

THE PHANTOM'S SONG

Written by

Gaston Leroux

FADE IN:

INT. GRAND THEATRE - NIGHT

The voice of twenty four year old, Croatian Tenor, ANTONIO TADINOVIC, resounds from the centre of the ornate stage.

He is world class. Each note pitch perfect, the depth of emotion, breathtaking.

Closer, perhaps we see the reason for such sincerity. He is blind and his face deeply scarred.

He reaches the crescendo, takes us to the very heights, and gently finishes. It's like being awoken from a dream.

For a second, stunned silence, then APPLAUSE washes over him like a tidal wave. He bows graciously, tears in his sightless eyes. The applause becomes even more thunderous.

He bows again and departs the stage.

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

In sharp contrast to the stage, the area behind the curtain is filthy and covered in dust.

Antonio orientates himself against the wall, stumbles blindly past well-dressed men and women stood in the corridor.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

You were wonderful. Absolutely
incredible.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

A revelation, dear. Your best
performance yet.

A woman in her Fifties takes his arm. Tall, lithe and blonde, with the intensity of the genius, or obsessive. MAESTRA. Her long, black dress sweeps behind her as she moves.

MAESTRA

Thank your audience. Never lose
your humility. It grounds us.

Antonio bows, stiffly.

ANTONIO

Thank you, thank you all. It is my
pleasure to serve you.

A grunt of approval from Maestra before she turns and
addresses the crowd.

MAESTRA

Thank you all for coming, and thank
you all for your continued support.
Antonio is very tired, as I'm sure
you can all imagine, and he will
not be receiving visitors this
Evening. Thank you, again.

She leads Antonio through a door.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

The noise from people outside ceases the moment the door
shuts. Antonio and Maestra are alone in a room which is a
memorial to lost grandeur.

The fading walls are adorned with images of great Artistes,
Operatic singers and Composers from the past.

Maestra shepherds Antonio to a black, velvet seat in front of
a huge, silver mirror.

MAESTRA

They were right, you were
wonderful, Darling. Wonderful, but
not Perfect. We should practice
more.

ANTONIO

Not tonight. Let me rest, just this
once.

MAESTRA

To lose your gift to laziness would be a tragedy. We must continue.

ANTONIO

Please Maestra, I'm so tired.

MAESTRA

See your tiredness for the false belief it is. Overcome it. We have a big performance tomorrow. Let it be the day we achieve perfection. You want to be perfect, don't you?

He nods.

MAESTRA

I know you do. Excellent. Let's start with The Siren.

Antonio sings scales through a closed mouth. Even this is beautiful.

Maestra stands behind him, puts her hands on his firm stomach.

MAESTRA

Keep your back straight, always from the diaphragm.

Her hands glide up his body to his throat. Feeling it as it undulates under her touch as he sings.

MAESTRA

The mechano-receptors in the tissue of the vocal folds are intricately affected by emotional changes. That's why every performance is subtly different. Unique. In one of those performances, perhaps only one, there is Perfection. What is the secret, do you think? How much love and hope, how much pain is the perfect mix?

Do you think you can achieve it? Do
you think you can find Perfection?

She stares into the mirror at his dead eyes.

ANTONIO

I will try, Maestra.

MAESTRA

To give your soul, it must be a
conscious decision. Will you give
me Perfection?

ANTONIO

Yes, Maestra.

MAESTRA

Good. I believe you. So many others
have failed me. Now, rest. Let me
help you from your clothes.

She unbuttons his Dinner Suit, helps him from his clothes
leaving him naked in front of the mirror.

He instinctively covers his form with his hands.

MAESTRA

An Artiste is always naked, my
dear. There is no shame.

Maestra walks away and gets Antonio's dressing gown which
hangs near the door.

She slips it on to him and kisses his hair.

MAESTRA

Good night, Antonio. I'll see you
tomorrow.

ANTONIO

Good night, Maestra.

She opens the door.

MAESTRA

I'll lock it, make sure there are
no prying eyes.

She leaves, closes the door. Keys turn in multiple locks.

Antonio is left in silence.

He rises, walks unsteadily to the corner of the room.

Behind a curtain, a Four Poster bed. He climbs inside and
huddles into a foetal position.

He sings an old, Croatian folk song to himself till he falls
asleep.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Maestra enters the room. She's now wearing an elegant, red
ball-gown.

She finds Antonio sitting silently in front of the mirror,
already dressed.

MAESTRA

Good Evening, Antonio. Are you
well?

ANTONIO

Yes, Maestra.

Maestra gathers a comb, prepares Antonio's hair for the
Evening performance.

MAESTRA

Tonight, is the night, Darling. I
can feel it. The Muse is here. When
you go onto that stage, remember
you are not only singing for
yourself, nor for me, not even for
the World. You are singing for the
Gods themselves. I have something
special for you.

She walks to a locked cupboard on the other side of the room.
Opens it. Takes out a package.

There is a long, black jacket inside. She puts it on him.
Classically elegant. Timeless.

MAESTRA

This has been worn only by the
greatest singers who have ever
lived. Honour it.

She admires him in the mirror.

MAESTRA

Let's go. I'll be watching from the
stands, as always.

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Antonio stands alone. He closes his eyes in silent prayer.
Steels himself for the performance to come.

The compere can be heard above the general hubbub of the
audience from behind the curtain.

COMPERE (O.S.)

Ladies and Gentlemen, please
welcome the Voice, not only of this
century, but of this Millenium and
the next. The irrepressible,
incredible, Antonio Tadinovic.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

RAPTUROUS APPLAUSE from the unseen audience greets him as he
reaches the centre of the stage.

Under the lights he looks incredible, his disfigurement
somehow only adding a sense of mystery to his appearance.

Slow, haunting orchestral music begins to play. He begins to
sing, matching the haunting melody with his incredible
vocals. But he stops, suddenly. A breakdown.

He runs off stage.

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

Antonio collapses into his chair in front of the mirror.
Bursts into wracking sobs.

Maestra storms into the room.

ANTONIO

I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I have
nothing left to give.

MAESTRA

Darling, There's always more to
give.

She grabs his face.

MAESTRA

Or have you forgotten?.

ANTONIO

Please, I'm sorry.

MAESTRA

You think you have sacrificed, but
what I have taken, I have given
back ten fold. You were born with a
gift. But to concentrate that gift
I had to take away distractions.
The physical beauty that made you a
prize for women who would have
ruined you. Like your wife. The
eyes that tricked you into fixating
on material realities. But perhaps
I need to take more?

ANTONIO

Please. No.

MAESTRA

Your hands so you may not touch,
your feet, so you may not walk?

Your arms, your legs? That proud
cock of yours, until you exist
solely in a world of sound and
emotion. Until what is left is only
the distillation, the pure Soul of
Music.

ANTONIO

Maestra, please. I will be better.

MAESTRA

You see, you have so much more to
give. You have to go deeper. I need
to hear the pain of your existence,
the torture. To hear you Transcend
that pain. To hear the Truth. I
want to hear the Truth, Antonio.

She drags him by the hair from the chair.

MAESTRA

You will sing. You will give me
True Perfection, or you will
understand what true sacrifice is.

INT. BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

She drags him through the hallway, past the same men and
women that were there before, but we realise now that they
are not real, they are only MANNEQUINS.

Their voices supplied by speakers attached to their mouths.

INT. STAGE - NIGHT

Maestra pulls Antonio into the centre of the stage.

MAESTRA

You will sing. Not for money, for
fame or esteem. You will sing to
live...

She storms down the stairs at the side of the stage.

MAESTRA

...And you will give me Perfection.

Takes her seat in the middle of the auditorium. In the completely empty stands.

She takes a remote control from her pocket and presses play. The voice of the compere plays through the impressive speaker system all around the Theatre.

COMPERE (O.S.)

Ladies and Gentlemen, please
welcome the Voice, not only of this
century, but of this Millenium and
the next. The irrepressible,
incredible, Antonio Tadinovic.

The beautiful Music begins again. The same haunting Melody.

A shiver runs through Antonio's body. A prayer.

ANTONIO

God, help me.

He starts to sing.

FADE TO BLACK.