the
best. I'm a-Max. I sing good."

STOP

MAX. I know. I – I – I mean that's the problem. Whenever I sing in front of people, I – I get tense. I tighten up. I can't help it.

TITO. That's it, eh? That's a-me, now. My doctor, he says take a-pills. Phenobarbital. It makes-a you sleep. But I'm a Merelli. I done take pills.

MAX. *(to himself)* Phenobarbital.

(During the following, MAX picks up SAUNDERS' bottle of phenobarbital from the table, where MAGGIE left it.)

TITO. Hey! I got it. We have a drink. A little wine, eh?

MAX. Hm? No! No, I – I – I don't think that's such a – *(He looks at the bottle of pills.)* Well. All right.

TITO. You got a-glasses? I got a good Chianti.

MAX. I – I don't know.

TITO. You gonna join me.

(He heads for the bedroom.)

MAX. Right. Okay. One glass!

(MAX disappears into the kitchenette as TITO enters the bedroom. MARIA is lying on the bed, on her stomach, still reading Vogue.)

TITO. Ciao.

MARIA. Ciao.

(She ignores him. TITO looks at her.)

TITO. Eh. *Bellezza.* I'm a-sorry. Okay?

MARIA. Phh.

TITO. I get a-tense. It's too much. It's a-my fault.

MARIA. Yeah.

TITO. Hey. Listen. We take a vacation. Soon. *(he sits on the bed)* Greece, eh? We get a boat. We sail a-the islands. Sleep all day. On the sand. *(he's rubbing her backside)* Just a-two, eh. Like a-the old days. Clams. Big lobster. Suck a-the claws.

MARIA. *(warming considerably)* Tito...

TITO. *Bellezza.*

(They get intimate. She's kissing his neck.)

MARIA. Close a-door.

TITO. Huh?

MARIA. Close a-door.

TITO. Now?

MARIA. Close.

TITO. Maria. I got a stomach. No joke.

MARIA. I make a-you better. Fix you up.

TITO. No. Hey. Not now, okay? I – I can't do it!

(She stops, angry.)

MARIA. Pig!

TITO. Maria!

MARIA. You got a girl.

TITO. I got nobody.

MARIA. You got a girl! So done lie!

TITO. Maria –

MARIA. Three weeks – nothing! Not once, eh?

TITO. I'm sorry. I get a-tense. I – I got a stomach!

MARIA. I wanna be a nun, I'll join a-the church! At least sometimes I have a-some fun. I sing a-hymns. Pluck a-chickens!

TITO. She's crazy. My wife, she's a-crazy.

MARIA. Oh sure, I'm a-crazy. I hate a-trains, I'm a-crazy. I hate hotels. I'm a-crazy. I got a-empty bed, and I'm a-crazy!

TITO. Maria, I'm a sick a-man!

MARIA. SO TAKE A-YOU PILLS!

TITO. *(angry)* Fine. Okay. I take a-pills! *(He goes to the vanity case and takes out his bottle of pills.)* You wanna pills, I take a-pills. Look! Hey! Two pills. No. Four pills!

MARIA. Two!

TITO. Four!!

MARIA. Oh!

TITO. Okay? Happy?

STOP!

6

Scene 2

START

(Four hours later. About 6:30 p.m. MAX and TITO are asleep. MAX is in the sitting room on the sofa. TITO is stretched out on the bed, under the covers. As the music fades, the telephone starts ringing. MAX wakes up, disoriented. He answers the phone.)

MAX. Hello?

BELLHOP. (singing through the phone)

LARGO AL FACTOTUM
DELLA CITTA, LARGO!
LA RAN LA, LA RAN LA,
LA RAN LA, LA!

MAX. Thank you –

BELLHOP. (through the phone) It's six-thirty! This is your wake-up call!

MAX. (into the phone) Thanks...Hm?...No. He's sleeping... No, you can't meet him...Not now! N – (MAX sighs.) Look. All right. If you bring up some coffee, you can meet him for a second...I promise!

BELLHOP. (through the phone) Yahoooooo!

(There's a knock at the sitting room/corridor door.)

MAX. (hanging up the phone) Coming!

(MAX goes to the door and opens it. It's DIANA. She's in her mid-thirties. Beautiful and very sexy.)

Diana.

DIANA. Hi, Max. (She strolls in, looks around.) Nice place.

MAX. Yeah. Well, you know. Tito Merelli.

DIANA. Of course.

(She wanders into the room, in no hurry.)

MAX. How was rehearsal?

DIANA. Not too bad. Considering I had to sing the duets by myself.

MAX. Yeah, I'm – I'm sorry about that. He'll be there tonight, though. No problem.

DIANA. It might work better that way.

(MAX looks at his watch.)

MAX. Diana...is there, uh, anything I can do for you?

DIANA. I just thought I'd stop by and say hello. I thought it might be preferable to meeting him onstage.

MAX. Gee, that's-that's nice of you, but the thing is, he's uh, he's sleeping right now. He's taking a nap.

DIANA. (sitting) I can wait. There's no hurry.

MAX. Yeah, well-actually, I – I thought it might be better if I got him to the theatre first and then he could meet everybody at the same time. I mean, I've got to wake him, and he has to get ready and – and he might want some time alone. If you see what I mean.

DIANA. Do you know what he could do for me, Max? One call from Tito Merelli and I'd be at the Met in two days.

MAX. Yeah –

DIANA. So you see, Max, it's very important to me that I get to know him. Spend a little time with him. Do you understand?

MAX. Yeah, I do. I really do. Except right now, the thing is just to get him there and-and then later, you'll have plenty of time. I mean he'll – he'll be here tomorrow. Right? Okay.

(pause)

DIANA. You're very cute, Max. Has anyone ever told you that before?

MAX. Sure. My – my mother. My Aunt Harriet.

DIANA. Anyone single?

MAX. My Uncle Bud.

DIANA. You aren't going to let me see him, are you, Max?

MAX. Later. I promise. I'll – I'll arrange it so you have lots of time with him. Alone. Okay? I promise.

DIANA. Will you give him a message for me?

MAX. Sure. Anything.

DIANA KISSES HIM, MAX FLAPS HIS ARMS
AND THEN STOPS.

we meet you backstage.

MAX. That's better. That is better. Because he's dead!

SAUNDERS. *(into the phone)* Yes, just Max...right. Fine. See you there. *(He hangs up.)*

MAX. That was a mistake.

SAUNDERS. Max...

MAX. No.

SAUNDERS. I'm begging you, Max. I'm on my knees. *(he is)*

MAX. No!

SAUNDERS. Look at me! Max. You can do it, believe me!

MAX. I can't!

SAUNDERS. A thousand people! They're getting dressed now. They've got tickets at fifty dollars each, Max. That's fifty thousand dollars!

MAX. Sir -

SAUNDERS. My whole career! My life, Max. My children. It's all in your hands.

(SAUNDERS grabs MAX around the knees and sobs. He looks up. No reaction. He sobs harder, sinking to MAX's ankles.)

MAX. Ohhhh, *crap!*

SAUNDERS. I'll never forget this, Max.

MAX. I bet.

(SAUNDERS jumps to his feet and races into the bedroom. MAX, now speechless with fear, follows him. During the following, SAUNDERS takes one of the suitcases from the closet and puts it on the bed next to TITO.)

SAUNDERS. I have it all figured out. It's simple. You change here, make-up, the works. Then we drive to the theatre just in time and suddenly, bang, you're onstage.

MAX. Oh God.

SAUNDERS. Between the acts, you'll stay in your dressing room. Locked up. Then, after it's over, it's straight to the car, drive back and we're finished.

MAX. What about, uh...*(He nods at TITO.)*

SAUNDERS. No problem. Tomorrow morning, we break the news. He took the pills after the performance and passed away quietly during the night. This is it. *(The costume. SAUNDERS rummages through the suitcase.)* Costume...make-up...hat.

(A knock at the sitting room/corridor door. They both freeze.)

Who's that?

MAX. How should I know?!

SAUNDERS. I'll take care of it. You just change, and make it quick.

(He hands MAX the suitcase and heads for the sitting room.)

MAX. Sir?

SAUNDERS. *(stopping)* Yes, Max?

MAX. Wish me luck.

SAUNDERS. We don't need luck, Max.

MAX. Thanks.

(MAX enters the bathroom. SAUNDERS leaves the bedroom and closes the door.)

SAUNDERS. We need a miracle. *(he walks to the sitting room/corridor door)* Who is it?

JULIA. *(offstage)* It's me, Henry. Open the door.

SAUNDERS. Julia! I told you not to come up!

JULIA. *(offstage)* Open the door, Henry!

(SAUNDERS opens the door. JULIA enters. She's about sixty and wears a silver dress covered in sequins. She strikes a pose.)

How do I look? The truth.

SAUNDERS. Like the Chrysler Building.

JULIA. I knew you'd like it. *(She sweeps in and twirls around.)* It's straight from Paris. *Haute couture.* I feel like one of those fancy French tarts.

SAUNDERS. Julia, for God's sake -

JULIA. Now, don't be cross, Henry. I couldn't bear waiting backstage anymore. Not with those shrimp. I could hardly breathe. Besides, I thought I might cheer him up. The woman's touch. Suddenly before he knows it he'll feel vital again. Totally alive.

SAUNDERS. No, I don't think so.

JULIA. You know what this reminds me of? That opera, the one with the snow falling, and the violins and everybody's hungry all the time.

SAUNDERS. Julia, please! Just listen!

JULIA. I'm listening, Henry.

SAUNDERS. I want you to go to the theatre. Now. All right? As a favor to me.

JULIA. Oh, Henry. You know how I feel about you.

SAUNDERS. *(moving towards the door)* Good. Off you go -

JULIA. But it's just so silly. I'm here already.

SAUNDERS. But you won't be soon. You'll be at the theatre.

JULIA. *(logically)* Not if I'm here. I can't be in two places.

SAUNDERS. You won't be in two places. You won't be here.

JULIA. Why not?

SAUNDERS. Because you'll be there.

JULIA. But why bother? I'm already here-

SAUNDERS. Julia, please -!

(a knock at the door)

Now what?!

JULIA. *(sitting)* I think it's the door.

(SAUNDERS stops halfway to the door, returns to just behind JULIA and raises his arm as though he's going to slug her over the head, backhanded. He controls himself and returns to the door.)

SAUNDERS. *(at the door)* Who is it?!

BELLHOP. *(offstage)* Room service. Coffee for two.

SAUNDERS. We didn't order any coffee.

BELLHOP. *(offstage)* You did so! Ask Max!

SAUNDERS. Well, it's cancelled!

JULIA. *(going to the door)* Oh stop it, Henry. You can't just let him stand there.

SAUNDERS. Don't -!

(She opens the door. The BELLHOP enters, holding a tray with a coffee service on it. He also has a camera hanging around his neck. He leaves the door open.)

BELLHOP. Thank you, madam.

JULIA. On the table, please.

SAUNDERS. And then get out.

JULIA. He's only doing his job, Henry.

SAUNDERS. Well, he can do it somewhere else.

BELLHOP. Shall I pour, madam?

JULIA. Thank you, that would be very nice.

SAUNDERS. Julia, I want you out of here!

BELLHOP. He's not very friendly, is he?

SAUNDERS. Julia, please! You promised!

JULIA. I wonder what's keeping Mr. Merelli?

BELLHOP. Is he getting dressed?

JULIA. Apparently.

BELLHOP. *(going to the connecting door)* Perhaps he needs some help with his buttons. You know these opera stars, they're helpless-

SAUNDERS. STOP!

(The BELLHOP stops, his hand on the doorknob.)

Take one step into that room and I will kill you.

BELLHOP. Fair enough. I'll wait out here.

SAUNDERS. You're not waiting anyplace, you're getting out!

BELLHOP. Fine....As soon as I meet him. *(He sits.)*

SAUNDERS. You're not meeting him.

BELLHOP. Max promised. That's why I brought the coffee.

STOP

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afraid. Who is this, please? *(startled)* Oh my goodness. Is anything – ...Julia Leverett. Chairman of the Opera Guild.

MAGGIE. Who is it?

JULIA. *(to MAGGIE)* The police.

MAGGIE. Police?!

JULIA. *(into the phone)* Is anything wrong officer?...Yes, I was there...

MAGGIE. What's the matter?

JULIA. Shh! ...*(into the phone)* Oh dear. I see...well that's good...oh dear!...oh good...oh dear...I certainly will. Thank you very much. Goodbye.

MAGGIE. Well?

JULIA. It's very sad actually. Apparently some lunatic dressed as a clown tried to get into the theatre tonight. He said he was Tito Merelli.

MAGGIE. Oh no.

JULIA. When they wouldn't let him in, he started screaming in Italian, so the stage manager called the police.

MAGGIE. Did they get him?

JULIA. Well, they arrested him and dragged him off, but he got away down an alley. Apparently the man's demented. When they grabbed him he actually hit a policeman.

MAGGIE. Oh my God.

JULIA. They're sending two of their men over to keep an eye out.

MAGGIE. I hope nothing happens.

JULIA. That's all we need at the reception is some lunatic on the rampage. We'll have enough of those already when the Board starts drinking. *(She heads for the door.)* I suppose we'd better go. They'll start arriving any minute now.

MAGGIE. Maybe I should wait here. I – I could tell him that you're looking for him. I mean, I just want to be helpful.

JULIA. Of course you do. And I won't tell Max if you don't.

MAGGIE. Max? It's none of his business.

JULIA. Isn't it?

MAGGIE. He didn't even show up tonight.

JULIA. *(teasing)* If I see him downstairs, shall I tell him you're looking for him?

MAGGIE. No, thank you.

JULIA. How about Tito?

MAGGIE. Aunt Julia –

JULIA. See you later, my dear.

STOP
(JULIA exits, closing the door behind her. MAGGIE pauses for a moment, then goes to the telephone and dials for the operator.)

MAGGIE. *(into the phone)* Stage door of the Opera House please...Hello, Harry? It's Maggie Saunders...just fine. How are you?...Yes it was. It was fabulous. I was just wondering, is...is Max around backstage by any chance?...*(disappointed)* Oh...Not at all?...No, that's all right. It's nothing special.

(The sound of the sitting room/corridor door being unlocked. MAGGIE looks up, says quietly:)

Thanks, Harry. 'Bye.

(She hangs up. The door opens and MAX enters. He's still in full costume and make-up. He doesn't see her.)

MAGGIE. Hi.

(MAX is startled.)

MAX. Ciao.

(MAX strolls into the room, full of confidence and swagger. MAGGIE is suddenly nervous, being alone with "Tito." She tries to make conversation, but MAX isn't helping.)

MAGGIE. I – I hope you don't mind me being here. The door was open – I mean, we knocked first, but you