

Saunders *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.)*

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Begin 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.

*(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

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End