

# 2<sup>nd</sup> SOPRANO I

MARIA. Isn't he doing well? I salute you. (*She applauds him.*)  
We all salute you. (*She encourages audience to applaud him, then looks at index cards she has been carrying.*)

Who's next? Lady Macbeth, Tosca, Lucia. I must say, what these students lack in voice and technique, they make up for in self-confidence. Don't laugh. That's important. Well, we shall see what we shall see. I wish them well. Next victim! That was a joke. My last one, I promise. (*To the Accompanist.*)

And what is that folderol on the piano there, please?

ACCOMPANIST. You mean the flowers? They're for you. You have an unknown admirer. Very operatic.

MARIA. Is this a classroom or a circus? (*Second Soprano is coming out onto the stage. She is in an evening gown.*)

That was very naughty of someone. I won't pretend I'm not flattered but I'm also not amused. Very, very naughty. (*To Second Soprano.*)

*Avanti, avanti!* Don't linger. If you're going to enter, enter. If you don't want to be out here, go away. I'll be right with you. Are you going somewhere after this?

SECOND SOPRANO. No.

MARIA. (*She reads the card on the bouquet.*) "Brava, La Divina. We love you." "La Divina." Don't make me laugh. And it's always "We love you," never "I love you." So. Now who have we here?

SECOND SOPRANO. Sharon Graham.

MARIA. Sharon Graham. Definitely not Greek.

SECOND SOPRANO. No.

MARIA. What's in a name, eh? I was Maria Meneghini Callas for a time. Of course, I was Signora Meneghini for a time as well. So. Sharon Graham. What are you going to sing for us?

SECOND SOPRANO. Lady Macbeth?

MARIA. Are you sure you want to do that, Sharon?

SECOND SOPRANO. I also have *Queen of the Night*, "Die Holle Rache" and *Norma*, the "Casta Diva."

MARIA. I think we'll stay with Lady Macbeth. The Sleepwalking Scene, I suppose.

SECOND SOPRANO. No, "Vieni! t'affretta," I thought.

MARIA. Ah, the Letter Scene! Well, that's something. They

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usually all want to start with the Sleepwalking Scene. You're humble, like me, that's good. So. This is her entrance aria, yes?

SECOND SOPRANO. Yes.

MARIA. So what are you doing out here? Go away. We don't want to see you yet.

SECOND SOPRANO. You want me to go off and come back out?

MARIA. No, I want you to enter. You're on a stage. Use it. Own it. This is opera, not a voice recital. Anyone can stand there and sing. An artist enters and *is*.

SECOND SOPRANO. I thought this was a classroom.

MARIA. It doesn't matter. Never miss an opportunity to theatricalize. Astonish us, Sharon.

SECOND SOPRANO. How do I do that?

MARIA. You can start by not entering as Sharon Graham. Enter as Lady Macbeth. Enter as Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth. Enter as Verdi's Lady Macbeth.

SECOND SOPRANO. I'll do my best.

MARIA. And Sharon, may I say one more thing? That's a beautiful gown, obviously. We've all been admiring it. It's gorgeous. I wish I had one like it.

SECOND SOPRANO. Thank you.

MARIA. But don't ever wear anything like that before midnight at the earliest and certainly not to class. We're talking about what's appropriate. This is a master class, not some Cinderella's ball. Eh? Off you go now. And come back as her. Come back as Lady. (*Second Soprano exits.*)

Sometimes we just have to say these things, eh? am I right? I learned the hard way. I didn't have anyone to tell me these things. I auditioned for Edward Johnson at the old Met wearing a red and white polka-dot dress, white gloves, a blue hat with a veil and what I later learned were known as Joan Crawford "Catch me/your "F"-word-me" pumps. I'm sorry, but that's what they were called. I was overweight and looked like an American flag singing Madama Butterfly. No wonder I wasn't engaged. She'll thank me one day.

# 2<sup>nd</sup> Soprano 2

against a Tosca because they didn't like the way she sang "Mario, Mario." It's a terrible career, actually. I don't know why I bothered. I didn't say that. You didn't hear it and I didn't say it! *(The Second Soprano comes back onto the stage.)*

SECOND SOPRANO. I'm back! *(Maria looks at her blankly.)* I'd like to try again. I've been in the ladies room throwing up. I must have. *(Maria holds up her hand to stop Second Soprano from going into further detail.)* So should I go out and come in again? *(Maria nods.)* I'll yell when I'm ready. *(Accompanist nods. Second Soprano exits.)*

MARIA. Water. I need more water.

SECOND SOPRANO. *(Off.)* I'm ready! *(Accompanist begins Lady Macbeth's entrance music again. Second Soprano enters at the appropriate moment in the text. The music stops. She begins.)*

*"Nel dì della vittoria io le incontrai.*

*Stupito io n'era per le udite cose;"*

MARIA. Where's your letter? You're meant to be reading a letter.

SECOND SOPRANO. I was pretending to hold one. Couldn't you tell?

MARIA. I don't want pretending. You're not good enough. I want truth. This is a letter. *(She seizes a piece of paper and thrusts it at Sharon.)* What are you saying?

SECOND SOPRANO. I'm saying "I met them on the day of victory. I was rapt in wonder at the things I heard. When the King's messengers hailed me as Thane of Cawdor."

MARIA. Put some wonder in your voice! Thane of Cawdor! It's what she's dreamed of.

SECOND SOPRANO. Thane of Cawdor! "A prediction made by those same seers who foretold a crown upon my head. Keep deep in your heart these secrets. *Addio.*"

MARIA. Do you know this speech in Shakespeare?

SECOND SOPRANO. I've read the play, of course, but that was in high school.

MARIA. You want to sing this music without knowing your Shakespeare!

SECOND SOPRANO. I'm not an actress. I'm just a singer.

MARIA. Do you think Verdi composed it without knowing

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END

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MARIA. Sssh! Listen, they're applauding. Never move on your applause. It shortens it.

SECOND SOPRANO. No one was applauding. You told them not to.

MARIA. I would never tell anyone that, *ma chère*. The worst part about being a teacher is being misunderstood. Applause is what we live on. Sometimes it's the only thing we have. Did that feel better that time, yes?

SECOND SOPRANO. I don't know. What do you think?

MARIA. I think you have a lovely voice.

SECOND SOPRANO. Thank you.

MARIA. I think you have some spirit, too.

SECOND SOPRANO. Thank you.

MARIA. I wish you well.

SECOND SOPRANO. Thank you.

MARIA. But I think you should work on something more appropriate for your limitations. Mimi or Micaela maybe. But Lady Macbeth, Norma. I don't think so. These roles require something else. Something. How shall I say this? Something special. Something that can't be taught or passed on or copied or even talked about. Genius. Inspiration. A gift of god. Some recompense for everything else. *(The Second Soprano bursts into tears.)*

What did I say? This is what I'm talking about. *Mut! Coraggio!* It takes more than a pretty voice to build a career.

SECOND SOPRANO. I wish I'd never done this. I don't like you. You can't sing anymore and you're envious of anyone younger who can. You just want us to sing like you, recklessly, and lose our voices in 10 years like you did. Well, I won't do it. I don't want to. I don't want to sing like you. I hate people like you. You want to make the world dangerous for everyone just because it was for you. *(She leaves. There is an awkward silence.)*

MARIA. So. *Po po po*. I think we should stop here. Miss Graham thought I wanted her to sing like Maria Callas. No one can sing like Maria Callas. Only Cecilia Sophia Anna Maria Kalogeropoulou could sing like Maria Callas. I'm very upset. I'm hurt. As strange as it may seem to some of you, I have