



THE WIND HOWLED. THE STORM CRACKLED ON the mountains. Lightning prodded the crags like an old man trying to get an elusive blackberry pip out of his false teeth.

Among the hissing furze bushes a fire blazed, the flames driven this way and that by the gusts.

An eldritch voice shrieked: ‘When shall we . . . two . . . meet again?’

Thunder rolled.

A rather more ordinary voice said: ‘What’d you go and shout that for? You made me drop my toast in the fire.’

Nanny Ogg sat down again.

‘Sorry, Esme. I was just doing it for . . . you know . . . old time’s sake . . . Doesn’t roll off the tongue, though.’

‘I’d just got it nice and brown, too.’

‘Sorry.’

‘Anyway, you didn’t have to shout.’

‘Sorry.’

‘I mean, I ain’t deaf. You could’ve just asked me in a normal voice. And I’d have said, “Next Wednesday.”’

‘Sorry, Esme.’

‘Just you cut me another slice.’

Nanny Ogg nodded, and turned her head. ‘Magrat, cut Granny ano . . . oh. Mind wandering there for a minute. I’ll do it myself, shall I?’

‘Hah!’ said Granny Weatherwax, staring into the fire.

There was no sound for a while but the roar of the wind and the sound of Nanny Ogg cutting bread, which she did with about as much efficiency as a man trying to chainsaw a mattress.

‘I thought it’d cheer you up, coming up here,’ she said after a while.

‘Really.’ It wasn’t a question.

‘Take you out of yourself, sort of thing . . .’ Nanny went on, watching her friend carefully.

‘Mm?’ said Granny, still staring moodily at the fire.

Oh dear, thought Nanny. I shouldn’t’ve said *that*.

The point was . . . well, the point was that Nanny Ogg was worried. Very worried. She wasn’t at all sure that her friend wasn’t . . . well . . . going . . . well, sort of . . . in a manner of speaking . . . well . . . black . . .

She knew it happened, with the really powerful ones. And Granny Weatherwax was pretty damn’ powerful. She was probably an even more accomplished witch now than the infamous Black Aliss, and everyone knew what had happened to *her* at the finish. Pushed into her own stove by a couple of kids, and everyone said it was a damn’ good thing, even if it took a whole week to clean the oven.

But Aliss, up until that terrible day, had terrorized

the Ramtops. She'd become so good at magic that there wasn't room in her head for anything else.

They said weapons couldn't pierce her. Swords bounced off her skin. They said you could hear her mad laughter a mile off, and of course, while mad laughter was always part of a witch's stock-in-trade in necessary circumstances, this was *insane* mad laughter, the worst kind. And she turned people into gingerbread and had a house made of frogs. It had been very nasty, towards the end. It always was, when a witch went bad.

Sometimes, of course, they didn't go bad. They just went . . . somewhere.

Granny's intellect needed something to *do*. She did not take kindly to boredom. She'd take to her bed instead and send her mind out Borrowing, inside the head of some forest creature, listening with its ears, seeing with its eyes. That was all very well for general purposes, but she was too good at it. She could stay away longer than anyone Nanny Ogg had ever heard of.

One day, almost certainly, she wouldn't bother to come back . . . and this was the worst time of the year, with the geese honking and rushing across the sky every night, and the autumn air crisp and inviting. There was something terribly tempting about that.

Nanny Ogg reckoned she knew what the cause of the problem was.

She coughed.

'Saw Magrat the other day,' she ventured, looking sidelong at Granny.

There was no reaction.

‘She’s looking well. Queening suits her.’

‘Hmm?’

Nanny groaned inwardly. If Granny couldn’t even be bothered to make a nasty remark, then she was *really* missing Magrat.

Nanny Ogg had never believed it at the start, but Magrat Garlick, wet as a sponge though she was half the time, had been dead right about one thing.

Three was a natural number for witches.

And they’d lost one. Well, not lost, exactly. Magrat was queen now, and queens were hard to mislay. But . . . that meant that there were only two of them instead of three.

When you had three, you had one to run around getting people to make up when there’d been a row. Magrat had been good for that. Without Magrat, Nanny Ogg and Granny Weatherwax got on one another’s nerves. With her, all three had been able to get on the nerves of absolutely everyone else in the whole world, which had been a lot more fun.

And there was no having Magrat back . . . at least, to be precise about it, there was no having Magrat back *yet*.

Because, while three was a good number for witches . . . it had to be the *right* sort of three. The right sort of . . . *types*.

Nanny Ogg found herself embarrassed even to think about this, and this was unusual because embarrassment normally came as naturally to Nanny as altruism comes to a cat.

As a witch, she naturally didn’t believe in any

occult nonsense of any sort. But there were one or two truths down below the bedrock of the soul which had to be faced, and right in among them was this business of, well, of the maiden, the mother and the . . . other one.

There. She'd put words around it.

Of course, it was nothing but an old superstition and belonged to the unenlightened days when 'maiden' or 'mother' or . . . the other one . . . encompassed every woman over the age of twelve or so, except maybe for nine months of her life. These days, any girl bright enough to count and sensible enough to take Nanny's advice could put off being at least one of them for quite some time.

Even so . . . it was an *old* superstition – older than books, older than writing – and beliefs like that were heavy weights on the rubber sheet of human experience, tending to pull people into their orbit.

And Magrat had been married for three months. That ought to mean she was out of the first category. At least – Nanny twitched her train of thought on to a branch line – she *probably* was. Oh, *surely*. Young Verence had sent off for a helpful manual. It had pictures in it, and numbered parts. Nanny knew this because she had sneaked into the royal bedroom while visiting one day, and had spent an instructive ten minutes drawing moustaches and spectacles on some of the figures. Surely even Magrat and Verence could hardly fail to . . . No, they must have worked it out, even though Nanny had heard that Verence had been seen enquiring of people where he might buy a

couple of false moustaches. It'd not be long before Magrat was eligible for the second category, even if they were both slow readers.

Of course, Granny Weatherwax made a great play of her independence and self-reliance. But the point about that kind of stuff was that you needed someone around to be proudly independent and self-reliant *at*. People who didn't need people needed people around to know that they were the kind of people who didn't need people.

It was like hermits. There was no point freezing your nadgers off on top of some mountain while communing with the Infinite unless you could rely on a lot of impressionable young women to come along occasionally and say 'Gosh'.

. . . They needed to be three again. Things got exciting, when there were three of you. There were rows, and adventures, and things for Granny to get angry about, and she was only happy when she was angry. In fact, it seemed to Nanny, she was only Granny Weatherwax when she was angry.

Yes. They needed to be three.

Or else . . . it was going to be grey wings in the night, or the clang of the oven door . . .

The manuscript fell apart as soon as Mr Goatberger picked it up.

It wasn't even on proper paper. It had been written on old sugar bags, and the backs of envelopes, and bits of out-of-date calendar.

He grunted, and grabbed a handful of the musty pages to throw them on the fire.

A word caught his eye.

He read it, and his eye was dragged to the end of the sentence.

Then he read to the end of the page, doubling back a few times because he hadn't quite believed what he'd just read.

He turned the page. And then he turned back. And then he read on. At one point he took a ruler out of his drawer and looked at it thoughtfully.

He opened his drinks cabinet. The bottle tinkled cheerfully on the edge of the glass as he tried to pour himself a drink.

Then he stared out of the window at the Opera House on the other side of the road. A small figure was brushing the steps.

And then he said, 'Oh, my.'

Finally he went to the door and said, 'Could you come in here, Mr Cropper?'

His chief printer entered, clutching a sheaf of proofs. 'We're going to have to get Mr Cripslock to engrave page 11 again,' he said mournfully. 'He's spelled "famine" with seven letters—'

'Read this,' said Goatberger.

'I was just off to lunch—'

'Read this.'

'Guild agreement says—'

'Read this and see if you still have an appetite.'

Mr Cropper sat down with bad grace and glanced at the first page.

Then he turned to the second page.

After a while he opened the desk drawer and pulled out a ruler, which he looked at thoughtfully.



‘You’ve just read about Bananana Soup Surprise?’  
said Goatberger.

‘Yes!’

‘You wait till you get to Spotted Dick.’

‘Well, my old granny used to make Spotted  
Dick—’

‘Not to this recipe,’ said Goatberger, with absolute  
certainty.

Cropper fumbled through the pages. ‘Blimey! Do  
you think any of this stuff works?’

‘Who cares? Go down to the Guild right now and  
hire all the engravers that’re free. Preferably elderly  
ones.’

‘But I’ve still got the Grune, June, August and  
Spune predictions for next year’s Almanack to—’

‘Forget them. Use some old ones.’

‘People’ll notice.’

‘They’ve never noticed before,’ said Mr Goat-  
berger. ‘You know the drill. Astounding Rains of  
Curry in Klatch, Amazing Death of the Seriph of Ee,  
Plague of Wasps in Howondaland. This is a lot more  
important.’

He stared unseeing out of the window again.

‘*Considerably* more important.’

And he dreamed the dream of all those who  
publish books, which was to have so much gold in  
your pockets that you would have to employ two  
people just to hold your trousers up.

The huge, be-columned, gargoyle-haunted face of  
Ankh-Morpork’s Opera House was there, in front  
of Agnes Nitt.

She stopped. At least, *most* of Agnes stopped. There was a lot of Agnes. It took some time for outlying regions to come to rest.

Well, this was it. At last. She could go in, or she could go away. It was what they called a life choice. She'd never had one of those before.

Finally, after standing still for long enough for a pigeon to consider the perching possibilities of her huge and rather sad black floppy hat, she climbed the steps.

A man was theoretically sweeping them. What he was in *fact* doing was moving the dirt around with a broom, to give it a change of scenery and a chance to make new friends. He was dressed in a long coat that was slightly too small for him, and had a black beret perched incongruously on spiky black hair.

'Excuse me,' said Agnes.

The effect was electric. He turned around, tangled one foot with the other, and collapsed on to his broom.

Agnes's hand flew to her mouth, and then she reached down.

'Oh, I'm so sorry!'

The hand had that clammy feel that makes a holder think longingly of soap. He pulled it away quickly, pushed his greasy hair out of his eyes and gave her a terrified smile; he had what Nanny Ogg called an underdone face, its features rubbery and pale.

'No trouble miss!'

'Are you all right?'

He scrambled up, got the broom somehow

tangled between his knees, and sat down again sharply.

‘Er . . . shall I hold the broom?’ said Agnes helpfully.

She pulled it out of the tangle. He got up again, after a couple of false starts.

‘Do you work for the Opera House?’ said Agnes.

‘Yes miss!’

‘Er, can you tell me where I have to go for the auditions?’

He looked around wildly. ‘Stage-door!’ he said. ‘I’ll show you!’ The words came out in a rush, as if he had to line them up and fire them all in one go before they had time to wander off.

He snatched the broom out of her hands and set off down the steps and towards the corner of the building. He had a unique stride: it looked as though his body were being dragged forward and his legs had to flail around underneath it, landing wherever they could find room. It wasn’t so much a walk as a collapse, indefinitely postponed.

His erratic footsteps led towards a door in the side wall. Agnes followed them in.

Just inside was a sort of shed, with one open wall and a counter positioned so that someone standing there could watch the door. The person behind it must have been a human being because walrus don’t wear coats. The strange man had disappeared somewhere in the gloom beyond.

Agnes looked around desperately.

‘Yes, miss?’ said the walrus man. It really was

an *impressive* moustache, which had sapped all the growth from the rest of its owner.

‘Er . . . I’m here for the . . . the auditions,’ said Agnes. ‘I saw a notice that said you were auditioning—’

She gave a helpless little smile. The doorkeeper’s face proclaimed that it had seen and been unimpressed by more desperate smiles than even Agnes could have eaten hot dinners. He produced a clipboard and a stub of pencil.

‘You got to sign here,’ he said.

‘Who was that . . . person who came in with me?’

The moustache moved, suggesting a smile was buried somewhere below. ‘Everyone knows our Walter Plinge.’

This seemed to be all the information that was likely to be imparted.

Agnes gripped the pencil.

The most important question was: what should she call herself? Her name had many sterling qualities, no doubt, but it didn’t exactly roll off the tongue. It snapped off the palate and clicked between the teeth, but it didn’t roll off the tongue.

The trouble was, she couldn’t think of one with great rotational capabilities.

Catherine, possibly.

Or . . . Perdita. She could go back to trying Perdita. She’d been embarrassed out of using that name in Lancre. It was a mysterious name, hinting of darkness and intrigue and, incidentally, of someone who was quite thin. She’d even given herself a

middle initial – X – which stood for ‘someone who has a cool and exciting middle initial’.

It hadn’t worked. Lancre people were depressingly resistant to cool. She had just been known as ‘that Agnes who calls herself Perditax’.

She’d never *dared* tell anyone that she’d like her *full* name to be Perdita X Dream. They just wouldn’t *understand*. They’d say things like: if you think that’s the right name for you, why have you still got two shelves full of soft toys?

Well, here she could start afresh. She was good. She knew she was good.

Probably no hope for the Dream, though.

She was probably stuck with the Nitt.

Nanny Ogg usually went to bed early. After all, she was an old lady. Sometimes she went to bed as early as 6 a.m.

Her breath puffed in the air as she walked through the woods. Her boots crunched on the leaves. The wind had died away, leaving the sky wide and clear and open for the first frost of the season, a petal-nipping, fruit-withering little scorcher that showed you why they called Nature a mother . . .

A third witch.

Three witches could sort of . . . spread the load.

Maiden, mother and . . . crone. There.

The trouble was that Granny Weatherwax combined all three in one. She was a maiden, as far as Nanny knew, and she was at least in the right age-bracket for a crone; and, as for the third, well . . .

cross Granny Weatherwax on a bad day and you'd be like a blossom in the frost.

There was bound to be a candidate for the vacancy, though. There were several young girls in Lancre who were just about the right age.

Trouble was, the young men of Lancre knew it too. Nanny wandered the summer hayfields regularly, and had a sharp if compassionate eye and damn' good over-the-horizon hearing. Violet Frottidge was walking out with young Deviousness Carter, or at least doing something within ninety degrees of walking out. Bonnie Quarney had been gathering nuts in May with William Simple, and it was only because she'd thought ahead and taken a little advice from Nanny that she wouldn't be bearing fruit in February. And pretty soon now young Mildred Tinker's mother would have a quiet word with Mildred Tinker's father, and *he'd* have a word with his friend Thatcher and *he'd* have a word with his son Hob, and then there'd be a wedding, all done in a properly civilized way except for maybe a black eye or two.\* No doubt about it, thought Nanny with a misty-eyed smile: innocence, in a hot Lancre summer, was that state in which innocence is lost.

And then a name rose out of the throng. Oh, yes. Her. Why hadn't she thought of *her*? But you didn't, of course. Whenever you thought about the young girls of Lancre, you didn't remember her. And then you said, 'Oh, yes, her too, of course. O' course,

\*The people of Lancre thought that marriage was a very serious step that ought to be done properly, so they practised quite a lot.

she's got a wonderful personality. And good hair, of course.'

She was bright, and talented. In many ways. Her voice, for one thing. That was her power, finding its way out. And of course she also had a wonderful personality, so there'd be not much chance of her being . . . disqualified . . .

Well, that was settled, then. Another witch to bully and impress would set Granny up a treat, and Agnes would be bound to thank her eventually.

Nanny Ogg was relieved. You needed at least three witches for a coven. Two witches was just an argument.

She opened the door of her cottage and climbed the stairs to bed.

Her cat, the tom Greebo, was spread out on the eiderdown like a puddle of grey fur. He didn't even awake as Nanny lifted him up bodily so that, nightdress-clad, she could slide between the sheets.

Just to keep bad dreams at bay, she took a swig out of a bottle that smelled of apples and happy brain-death. Then she pummelled her pillow, thought 'Her . . . yes,' and drifted off to sleep.

Presently Greebo awoke, stretched, yawned and hopped silently to the floor. Then the most vicious and cunning a pile of fur that ever had the intelligence to sit on a bird table with its mouth open and a piece of toast balanced on its nose vanished through the open window.

A few minutes later, the cockerel in the garden next door stuck up his head to greet the bright new day and died instantly mid-'doodle-doo'.

\* \* \*

There was a huge darkness in front of Agnes while, at the same time, she was half-blinded by the light. Just below the edge of the stage, giant flat candles floated in a long trough of water, producing a strong yellow glare quite unlike the oil lamps of home. Beyond the light, the auditorium waited like the mouth of a very big and extremely hungry animal.

From somewhere on the far side of the lights a voice said, 'When you're ready, miss.'

It wasn't a particularly unfriendly voice. It just wanted her to get on with it, sing her piece, and go.

'I've, er, got this song, it's a—'

'You've given your music to Miss Proudlet?'

'Er, there isn't an accompaniment actually, it—'

'Oh, it's a *folk* song, is it?'

There was a whispering in the darkness, and someone laughed quietly.

'Off you go then . . . Perdita, right?'

Agnes launched into the Hedgehog Song, and knew by about word seven that it had been the wrong choice. You needed a tavern, with people leering and thumping their mugs on the table. This big brilliant emptiness just sucked at it and made her voice hesitant and shrill.

She stopped at the end of verse three. She could feel the blush starting somewhere around her knees. It'd take some time to get to her face, because it had a lot of skin to cover, but by then it'd be strawberry pink.

She could hear whispering. Words like 'timbre' emerged from the susurrations and then, she wasn't



surprised to hear, came 'impressive build'. She did, she knew, have an impressive build. So did the Opera House. She didn't have to feel good about it.

The voice spoke up.

'You haven't had much training, have you, dear?'

'No.' Which was true: Lancre's only other singer of note was Nanny Ogg, whose attitude to songs was purely ballistic. You just pointed your voice at the end of the verse and went for it.

Whisper, whisper.

'Sing us a few scales, dear.'

The blush was at chest-height now, thundering across the rolling acres . . .

'Scales?'

Whisper. Muffled laugh.

'Do-Re-Mi? You know, dear? Starting low? La-la-lah?'

'Oh. Yes.'

As the armies of embarrassment stormed her neckline, Agnes pitched her voice as low as she could and went for it.

She concentrated on the notes, working her way stolidly upwards from sea-level to mountaintop, and took no notice at the start when a chair vibrated across the stage or, at the end, when a glass broke somewhere and several bats fell out of the roof.

There was silence from the big emptiness, except for the thud of another bat and, far above, a gentle tinkle of glass.

'Is . . . is that your full range, lass?'

People were clustering in the wings and staring at her.

‘No.’

‘No?’

‘If I go any higher people faint,’ said Agnes. ‘And if I go lower everyone says it makes them feel uncomfortable.’

Whisper, whisper. Whisper, *whisper*, whisper.

‘And, er, any other—?’

‘I can sing with myself in thirds. Nanny Ogg says not everyone can do that.’

‘Sorry?’

‘Like . . . Do-Mi. At the same time.’ ‘Up here?’

*Whisper, whisper.*

‘Show us, lass.’

‘♪ Laaaaaa ♪!’

The people at the side of the stage were talking excitedly.

Whisper, whisper.

The voice from the darkness said: ‘Now, your voice projection—’

‘Oh, I can do *that*,’ snapped Agnes. She was getting rather fed up. ‘Where would you like it projected?’

‘I’m sorry? We’re talking about—’

Agnes ground her teeth. She *was* good. And she’d show them . . .

‘To here?’

‘Or there?’

‘Or here?’

It wasn’t that much of a trick, she thought. It could be very impressive if you put the words in the mouth of a nearby dummy, like some of the travelling showmen did, but you couldn’t pitch it far

away and still manage to fool a whole audience.

Now that she was accustomed to the gloom she could just make out people turning around in their seats, bewildered.

‘What’s your name again, dear?’ The voice, which had at one point shown traces of condescension, had a distinct beaten-up sound.

‘Ag— Per . . . Perdita,’ said Agnes. ‘Perdita Nitt. Perdita X . . . Nitt.’

‘We may have to do something about the Nitt, dear.’

Granny Weatherwax’s door opened by itself.

Jarge Weaver hesitated. Of course, she *were* a witch. People’d told him this sort of thing happened.

He didn’t like it. But he didn’t like his back, either, especially when his back didn’t like him. It came to something when your vertebrae ganged up on you.

He eased himself forward, grimacing, balancing himself on two sticks.

The witch was sitting in a rocking chair, facing away from the door.

Jarge hesitated.

‘Come on in, Jarge Weaver,’ said Granny Weatherwax, ‘and let me give you something for that back of yours.’

The shock made him try to stand upright, and *this* made something white-hot explode somewhere in the region of his belt.

Granny Weatherwax rolled her eyes, and sighed. ‘Can you sit down?’ she said.

‘No, miss. I can fall over on a chair, though.’

Granny produced a small black bottle from an apron pocket and shook it vigorously. Jarge's eyes widened.

'You got that all ready for me?' he said.

'Yes,' said Granny truthfully. She'd long ago been resigned to the fact that people expected a bottle of something funny-coloured and sticky. It wasn't the medicine that did the trick, though. It was, in a way, the spoon.

'This is a mixture of rare herbs and suchlike,' she said. 'Including suckrose and akwa.'

'My word,' said Jarge, impressed.

'Take a swig now.'

He obeyed. It tasted faintly of liquorice.

'You got to take another swig last thing at night,' Granny went on. 'An' then walk three times round a chestnut tree.'

'... three times round a chestnut tree ...'

'An' ... an' put a pine board under your mattress. Got to be pine from a twenty-year-old tree, mind.'

'... twenty-year-old tree ...' said Jarge. He felt he should make a contribution. 'So's the knots in me back end up in the pine?' he hazarded.

Granny was impressed. It was an outrageously ingenious bit of folk hokum worth remembering for another occasion.

'You got it exactly right,' she said.

'And that's it?'

'You wanted more?'

'I ... thought there were dancin' and chantin' and stuff.'

'Did that before you got here,' said Granny.

‘My word. Yes. Er . . . about payin’ . . .’

‘Oh, I don’t want payin’,’ said Granny. ‘S bad luck, taking money.’

‘Oh. Right.’ Jarge brightened up.

‘But maybe . . . if your wife’s got any old clothes, p’raps, I’m a size 12, black for preference, or bakes the odd cake, no plums, they gives me wind, or got a bit of old mead put by, could be, or p’raps you’ll be killing a hog about now, best back’s my favourite, maybe some ham, a few pig knuckles . . . anything you can spare, really. No obligation. I wouldn’t go around puttin’ anyone under obligation, just ’cos I’m a witch. Everyone all right in your house, are they? Blessed with good health, I hope?’

She watched this sink in.

‘And now let me help you out of the door,’ she added.

Weaver was never quite certain about what happened next. Granny, usually so sure on her feet, seemed to trip over one of his sticks as she went through the door, and fell backward, holding his shoulders, and somehow her knee came up and hit a spot on his backbone as she twisted sideways, and there was a *click*—

‘Aargh!’

‘Sorry!’

‘Me back! Me *back!*’

Still, Jarge reasoned later, she was an old woman. And she might be getting clumsy and she’d always been daft, but she made good potions. They worked damn’ fast, too. He was carrying his sticks by the time he got home.

Granny watched him go, shaking her head.

People were so *blind*, she reflected. They preferred to believe in gibberish rather than chiropracty.

Of course, it was just as well this was so. She'd much rather they went 'oo' when she seemed to know who was approaching her cottage than work out that it conveniently overlooked a bend in the track, and as for the door-latch and the trick with the length of black thread . . .\*

But what had she done? She'd just tricked a rather dim old man.

She'd faced wizards, monsters and elves . . . and now she was feeling pleased with herself because she'd fooled Jarge Weaver, a man who'd twice failed to become Village Idiot through being over-qualified.

It was the slippery slope. Next thing it'd be cackling and gibbering and luring children into the oven. And it wasn't as if she even *liked* children.

For years Granny Weatherwax had been contented enough with the challenge that village witchcraft could offer. And then she'd been forced to go travelling, and she'd seen a bit of the world, and it had made her itchy – especially at this time of the year, when the geese were flying overhead and the first frost had mugged innocent leaves in the deeper valleys.

She looked around at the kitchen. It needed

\*Not that she sat looking out of the window. She'd been watching the fire when she picked up the approach of Jarge Weaver. But that wasn't the *point*.

sweeping. The washing-up needed doing. The walls had grown grubby. There seemed to be so much to do that she couldn't bring herself to do any of it.

There was a honking far above, and a ragged V of geese sped over the clearing.

They were heading for warmer weather in places Granny Weatherwax had only heard about.

It was tempting.

The selection committee sat around the table in the office of Mr Seldom Bucket, the Opera House's new owner. He'd been joined by Salzella, the musical director, and Dr Undershaft, the chorus master.

'And so,' said Mr Bucket, 'we come to . . . let's see . . . yes, Christine . . . Marvellous stage presence, eh? Good figure, too.' He winked at Dr Undershaft.

'Yes. Very pretty,' said Dr Undershaft flatly. 'Can't sing, though.'

'What you artistic types don't realize is this is the Century of the Fruitbat,' said Bucket. 'Opera is a production, not just a lot of songs.'

'So you say. But . . .'

'The idea that a soprano should be fifteen acres of bosom in a horned helmet belongs to the past, like.'

Salzella and Undershaft exchanged glances. So he was going to be *that* kind of owner . . .

'Unfortunately,' said Salzella sourly, 'the idea that a soprano should have a reasonable singing voice does not belong to the past. She has a good figure, yes. She certainly has a . . . sparkle. But she can't *sing*.'