

Cheswick's white Buick LeSabre edged down Crimson Avenue toward the light, staying comfortably below the speed limit, as Cheswick always did. The LeSabre was in good condition, considering it was 24 years old. Cheswick was 48 years old, so the car was a relative youth comparatively. He prided himself on the car, once a symbol of style and class that Cheswick longed for. He couldn't afford much more than a 24-year-old relic of the past, but he didn't see it that way. At least he tried not to see it that way. He liked to consider himself above the fray. Let those with no sense of proper etiquette, proper style, drive sports cars or convertibles. No, Cheswick longed for a different time when people carried themselves properly.

Plunk!

He was roused out of his reverie, sitting at a red light, by a loud thump at the front of his car. He saw a teenager with long scraggly hair staring back at him, both of his hands on Cheswick's hood. The look was one of amazement, or shock, but certainly not fright or pain.

"Whoa dude, that was rad! Dju see that?"

Cheswick couldn't see who this miscreant was talking to, hopefully not him. He didn't know what to do. He wasn't sure he should get out, maybe this was a ploy to rob him or steal his car. But he had to see if there was damage. *Be brave, Cheswick!*

He undid his seat belt, and opened the door. The kid stayed there, though his hands were now removed from his hood.

Cheswick shut the door and proceeded forward, slowly. "What did you do young man?"

"Uh, whaddaya mean dude? I just used your car to help me stop. Dju see how fast I was going? Like 50 I think!"

Cheswick looked down and saw the boy's skateboard at his feet. He then moved around to check the car. No dents or scrapes, thankfully. Maybe some hand prints from the kid's obviously unwashed paws. He could clean those off when he got home later.

HONNNKK! HONNNKK!

Cheswick turned to the car behind him, the driver seemingly sitting on his car horn. The man gestured and pointed up. Cheswick turned and saw the light had turned green. He waved to the man to indicate an apology and moved back to his door.

"Please move along young man. And for God's sake, slow down if you can't control that thing."

He felt vindicated. He got back into his car and went on his way. He didn't want to be late. He prided himself on always being early.

The building was a squat rectangle behind a cramped, pockmarked parking lot. There were just five spots, and three of them were taken by a strange variety of cars. A Jeep, wide open as they always seemed to be in California. A Chevy Cavalier, which was probably as old as his Buick but an insult to anyone who appreciated, well, anything. And finally a black Tesla, shiny and gaudy and completely out of place. He pulled into a spot between the Tesla and the Chevy, feeling the crumble and dips of the concrete below.

Entering the building, the first thing to hit him was the smell. It was only 10am but there was a putrid odor of Mexican food. He had nothing against Mexican food, he knew it was quite popular here since Mexico was so close and Los Angeles was home to such a large population. Who was he

to judge, after all, his predecessors emigrated to the US from England at some point as well. But that smell had no place in a studio where artists needed to work. And to breathe.

“Hi there, you must be Cheswick.” She was short, with hair that was going in many directions due to a hairband, some ponytails, and seemingly whatever else she could find to put up there. Except a brush, apparently, or maybe even a shower.

“Yes, Cheswick Wintours.” He put his hand out, a proper business welcome.

“Ok, great, I’m Ally” and she met his hand with hers, as well as a curious expression like she was being asked to recite something in Sanskrit in order to proceed. She gave him a dead fish, but then met his grip and jerked it up and down somewhat vigorously when that seemed to be the protocol. Cheswick wrinkled his brow in response, then quickly pulled his hand loose.

She looked confused, then pulled her hand to her side.

“Follow me,” she said, trying to move past the awkwardness. They walked back down a short hallway and proceeded through a door on the right which led into the studio. Cheswick could see the control booth straight ahead, where two men were sitting. One got up and came out to meet them.

“Hi, Gary Guller. You must be Cheswick.”

“Yes, nice to meet you Mr. Guller.”

“Please, just Gary. Can I call you Ches?”

“Cheswick is fine, thank you.”

“Alrighty then. Cheswick. So we’re all set here, ready whenever you are. Do you need to warm up?”

“Just for a minute or two, yes. Some basic vocal exercises. Do you have any water?”

“Sure, absolutely, let me get you a bottle,” Ally said, and walked over to where there was a fridge in the corner. She returned with a miniature bottle of Poland Spring and handed it to him.

“Ok, you’ve got plenty of time to warm up, just signal when you’re ready, I’ll be in the booth with Johnny over there.” He pointed to the booth at a sleepy-looking, quite hairy man, who nodded back.

“You know the lyrics and the melody, right?”

“Yes, I practiced it many times. I hope I do it justice.”

“I’m sure you will.”

And with that Gary walked into the booth. Cheswick was sure the Tesla was his. Just wasn’t sure if Ally was the Chevy or the Jeep. Both cars were old and had messes inside.

Cheswick nodded to Gary in the booth, then leaned into the microphone.

Immediately the deep bass and vibrato of his voice made the words come to life. Gary and Johnny looked at each other like they just struck gold. Maybe they had.

As Cheswick walked toward the front door, leaving Ally behind after another awkward handshake, his strong confident bearing and countenance began to wilt as he peered through the grimy glass-paned door. The skateboarder. Cheswick froze in his tracks, and watched as the skateboarder pushed through and then also stopped, smirking towards him.

“Hey, whassup again dude.”

“What are you doing here? Are you following me?”

“Naw man. Chill. I’m here for an audition. You too? Or do you run this taco stand?”

That comment reminded Cheswick of the odor which still permeated the lobby.

"No. I was just auditioning. What are you auditioning for?"

"The commercial, dude. Same as you I guess."

Cheswick closed his eyes. It's a short drop when the heights you fall from involve auditioning for a commercial in a rundown building in a sketchy part of town, but a fall nonetheless. Cheswick just walked around the skateboarder and out the door. He heard Ally say goodbye again.

To dream the impossible dream, to fight the impossible foe, to bear with unbearable sorrow, to run where the brave dare not go.

Cheswick replayed that beautiful, haunting melody in his head, hearing his impeccable rendition when he played Don Quixote at the Pantages Theater. Well, he sort of played him. He was the understudy for two years, and in that time he got onstage twice. Damn lead actor never got sick, never got injured. Must have been a record. But his two performances were epic, he thought. Ten years ago, but felt like yesterday. He heard the music again.

He was just sitting in his living room chair, reading the newspaper but having trouble concentrating. The news out of Europe was troubling, leadership was failing there too. His image of England as the ever-shining beacon of light in this dark world, a place where he dreamed of returning one day for good, was dwindling as it seemed to be a mirror of the US. *The impossible dream*. He then heard a ringtone, something which hardly ever occurred.

"Cheswick Wintours," he answered, the formality never at a loss.

"Cheswick, it's Gary, from the studio. How are you today?"

"I'm well, Gary, how about you?"

"Great, thanks. Listen, we loved your audition yesterday. You knocked it out of the park, really impressive. That voice, I tell ya. We'd like to bring you back in, we want to try something a little different, something which will really be unique and take it in a slightly different direction. What do you think?"

Cheswick unfortunately was not in a position to argue or disagree. Times being how they were, as they say, beggars can't be choosers. "Sure, Gary, that sounds wonderful. I look forward to it."

"Outstanding. Listen, I'm going to e-mail you over a couple new sheets, take a look and try it out. And see you tomorrow. 10:30 work for you?"

"Yes it does. I'll be there bright and early."

Cheswick looked at the music sheets. It listed two different vocal ranges. He hadn't sung tenor in many years, but he thought he might be able to do it. Would probably have to do it separately, maybe they could record two separate tracks and combine them after. Tough to go between the two ranges back and forth.

"Hey, welcome back Ches," Gary came over, gliding across the studio floor, smiling and seemingly amped up. "I mean Cheswick, sorry."

"Thank you Gary. I'm excited to be back. This should be interesting today, I hope I can make it work for you."

"I know you can, I have no doubt."

Gary nodded his head, hands on his hips, like he was waiting for something. "So, here's what we're gonna try today."

Just as he said that, the side door, which apparently led to the bathroom, opened. And through it came skateboarder. Cheswick's mouth dropped. His brain locked up as well.

"Ah, here's Jensen. He was just practicing with us, I think he's ready to go. That right Jensen?"

"Absolutely. Just had to drain the vein, know what I mean."

"Sure do. So Jensen will be singing tenor while you obviously take the bass, like yesterday. I know you'll kill it again. You had a chance to see the revisions, right Cheswick?"

Cheswick was still staring at Jensen, who was swinging his hands, apparently trying to dry them. He turned his head to Gary. "I'm sorry, what was the question?"

"I asked if you had a chance to look at the revisions I sent over yesterday."

"Oh yes, yes of course I did. The whole thing, both parts I guess."

"So yeah, you'll be handling the bass. That work for you?"

Cheswick now understood what was happening. He felt like an idiot for not figuring it out yesterday. "Sure, of course. Whatever you need, I'm here."

"That's what I love to hear, thanks Cheswick."

Jensen was now standing with both of them, but facing Cheswick. "Cheswick, is that your name?"

"Yes."

"Jensen, nice to formally meet you." And in a show of complete surprise to Cheswick, Jensen put out his hand to shake. Which Cheswick cautiously met with his own.

"Nice to see you again as well."

"You guys met before?" Gary asked, more excited than curious.

Cheswick and Jensen looked at each other. Jensen actually spoke first. "We just kind of ran into each other yesterday."

"Here, of course." Cheswick added.

"Yeah, here. In the lobby," Jensen said, after a momentary hesitation while looking at Cheswick. Looking relieved.

"Ah, makes sense. You guys were right after each other."

With that they each took their places, Gary into the booth, and Jensen and Cheswick at the microphones. Cheswick did a few exercises, and took a couple sips from the water bottle which he brought.

They began.

Cheswick, *lento*:

Aaaawwwwwwwww

In the beginning, darkness ruled the world,

Then heavens opened up, beams of light unfurled.

Jensen, *moderato*:

Shine on me, shine on me!

Bring that sweetness to my lips!

Cheswick, *moderato*:

Sweet bursts of flavor,

Lightning across your tongue.

Jensen, *melisma*:

Boom! Sizzle! Boom! Sizzle!

Pop Rocks! Pop Rocks! Pop Rocks!

Boom! Sizzle! Boom! Sizzle!
Pop Rocks! Pop Rocks! Pop Rocks!
Cheswick, lento:
Popp Rrrockkkkkss.

Gary signaled with hands up, meaning hold, then dropped them quickly down meaning done. Cheswick and Jensen relaxed. Gary raised his arms up in celebration, like he just crossed the finish line. He came running out of the booth, hands still up, over to his singers. Jensen quickly high-fived, left hand to Gary's right, while Gary held out his left hand out in front of Cheswick. Cheswick got the picture and finally gave Gary the weakest version of a high-five Gary had probably ever received. All good though, Gary was enraptured.

"That was amazing! So much better than I even imagined. Your voices meshed so well, like they were made to sing together. You guys should do a duet, I swear."

Six months later

"Hello Jack." Jack was Cheswick's on-again, off-again agent. Doesn't pay to be an agent to someone nobody wants.

"Cheswick, how are ya' my friend?"

"Fine, Jack. It's been a while." It was always a while between calls.

"Yeah, I know, sorry. But Cheswick, that commercial is killing. Everybody loves it. Everybody."

"Ok, great. And?"

"Cheswick, you're not gonna believe the offer you just received..."

The End