

The Elevator Boy

by Jeannie Serpa

Enrico Caruso steps into the elevator at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. It's the 1920's and he is recognized as the world's greatest tenor.

Costumed for his role in La Boheme, he is on his way from dressing room up to the stage of this grand opera house. Caruso is the sole passenger. The elevator has been reserved for this star of stars. The elevator boy is in awe and very nervous. Such responsibility! The Great Caruso! He is shaking in his uniform, the palms inside his gloves are clammy with sweat.

"Good evening, sir," he says, voice quaking.

"Buono sera, mio ragazzo," Caruso booms, in that rich unbelievable voice.

The elevator boy isn't familiar with Italian but he thinks, "If the man sounds this good when he speaks, what must it be to hear him sing? He pulls the folding caged door to a close and turns the brass handle that starts their ascent.

As they slowly rise, Enrico Caruso starts to sing, warming up with his opening lines. That huge magnificent voice inside the tiny Otis elevator is deafening. The elevator vibrates from the sheer volume.

The boy stops the elevator and the great man steps into the corridor. He extends his hand and warmly shakes that of the boy's, pressing something into his palm. The elevator boy looks down at a folded ten-dollar bill. This is a small fortune to a young man in the 20's! He tries to say, "Thank you," but his voice fails and he can only gulp.

Caruso straightens his hat, adjusts his jacket a bit then closes his eyes and makes the sign of the cross. With long purposeful steps he strides down the corridor toward the stage. The boy is riveted to the floor; his legs just won't move. Minutes pass, then thunderous applause and the master starts to sing.

Years later the elevator boy, now a married man with children, relates this tale and shows that same ten-dollar bill to his family.

This is a true story. How do I know?

The elevator boy was my father.