

# Stagehand I

expression? Listening is beyond the point. We're singing now. I want to talk about your "Oh!"

FIRST SOPRANO. I sang it, didn't I?

MARIA. That's just it. You sang it. You didn't feel it. It's not a note we're after here. It's a stab of pain. The pain of loss. Surely you understand loss.

FIRST SOPRANO. I'm always losing my umbrella. You mean a person.

MARIA. It's not just a question of singing. Anyone can get the notes out. Well, that's not true actually. Scotto had no business singing this music. Know your limitations. That's important. So, what are we talking about here, eh? Feeling, feeling, feeling.

"Oh!" You hear the difference?

FIRST SOPRANO. Yes.

MARIA. I want to hear everything in that one sound. "Oh!" Can you give me that?

FIRST SOPRANO. I'll try.

MARIA. Try isn't good enough. Do. The theatre isn't about trying. People don't leave their homes to watch us try. They come to see us do.

All right, you can come out now. Excuse me, Sophie.

*(Stagehand appears with a cushion for Maria.)*

*Avanti, avanti!* The theatre isn't for people who like to be in their ivory towers either.

STAGEHAND. Is this what you wanted?

MARIA. It's fine. Interruptions every moment.

STAGEHAND. You said you wanted this.

MARIA. I did. This is a class. I'm making a point. You're singing an aria and they're building scenery in the wings.

STAGEHAND. I wasn't building any scenery.

MARIA. You see? You see?

STAGEHAND. Anything else?

MARIA. No. Let's give him a hand. *(Watching him go.)*

Couldn't care less!

*Allora.* Where were we? Ah, yes, "oh!" I'm not going to stop you this time, *cara*. Now, I may speak to you while you sing but I'm not going to stop you.

# Stagehand 2

our guest. One of the most beautiful *bel canto* arias, if not the most difficult.

FIRST SOPRANO. They say you were unsurpassed in the role. I have your recording, of course. Even Sutherland.

MARIA. Stop right there. This is important. For all of us. I won't hear anything against any of my colleagues. And neither should you. She did her best. That's all any of us can do. Joan was. Well, that's a whole other story. Like her looks, it wasn't her fault. A twelve-foot Lucia de Lamamour. Whoever heard of such a thing? But what was she to do? Stoop her way through the role? I don't want this class to disintegrate into a discussion of personalities. I won't let it happen.

What?

ACCOMPANIST. Me?

MARIA. Yes, you. Who else? You've been trying to get a word in. I saw you back there. I have eyes in the back of my head. You have to if you want a career in the theatre. Someone somewhere is always behind you plotting your downfall. That's a fact. Always. If you don't develop eyes in the back of your head, you'll soon end up with a dagger in your back. Look what they did to me. The envy. The malice. But that's another story. So? What? Speak. We're wasting valuable time.

ACCOMPANIST. The footstool. It's here.

MARIA. Well bring it out. Do I have to do everything myself?

ACCOMPANIST. They didn't want to interrupt.

MARIA. What would you call this? Do you understand now what I go through? All I'm trying to do is hold a simple master class. (A Stagehand brings out a footstool. He wears jeans and a T-shirt.)

STAGEHAND. Where do you want it?

MARIA. There.

STAGEHAND. Here?

MARIA. That's where the chair is. (He puts the footstool down in front of Maria's chair.) Bravo! Well done.

STAGEHAND. Hunh?

MARIA. See how simple that was? Tell your supervisor we can begin now. Thank you.

START

STAGEHAND. I don't have a supervisor. You're welcome.  
(*He goes.*)

END  
MARIA. People like that have absolutely no interest in what we're doing here. It's very humbling. We bear our hearts and they say "Hunh"? I always thought our art reached everyone. Well, I used to think a lot of things I don't anymore. Eh? So. Carmen De Palma? Are you ready? Straighten up. Head high. We're not hiding anything.

FIRST SOPRANO. It's Sophie. Sophie De Palma. You said Carmen.

MARIA. I can't be expected to keep everyone's name straight. I'm focused on the music now. And so should you be. Manny? Are you ready? Did I get that right at least? You are Manny?

ACCOMPANIST. Yes.

MARIA. Well, I'm good for something. I'm going to sit down now. Ignore me. Forget all about me. Poof! I'm invisible. I asked for a cushion, too. You see? You see? Never mind now. It's too late. We're working. All right. Now I want total silence and complete concentration. Sophie De Palma. Amina's aria. *La Sonnambula*. Good luck. (*She makes herself comfortable.*) You see why I asked for this stool? I have short legs. I always looked tall in the theatre but I always had short legs. When Zeffirelli dressed me in *Norma*. But that's another story. Are you waiting for me? Begin. (*Accompanist begins to play.*) Posture, posture. Not yours. Hers! (*She listens to the introduction to the scena and recitative.*)

FIRST SOPRANO. "On!"

MARIA. Stop right there. I'm sorry to do this to you but what's the point of going on with it if it's all wrong? Eh? You're not listening to the music.

FIRST SOPRANO. I wasn't?

MARIA. Let it fill you up. It's so simple. Listen. It's all there. Who she is. You don't have to do anything but listen. A simple country girl. An innocent victim. He's broken her heart. Have you ever had your heart broken?

FIRST SOPRANO. Yes.

MARIA. You could have fooled me. This is the theatre, darling. We wear our hearts on our sleeves here.