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# **Angels of Music**

Written by Kim Newman

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# ANGELS OF MUSIC

KIM NEWMAN

TITAN BOOKS

## ANGELS OF MUSIC

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*For Randy and Jean-Marc Lofficier*

Christine Daaé – the Angel of Song  
Trilby O’Ferrall – the Angel of Beauty  
Irene Adler – the Angel of Larceny  
La Marmoset – the Angel of Light  
Sophy Kratides – the Angel of Vengeance  
Unorna – the Angel of Magic  
Ayda Heidari – the Angel of Blood  
Ysabel de Ferre – the Angel of Rapture  
Hagar Stanley – the Angel of Insight  
Katharine Reed – the Angel of Truth  
Clara Watson – the Angel of Pain  
Lady Yuki – the Angel of the Sword  
Gilberte Lachaille – the Angel of Love  
Elizabeth Eynsford Hill – the Angel of Many Voices  
Riolama – the Angel of the Air  
Alraune ten Brincken – the Angel of Ill Fortune  
Olympia – the Clockwork Angel  
Thi Minh – the Angel of Acrobatics

# ACT ONE: THE MARRIAGE CLUB

“The requiem mass is not at all gay,” Erik’s voice resumed, “whereas the wedding mass – you can take my word for it – is magnificent! You must take a resolution and know your own mind! I can’t go on living like this, like a mole in a burrow! Don Juan Triumphant is finished; and now I want to live like everybody else. I want to have a wife like everybody else and to take her out on Sundays. I have invented a mask that makes me look like anybody. People will not even turn round in the streets. You will be the happiest of women. And we will sing, all by ourselves, till we swoon away with delight. You are crying! You are afraid of me! And yet I am not really wicked. Love me and you shall see! All I wanted was to be loved for myself. If you loved me I should be as gentle as a lamb; and you could do anything with me that you pleased.”

Gaston Leroux, *The Phantom of the Opera* (1909–10)

## I

TOWARDS THE END of the seventies – that colourful, hectic decade of garish clothes, corrupt politics, personal excess and trivial music – three girls were sent to the Paris Opéra. They could dance a little, sing a little more, were comely when painted and cut fine figures in tights. Were the world just, they would have been stars in the ascendant. Leading roles would have been assigned to them. Rewards would have come along... fame, riches and advantageous marriages.

However, a rigid system of seniority, patronage and favour-currying then governed the house. Our heroines, no matter how perfectly they trilled audition pieces or daintily they lifted skirts from shapely calves, were of the ‘untouchable’ caste, and fated to remain in the depths of the chorus. If critic or admirer or patron were to call public attention to their qualities, they would likely find themselves cast as slaves in the next production, faces blacked with burnt cork, holding the Queen’s train at the rear of the stage. Such was the ruthless dictate of the house’s reigning diva, Signorina Carlotta Castafiore.

Yet... Christine Daaé had a Voice. Trilby O’Ferrall had a Face. And Irene Adler had a Mind. When they arrived at the Opéra, the women were gems in the rough. To be revealed as diamonds of the first water, they required polish, cutting and careful

setting. Without such treatment, they were likely to become dull pebbles, lost among so many other shingles on the beach.

Many equally appealing young ladies have served years in the chorus as their brothers served terms in the armed forces (or prison), trying not to squander meagre pay on absinthe or cards, hoping to emerge whole in mind and limb from regular ordeals, dreaming of comfortable retirement. At best, they might end up the second wives of comfortable widowers; at worst, they might... well, 'at worst' is too hideous to be dwelled upon, save to observe that such as they were found ragged on the cobbles or drowned in the Seine with a frequency which verged upon the scandalous.

These demoiselles tended to attract the puppy-like devotions of decent, dull-witted youths and the carnivorous attentions of indecent, cold-hearted roués. Our trio, in their private dreams, yearned for a different stripe of suitor – mysterious, dominating, challenging. Without such a presence in their lives, the girls lacked direction. But, even kept outside the circle of the limelight, they had an unnerving tendency to sparkle. Carlotta saw the shimmering in her wake, and made sure they stayed in shadow. Nevertheless, one by one, they were *noticed*... not by the stuffy and harassed management or the violently partisan audience clagues, but by a personage who saw into their secret selves.

This unique individual was at once Christine's Trapdoor Lover, Trilby's Mesmerist Genius and Irene's Mastermind of Intrigue. All Paris knew him as the Opera Ghost, though most deemed him a phantasm rather than a phantom. He was a bogey conjured by stagehands to throw a scare into pretty little ballerinas, not the spectre of a dead man whose bones lay unshriven in a recess of Charles Garnier's palatial opera house. Those who had cause to believe the Phantom of the Opera a man of flesh and bone were wise enough not to speak of him. There were rumours about what happened to those who earned his displeasure.

His protégées came to know him as Monsieur Erik.

Among the Phantom's few intimates was the Persian. The exact function of this long-faced, astrakhan-capped fellow at the opera house was hard to determine but evidently essential. The girls flitted through a surface world of upholstered finery, fashionable cafés and society engagements, of grand opening nights and merry madcap balls; the Opera Ghost confined himself to the decaying, watery labyrinth below street level, among the scenery of out-of-fashion productions and tombs of tortured men. Only the Persian passed easily between the two realms. It was said he was the only man living who had seen the true face behind mirror and mask, though some claimed to have glimpsed a yellow-eyed, noseless spectre in Box Five, upon which it had a permanent lease.

From behind a mirror in Dressing Room 313, Erik gave 'music lessons', whispering for hours to his songbirds – his Swedish-born French nightingale, French-born Irish thrush and All-American eagle. He first discovered Daaé, his most naturally gifted pupil, and called from her a voice to rival the angels. Moreover, he taught her to *feel* the music, to imbue the polite perfection of her natural tones with the rude turbulence of her young heart. Thanks to Erik, Christine's voice could reach and affect in a manner those who heard it would never forget, though for her finest performances her only auditor was a single, tattered soul weeping under his mask.

O'Ferrall, near death after a spell under another mesmerist-tutor, was cracked in voice, body and spirit when brought to Erik. He repaired her voice if not to its former, artificial magnificence – once, briefly, she had performed at the highest level – then at least to pleasant adequacy. Not a natural singer like Christine, Trilby was, if properly presented, the greatest beauty of the age, an attainment involving at least as much sacrifice and special exercise as musical distinction.

Adler, the American, was warier, less obviously talented, too strong-willed for the special tutelage Erik bestowed upon her sisters in song, but prodigiously gifted. She could turn her quick

mind and light fingers to almost anything. Irene's involvement with the Agency was a matter of negotiation towards mutual advantage rather than submission to the will of the Opera Ghost.

Each, in her own way, benefited from Erik's work with them, and grew when they worked together. Collaboration went against the instincts of the potential diva in each... but they were more effective as a trio than they would have been as three solo turns. Should their maestro have been interested, a healthy income could have been generated by hiring out *les trois jolis anges* as entertainment for cafés, society functions, musical soirées, orgies, weddings, funerals and the like... but his vision for his protégées was of a different stripe. He saw in them deeper, more specialised talents and was determined they should be put to good use. A mystery himself, Erik set out to rid the city – *à terme*, all France (and overseas territories and possessions) – of competition. His own mask would stay in place, but all others would be lifted.

Though seldom seen above street level, Erik founded a private enquiry agency. Just as an opera director does not appear on stage, except to take bows after a first night, Erik remained in his well-appointed cellars while his protégées acted on his behalf and received the applause due to them.

It was circulated in the proverbial circles that those who wished to engage the Opera Ghost Agency must first make contact with the Persian or, for more delicate matters, Madame Giry, the Keeper of Box Five. These loyal operatives would convey the details of the case to the Phantom himself. Often Erik was already well apprised of matters in which prospective clients wished him to take an interest. Thanks to an intricate array of tubes and shutters, he could eavesdrop on gossip uttered in any box, dressing room or lavatory in the house. Few matters of moment troubled the city without being discussed somewhere within the Paris Opéra. Once a case came to Erik's attention, it was his decision – unaffected by the scale of fee on offer – whether a commission was accepted or declined.

If accepted, a bell sounded.

## II

BELLS WERE FOREVER ringing around the house, to summon artistes, dressers, musicians, commissionaires, wine-waiters, clerks, servants, composers, scene-shifters, rat-catchers, chorus girls, washer-women. Bells were sounded to alert the audience when a performance was about to commence or resume. Not to mention the cow-, sheep- or goat-bells rung by percussionists when pieces with rustic settings were given. Only a finely tuned ear could distinguish individual tones among such tintinnabulation. But our three girls knew their bell. When it tinkled, anything they happened to be doing – no matter how important – was set aside in their haste to make their way to a dressing room at the end of a basement corridor which had apparently been abandoned as too far from the great stage for convenience.

When Erik rang the bell, Christine Daaé was in a scuttle-shaped bathtub, all a-lather, singing scales... Trilby O'Ferrall was posing in a sunlit upper room for a class of impoverished art students who'd pooled meagre funds to purchase an hour of her time... and Irene Adler was practising her lock-picking blindfolded, working away with hairpins and clever fingers.

Within moments, the tub stood empty, the students disappointed and the lock unpicked. The girls nipped swiftly to answer the summons, using dumb-waiters, trapdoors and other byways known only to intimates of Charles Garnier. They arrived simultaneously at Dressing Room 313. The Persian looked up from the latest number of *La Petite Parisien* and flapped a hand at them, the smoke from his Turkish cigarette making a question mark in the air. The trio arranged themselves on a divan before the large, green-speckled mirror. Christine and Trilby were still wriggling into suitable clothes. They helped each other with hooks and buttons. Irene coolly replaced the pins she had been using as lock-picks. When the Persian turned down the gaslight,



it was possible to discern a chamber beyond the mirror's thin silvering. A slender shadow stood there, extravagantly cloaked and hatted, violin tucked under his chin. Erik extemporised the sort of 'hurry up' trill used to encourage unpopular acts to get off the stage in *salles des variétés* as the girls concluded their business with a minimum of pinching and tutting.

'What's the ruckus this time, Bright Boy?' asked Irene, whose speech still bore the pernicious influence of her native New Jersey. 'Is some mug tryin' ta knock over the Louvre again?'

'Could it be a plot to bring down the government?' asked Trilby.

'Or set off dynamite under Notre-Dame?' asked Christine.

The Persian exhaled a smoke ring. 'Nothing so everyday, ladies.'

All eyes turned to the mirror. Trilby, by a degree the prettiest of our trio and a long chalk the most vain, fussed with her short brown curls, accompanied by a teasing little violin tune. She noticed the others looking at her, smiled sweetly and put her hands in her lap as if about to listen dutifully to a sermon.

The violin was set down and a sepulchral voice sounded, conveyed into the room through a speaking tube with a woodwind tone.

'Our client,' said Erik, 'is most exalted. In fact, a president.'

'The President of the Republic!' exclaimed Christine, saluting.

With the shortage of male chorus – thanks to the brutal levies of the Franco-Prussian War, the Siege, the Commune and *la Semaine Sanglante* – the boyish Daaé frame was often gussied up *en travestie* in braided uniform. She was better at close-order drill than any lad in the company. Off duty, as it were, she often favoured military tunics. Though born in Sweden, she had been raised mostly in France and was a true patriotess. She could have posed for the image of Marianne if, unlike the often-painted Trilby, she were not addicted to the fidgets.

'It can't be that maroon in the White House!' said Irene Adler.

'Ireland hasn't got a president, more's the pity,' muttered Trilby – born in Paris of an Irish father and a French mother,

never to set foot on the green sod from which she inherited her complexion. 'Just the cursed God English, and their fat little German Queen.'

'Our client is far more respected than a mere head of state,' said Erik. 'She is *la Présidente*. Apollonie Sabatier, *née* Joséphine-Aglaré Savatier. Her salon may be more vital to *la vie parisienne* than any government building, museum or cathedral.'

'Salon?' queried Christine.

'He means whorehouse,' explained Irene. 'What Miss Potato's Limey oppressors call "a knocking-shop".'

Trilby good-humouredly stuck her tongue out at Irene.

'I've heard of Madame Sabatier,' said Trilby. 'She's one of those Horizontal Giantesses.'

'Indeed,' continued Erik. 'The most upstanding, indeed paradoxically vertical of the nation's *grandes horizontales*. You will have seen her portrait by Meissonier, her statue by Clésinger.'

'That Baudelaire freak was nuts about her,' said Irene.

There was a pause. It would be easy to conceive of a yellowish, skeletal brow wrinkling in a frown, a lipless mouth attempting a moue of displeasure, a glint of irritation in sunken yellow eyes.

'What did I say?' whined Irene. 'Everyone knows the guy was ga-ga for the dame. Did you ever see Baudelaire? Weirdest-looking turkey this side of the state fair, mooning over this overpriced sporting gal. Most ridiculous thing you ever heard of. Just like Beauty and the Beast!'

An exhalation of impatience hissed through the speaking tube.

The Phantom had a particular, personal dislike of the Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont fairy tale known far and wide as *La Belle et la Bête*. When the management attempted to revive André Grétry's *Zémire et Azor*, a once-popular *opéra comique* inspired by the story, the production was dogged by a run of bad luck. At the end of the dress rehearsal, the luckless tenor cast as Azor discovered that the inside of his beast mask had been cruelly coated with indissoluble glue. The prank became

unpleasantly apparent when he attempted to tear off his mask to take a bow. No understudy would take the role on opening night, and the piece was replaced at the last moment by a less controversial item from the repertoire, Daniel Auber's *Fra Diavolo, ou L'Hôtellerie de Terracine*.

Irene thought over her comments about ugly geniuses smitten with beautiful women, looked again at the silhouette beyond the mirror, and paled in rigid terror. She had spoken without thinking, which was unlike her.

Without the benefit of 'music lessons', Irene was less schooled than Christine and Trilby in the discipline expected of Erik's operatives.

Eventually, the hissing became a normal susurrus, and Erik resumed.

'It is true that the Salon Sabatier has been the haunt of poets and artists. *La Présidente* has admirers among our greatest creative minds.'

'I know all about the minds of poets and painters,' said Trilby. 'Filth and degeneracy is what goes around in their clever little brains. Enough scribblers and daubers have trotted after me. Ought to be ashamed, so they should.'

Trilby spat in her hand and crossed herself. It was something her father often did when pledging to creditors that funds would be available by the end of the week, just before the O'Ferrall *ménage* moved to a new, usually less salubrious address.

'Our client requires us to display great sensitivity and tact,' decreed Erik.

'None of the tittle or the tattle,' said Christine.

'Exactly. In the course of this investigation, you might well become privy to information which *la Présidente* and her particular friends...'

'Johns,' put in Irene.

'...would not wish to be generally known.'

'Have you noticed how these fancy fellers *always* think their wives don't know a thing?' said Trilby. 'Bless their hearts. They're

like tiny children. Wouldn't they be surprised if they knew what their missuses got up to while they're tomcatting about town?'

All three laughed. Christine, it had to be said, frequently did not quite 'get' the meaning of her friends' comments – especially when, as was their habit, they spoke in English – but was alert enough to conceal occasional ignorance by chiming in with musical giggles. Her chief trait was adorability, and foolish fellows were already composing remarkably poor sonnets about the smallness of her nose with ambitions towards epic verse on the subject of the rest of her anatomy. Trilby was older than the others, though no one would ever tell to look at her. Her greater experience of the artistic life inclined her to be protective of her baby sisters. Foolish fellows in her presence tended to be struck dumb, as if she were a vision at Lourdes. Sometimes, a glazed look came into her eyes, and she seemed a different, more ethereal, slightly frightening person.

Irene, in years the youngest, was a harder nut to crack, and men thought her handsome rather than pretty, as dangerous as alluring. She put it about that she fled her homeland after knifing a travelling preacher for whom she had been shilling. It was considerably more complicated than that. She often imagined returning to New York on the arm of one of the crowned heads she had seen in the rotogravure. In her copy-book, she had already designed an Adler coat of arms – an American eagle, beak deep in the side of a screaming naked Prometheus. A foolish fellow who stepped out with her tended to find some unknown *apache* had lifted their note-case, snuff-box, cuff-links and watch during the course of a delightful evening with a disappointing curtain.

'It is a matter of a man and his wife which has been brought before us,' announced Erik. 'The man of some distinction, the woman an unknown.'

The Persian undid the ribbon on a large wallet, and slid out clippings from the popular press, a wedding brochure, photographic plates and other documents. These were passed among the girls.

Some excitement was expressed at a reproduced portrait of a handsome fellow in the uniform of a brigadier of the armies of the late Emperor. There was cooing of admiration for a curly moustache and upright sabre. With a touch of malice, the Persian handed over a more recent likeness, in which the golden boy was all but unrecognisable. These days, the soldier was an enormous, shaggy-browed, weathered hulk, a pudding of flesh decorated with innumerable medals.

'You recognise Étienne Gérard, retired Grand Marshal of France, still reckoned one of our most influential citizens,' said Erik. 'No one is as canny as he when it comes to badgering the right politician to change a procurement policy or effect a strategy of preparedness.'

'He started shouting "the Prussians are coming, the Prussians are coming" just after von Blücher bloodied his nose at Waterloo,' said Christine. 'I had an uncle like that.'

'Of course,' said Trilby, 'the Prussians really were coming.'

'That doesn't make the old man any less a booby.'

'You're behind the times, Chrissy,' put in Irene. 'Gérard stopped tooting that particular trumpet a few months back. He's a changed man since he got hitched to this little social-climber. Now, he's big on beating swords into ploughshares and insisting the French people have no greater pal than Bismarck.'

The wedding brochure commemorated the joining-together of Grand Marshal Gérard with his bride, Poupée Francis-Pierre.

'He's over ninety and she's what... sixteen?' said Trilby.

'Precise details about Madame Gérard's age, background or qualities are hard to come by,' said Erik. 'Such information is one objective of our investigation.'

'I heard she was a dancer,' said Christine, looking at a studio photograph of the bride. 'Looks like she's made of porcelain. You'd think she'd *snap* if the old goat so much as touched her.'

'Is she one of *la Présidente's* dollymops?' asked Irene. 'Some addlehead dotards go for that rouge-cheeked widdle girlie act.'

'Madame Gérard is *not* a former ornament of the Salon

Sabatier,' said Erik. 'Indeed, she is the cause of some consternation among the girls there. Before his nuptials, the Grand Marshal, despite his advancing years, was an especially favoured and enthusiastic regular customer.'

'Tarts like 'em old and rich,' said Trilby. 'They can't do much, but pay well over the odds.'

Irene laughed, and Christine joined in.

'Though not of an artistic temperament,' continued Erik, 'Grand Marshal Gérard found Madame Sabatier's establishment more to his liking than many rival houses run to cater to more military tastes.'

'Boots and whips,' shuddered Irene.

'Subsequent to his wedding, he has not visited the Salon.'

'No wonder. He's getting poked for free at home.'

'*La, Irène*, you say such things,' tittered Christine.

'Madame Sabatier reports that losing a longstanding patron to marriage is an accepted risk of her business. However, she takes pride in the fact that, with this single exception, her clients have returned within three months of their honeymoons, and been more generous than before in the matter of recompense and gifts, usually with an added exhortation to increased discretion.'

Christine laughed out loud, musically. 'The Madame is deluded. Look at Gérard's life, all the way back to the last century. All those exploits and adventures. He's obviously a reckless romantic.'

'I agree,' said Trilby. 'The old idiot's probably in love with the minx.'

'I'll bet nuggets Petite Poupée has been down to the dressmakers to see how she looks in black,' said Irene. 'Then steered by the apothecary's on the way home. If used in excess, those boudoir philtres for the use of senior gentlemen are bad for the constitution... so I hear.'

'If that is the case, we are required by our client to intervene,' said Erik.

'I'll say,' put in Trilby. 'Can't let some filly get away with murder. We've got a reputation to think of.'

‘Does Madame Présidente fear for Gérard’s life?’ asked Christine.

There was a pause. Breathing could be heard through the tube.

‘It may come to that. At present, she is more concerned that the old fellow is not “acting like himself”. She takes a keen interest in the defence of France...’

‘Sausage-eaters are notoriously rough on whores and stingy about paying.’

‘Thank you for that insight, Irene. “Adler” is a German name, is it not? As I was saying, Étienne Gérard’s change of mind on matters military and political troubles Madame Sabatier more than his absence from her customer register. She believes the Grand Marshal might have been “got at” in some way...’

‘Hypnotised,’ said Christine, thrilled.

‘Mesmerised,’ said Trilby, dreamily.

‘Doped,’ said Irene, cynically.

‘She wonders if the Grand Marshal even *is* the Grand Marshal.’

‘Murdered and replaced by the mad twin from the attic,’ suggested Christine, who read a great deal of sensation fiction, avidly following every *feuilleton* in every periodical in Paris. ‘Possessed by one of those invisible *horlas* one hears of and forced to do the bidding of some creature from beyond the veil.’

The Persian gathered back all the documents, and resealed the packet.

‘Erik,’ said Irene, ‘are you *sure* this is a job for the Agency? It sounds mighty like some scorned *comare*, sulking because Sugar Daddy has cut off the cash flow, out to do dirt to the chit who has stolen him away. Shouldn’t they settle it with a decent knife-fight and leave us out of it?’

The Persian produced several more wallets.

‘The Grand Marshal is not an isolated case.’