

REYER: *[entering from offstage, interrupting him]* No, no, no...Signor...if you please: "Rome." We say "Rome," not "Roma."

[A STAGEHAND carries a ladder across the stage. Hammering and shouting is heard]

PIANGI: Si, si. Roma, Rome... Is hard for me.

[PIANGI continues practising...]

PIANGI (cont'd): Rome...Rome.

[Enter MONSIEUR LEFEVRE, the retiring Manager of the Opera Populaire, with MONSIEUR FIRMIN and MONSIEUR ANDRE, to whom he has just sold it]

REYER: Once again, then, if you please, signor: "Sad to return..."

LEFEVRE: This way, gentlemen, this way. Rehearsals, as you see, are underway, for a new production of Chalumeau's Hannibal.

[Sensing a hiatus in the rehearsal, LEFEVRE attempts to attract attention]

LEFEVRE: Ladies and gentlemen, some of you may already, perhaps, have met Monsieur André and Monsieur Firmin...

[The new MANAGERS are politely bowing, when REYER interrupts]

REYER: I'm sorry, Monsieur Lefèvre, we are rehearsing. If you wouldn't mind waiting a moment?

LEFEVRE: *[Bowing apologetically]* My apologies, Monsieur Reyer. Proceed, proceed...

REYER: Thank you, monsieur,

LEFEVRE: *[Sotto voce to ANDRE and FIRMIN]* Monsieur Reyer, our chief répétiteur. Rather a tyrant, I'm afraid.

REYER: *[Turning back to PIANGI]* "Sad to return..." Signor...

[The rehearsal continues]

[At the end of the chorus LEFEVRE claps his hands for silence. The elephant is led off. TWO STAGEHANDS are revealed operating it from within.]

LEFEVRE: Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention please? Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention...? Ladies and gentlemen, may I...? Madame Giry...

[GIRY bangs her cane and there is silence.]

LEFEVRE (cont'd): Thank you. As you know, for some weeks there have been rumours of my imminent retirement. I can now tell you that these were all true, and it is my pleasure to introduce to you the two gentlemen who now own the Opera Populaire: Monsieur Richard Firmin and Monsieur Gilles André.

[Polite applause. Some bowing. CARLOTTA makes her presence felt.]

LEFEVRE (cont'd): Gentlemen, Signora Carlotta Giudicelli, our leading soprano for five seasons now.

[Polite bow from ANDRE and FIRMIN.]

ANDRE: Of course, of course, I have experienced all your greatest roles, signora.

CARLOTTA: Piacere.

LEFEVRE: And Signor Ubaldo Piangi.

FIRMIN: An honour, signor.

The Phantom of the Opera

PIANGI: *Piacere.*

ANDRE: *[Keen to impress]* If I remember rightly, Elissa has a rather fine aria in Act Three of Hannibal. I wonder, signora, if, as a personal favour, you would oblige us with a private rendition? *[Somewhat acerbic]* Unless, of course, Monsieur Reyer objects.

CARLOTTA: *[flattered]* My manager commands. Monsieur Reyer?

REYER: *[a polite bow to CARLOTTA]* My diva commands. Will two bars be sufficient introduction?

FIRMIN: Quite sufficient.

REYER: *[ensuring that CARLOTTA is ready]* Signora?

CARLOTTA: Maestro. *(cue bar 127)*

CARLOTTA: These things do happen? You have been here five minutes, what do you know? *SI*, these things do happen — all the time. For the past three years these things do happen. *[To LEFEVRE]* And did you stop them happening? No! *[To FIRMIN and ANDRE]* And you — you're as bad as him "These things do happen!" Well, until you stop these things happening, this thing does not happen! Ubaldo! Andiamo.

[CARLOTTA sweeps out. PIANGI dutifully follows.]

PIANGI: Amateurs!

[PIANGI sweeps out after CARLOTTA]

LEFEVRE: *[After a pause]* I don't think there's much more I can do to assist you, gentlemen. Good luck. *If you need me, I shall be in Frankfurt.*

[LEFEVRE leaves. The COMPANY looks anxiously at the new MANAGERS]

ANDRE: La Carlotta will be back.

GIRY: You think so, monsieur? I have a message, sir, from the Opera Ghost.

[The BALLET GIRLS twitter and twirl in fear]

FIRMIN: God in Heaven, you're all obsessed!

GIRY: He merely welcomes you to his opera house, commands that you continue to leave Box Five empty for his use, and reminds you that his salary is due.

FIRMIN: His salary?

GIRY: Monsieur Lefevre paid him twenty-thousand francs a month. Perhaps you can afford more, with the Vicomte de Chagny as your patron.

[The BALLET GIRLS twitter and twirl in excitement. CHRISTINE takes hold of MEG, nervously]

ANDRE: *[To GIRY]* Madame, I had hoped to have made that announcement myself.

GIRY: *[Ignoring him; to FIRMIN]* Will the Vicomte be at the performance this evening, monsieur?

FIRMIN: Yes, in our box.

ANDRE: Madame, who is the understudy for the role?

REYER: There is no understudy, monsieur — the production is new.

MEG: Christine Daaé could sing it, sir.

FIRMIN: The chorus girl?

[EVERYONE glares at her, but she continues tentatively]

MEG: She's been taking lessons. From a great teacher.

ANDRE: *[To CHRISTINE]* From whom?

CHRISTINE: *[Uneasily]* I don't know, sir...

FIRMIN: Oh, not you as well! *[Turning to ANDRE]* Can you believe it, André? A full house — and we have to cancel!

GIRY: Let her sing for you, monsieur. She has been well taught.

ANDRE: Very well.

REYER: *[After a pause]* From the beginning of the aria then, mademoiselle.

3. Act I / Scene 1 (Hannibal)