

THE PIAGGI SUITE

A Comedy in Two Acts

by

Diane Grant

“Music, the greatest good that mortals know,
And all of heaven we have here below.”

Joseph Addison – A Song for St. Cecilia’s Day

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Member of the Dramatists Guild, Inc.
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Cast of Characters

Shirley Whitlock:	A legal secretary, Darlene's aunt
Gwen Turner:	A housekeeper, forties
Louise Anderson:	A soprano, twenty-five
Ziggy Martin:	A singer and lyricist, twenty-six
Darlene Lescault:	A composer, seventeen
Eric Chapman:	A composer, pianist and retreat manager, thirties
Barney Rushton:	A contractor, middle-aged
Sophia Piaggi:	A famous opera singer, indeterminate age
Norman MacMillan:	Sophia's secretary, forties

Setting

Aeolian Manor, an old mansion and a retreat for musicians in The Berkshires.

Time

The present, mid-July.

ACT I

Scene I

SETTING: The communal room of the retreat, a large sitting room with
 French doors upstage center, which open onto a garden.
It's furnished with comfortable sofas and big armchairs, one of
which revolves, a long table, and a piano.

The room is dark, the curtains drawn.

AT RISE: Offstage, two voices, a man and a woman's, singing the round,
Mister Bach. Shirley sits in a chair, a shaft of light from a
doorway illuminating her. She's finishing off a doughnut and cup
of coffee.

Gwen enters. She opens the curtains, flooding the room with light,
then opens the French doors. The music swells. She stops and
listens to the music. The music ends. She doesn't move.

Shirley coughs and holds up her empty coffee cup. Gwen takes it,
and exits.

Louise and Ziggy enter.

 LOUISE

Wasn't that exhilarating? Song before breakfast.

 ZIGGY

I love singing with you. You're the best.

 LOUISE

I hope Harmon Breslin thinks so.

 ZIGGY

You're auditioning for Harmon Breslin?

 LOUISE

Yes. He's coming to hear me at the public concert.

 ZIGGY

Way to go.

LOUISE

I have everything crossed. Fingers, toes. Hey, why don't you sing at the concert? .

ZIGGY

I'm not performing anymore.

LOUISE

Why? You're a natural singer.

ZIGGY

(laughs)

Someday, I'll get some training.

SHIRLEY

It's dangerous to sing without training. You can do terrible damage to the voice.

LOUISE

(to Shirley)

Why don't you sing with us, Shirley? It makes you feel so good.

SHIRLEY

There's too much tension in my neck muscles. I'm sure I've got a hostile closure of the vocal cords.

(Ziggy comes up behind her and puts his hands on her shoulders.)

ZIGGY

I can fix that.

SHIRLEY

What are you doing back there? Get away.

ZIGGY

A good massage'll relax those muscles and the cords'll open right up.

(Ziggy massages Shirley's neck.)

Give yourself to me, Shirley.

SHIRLEY

Get your hands off me!

(Ziggy throws his hands up in the air.)

ZIGGY

Whoa.

SHIRLEY

Massage doesn't do a thing for me, thank you. I'm getting a cold. My window banged open last night. The lock's broken.

LOUISE

Tell Eric. He'll fix it.

SHIRLEY

He's a musician, not a handyman.

LOUISE

He's running the place, now. He'll hire a handyman.

SHIRLEY

It was so thoughtless of Edie and Joe to retire. You watch. Eric won't be able to manage when the place fills up. If it fills up. He's too...

(makes a gesture with her hands, meaning intense or scattered.)

LOUISE

Shirley, he's wonderful.

SHIRLEY

You think everybody's wonderful. The whole place is looking kind of seedy, if you ask me.

LOUISE

It's not the Ritz.

SHIRLEY

It's certainly not Tanglewood.

(Louise picks up a brochure and displays it)

LOUISE

Have you read the brochure? Aeolian Manor is a charming sylvan retreat, where everyone who loves to make music can relax and breathe the country air...

ZIGGY

...play quartets on the lawn, write sonatas in the pool...

LOUISE

or sing Schubert in the shade of its sycamore trees.

ZIGGY

(gives brochure to Shirley)

Try to say that three times.

SHIRLEY

Oh, piddle.

(looks at brochure)

LOUISE

Look at that old photo. There's Gwen, hiding in the back. Isn't she beautiful?

SHIRLEY

That's a horrible haircut.

LOUISE

(to Ziggy)

I'm going to run scales until eleven, study German until twelve, and then it's Yoga before lunch. What're you going to do today?

ZIGGY

Malingering.

LOUISE

Would you like to malingering at croquet this afternoon?

ZIGGY

If you promise not to beat me.

LOUISE

Promise.

(Darlene enters, wearing a Puccini T-shirt over a bikini, her towel over her shoulder.)

DARLENE

Did you hear? Sophia Piaggi's coming here for two weeks. Isn't that awesome?

LOUISE

The Sophia Piaggi?

SHIRLEY

She'd never come to a backwater like this.

DARLENE

(without stopping for breath)

It's true. Eric told me. His Mom and Dad know her. Can you believe that? They met her in Bregenz twenty years ago just before her husband died. She was playing

Desdemona in *Otello* at the Festspielhaus at the time and Edie and Joe went back after the performance and they've been friends ever since and they just saw her again at Covent Garden in *Turandot*. She was brilliant as Turandot but she said the production was a disaster and she was exhausted so Edie and Joe told her about Aeolian and the country air, and she said she'd come because she'd earned some R&R. Isn't that awesome? That's what Edie said, "R&R."

(Darlene sees Ziggy and smothered a scream.)

You're Ziggy Martin. You can't be. You are.

ZIGGY

I seem to be.

DARLENE

(to Louise)

He really is.

(to Ziggy)

You sing like God.

(to Louise)

He opened for Sheryl Crow. Can you believe that?

(to Ziggy)

I saw you with Dave Matthews. In Syracuse. It was the most beautiful night of my entire life.

Did you really sit in with Sting?

(Ziggy shrugs. He did.)

Awesome. How come you aren't singing anymore? I've missed you so. Did you ever see me at *The Black Hole*?

SHIRLEY

Darlene!

DARLENE

It's a club!

SHIRLEY

People go there to get *high*.

DARLENE

You can get *high* anywhere. What does the club have to do with it? Zip.

(to Ziggy)

I'm mad about the *Hole*. I had this song I wrote for you but they wouldn't let me go backstage. In November, two years ago. I was sitting right in front, surrounded by an entourage of coffee cups. I'd had eight cups of coffee and I was *high*.

SHIRLEY

What on earth are you wearing?

DARLENE

A T-shirt. Giacomo Puccini. I love Puccini.

SHIRLEY

Under the T-shirt.

DARLENE

It's a bathing suit, Auntie. I've seen you wear bathing suits.

SHIRLEY

Not like that, you haven't.

DARLENE

I wonder what Sophia really looks like.

LOUISE

I heard her *Madame Butterfly* at the Met. It was so beautiful.

SHIRLEY

You know why he died, don't you? It was a huge scandal.

LOUISE

Who?

SHIRLEY

Her husband. He was a surgeon and he O.D'd. on cocaine.

ZIGGY

O.D'd.?

SHIRLEY

Yes, O.D'd. He used to operate when he was *high*.

DARLENE

(to Ziggy)

Auntie knows everything.

SHIRLEY

I know a lot more than you think, Miss Smarty-Pants.

(Eric enters.)

LOUISE

Eric, is Sophia Piaggi really coming here?

ERIC

Today.

SHIRLEY

But she's used to the best.

(Gwen enters, carrying a basket and garden shears.)

LOUISE

This place is the best.

ERIC

And I have excellent help, don't I, Gwen. Gwen's really in charge, thank God.

DARLENE

Gwen, did you hear? Sophia Piaggi's coming here. Isn't that awesome?

GWEN

(darkly)

Awesome.

SHIRLEY

Gwen, the lasagna was far too spicy last night. For hours, I could feel stomach acid backing up into my larynx and irritating the vocal cords.

GWEN

I'll speak to the cook.

LOUISE

I didn't think it was that spicy.

ERIC

(affectionately)

Of course, you're the only singer I know who lives on chili fries.

GWEN

(to Ziggy)

Feet.

(She exits to the garden. Ziggy takes his feet off the sofa.)

DARLENE

I'm going to swim. See you at croquet, Louise.

(She smiles broadly at Ziggy and flips her hair.)

Care for a dip?

(She exits.)

LOUISE

To breakfast. I'm so hungry, I'm going to have pancakes with syrup, scrambled eggs and bacon, and two pieces of toast with orange and pineapple marmalade.

ZIGGY

Not me. My appetite left me somewhere near the stomach acid and the larynx.

(He exits.)

SHIRLEY

(watches him from the doors)

He's going after Darlene. Did you see the way he was looking at her? He seems very fond of pubescent bodies, if you catch my drift.

LOUISE

He's a big teddy bear.

ERIC

(warily)

Is he?

(He exits.)

SHIRLEY

Nobody drops out without a reason. *The Black Hole!* That girl was there the night she killed herself.

LOUISE

What girl?

SHIRLEY

It was in all the papers. She shot herself in her car.

LOUISE

Have you had breakfast?

SHIRLEY

I'll have a little something. I hope Gwen wasn't upset about the lasagna. I ate it, after all. I remember those children starving in Somalia.

LOUISE

(amused)

If they'd had that lasagna, they'd have cleaned their plates, no matter how spicy it was.

(Ziggy enters, humming, crosses the room, and exits.)

SHIRLEY
Arlette. That's what her name was. Arlette.

LOUISE
Who?

SHIRLEY
The girl who killed herself.

(Darlene enters.)

DARLENE
Ziggy's getting his suit. Whoo-ee. He needs a towel. I'm going to get him one of ours.

SHIRLEY
Don't give him one of mine.

DARLENE
He's not going to keep it.

LOUISE
He can have one of mine.

SHIRLEY
I don't want her hanging around with that man.

DARLENE
You know me and creative men. I can't resist them.

SHIRLEY
Darlene. Just look at him. He's a womanizer.

DARLENE
You are so out of it. It's not who you are, it's what you make. Puccini was a womanizer. Does that mean *Tosca* sucks?

(She exits.)

SHIRLEY
(calling after her)
I don't find that kind of language amusing.
(to Louise)
I wonder why she's really coming here?

LOUISE

Who?

SHIRLEY

Sophia!

looks in. (Louise and Shirley exit. A man appears at the French doors and Eric enters on his cellphone and the man listens.)

ERIC

(into phone)

Is this Rushton's? Can you hear me, now?

(loudly)

Is Barney there? Barney Rushton.

(listens)

He's retired? Is everyone retiring? Who am I talking to? Chuck. Eric Chapman. From the Aeolian Manor? Listen, Barney was going to repair some of the masonry here. Have you got another man who could...

(listens)

We owe you how much?

(listens)

Uh huh, uh huh....Well, you're the boss. No. no. No problem.

(hangs up)

Solid work, Eric. You are really good at this.

(He gestures as if hanging himself, puts his cell phone in his pocket, goes over to the piano and starts to play. Ziggy enters and hears Eric playing. Eric becomes aware of him and stops playing.)

ZIGGY

Nice. That one of yours?

ERIC

Mmm hmm.

ZIGGY

You're still writing.

ERIC

Mmm hmm.

(Ziggy pulls a napkin out of his pocket.)

ZIGGY

Take a look at this.

(hands the paper to Eric.)

I'm kind of proud of it, actually.

(Eric hands the paper back.)

ERIC

I'm sure it's good.

ZIGGY

It's not my usual stuff. I'm changing direction. It's more serious, more classical, like....

ERIC

...An art song.

ZIGGY

Yeah. An art song. I thought you'd like to have a crack at the music.

ERIC

You wouldn't want a nobody like me writing the music.

ZIGGY

You write terrific tunes.

ERIC

But I wrote you some and you couldn't use them, could you? You needed a name. Somebody with credentials, a track record.

ZIGGY

Hey, you're talking a long time ago. It was business. It was nothing personal.

ERIC

How come I felt so much personal pain?

ZIGGY

I don't want to perform anymore, man, and I've got a lot of beautiful words you could put to music.

ERIC

You still drinking?

ZIGGY

I'm a pussycat. Lapping up bowls of milk. Lowfat.

(He pulls a lollipop out of his pocket, takes paper off of it, and puts it in his mouth.)

Trying to stop smoking, too. Want one?

ERIC

No thanks.

(Ziggy tries to give him the lyrics.)

No.

ZIGGY

Your loss.

(Ziggy leaves the lyrics on the piano. Darlene enters, carrying a large beach towel.)

DARLENE

Where's your suit? Did you change your mind? I had to fight for this towel. Shirley won't part with anything. We're not to lose it and we're not to stay out too long and we're not to go out too far and, don't you forget it, we're not to fool around.

ZIGGY

Hey, hey, if we're not going to fool around, forget it.

DARLENE

Hey, hey to you.

(They spar playfully. She flicks the towel at him. Ziggy picks up the lyrics and starts to put them in his pocket.)

What's that?

ZIGGY

It's nothing. A few words on paper.

DARLENE

Lyrics?

ZIGGY

You could say that.

DARLENE

For something new?

(Ziggy nods.)

Could I hear them? Please.

(Ziggy gives Eric the lollipop to hold while he reads.)

ZIGGY

It's called *All For You*.

(reading)

"I am wounded and in flight
Blinded by the glare of light
Shivering in the dark of night
Take me, hold me, keep me warm.

"With sorrows I am pressed
Lay my head upon your breast
Wrap me round and let me rest
Take me, hold me, keep me safe.

"I'll be still and hide my face
Be still and hide my face
Sheltered in your sweet embrace
'Til I can sing my songs again.

"And when I'm mended and new
I will sing them all for you.
My home, my joy, my love, my life,
I will sing them all for you."

DARLENE

That was to die for.

ZIGGY

Thank you.

(He takes the lollipop back.)

DARLENE

Who's going to write the music?

ZIGGY

(looking at Eric)

Why don't you?

DARLENE

You're asking me?

ZIGGY

We could work together.

DARLENE

You mean like collaborate?

(Ziggy nods.)

That is so cool. I have to warn you, though, when it comes to the work, I'm uncompromising and tough.

ZIGGY

Just the kind of collaborator I need.

(Ziggy gives her the lyrics.)

DARLENE

I'm honored.

(Darlene crushes the paper napkin to her chest.)

Oh, I've scrunched it.

ZIGGY

Here, I'll smooth it out. Turn around.

(He puts the paper napkin on Darlene's back and presses it flat.)

DARLENE

We'll write something so beautiful, you'll die of pleasure. We can work in my room. I'm in the Jenny Lind on the second floor.

ZIGGY

Let's start, now.

DARLENE

Cool.

ZIGGY

(He takes another lollipop out of his pocket.)

Pop?

DARLENE

Thanks.

(She takes the lollipop and exits. Ziggy picks up his guitar.)

ERIC

If you hurt that little girl, I'll kill you.

ZIGGY

You're a real asshole, you know that?

(Ziggy exits. Gwen enters.)

GWEN

Her secretary called again. From the car. Are we sure we understand that Ms. Piaggi has to have a suite facing the east with a bath, a piano, and a double bed with a firm mattress?

And we do know she must have fresh unscented flowers in her room, mineral water and some kind of fruit? Every day? And she hopes we've arranged to keep the kitchen open so she can take her meals at any hour and she's not to be disturbed before ten.

ERIC

Have we done that?

GWEN

We did that after the first phone call.

ERIC

Did you replace the plaque on the door of the Joan Sutherland suite?

GWEN

We no longer have a Joan Sutherland suite. We have a Piaggi Suite. And a very good suite it is.

ERIC

Good.

GWEN

We moved the Yamaha into the sitting room. It has an excellent tone. The kitchen staff is unhappy but holding.

ERIC

She's the one we have to keep happy. What kind of accommodations does her secretary need?

GWEN

A room with a cot, I imagine. And a box of Roloids. Why is she coming here?

ERIC

Now, this is not for publication.

GWEN

My lips are sealed.

ERIC

When Sophia played Turandot in London, a new soprano, named Carinna Doulenc, was supposed to make her debut as Liu.

GWEN

I've heard about her. Doesn't she travel everywhere with her cat?

ERIC

Yes. She loved that cat.

GWEN

Loved?

ERIC

On opening night, she found it dead in her dressing room.

GWEN

What?

ERIC

She had hysterics and the understudy had to go on. They say it's ruined her career.

GWEN

How horrible.

ERIC

Sophia sang brilliantly and got rave notices but she thought Carinna had ruined opening night. She's coming here to get as far away from everything as she can.

GWEN

Well, this is pretty far away from everything.

(Offstage, a doorbell rings.)

ERIC

There they are.

(smoothing down his hair)

How do I look?

GWEN

They just called.

ERIC

Yes, but where was the car when they called?

GWEN

She's not the Queen of the Night.

ERIC

She's a world famous diva with a first rate reputation.

GWEN

And a second rate voice.

ERIC

Gwen!

GWEN

With great gasps for breath in the lower register and hideous glottal stops every time she reaches for anything higher than a B flat.

ERIC

Never say that out loud again!

GWEN

(whispers)

And too much vibrato.

ERIC

I am so serious about this. If she likes us, she might want to make a contribution.

GWEN

To the little people?

ERIC

To us, if we behave ourselves.

(Offstage, the doorbell rings again. Eric jumps.)

I'll get it.

(He exits. Gwen takes a bottle and a rag from her pocket, sprays a spot on the carpet.)

GWEN

Grrrr.

(Louise enters)

I thought you were having breakfast.

LOUISE

(joking)

I'm running away from Shirley. She's upset because her eggs were underdone.

(Gwen rubs harder at the carpet.)

GWEN

(to herself)

I'd like to throw a couple of hard boiled ones at her.

(Eric enters.)

ERIC

(to Gwen)

There was nobody there.

(to Louise)

Have you had breakfast?

(Louise smiles at Gwen. Eric goes to the piano.)

Is the voice warmed up?

LOUISE

Yep.

GWEN

(to Louise)

Watch the portamento.

(She exits.)

ERIC

She's right. Not a hint of sliding from note to note. Hit every one squarely in the middle.

LOUISE

No sliding. Absolutely.

ERIC

Un bel di, I think.

LOUISE

Un bel di. Good.

(Eric starts to play.)

Do you think we'll be ready for the concert?

(Eric stops playing.)

ERIC

We'll be fine.

LOUISE

We will, won't we?

ERIC

Yes.

(He starts to play again.)

LOUISE

Do you really think Mr. Breslin'll like me?

(Eric stops playing.)

ERIC

He'll love you. Everybody loves you. I love you.

LOUISE

Don't play with me. I'm talking about my voice.

ERIC

I'm not playing. I love you. Not your voice, all of you. Say you'll marry me.

LOUISE

I can't.

ERIC

You're crazy about me. I know you are. I can tell here...

(kisses her)

...and here.

(kisses her again)

LOUISE

I don't have time to fall in love.

ERIC

It takes a millisecond.

(He comes up behind her, puts his arms around her. She moves into the embrace, leans against him.)

LOUISE

But what about all the years that come after? Think about the casualty rate of singer marriages. If Mr. Breslin takes me on, it'll change everything. I'll have to go all over the world at a moment's notice – an opera here, a recital there, personal appearances, recording sessions. I'll be in the magazines and on TV. You'd be here at Aeolian. How could we stay together?

ERIC

Say, "Yes," and we'll work out the details later.

LOUISE

You're impossible.

(She kisses him.)

ERIC

(seriously)

Louise, whatever happens, I'll always put you first.

LOUISE

Maybe Sophia could put in a good word for me. She must know Harmon Breslin. Everybody knows Harmon Breslin.

ERIC

Are we going to work or not?

Eric plays and Louise sings. Barney, the man whom we saw outside, enters and quietly listens. He has a camera around his neck. Louise sees him and stops singing. He claps.)

BARNEY

Beautiful, beautiful.

ERIC

Hello?

BARNEY

Barney Rushton. The door was open.
(to Louise)

Brava.

ERIC

Rushton?

BARNEY

Chuck said you'd called.

ERIC

Did you ring the bell a few minutes ago?

BARNEY

I did but then I saw that statue at the back and walked around to take some pictures. It's really something.

ERIC

It's Apollo. The God of Music.

BARNEY

There's a huge chunk out of the base. Have you noticed?

ERIC

(alarmed)

No.

(Gwen enters.)

BARNEY

Hello.

ERIC

Gwen, this is...

BARNEY

Barney Rushton. Have we met before?

GWEN

No.

BARNEY

My mistake. Nice to meet you, Gwen.

(looks down.)

Is this floor warped?

(looks up)

My God, look at that.

(He takes a picture.)

GWEN

Did you take my picture?

BARNEY

I'm sorry, sweetheart. I was focussed on that lintel above your head.

(to Eric)

Have you noticed that crack?

GWEN

I don't want my picture taken, thank you very much.

ERIC

I thought you were retired.

BARNEY

I was on my way to Toronto in the Buick out there when Chuck called. He said you had your pants in a knot, so, I said to myself, "Barney, you could start your retirement here and make a little money while you're at it." Do you have a room available?

ERIC

I wish could say, "Yes," but we're closed to the public. I'd love to hire you on a daily basis.

BARNEY

Nah. That wouldn't suit me. I'm retired. This is a great old place. When was she built?

ERIC

1902.

BARNEY

1902. Yep. Thought so.

ERIC

Thought so?

BARNEY

Dry rot.

ERIC

Dry rot?

BARNEY

You don't want to fool with dry rot.

ERIC

We're talking big money, here, Barney. Right?

BARNEY

I could do you a real good deal.

ERIC

How good?

BARNEY

I'd throw in the masonry. No charge.

ERIC

The thing is, we're expecting a very important guest.

Anybody I'd know?
BARNEY

No. She's an opera singer.
ERIC

No kidding.
BARNEY

Sophia Piaggi.
ERIC

The Sophia Piaggi?
BARNEY

(surprised)
You've heard of her?
ERIC

Yep. She's pretty good. Breathy but good.
BARNEY

You think she's breathy?
GWEN

And too much vibrato, don't you think?
(about Louise)
Now, this gal's got a beautiful voice.
BARNEY

(to Eric)
What about the Renata Tebaldi room? It's out of the way.
GWEN

Gwen?
(She stares at him, stonily.)
You wouldn't disturb Ms. Piaggi?
ERIC

(shaking Eric's hand)
She won't even know I'm here. My bags are in the car.
BARNEY

I'll help you. Do you sing, Barney?
GWEN

BARNEY

Do you?

GWEN

No.

(Barney and Gwen exit. Offstage SFX: a screech of brakes, and the sound of skidding on gravel. Gwen, offstage)

Watch out! Oh, my God. Look out, look out!

BARNEY

(offstage)

Brake, brake, brake, brake!

(Offstage SFX: a crash. Eric and Louise exit. Darlene, Ziggy, and Shirley enter.)

DARLENE

What's going on?

SHIRLEY

With my luck, somebody's hit my car.

SOPHIA

(offstage)

Who parked this old wreck out here? It's jutting out into the driveway. You stupid man. How could you park like that? You'll pay for this. Get out of my way.

DARLENE

Oh oh.

BARNEY

(offstage)

You were driving too fast.

SOPHIA

(offstage)

Get away from me.

(Sophia enters. She's wearing sunglasses and is all in black, except for a flamboyant, multi-colored silk coat. She's with an excellent carriage and a commanding

beautiful presence.)

SOPHIA (continued)

I always drive too fast. I like driving too fast. It relaxes me.

(sees the four staring at her and her manner changes instantly)

Ah, a welcoming committee for Sophia. Ciao, everybody.

(flings off her coat. Shirley catches it and strokes it.)

Beautiful, isn't it? For the late summer. I wear fur in the winter. I have nine fur coats. To tell you the truth, I don't need nine. How do you travel with nine furs?

(takes off sunglasses, to Ziggy)

Who are you, darling?

ZIGGY

Ziggy Martin.

SOPHIA

Ziggy. I have got to sit.

(Sophia takes Ziggy's arm and sits.)

What are you, Ziggy?

ZIGGY

I, uh, I'm an all American boy, I guess.

SOPHIA

You are, aren't you, darling. What do you do?

ZIGGY

I write songs.

SOPHIA

Magnifico. I adore crossover music. I'm making a CD of new songs soon, like Kiri and Domingo and Dawn. I could sing one of your songs. Would you like that?

ZIGGY

That's a fantastic idea.

SOPHIA

Renee made a jazz CD and now she has a dessert named after her. *La Diva Renee*, chocolate with hazelnuts.

DARLENE

Ms. Piaggi, you are to die for.

SOPHIA

Grazie.

(to Shirley)

Could you get me a drink of water, darling?

SHIRLEY

With ice?

SOPHIA

Just water, lukewarm, and hurry.

(Shirley gives the coat to Darlene and exits. Eric rushes in.)

ERIC

There wasn't too much harm done. Is there anything I can get for you? Something to eat or drink? I could show you up to your suite, if you like.

SOPHIA

Not now, darling. I'm sitting down.

(Louise enters.)

LOUISE

Ms. Piaggi. Louise Anderson. I'm a soprano, too.

ERIC

Louise won the Mirella Freni competition this year. Most promising newcomer.

DARLENE

The judges said she sounded just like Leontyne Price.

SOPHIA

Well. I must hear you sing sometime.

LOUISE

(She puts out her hand to Sophia.)

You've always been an inspiration to me. I heard you in Rigoletto when I was a teenager.

(Sophia ignores Louise's hand. Barney enters, carrying a small notebook and a pen.)

BARNEY

What are you going to do about my car?

SOPHIA

(to Eric)

Who is this ridiculous person who brings me all this trouble?

BARNEY

Lady, your car was moving and mine was standing still.

(He make notes in the notebook.)

SOPHIA

What is he doing here?

ERIC

He's a...a writer.

BARNEY

A writer?

ERIC

A writer.

BARNEY

Right.

(tearing off a piece of paper)

Read this. It's an estimate. There's about \$1,200 damage done, I'd say.

SOPHIA

Take it away. My secretary does all that.

(to Eric)

Now, darling, the rooms.

ERIC

We've put you in The Piaggi Suite.

SOPHIA

The Piaggi Suite?

ERIC

It's our very best.

SOPHIA

How charming. Now, I am happy.

ERIC

(mutters at Barney)

She won't even know I'm here.

(Shirley enters, carrying a glass of water.)

SHIRLEY

Your water, Ms. Piaggi?

SOPHIA

So sweet. Grazie.

(ignores the glass)

You have writers, here?

ERIC

He's our first.

(Sophia and Eric exit.)

ZIGGY

Whoa.

DARLENE

Wow, can she yell. Is that a diaphragm or what?

SHIRLEY

Don't be rude. She's an artiste. She has temperament.

(Shirley drinks the water. Norman enters, carrying two large leopard skin suitcases. He's wearing a tailored three piece suit.)

BARNEY

Are you the secretary?

NORMAN

Yes.

(He crosses and puts the suitcases offstage, re-enters.)

BARNEY

(waves the paper)

I'm the Buick.

(Norman takes the paper.)

SHIRLEY

Secretary. How do you pronounce that? Flunkey?

NORMAN

Did you call me a flunkey?

SHIRLEY

I said the word. I didn't mean anything by it.

NORMAN

What's your name?

(He exits.)

SHIRLEY

Shirley.

(Norman enters, carrying another leopard skin bag.)

NORMAN

Shirley, I never say anything without meaning it.

SHIRLEY

Alright, I mean this. I'm a secretary and I've never had to carry my boss's suitcases.

(Norman crosses and put the bag offstage, re-enters. Gwen enters, carrying another leopard skinsuitcase.)

NORMAN

Put that down!

(Gwen puts the suitcase down.)

Ms. Piaggi is my job.

(to Shirley)

It is a privilege to carry her suitcases.

(He takes the suitcase, crosses and puts the suitcase offstage.)

BARNEY

What about the damage to the cars?

(Norman exits.)

NORMAN

(offstage)

Ms. Piaggi will buy a new car.

BARNEY

Swell.

(Norman enters, carrying another leopard skin bag.)

NORMAN

She likes new cars. She has a Fiat 500 in Lugano, the small, silver Rolls in London, a Lincoln Navigator in Manhattan...

(He crosses and puts bag offstage, re-enters.)

BARNEY

I have a 1994 Buick LeSabre automatic with overdrive and one hundred forty three thousand miles on it. It's the only car I've got and it's damaged.

(Norman snaps his fingers.)

NORMAN

Coat.

(Darlene hands him the coat. To Barney)

Follow me. I'm in damage control.

(Norman exits, followed by Barney.)

(END OF SCENE)