

Prologue

Roderick

ONE HELL OF A PINKERTON

Naturally, I detested being in Calgary, and for MADAME BUTTERFLY, of all things, but Covent Garden had canceled my next production, I needed the cash, and it was only three weeks of my time.

Only. The production landed me squarely in the frozen core of the Canadian winter. Mind-numbing blizzards howled down the blank Calgary sidewalks, forcing everyone to take cover in the heated walkways that linked the downtown office buildings in a stiff embrace of steel and glass.

If you're an opera director like myself and merely doing a show to shore up shaky finances, then all you're really looking for is ease of execution. You're not planning to make history; you're not challenging the sainted legacies of Stanislavsky or Giorgio Strehler; all you want is to fatten your bank account and catch up on your sleep. I barely slept a wink in Calgary.

It began harmlessly enough. I was changing planes in Toronto when I saw a telltale blue score clutched under the arm of an overweight gentleman lining up for my flight.

Lord, don't let him be my leading man, that seductive devil

Pinkerton. Needless to say, that's precisely who he was.

Despite my misgivings, I waved my score at the unsexy little man, and disguised my forebodings with some well-worn politesse. “Do we have a match?” I asked.

He took one look at my score and exclaimed, “Whaddya know, Joe?”

Naturally, I was startled. “And who, may I ask, is Joe?”

“It’s just an expression, no big deal.” He extended his pudgy hand. “Hi, Richie Verdun, pleased to meet you. What part are you singing?”

I explained I was his director, Roderick Cranbrook.

“Oops, sorry, guess I should have known, but I’m pretty new at this game.”

An understatement, if ever there was one. When the company had warned me that my Pinkerton would be a newcomer, I assumed they meant some smart young lad fresh out of Juilliard. In point of fact, the man flying with me to Calgary had never been to Juilliard, indeed, he’d barely heard of it. He evidently had been selling cars in the vast wasteland of the American Midwest and somehow or other convinced the good people of Calgary that he was the Pinkerton of their dreams. How or why, I’ll never understand. Singers normally start working professionally in their twenties, mid-thirties at the very latest. Here was Richard, well into middle age, coming straight out of nowhere to make his operatic debut as nothing less than the leading tenor in *MADAME BUTTERFLY*. I’d never

heard of anything remotely comparable.

His chances weren't good. Opera is a special culture. Mastering it takes time. A great deal of time, especially for tenors, who usually are slower to develop than the others. It didn't help that Richard looked impossibly out of place, traveling to his first engagement as a leading tenor clad in strip-mall attire, baggy chino pants, ill-fitting lumberjack shirt, a floppy brown parka that clashed with his jaunty blue baseball cap. True, it was 1983, and men's fashion back then was often timid or stodgy. But the poor fellow seemed blissfully unaware that opera's all about magic, elegance, eloquence. It's the antithesis of ordinary, the polar opposite of drab.

Not that he was vulgar, mind you. He was actually quite agreeable, charming even, in that hapless, harmless American manner that seems to beg incessantly for your affection. I'm British and normally cannot abide such fraudulent nonsense. We all know Americans are just as cutthroat and self-serving as anyone else, possibly even more so, but Richard seemed decent enough underneath all that cultural camouflage, genuinely modest and unthreatening. Almost absurdly eager to please.

When we met at the airport, he was quite anxious about rehearsals. Atypically for me, I felt touched by his insecurity and resolved to feed him an oversized helping of mush: *he shouldn't worry: he'd have a wonderful time: it was just a gathering of friends: Puccini was our god, we all strove to serve him.*

After hearing my little sales pitch, Richard moved in so close that his round, balding head very nearly touched mine. “Roderick, are you shitting me?” He looked like a crazed court jester, Rigoletto’s wayward younger brother.

“Richard, I assure you I’m not *shitting you*, as you so charmingly put it. I am just trying in my no doubt inadequate way to put you at your ease. We’re all in this together.”

“Well, good, I’ll give it all I got.”

He’d have to give plenty. His Butterfly, Polyna Ostrovsky, was an unrelenting trial. Her husband, Egon Kleinhaus, was hardly less so and he would be in the pit, molding, or, more likely, distorting the performance. Big houses wouldn’t hire him – he had none of his wife’s considerable ability – but provincial theaters had no choice. If they wanted *La Polyna*, Egon came *mit*. All in all, a less charming, more difficult couple would be hard to find, even in the contentious little world of opera.

I’ll never forget the look on Polyna’s face when Richard ambled into that first rehearsal, smiling his weak little smile. She turned to me and asked, *sotto voce*, “Is that the janitor? Just kidding, *mon cher*.” I had explained in advance that Richard was *sui generis*. His voice was exceptional – everyone was excited about his future – but those of us who had the benefit of experience would have to be patient and help him along a bit. She professed the greatest willingness to be of service. “*Caro Roderick*, when

have I ever refused anyone help?" I smiled politely and changed the subject.

As Richard plodded towards us, Polyna's voice glittered through the gloom of the rehearsal room. "*Eccolo, il grande amore della mia vita.*"

"Sorry?" This produced considerable tittering at the outer edges of the room. Our leading tenor clearly had no Italian at all.

That was the least of his problems. As the long day wore on, it soon became clear that Richard was an absolute, abject beginner, greener than grass, greener than limes, greener than broccoli. The simple instructions "stage right" and "stage left" confused him utterly. I would constantly remind him that stage right referred to the audience's left, regardless of where he might be. He would nod eagerly before trooping off in the wrong direction. He had no concept of natural, relaxed acting. Indeed, his crude posturing hardly qualified as acting at all. As for his basic stage deportment, he slouched about like a browbeaten family retainer or a hapless bystander who had stumbled onto the scene, except for sudden bursts of oddly robotic strutting, as if some mechanical being had taken command of his tubby little body.

His singing, on the other hand, was healthy and in tune. It didn't have a trace of the Italianate warmth and beauty Puccini's music really requires, but it certainly was hearty, so hearty that it sometimes obliterated Polyna's

lovely but febrile sound. She didn't find this amusing, so in no time her husband, he of the long baton and short temper, was barking at Richard to sing more softly. This Richard couldn't, or wouldn't, do, which greatly increased the exasperation of the Ostrovsky-Kleinhaus axis. For my part, I felt that while Richard may have been inartistic at times – almost cloddish – he had a clear vocal presence and in opera that certainly counts for something.

Clear voiced or not, Richard was profoundly unready for an important debut. Everyone at that dismal first rehearsal was painfully aware of it, except for dear dim Richard himself. He ignored or didn't catch the increasingly exasperated grimaces people kept flashing in my direction. Instead, he played the earnest schoolboy, eager to learn, willing to change, grateful for any chance to repeat a difficult passage, amazed by our kind indulgence of his many deficiencies.

As the rehearsal finally shuddered to its end, Egon took me aside and said, "This tenor is utterly impossible."

"He's raw. He's untrained. I'll give him some private coaching."

"This will not help."

"I'm rather clever, you know. I think I can reduce some of his more grievous excesses."

"And the missed entrances, the lack of subtlety? What can you do about that?"

"I rather thought that was your department, Egon."

“*Na ja*, but this man is so unmusical he doesn’t even keep the tempo.” Neither did Egon, but I chose not to mention it.

“Come, come, it’s just a first rehearsal. Give him a chance; he’ll improve.”

“Never in a million years, never in all eternity.”

“*Lieber Egon*, where’s your native optimism?”

“I don’t have any. I’m Viennese.” I may not have liked his awkward conducting, but I did rather enjoy his curdled sense of humor. I repeated that we really had to give the poor man a proper chance. Egon looked skeptical and Polyna, who had been hanging on our every word, started to wax poetic about her last BUTTERFLY in Brussels where she was partnered by a gorgeous young Mexican, Jorge Alvorado, six feet tall, not yet thirty, with a voice as warm as the Neapolitan sun. “That’s all well and good, *cara*,” I said. “But it’s only our first rehearsal.”

“Another one like this and we’re going,” she replied.

“Going, as in canceling, leaving the show? What about your contracts?”

“We didn’t sign on for amateur night. I can’t be expected to rehearse myself to death just to humor some shoe salesman.”

“Cars, actually. He sells cars.”

“That’s even worse. He pollutes that way the atmosphere,” said Egon. “He has absolutely no place in opera.”

“Egon, we really have got to be patient.”

“*Warum?*”

“Signed contracts for one thing. Besides, Richard did seem to get a bit better near the end of rehearsal.”

“Better doesn’t always mean good,” replied Polyna.

“If you really feel that way, you should speak to management now, while there’s still time to find a replacement.”

“*Ach*, that idiot Jennings, he doesn’t understand anything.” Egon had a point. Roger Jennings was hired as director of the Calgary Opera because he had helped a local grain storage company turn a profit. The board of trustees, in their infinite wisdom, no doubt, thought he might do the same for the opera. They were soon disabused of that notion and stuck with a mediocre manager. “I worry that we bring this up with Jennings,” said Egon. “He finds us someone even worse.”

“That’s a real possibility, alas.”

“So, what do we do?” asked Polyna.

“How about this? We’ll focus on Act Two for the next few days, which doesn’t require the tenor, while I give Richard some intensive private coaching. Who knows? Maybe magic will strike.”

“Or maybe not,” said Polyna.

The prospect of private sessions with Richard filled me with dread. How on earth was I going to turn a bumbling middle-aged man into even a faint approximation

of Puccini's young lover?

Richard resisted me every step of the way, not because he was arrogant or bloody minded, but because he was totally untrained. He had taken only singing and music lessons, not acting, not stage movement. And acting, easy as it might appear to the uninitiated, is a complex, evanescent discipline. It can't be mastered overnight. I tried to convince Richard that acting was basically reacting, that all an actor really had to do was lose himself in the given situation and respond naturally to it, but that was beyond him. He kept reverting to posing and posturing. I longed – ached – for a brief instant of credible, lifelike behavior. In vain, alas, utterly in vain.

Into my slough of despond, there did flicker a few feeble beams of light. Richard took rather well to practical tips. He could follow clear and simple instructions, as long as they stayed far away from such intangibles as “credible, lifelike behavior.” I got him to stop singing into the wings. He learned to angle himself so he seemed to be addressing his partner while projecting out to the public. He even abandoned those bewildering outbursts of robotic activity. After three days of hard work, he seemed a bit less raw and out of place. Was he an ardent young lover? Was he a convincing Pinkerton? Far from it.

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I had arranged to stage Richard's third act aria on his return to regular rehearsals so as to keep Richard and Polyna apart a bit longer. While my cunning little plan avoided direct interaction with the dreaded diva herself, her husband was on hand and in excellent form. Within a short time, Richard's musical insecurities brought everything to a standstill.

"*Nein, nein, nein.* You are always coming in late."

"Maestro, sorry, but I couldn't see my cue."

"Just count and come in automatic."

"I did."

"Then you count wrong. Come, we try again."

Yet once more Richard struggled to master his (very simple) entrance. Once more he failed. Once more Egon did what he does best.

"*Nein, nein, nein!* I have of this enough." With that, he slammed down his score and shot me a dark look. "I wait for you outside." The air in the rehearsal room grew noticeably thicker as he stamped out and slammed the door.

I put the company on break and followed Egon into the hallway. He was quite literally shaking with rage. "I tell you this man is impossible."

"Maybe it would help if you gave him a clearer cue."

"I give him the cues. He does not look."

"The last few times you didn't give him anything."

"What is the use? He looks but does not see. I go

now to this Roger fellow. I have of the tenor enough. You come with me?”

“I have no alternative.” For all my warnings, Richard seemed as raw and unfocused as ever. I wasn’t running an opera training program; I was staging MADAME BUTTERFLY. Enough! *Basta con questa pasta!*

Roger Jennings nervously greeted us at his door and ushered us into an unpretentious little office, as plain and bleak as the prairies. There was nothing on the walls to indicate he ran an opera company, no pictures of singers or composers, just some snapshots of the broad rolling farmlands of central Canada.

“I gather you’ve been having some problems with the tenor.”

“That’s rather an understatement,” I said.

“I don’t get it. He gave me a great audition. He sang the hell outta his aria.”

“Just now we rehearse it. He comes in wrong every time. He is total impossible.”

“I’m sorry to hear it.”

“Not as sorry as we are,” I said. Roger looked away and started toying with some pencils on his desk.

“There is here really a problem,” said Egon.

“A very serious one,” I added.

“There is also good news. We have already the solution.”

“We do?” I asked. Evidently Egon and La Polyna

had not been idle these past few days.

“*Jawohl*. This wonderful Mexican tenor Jorge Alvorado has sung Pinkerton many times already in Spain and Italy. He is free for the performances.”

“What about rehearsals?” I asked. I had been down that dark road before. A lead is indisposed and a replacement rushes in to save the show, thereby destroying the director’s conception, since there isn’t time for adequate rehearsals.

“*Nein, nein*, I think of you, Roderick, very carefully. He can be here the beginning of next week.” That would give us two full weeks together – more than time enough. I’d heard nice things about Signor Alvorado and not just from the Ostrovsky-Kleinhaus mafia. It seemed our problem was solved.

“Well, I don’t know,” said Roger. “It sounds like a pretty expensive proposition.” What else do managers ever say?

“This you decide for yourself,” said Egon, “But Madame Ostrovsky and I will not work with this nincompoop. If you do not replace him, we pack our bags and go home.”

“But you signed your contracts.”

“Sorry, we do not come to Calgary to make a joke.”

I must say I was rather impressed. It’s true they had signed contracts, but opera isn’t a business. It’s art, or something like it.

Trapped in his seat of power, Roger struggled with Egon's threat. A new Butterfly, especially one of Polyna's stature, would be extremely difficult to find at this late date.

Egon kept admirably calm as Roger squirmed. "Here are the contacts for Alvorado's agent," he said. "This Verdun is a nice fellow, but Puccini comes first."

Roger still said nothing. Clearly, he'd never faced this sort of crisis before. Another beginner. Lord, would we ever get this show on stage?

Finally, Roger spoke. "What'll I tell my board?" The only relationship that ever really matters to a manager, especially in North America, is the one with his employers. Forget Puccini. Forget Mozart. The board must be indulged at all costs.

"Tell them the tenor is indisposed. We make a brilliant replacement," said Egon.

"But he's not sick at all." Good lord, didn't the man know anything?

"Roger, it's the graceful way out," I explained. "It's the best way for everyone to save face."

"While I wind up spending thousands of extra dollars."

"You want to save money, go to the supermarket," Egon snarled.

"Well, let me think about it."

"No. 'If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly.'" Roger obviously didn't get the

allusion. “It’s now or never. Time to decide. We’ve got artists downstairs waiting to rehearse. I won’t playact with them. Neither will Egon.”

“*Jawohl*,” said Egon, “We cannot wait with this. It is too important.”

“What if I have trouble with Alvorado’s agent? Once those guys hear you’re in a jam, they screw you.”

“Then we’ll find someone else,” I said.

“Whoever we get, he won’t have a big voice like Richard.” Roger seemed genuinely sorry to be losing him.

There was another sizable pause as Roger grappled further with the problem. He desperately wanted it to go away, but we wouldn’t let it, not for one second. Once again, I wondered why so many spineless types end up as opera managers.

“All right,” said Roger, “I’ll call Alvorado’s manager. He’s in Madrid, so I won’t be able to get to him till tomorrow.”

“But Richard must be told today,” I noted. “Right this very minute.”

“Roderick, I’ve got a million things to do .”

“So do I, or we won’t have a production at all.” I sensed that Roger needed extra encouragement, so I turned to Egon and said, “Why don’t you tell the cast we’ll reconvene around two, while I settle things up here with Roger?”

“Thank you, Roger. You will not regret this,” Egon

said.

Once Egon had left, Roger got wobbly. “You really think I should do this?”

“Yes. It’s in the best interest of the show.”

“If you say so. But you’ve got to be the guy who breaks it to him.”

“Now, see here, I didn’t hire him. You did.”

“But you’re so good with people. He won’t even realize he’s been sacked.”

“Sorry, but I couldn’t possibly.”

Roger locked eyes with me in a sudden, startling demonstration of will power. “This is a deal breaker. If you want this guy out, you lower the boom yourself.”

“Now, just a second. Egon’s unhappier with Richard than I am. Have him do it.”

“Not on your life. He’ll say something stupid and get us into all kinds of trouble.”

“Who’s to say I won’t?”

Roger’s gaze hardened. His eyes blazed with force and determination. “No more dithering. Just go out and do it.” Well, well, what a surprise. If Roger Jennings really wanted something, his spine could be ringed round with steel.

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I found our tenor in the rehearsal room, compulsively

pounding out the section of his aria that had proved so problematic. His powerful voice rang out repeatedly, in tune and on time. Why couldn't he have done it when it really mattered?

Richard looked up as I neared him. "That's right, isn't it?"

"It is."

"That's how I learned it. That's how I've always done it, but Egon keeps speeding up on me."

"He does?"

"You bet. His hands flop around like a giant Mixmaster and, before I know it, he's changed tempo."

"Surely not."

"Look, I'm the poor sucker dealing with him and I tell you he keeps hopping around like a..." Richard stopped and studied me a bit. "Hey, what's wrong? Is something eating you?"

"Richard, we've got to talk."

"No problem. Sit down. Take a load off." We settled ourselves at a rickety table littered with half-empty water bottles and stray rehearsal schedules. I wanted to start, but found it curiously difficult. There was this round gentleman, at least ten years my senior, lolling on his chair, absurdly ignorant of the blow that would shortly flatten him. I'd fired people before. I was acquainted with the awkward formalities, but Richard's innocence – or blindness, or complete and utter stupidity – robbed me of

speech. I struggled to find the right way to broach the matter, when Richard leaned forward and asked, “What’s the matter, man? Cat got your tongue?”

“Well, actually, Egon and I have been...”

Richard, fool that he was, plunged into the Stygian depths. “God, that guy. I try my best, but he just hollers and howls at me. It drives me totally bananas. I mean, it’s not his fault he’s German, but still...”

“Actually, he’s from Vienna.”

“You know what I mean. He gets upset over nothing and wastes our valuable time.”

“Richard, the conductor is always right.”

“Except when he’s wrong.”

“Egon’s certainly not wrong in your case.”

“What the hell does that mean?”

“It pains me to say this, but I’m afraid we’re going to have to replace you.”

“Replace me?”

“You can’t be all that surprised,” I said. “Things haven’t been going well. You’re upset. Egon’s upset. I’m upset. It’s the best for everyone.”

His face was frozen in shock. Surely, he must have sensed the catastrophe lurking round the corner.

“Now look, it’s really not as bad as all that,” I continued. “We’re determined to handle it in a considerate and forbearing manner, so as not to harm your chances elsewhere. We’ll just tell everyone you’ve taken ill. The cold

up here is a perennial problem. No one will question it. You'll receive your full fee, go back home and work with your teacher, and then, with any luck at all, you can start out again on a more promising, less problematic path." Pale, drained of color, his face retained its hurt, astonished expression.

"Polyna," he finally said. "She's always had it in for me."

"It's got nothing to do with her."

"Oh, come on, just because I'm not part of your tight arty group, you think I don't know what's what? This is her work. It's got her sweaty fingerprints all over it."

"Blaming others doesn't strike me as very helpful."

"What is? Packing my bags? Clearing outta here, tail between my legs?"

"That's not how I'd characterize it."

He wagged his head from side to side. "You really let me down, man. I thought you were on my side. I thought you really cared."

"I do care, but I care even more about the show. We're obliged to give the public the best BUTTERFLY we can."

"Fair or unfair. Right or wrong."

"Richard, be reasonable; you're just starting out."

"At age forty-three."

"Whatever your age, it's simply too early for you to be doing something this exposed. It's wrong for you and

wrong for the show.”

“Why didn’t you warn me? Why didn’t you just say my ass was on the line?”

“I tried, but you never...”

“*It’s nice. It’s getting better. You can do it.* That’s all I ever got from you, sweet talk, la la land. You never once told me the truth.”

“Sorry, I rather thought I had.”

“Right, sure.” He turned away. His shoulders drooped; his head hung down. It was a painful minute or so before he asked in a pale, plaintive voice, “You got kids, Roderick?”

“I’d have thought my sexual orientation would have been clear to you by now.”

“Doesn’t stop a guy from having kids. We had a nice married fella out on the lot with two teenage boys. At age forty-five, he saw some young dude cruising down the street and that was it.”

“Sorry, but I fail to see the point.”

“Kids are the point, kids. They look up to you all their lives. You’re their Dad, their hero, their star, then, wham!”

“Good lord, man, it’s nowhere as drastic as that.”

“The hell it isn’t. I finally get to the majors and lose the whole damn game.”

“You haven’t lost a thing.”

“My kids’ respect, their belief.”

“Don’t exaggerate, Richard; you aren’t going to lose anything at all.”

When he spoke again, it was in his earlier, more plaintive tone, which seemed in such curious contrast to his almost brutal singing. “Carol, she’s my oldest, you know what she did when she heard I got this job? She went and bought herself a ticket to fly out here for the premiere. She just started living on her own and every penny counts but her old man’s dreams mean so much to her that she just had to make the sacrifice. The boys are busy with school and my wife Kit hates flying, so the only one coming out is Carol. Or was. Sure hope she can cash in that ticket.” He slumped back in his chair.

“Well if there’s really a problem, I’ll see if the company will cover it.”

“It’s not about the money!” Then his anger subsided and he returned to the soft, rueful tone I knew so well.

“Sorry, just feeling kinda emotional.”

It was at exactly this moment that Polyna danced – no, twirled – into the rehearsal room. “My mistake,” she said, “I was looking for a place to vocalize.”

“Give us a few minutes,” I said. “We’re just finishing up.”

“Of course, *caro*, of course. Sorry to interrupt.” And with that, she duly danced her way out again, barely disguising her delight at seeing Richard downcast before me.

After another prolonged silence, Richard started in again, even more quietly than before. “You know why I did all this, why I went through hell and high water to train myself and condition myself and change myself so I could finally make it in Operaland? My kids. They believed in me. They sat me down and convinced me to give up my job and take the plunge. They went, ‘You worked like a dog year after year selling cars. Do something you want, something you really love. Go out there and be a star tenor.’”

“You mean to tell me this whole thing was your children’s idea?”

“And my wife too, of course. They’re behind me, man, one hundred percent, and now you’re asking me to go back home, tail between my legs, and hand them some crap about getting sick. How can I do that? How can you ask me to piss away my dreams after all their love and encouragement?” How small and sad he looked at that moment. How defenseless. Finally, a new mood came over him. He stiffened up and raised his gaze until he was staring straight at me. “My family’s right, you know. I can sing. Give me one more chance and I promise I’ll give you one hell of a Pinkerton, I really and truly will.”

I rather doubted it, but he’d gotten through to me somehow, that curious fireplug of a man. For all my Cantabridgian rationality, I do work in the opera. I’ve got this soft spot, this Dickensian weakness for sob stories and

tearjerkers. I was staging Puccini, for heaven's sake! And so, against my better judgment and with considerable wariness, I became Richard's advocate.

Roger Jennings was delighted. He was spared the tedium of hiring a replacement (and paying an extra fee) and avoided the indignity of explaining everything to his board. Egon and La Polyna were less amused. Much as I suspected, however, they weren't really ready to give up their handsome double fee. Instead, they did their best to make rehearsals extremely tiresome, with numerous demands from *la Diva* and the occasional choleric outburst from the *Kapellmeister*.

###

Opening night belonged to Polyna, of course; MADAME BUTTERFLY is always the exclusive property of its leading lady. As for Richard, well, he sounded healthy and didn't bumble about as much as I had feared he would. Luckily for him, the public in Calgary proved extremely tolerant. No one laughed or threw rotten tomatoes. Even the press was fairly kind. It certainly didn't count as "one hell of a Pinkerton," but it wasn't disastrous either.

As the bows drew to a close, Richard jogged over and engulfed me in a sweaty bear hug. Like most neophytes, he still was in the throes of opening night nerves. "I hope I didn't mess up too bad. I kinda got lost in

that final exit.”

“I doubt anyone noticed,” I said and attempted to extricate myself.

He was unwilling to let me go. “Man, I really gotta thank you for getting me through it.”

“Nonsense,” I replied. “You were the one who was out there. Keep working that way and all will be well.” In fact, his case was so unlikely, his talents so idiosyncratic, I couldn’t possibly predict with any certainty what the larger operatic community might make of him. All I felt at that moment was relief. Somehow or other, we got through it. I could collect my fee and go home.

My thoughts were interrupted by a sudden shout from Richard: “Carol!” He set me free and rushed over to embrace a tall, gangling young woman who seemed stunned by all the backstage clamor and confusion. He dragged her over. “This is the girl I’ve been telling you about,” he said, “Carol, my oldest.”

We shared some pleasantries and shook hands. I was startled by her damp palms and uncertain air, not to mention her unfortunate attire – a polyester pantsuit in a dangerously electric cerise. “Now, you be nice to her, Roderick; she’s my biggest supporter.”

“Oh, Daddy, come on.” At that moment, Richard was waylaid by an exuberant trustee and I was left to chat with her on my own. I asked how she liked seeing her father on stage.

“Oh, it was great. I’m just so proud of him.”

“I can imagine.”

“Can I tell you a little secret?”

“By all means.”

“I never really saw an opera before.”

“You’re a lucky woman.” Carol seemed shocked.

“Just being clever, my dear. Pay no heed.”

“Daddy told me you helped him a lot.”

“One does what one can.”

“No, no,” she said, “You were really great, him being so inexperienced and all.”

“It was my pleasure.”

“Can I ask a silly question?”

“Ask away.”

“Daddy’s pretty good at this, isn’t he?”

I was a model of tact and discretion. “Yes, he most certainly is.”

“Do you think he’s going to get famous?”

“Is that important?”

“To him it is. He always wants to be best at everything. He’d get sore at my brothers if they beat him in just about anything.”

“What about you?”

“I’m the girl in the family. I didn’t have to shoot hoops with him. I guess I was kinda lucky, huh?” There was a small pause while we studied each other from opposite sides of the moon. “But you still haven’t told me

if you think Daddy is going to become famous.”

“I’ve really no idea. These things normally take quite a bit of time. If he does get famous, he’ll have you flying all over the globe.” I’ve no idea why I chose something so trivial; I must have wanted in some small way to impress her.

“He will?”

“That’s what opera singers do. They fly from country to country to make their careers.”

“Gosh, I don’t know how often I could take off from work. I was pretty lucky my boss let me fly out here.” Our conversation soon dwindled to a close. I felt terribly embarrassed for the poor girl, mixing so uneasily with the cognoscenti. She really had no idea of the life her father sought for himself.

I wondered if Richard did either.