DOROTHY: So do you think the Princess from Pittsburgh will succeed in making Rudolph Vaselino?

NOËL: There's no forecasting Americans in love. You celebrate Saint Valentine's Day with a massacre.

DOROTHY: Love should be so simple. A loves B, B loves A. They roll around on each other and spell AB, BA, ABBA, BABA. But there are all those other letters waiting in line and the thing turns into alphabet soup. I envy the Babylonians. They didn't have any vowels.

NOËL: How do you go on.

DOROTHY: Well, if you can be Peter Pan, I can be Wendy.

NOËL: What are we doing in this illiterate Eden?

DOROTHY: I'm trying to present a moving target to the little boy with the arrows. No, on the train coming out here I wrote a hateful movie about Broadway. On the train back, I'll write a hateful play about Hollywood. It's a living. Your turn.

NOËL: I'm running from bigger boys with bigger arrows. No, I wish to understand this curious beast, America, and Hollywood seems to be its heart.

DOROTHY: Or some part bloody and beating.

NOËL: If I could comprehend the film industry, I think I should have a grip on the U.S.A.

DOROTHY: Fate has sent me to you. It's simple. The film industry consists of Jewish producers in California trying to convince Catholic bankers in New York that they know which fantasies will sell to Protestant farmers in Nebraska.

NOËL: The only great religion omitted is the Muslims.

DOROTHY: They have something better.

NOËL: And what is that?

DOROTHY: Hashish.

NOËL: Gesundheit.

(THEY TOAST ONE ANOTHER AND TOT Down ANOTHER DRINK.)

CHARACTERS

FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS (middle-aged), a wealthy woman without musical talent who labors under the misguided belief that she is a major vocal artist;

COSIMO MCCOOM (29), a not-so-successful song composer, and FLORENCE'S rather unenthusiastic accompanist.

SCENE

An elegant music room at the Ritz-Carlton.

TIME

The 1930s.

MCCOOM has just finished playing "Crazy Rhythm" on the piano as FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS enters.

FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS: Is that what they call jazz? Is it? Goodness, Cosme! (Caresses the piano.) You've quite shocked the Bechstein.

COSIMO MCCOOM: Music is music.

FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS: And people sing that song and they dance? Is that what happens? Your friends, for example. When you and Kurt—such a personable young man!—when you and he are entertaining young ladies, You bad boys.

COSIMO MCCOOM: (Embarrassed.) Shouldn't we get to work?

FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS: (Crossing away from him, oblivious.) I could almost picture myself singing it. I imagine it would create quite a sensation.

COSIMO MCCOOM: Here at the Ritz? ... I don't know. Your audience expects something different.

FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS: Ah! But what if we were to find ourselves with a different kind of audience?

COSIMO MCCOOM: Different?

FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS: Different.

COSIMO MCCOOM: In what way?
Florence Foster Jenkins: Suppose we suddenly found ourselves with more seats to sell?

Cosimo McMoon: More... seats?

Florence Foster Jenkins: Many more.

Cosimo McMoon: But you've... Madame J, you've been sold out for weeks!

Florence Foster Jenkins: True.

Cosimo McMoon: Why would you need more seats?

Florence Foster Jenkins: So that many more music lovers could pay their two-forty to attend.

Cosimo McMoon: You've already got five hundred coming. Isn't that enough?

Florence Foster Jenkins: Think of my charities, Cosme! Think what such a box-office boost could mean.

Cosimo McMoon: Boost?

Florence Foster Jenkins: Boost. You see, it's been proposed... Quite out of the blue. That we move our recital. To a larger... venue. Which is rather exciting. Don't you think?

Cosimo McMoon: But... (He rises and crosses to her.) I thought you were happy here at the Ritz.

Florence Foster Jenkins: Up to a point.

Cosimo McMoon: I thought you liked the intimacy of the ballroom.

Florence Foster Jenkins: Yes and no.

Cosimo McMoon: Exactly what are we talking? How much larger?

Florence Foster Jenkins: Believe me, we will make quite a splash. There is considerable anticipation among those in the know.

Cosimo McMoon: And you just...? I mean, its arranged?! Just like that?

Florence Foster Jenkins: It's come as a shock. I quite understand.

Cosimo McMoon: I should say so.

Florence Foster Jenkins: I was telephoned, Cosme. And this was proposed.

Cosimo McMoon: Proposed? (Crosses away, returning to the piano bench.) What was proposed? Move us where? The Hippodrome?

Florence Foster Jenkins: Not. Quite.

Cosimo McMoon: Where? (Terrified, he jumps to his feet and rushes back to her.) Dear God—tell me where!

Florence Foster Jenkins: (Reverently) Town Hall.

Cosimo McMoon: (Appalled) Town Hall?

Florence Foster Jenkins: It's been proposed that we move our recital there. Cosme. Where they have guaranteed there will not be a single empty seat. Not one!

Cosimo McMoon: But...!

Florence Foster Jenkins: Of course I knew I had a following. I'm not blind after all. But I must say, I had no idea I was quite so... popular! (She sits in the chair.)

Cosimo McMoon: I can't believe what you're telling me.

Florence Foster Jenkins: I could hardly believe it myself.

Cosimo McMoon: (His hysteria growing) I mean, what have I been doing all this time? All this rehearsing! This isn't easy for me. I'm trying to... what's right for you. (He snaps, lashing out at her.) I could just let you sing! You know? But I don't. Because I worry. And because I do the decent thing everyone assumes I'll just go along...! With whatever... crazy...! (Becoming speechless.)

Florence Foster Jenkins: (To calm him.) Shh! Cosme, dear Cosme, think what's at stake. In these perilous times. With so many in need. How can I refuse? We must all try to do some good in the world.

Cosimo McMoon: (His vehemence born of desperation.) But at what price?

Florence Foster Jenkins: (Startled) I beg your pardon?

Cosimo McMoon: At what price?

Florence Foster Jenkins: I don't understand.

Cosimo McMoon: Your artistic standards. What of them?

Florence Foster Jenkins: (She moves to him, alarmed.) Como dice?

(Now that He has her attention, He pursues his advantage, improvising frantically.)

Cosimo McMoon: Your voice in a barn like Town Hall?
Florence Foster Jenkins: Barn?

Cosimo McMoon: They didn’t tell you? About the acoustics? I mean it’s famous. For how you can’t hear.

Florence Foster Jenkins: You can’t?

Cosimo McMoon: You think you’ve gone deaf.

Florence Foster Jenkins: Deaf?

Cosimo McMoon: (Advances on her, backing her into the chair.) To go from our little room to that great monster….! It’s something that should be approached gradually, very gradually. If at all.

Florence Foster Jenkins: Surely we can rehearse. Prepare.

Cosimo McMoon: And what if strain should be induced? What then?

Florence Foster Jenkins: (Unnerved.) Strain? (With one hand she caresses her throat.)

Cosimo McMoon: It could undermine all we’ve worked for. I can’t allow that. Won’t. I don’t care what they say.

Florence Foster Jenkins: (Her other hand goes to her throat.) Strain?

Cosimo McMoon: Strain. (Seeing that he has won, he crosses back to the piano.) Mrs. Jenkins, listen, if your concern is extra revenue—wouldn’t the same result be achieved by adding an additional recital here at the Ritz? At least that way there won’t be any…

Florence Foster Jenkins: Strain. (Humbly.) What can I say? You saved me from myself.

Cosimo McMoon: (Modesty.) Well.

Florence Foster Jenkins: Mille grazie, signor buon fortuna.

Cosimo McMoon: (Sits.) Prego, I guess.

Florence Foster Jenkins: To abuse my voice is unthinkable. After all, one is not a trombone.

Cosimo McMoon: Exactly!

Florence Foster Jenkins: We shall add two more recitals to our present schedule.

Cosimo McMoon: Two…!