

~~(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.)~~

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!~~