

The Second Tosca

a play in two acts

by Tom Rowan

Draft Ten (Production): June, 2007

Copyright:

Tom Rowan
PO Box 2048
Times Square Station
New York, NY 10108
212-398-2389
TLRowan@hotmail.com
www.tomrowan.net

CAST OF CHARACTERS

AARON STEINER, a conductor, forties

LISA DUVALL, his fiancée, a soprano, mid-thirties

STEPHEN DUVALL, her younger brother and manager, early thirties

GLORIA FRANKLIN, a legendary diva, African-American, fifties

DARCY GREEN, her personal assistant, an aspiring singer, mid-twenties

NATHANIEL COLBY, a music student, early twenties

BEN, an assistant stage manager, thirties

ANGELINA, a soprano from the Golden Age

SETTING: Backstage at Opera California

TIME: The present

ACT ONE

Scene One

(Backstage at Opera California.)

Upstage right is the Star Dressing Room, which can be revealed or concealed as necessary through use of lighting or perhaps a scrim. It contains two dressing tables with lighted mirrors, a costume rack, chairs, and a small couch. One of the dressing tables is clearly in use, with makeup arranged in front of the mirror, on which several opening night greeting cards are posted. The room is separated by a practical door from the Green Room, which occupies the majority of the playing area. It is furnished with a long couch, a coffee table, a vending machine, and a small refrigerator. There is also a rehearsal piano and a sideboard equipped with a coffee-maker, a water heater, tea bags, and paper cups. The upstage wall is decorated with opera posters from past seasons and autographed photos of stars. It may also be partially made of scrim to allow for mysterious appearances when required. At stage left, several black leg curtains mark the edge of the Wings and unseen Stage area. Just to the right of this is a stage manager's station equipped with a clip light, a headset, and a high stool. The Stage Door is understood to be offstage right.

Early afternoon. Lights come up to reveal LISA sitting on the couch in the Dressing Room, studying a bulky printed opera score and listening to a Walkman. Occasionally nodding her head as she follows along with the sheet music, she seems somehow restless. In the Green Room, BEN is sitting on the stage manager's stool, hanging up a phone. AARON enters from the stage area, in a turtleneck.)

AARON

What's the latest?

BEN

A couple of the guild ladies went out to the airport to pick her up. But now they're saying the flight's not getting in till two o'clock.

AARON

That's three hours behind schedule. How are we supposed to do a first staging rehearsal without our Tosca?

BEN

Isn't there an understudy who can fill in? Or a... what do you call them in opera?

AARON

A cover. (*Smiles mischievously*) And indeed there is. Are you new here?

BEN

(*Nods*) First day. My names's Ben. I'm one of the ASM's--Assistant Stage Managers.

AARON

Aaron Steiner, conductor. (*Shakes his hand*) I'm familiar with the production department lingo, thanks.

BEN

You're beatin' me, then. Opera's not my usual gig. I guess this Gloria Franklin's pretty hot stuff?

AARON

(*Winces*) You are new. Has anybody informed Margot about the delay?

BEN

Next thing on my list. (*Starts to go, then turns back*) Do you think this means the rehearsal will run overtime?

AARON

Not on Stewart's budget.

(*BEN nods and exits to the Stage. AARON is about to exit stage right when STEPHEN comes in through the stage door.*)

STEPHEN

The stage is *that* way, Aaron. Aren't you supposed to be at rehearsal?

AARON

So I thought. Gloria Franklin's flight was delayed.

STEPHEN

(*Knowingly*) Is that a euphemism for... ?

AARON

(*Nods*) Oh, probably all strategy. So she can make a grand diva entrance halfway through the rehearsal, complete with dog and fur coat.

STEPHEN

Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

AARON

One step ahead of you. The coffee shop?

STEPHEN

Maybe. I'll check the practice rooms. Is she ready for this?

AARON

(Smiles grimly) She'd better be.

(They exit quickly, in opposite directions. Far upstage, a delicate, shimmering light picks out ANGELINA, dressed in a satin 1950's evening gown and holding a bouquet. She glances down at LISA and sings, from Leoncavallo's I Pagliacci:)

ANGELINA

O che bel sole di mezz'agosto!
Io son piena di vita, e, tutta illanguidita
Per arcano desio, non so che bramo!

(ANGELINA vanishes. GLORIA and DARCY come on right, through the stage door. GLORIA FRANKLIN is wearing a turban and a dramatic traveling cape; both women are loaded down with luggage, including a pet carrier which DARCY handles with care.)

GLORIA

(To the room) Call off the search party! We're here! *(She looks around.)* Not much of a welcome.

DARCY

Nobody knew we got on that earlier flight.

GLORIA

Didn't I tell you to recharge the cell phone? *(Looks around)* If memory serves, the star dressing room is on this side... *(She finds the door.)* And here it is. I sang one of my best Aidas here in 1987. Looks like they haven't changed a thing.

DARCY

It's a beautiful opera house.

(GLORIA opens the door and enters the Dressing Room, startling LISA.)

LISA

Miss Franklin! You're here. I'm Lisa. Ohmygosh, let me help you with those. (*Takes a couple bags from her.*)

GLORIA

(*To DARCY*) Time please?

DARCY

(*Consults her watch*) Twelve-twenty.

GLORIA

(*Smiles*) What did I tell you? Ten minutes to spare. Gloria Franklin has never been late for a rehearsal!--and now is not the time to start. (*to DARCY*) I hope you gave the cab driver a good tip for preserving my reputation!

DARCY

Thirty percent as always. (*to LISA*) She got us on an earlier flight. And don't worry, we won't be billing the company.

GLORIA

I have enough frequent flier miles for a trip to Mars--if they ever get around to building an opera house up there!

(*DARCY laughs, a bit too loudly, and LISA joins in. GLORIA takes a tiny dog out of the pet carrier.*)

LISA

How adorable! What's her name?

GLORIA

This is The Princess Eboli! I got her in Chicago during a run of *Don Carlo*. I told her I was going to name her Elisabetta, and the little thing growled at me! Right away I knew she was a mezzo.

LISA

(*Laughs*) I love it.

GLORIA

(*To the dog*) How's Mama's little baby? Tired and hungry after a looong flight? You need a walky? (*She starts to hand the dog to LISA.*)

DARCY

I'll do that, Gloria. (*She attaches a leash to the dog's collar.*)

GLORIA

Good, thank you, Darcy. (to LISA) So you can run to the store for me. The Princess likes premium chopped beef, we can microwave it. And I need some whole lemons and some Earl Grey Tea. Be a dear and have it ready for me by the first break in rehearsal. (To DARCY) Oh, Darcy? Where'd you pack my Tosca score?

DARCY

It's in the small leather duffel. I'd better get outside; she's all skittery, I'm afraid she's gonna start leaking. (Exits with the dog.)

GLORIA

Oh, Linda, honey, one more thing--

LISA

It's Lisa.

GLORIA

Right right. There's a humidifier in that suitcase. Be a peach and set it up for me right away. Nothing dries out the cords like air travel. I need controlled atmospheric conditions!

LISA

(Smiles) I can relate!

(She opens the suitcase as GLORIA looks for the score. AARON enters the Green Room from right and then walks in the open Dressing Room door.)

AARON

Lisa, you've got about five-- (sees GLORIA) Miss Franklin! You're here; you made it after all.

GLORIA

Did you people really think I was going to be late for a rehearsal? Apparently my reputation no longer precedes me.

AARON

On the contrary, it absolutely does. It's an honor to meet you; I'm Aaron Steiner.

GLORIA

Maestro Steiner, how do you do? You're younger than I expected. I've been looking forward to our collaboration. (Digs in her purse.) Just let me give the girl here some money and we'll head

over. (*Hands some bills to LISA*) Keep the change, Laura, you've been a peach!

AARON

(*A bit alarmed*) What's this now?

LISA

Just some tea and dog food.

GLORIA

And lemons!

LISA

And lemons. You guys get acquainted; I'll be back in a jiffy. There's a supermarket a couple blocks up. (*She starts out.*)

AARON

Lisa, what are you doing? I'm sure one of the dressers can take care of that, or someone from Production.

GLORIA

Isn't she a dresser?

AARON

Excuse me?

LISA

(*Laughs*) It's fine.

AARON

Madame Franklin, allow me to introduce my fiancée, Lisa Duvall.

GLORIA

Goodness, how terrible! Please forgive me, Miss Duvall. I came upon someone in my dressing room and made an... erroneous assumption.

LISA

(*Smiling*) No problem, it's totally understandable. (*She shakes GLORIA's hand.*) It's a great honor; you've always been one of my idols!

(*AARON cringes.*)

AARON

This is Lisa's dressing room too, Miss Franklin.

LISA

That's right. We're going to be room-mates!

GLORIA

Room what?

AARON

Miss Duvall is a Principal Soprano with the company. Currently appearing as Nedda, through Saturday night. And then she'll be covering you as Tosca and singing the family matinee.

(GLORIA gapes.)

LISA

I set my stuff up by this mirror over here; I thought you'd like to have the one closer to the door. If you'd like I can move--

GLORIA

My heart is broken! *(Unsteadily, she sinks down on the couch.)* Of all the terrible things...Child! Come here and sit! *(She pats the couch beside her.)* A fellow artist, and I was ordering you around like a... What good am I? What use am I at all?

LISA

(Sitting beside her) Please don't worry about it.

GLORIA

I can't believe you didn't say anything.

AARON

I can't believe that either.

LISA

You're Gloria Franklin. THE Gloria Franklin. Who wouldn't be honored to get you a cup of tea?

AARON

She was sending you to get food for her dog.

GLORIA

(Sharply, to AARON) I said I was sorry. *(to LISA; smiles)* And I meant it sincerely. I look forward to hearing you sing.

(STEPHEN comes in.)

LISA

Stephen, where have you been?

STEPHEN

On the phone as usual, hustling you up some Violettas for next season. Would you love to spend the spring in San Diego?

LISA

Stephen, this is Gloria Franklin. Miss Franklin, this is my brother, Stephen Duvall.

GLORIA

Pleased to meet you, Stephen.

STEPHEN

Likewise; it's an honor.

GLORIA

(To AARON) Ready to get to work, Maestro?

AARON

Absolutely. I'll introduce you to the director, Margot Loomis.

GLORIA

I've heard good things. Warn me in advance, though: Is this going to be a traditional staging or some crazy concept?

AARON

Oh, quite traditional. The Palazzo Farnese in replica.

GLORIA

That's a relief. Not that I'm opposed to creativity! But the last time I did Tosca was in Germany a couple years ago. The director's concept was that the whole thing transpired inside a Large Yellow Box.

AARON

A yellow box?

GLORIA

Large. I think it was supposed to represent "the political ideologies in which we imprison ourselves and others." Or some such foolishness. Post-Modern Eurotrash, with the emphasis on the Trash.

STEPHEN

Some directors just don't know how to think outside the box.

LISA

Thank you Stephen.

GLORIA

(Taking AARON's arm) Shall we, then? (to LISA) Are you coming, Lana?

LISA

Lisa. No, the second cast is rehearsing next week. I've got to warm up for tonight's *Pagliacci*.

GLORIA

Very well then. To the stage!

AARON

(Over his shoulder as he escorts GLORIA out.) I'll see you guys soon. (They exit.)

LISA

She's nice.

STEPHEN

Indubitably a Diva.

LISA

She'll loosen up when she gets to know us better. I can't wait to pick her brain about *Tosca*! She's done it hundreds of times.

STEPHEN

Yeah, like in the seventies.

LISA

Eighties mostly, I think. She's ageless, though. I think she's still a beautiful woman.

(DARCY comes back in with *The Princess Eboli*.)

DARCY

Where's Gloria?

LISA

They went out onstage for rehearsal. This is my brother Stephen. Stephen, this is Miss Franklin's personal assistant...Darcy, right?

DARCY

Darcy Green. Nice to meet you.

STEPHEN

Likewise.

DARCY

(to LISA) I don't know if Gloria talked to you yet, but we won't be requiring your services. She always has it written into her contracts that I'm to be hired as her personal dresser. I'm union.

STEPHEN

Could you run that by us again?

LISA

Don't worry, Stephen, we had a little misunderstanding earlier. (to DARCY) I'm actually not a dresser; I'm a soprano with the company. This is my makeup over here.

DARCY

Oh gosh, I'm so sorry. I had no idea.

LISA

Forget about it, it was an honest mistake.

STEPHEN

Lisa, we need to work on your wardrobe. (to DARCY) I've been telling her, people won't treatcha like a diva until ya start dressing like a diva.

DARCY

That's what Gloria tells me! I'm a singer too.

LISA

You are?

DARCY

Uh-huh. I met Gloria when she taught a master class at my college and she sort of took me under her wing. Now I'm her protégée. (Laughs) She thinks I have like Major Career Potential. I travel with her and keep her organized and in exchange she gives me free voice lessons.

STEPHEN

Well I guess that's no stranger than being your own sister's manager.

LISA

There's nothing strange about either one, Stephen. Darcy, I think that's great. Just think how much you're learning about the opera world!

DARCY

Exactly. And I meet a lot of interesting people who might be able to help my career. Gloria often arranges auditions or coachings for me at the various opera houses where we work.

LISA

Aaron's a great coach. He'd probably work with you.

DARCY

You mean Aaron Steiner, the conductor?! Ohmygod, I am so excited about meeting him! I looked him up online and found some great pictures; he's worked all over the world and he's *really* handsome. For an older man, that is. Have you met him yet?

LISA

Several times. Aaron and I are engaged.

DARCY

Woops. Okay, that's like the second time in two minutes I've said like the totally wrong thing to you. I'm sure you already think I'm like this total ditz.

STEPHEN

Like, not at all.

LISA

Stephen.

DARCY

How 'bout if I turn right around and walk out of the room and then come back in and we start all over?

STEPHEN

I don't have time to meet you again; I've got a bunch of phone calls to make.

DARCY

Then I'd better find the rehearsal I guess, see if Gloria needs anything.

STEPHEN

I'll show you the way.

DARCY

Thanks. Do you think it's okay if I take the Princess?

STEPHEN

In a rehearsal?

DARCY

Most people don't mind because it makes Gloria happy.

LISA

Would you like to leave her here with me? I love dogs; I could watch her and play with her.

DARCY

Oh, we couldn't impose.

LISA

Nono; really. I'd enjoy it!

DARCY

Okay then. Thank you. I won't be long. It's been so nice meeting you.

STEPHEN

Right this way.

(He shows DARCY out of the Dressing Room and over to the Wings; she exits left. He sits down on the couch in the Green Room and takes out his cell phone and a leather-bound calendar. In the Dressing Room, LISA picks up The Princess Eboli and cuddles her.)

LISA

You are such a sweet one. Are you a good girl? Are you? Are you a good girl? Did you behave yourself on the airplane? I bet you did, you little cutems.

(AARON comes back in from the Stage.)

AARON

Dog-sitting now?

LISA

I asked to. Isn't it kind of early for a break?

AARON

They don't need me; they'll spend an hour looking at the model of the set and listening to Margot explain her "philosophy of period movement." (*LISA laughs.*) Go in if you want to.

LISA

(*Shakes her head*) It's just the first day. I want to give Miss Franklin her space.

AARON

Gracious as ever. But don't you forget you're not just the cover; you're the Second Tosca. You have as much right to be on that stage as she does.

LISA

(*Sweetly*) Thank you, dear.

AARON

(*Almost whispering in her ear*) Do you know what I want to do the minute we get back to New York?

LISA

Darling, why wait?

AARON

Very funny, that's not what I... I meant I want to pick out a location for the wedding.

LISA

In New York? You know how much my parents have always wanted to see us get married in their church in Maine!

AARON

Who would go all the way up there?

LISA

Our families! Our close friends.

AARON

There's a beautiful old synagogue on the Upper East Side. Seats eight hundred. And the acoustics are phenomenal.

LISA

(*Warily*) I told you I'm not singing at my own wedding.

AARON

I think you should. Maybe a couple Schubert pieces...

LISA

Aaron.

AARON

And do you know what? I've been talking to the costume designer here. It so happens she does wedding gowns too. I'm imagining kind of a Renaissance line, like a Juliette or a Desdemona--

LISA

Sorry to break it to you, darling; the groom doesn't pick out the dress. *(Beat)* Besides, my brother will want to do that.

AARON

Either way, we're setting a date as soon as we know what's happening with the Met.

LISA

(Smiles) First things first.

AARON

Stewart told me their scout's been snooping around here lately. She's coming to see *Cavalleria* and *Pagliacci* on Saturday.

LISA

Oh, thanks for telling me. I was running out of reasons to be nervous.

AARON

And if she's as excited about your Nedda as I think she will be, I'm hoping we can get her to come back and see you do Tosca as well.

LISA

At the family matinee? She won't be able to hear me over all the crying babies and snoring grandparents.

AARON

Stephen told me they might have a couple Toscas opening up next season. Some soprano from Bulgaria who's having problems with the IRS.

LISA

I want to make my Met debut as Violetta. Or Marguerite, or Musetta!

AARON

Tosca is the quintessential diva role.

LISA

People expect a heavier voice as Tosca. They're used to--

AARON

With me in the pit, it'll sound like it was written for you. They'll forget they've ever heard it before.

LISA

That's the awful thing; they know it by heart! The *afficionados*.

AARON

They've never heard it like we're going to do it. The record companies'll be tripping over each other trying to get to us. The Steiner-Duvall Tosca, complete on two CD's.

LISA

Maybe we can sell copies at the wedding. (*Affectionately*) You nut.

AARON

What? You and I are a good team. Potentially a great one.

LISA

"Potentially."

AARON

This could be the vehicle we've been waiting for. To put you on the map with the international companies.

LISA

(*Dubiously*) Tosca?

AARON

Just tell me what you need to make it feel right. Whatever you want, I will make it happen.

LISA

(*Mischievously*) Well I think I know just the Thing.

AARON

Lisa. I should go check on the rehearsal. Let somebody else mind the dog. You need a nap and a warm-up before the performance tonight.

(AARON exits. LISA sighs and turns her attention back to The Princess Eboli.)

LISA

You doing okay, baby? I'll bet you're hungry! Nobody ever went to get your ground beef! I'll see if there's anything good in the fridge.

(She goes into the Green Room and, not seeing STEPHEN, opens the door to the refrigerator and leans over, examining the contents of the lower shelves. BEN comes on from the Wings and sees her--from behind.)

BEN

Nice view.

LISA

Excuse me?

BEN

Just... you know. The week-old takeout sandwiches and half-eaten pieces of fruit. Appetizing.

LISA

You said it.

BEN

I'm new here; my name's Ben.

LISA

Hi, Ben. I'm Lisa. What do you do here?

BEN

Assistant Stage Manager. How 'bout you?

LISA

What about me?

BEN

Let me guess. A dancer? Orrr... with the chorus?

LISA

Me, no. I'm... I'm a dresser, actually.

BEN

Good deal. That's probably what keeps you in shape.

LISA

What?

BEN

Cinchin' those hefty ladies into their corsets must take a lot of upper body strength.

LISA

Sometimes. Not all opera singers are fat, though; that's a myth. In fact, a lot of them are very beautiful women.

BEN

Okay, well, let me know.

LISA

You're mean.

BEN

I just calls 'em like I sees 'em, Lisa the Dresser. This opera thing is new to me.

LISA

Oh, yeah? What's your usual gig?

BEN

I'm always a stage manager, just not usually opera. I work some of the big Broadway tours that come through. And concerts, arena shows. Last year I did Janet Jackson and Madonna both.

LISA

Did Madonna get jealous when you "did" Janet?

BEN

(Laughs) That came out wrong, I guess. But they're more my speed, music-wise. I don't think I get the whole opera... thing.

LISA

Me neither. It's so... pretentious. I like the ballet better. I mean the *costumes* are... lighter. Easier to lug around.

BEN

Guess they would be.

LISA

Could you do me a favor, Ben?

BEN

Name it.

(She takes his hand and leads him into the Dressing Room, where she hands him The Princess Eboli.)

LISA

Watch this dog for a few minutes? She belongs to the lead soprano. I said I'd get her something to eat and I just have to dash down to the store. Shouldn't take me more than ten minutes.

BEN

I think I could handle that.

LISA

(Getting her purse) Thank you so much. I owe you one.

BEN

Well I'll bear that in mind, Lisa. Maybe we could go for a drink some night after rehearsal?

LISA

I don't know about that, Ben. It sounds tempting. But there's usually a lot of... sewing to do. Things get ripped! And laundry; it's my job to do the wash every night.

BEN

I could wait. I'm a night person, me.

LISA

(Smiles) Back in a few!

(She leaves him in the Dressing Room and goes out into the Green Room, where she finds STEPHEN listening at the door.)

STEPHEN

Slut.

LISA

Eavesdropper.

STEPHEN

Liar.

LISA

Bitch.

*(LISA exits via the stage door. In the Dressing Room, BEN
cuddles The Princess Eboli.)*

BEN

Good girl.

(Lights fade.)