

Cast of Characters

WOMAN

YOUNGER MAN

OLDER MAN

AUDITION
by Matthew Sheridan

(A rehearsal studio in midtown Manhattan. 10 AM, autumn. A WOMAN—40, says she's 30—is stretching and talking into her cell phone. There is a piano, table and chair.)

WOMAN. *Reginald Marcus.* The one and only. I literally begged my agent for this audition. There's nobody here yet.

(A noise at the door.)

Wait. Someone—

(YOUNGER MAN enters—a youthful 35, casually dressed, has a shoulder bag.)

YOUNGER MAN. *(A bit shyly:)* Hi.

WOMAN. *(Sweetly:)* Hi.

(She watches to see what he does. He crosses to the piano and noodles quietly. Into phone:)

Just the pianist. I'll call you after. I gotta stretch. I know—thanks!

(Stretching, to YOUNGER MAN who has stopped playing after a bit:)

Go ahead and play!

YOUNGER MAN. Well...

WOMAN. Hey, you need to warm up too.

YOUNGER MAN. Not really.

WOMAN. We *all* need to warm up, hon.

(She laughs. He shrugs and plays, she stretches. When he stops playing a moment, she grabs her ear.)

Nice. I've seen you around. Don't you play ballet classes at Steppin' Out? For what's-his-name?

YOUNGER MAN. No. I'm new to New York. Are you auditioning?

WOMAN. Why else would I be here?

YOUNGER MAN. I thought maybe you worked here.

WOMAN. Linda thought it was alright if I wait here. *(To clarify:)* Linda with the scary hair in the office who does the bookings—

YOUNGER MAN. I know who she is. She said you could come in?

WOMAN. Pretty much. She didn't say I *couldn't* wait in here. If you ask me, auditions are too formal, too impersonal. They look at you. In eleven seconds they decide you're one of these or one of those. Come on, we're all people. I want Reginald Marcus to see *me*, not the 2:15 in yellow. That's why I made sure I got the first slot. Now when he comes in the door—Shazam! Here I am!

(YOUNGER MAN *laughs*.)

YOUNGER MAN. Shazam!

WOMAN. Yeah—Shazam! It's a joke that I still even have to audition. Everybody in New York knows my work at this point...

(*Silence as she waits for him to comment and he doesn't.*)

This your first time?

YOUNGER MAN. First time for what?

WOMAN. Playing for Marcus?

YOUNGER MAN. No—

WOMAN. (*Not believing him:*) I understand. It's pressure. He's a name.

YOUNGER MAN. You think?

WOMAN. (*An expression that says "duh":*) No doubt about it. He's the composer to watch. Very up-and-coming. That award he won. There's a lot of buzz. The big profile in Backstage—or Variety.

YOUNGER MAN. Variety. Did you read that?

WOMAN. Everybody read that. My girlfriend told me all about it. (*A thought hits her:*) What am I doing?

(*Digs into her bag and takes out binder of sheet music. She opens it to a certain page and puts it on the piano.*)

E-flat. (*Note: whatever key she will sing in goes here, not necessarily E-flat.*)

YOUNGER MAN. Well—

WOMAN. Not for *my* benefit! For *yours*! It's a tricky key change. I thought you'd want to get cracking right away. (*Indicating place in score:*) I start here.

(YOUNGER MAN *laughs*. He starts playing. WOMAN starts singing.)

Little faster, hon.

(*She finishes her 16 bars. They've gone fairly smoothly. She grabs her ear again.*)

Not bad. You stick with this you'll be plowin' through this stuff with the best of 'em.

YOUNGER MAN. Let me ask you something—

(*Her cell phone rings.*)

WOMAN. (*Into phone:*) Hey! Okay. Okay. Oh my God. Oh my God, that's horrible. That really is a nightmare but I'm actually at an audition as we speak. If it weren't *Marcus* I'd totally blow this off but I can't talk now. Call me later. Oh my God. Okay bye.

(*She turns to YOUNGER MAN.*)

One more time.

YOUNGER MAN. (*Beat—he's trying to follow her rapid transitions.*) One more time for what? Oh. No, I'd rather not.

WOMAN. For you too. You're good, but you're not Bill Thal.

YOUNGER MAN. Who's Bill Thal?

WOMAN. (*Incredulous laughter.*) You really *haven't* been in New York very long have you. Bill Thal is a dear, dear friend of mine and one of the best coach-accompanists working. Yep. I know everybody. That was Melissa Bianco I was talking to. Starring in *Wildfire* right now.

YOUNGER MAN. Who? Oh, yeah, I want to see that.

WOMAN. (*Flirtatiously:*) I get comps all the time. This business is all about networking, hon. Bill's so busy, I often need an accompanist. And I've got oodles and caboodles of friends who are always needing pianists.

(*She indicates the music, that he play her audition number again, smiling, enticing.*)

YOUNGER MAN. I'd rather rest before the audition.

WOMAN. (*Her face falls; muttering:*) I knew it.

YOUNGER MAN. Knew what?

(*WOMAN dials cell, her back to YOUNGER MAN.*)

WOMAN. Rich? Listen I'm at an audition, but I wanted to see if you wanted to meet later for coffee. Give me a call when you get this. I'll turn the ringer off. Bye, handsome.

(*Hangs up, turns to YOUNGER MAN.*)

Rich Landes. Great guy. Great, great guy. We always hang out when he's in New York. Rich Landes from—

YOUNGER MAN. (*Politely:*) You really do know everybody, don't you.

WOMAN. (*Pleased:*) Well...

YOUNGER MAN. Except Reginald Marcus.

WOMAN. Not yet anyway. (*More straightforward:*) Listen, I really need to book this. Come on. One more time.

YOUNGER MAN. What? No, I'm resting, as I said.

WOMAN. (*Looks daggers at him in silence, then:*) Well can you at least give me my starting pitch.

YOUNGER MAN. (*Moving away from the piano:*) I don't need to be at the piano.

WOMAN. (*Annoyed:*) I didn't ask you to move away from the piano. I asked for my note!

YOUNGER MAN. (*Not sarcastic:*) Oh. You can't—

WOMAN. No I can't read music. Just give me the goddamn note. Please.

(*YOUNGER MAN returns to piano and plays a pitch. She starts to sing. After she's about eight bars in...*)

YOUNGER MAN. Wait, wait!

WOMAN. (*Furious:*) What are you doing to me? I'm in the middle of singing!

YOUNGER MAN. I'm sorry but I gave you the wrong note. I forgot you do this in E-flat.

WOMAN. (*Panicked:*) That's why it felt so high! I'm straining my voice right before this major audition. YOU'RE MAKING ME STRAIN MY VOICE! I KNEW SOMETHING—

YOUNGER MAN. *Calm down!* (*Beat.*) Good God. (*Sighs.*) You can have this transposed ahead of time, you know. If—Bill Thal doesn't offer that service, there are plenty of people that do. And if you don't have the sense to do *that*, then the very least you can do is treat the accompanist with a modicum of respect.

(*A long silence—then the WOMAN laughs lightly and deprecatingly.*)

WOMAN. I don't know where you come from—New Jersey? Indiana? —I don't know. But this is New York City. One more time—*New York City.* And there are more accompanists here than there are pigeons. So unless you're Bill Thal you're replaceable. When you're new people

will try you out, it's true. You were lucky to get this Reginald Marcus gig but don't let it go to your head. And don't think every door is going to open for you so easy. I've been around. Let me tell you—a superior attitude like that will work against you big time. And since—

(*She has been looking at him meaningfully, almost threateningly. At the sound of the door opening she immediately shuts up. Both she and the YOUNGER MAN watch as the OLDER MAN, perhaps 55, dressed somewhat formally, enters.*)

OLDER MAN. Sorry I'm late.

WOMAN. (*Suddenly turning on the charm:*) You're not late! I'm early! I'm *always* early!

(*She laughs a bubbly laugh.*)

YOUNGER MAN. (*To WOMAN, whose eyes stay on the OLDER MAN:*) I didn't get your name.

WOMAN. (*Offers hand to OLDER MAN with smile.*) Hi I'm Jamie! Jamie Gerlan! (*Note: accent on second syllable of "Gerlan."*)

OLDER MAN. Oh hi.

YOUNGER MAN. Jamie, this is my accompanist, Eben Carter.

(*OLDER MAN crosses to piano, YOUNGER MAN to table.*)

WOMAN. (*After a beat, to the YOUNGER MAN, confused:*) What? Then who are you?

OLDER MAN. Transpose to E-flat, Reggie?

WOMAN. (*Realizing...*) You've got to be kidding me.

OLDER MAN. Oh, changing keys is not a problem, Ms. Gerlan.

(*YOUNGER MAN sits at the table and takes a folder from his bag.*)

WOMAN. (*To YOUNGER MAN:*) You're Reginald Marcus?

YOUNGER MAN. Shazam.

(*The WOMAN is in a mild state of shock. She laughs, then abruptly stops, a panic-stricken expression on her face, then laughs again, then stops abruptly again with the same panicked expression.*)

WOMAN. Jesus.

(*She picks up her bag and runs from the room.*)

OLDER MAN. (*After a beat:*) Did I miss something?

End of Play