

Little Me

LITTLE ME, based on *Little Me*, by Patrick Dennis, *opened at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre on November 17, 1962, starring Sid Caesar; directed by Cy Feuer and Bob Fosse; choreography by Bob Fosse; lyrics by Carolyn Leigh; music by Cy Coleman; presented by Feuer & Martin.*

THE SCENES

THE PRESENT: Belle's estate in Southampton, Long Island
THE PAST: Venezuela, Illinois
Peoria
Chicago
Somewhere in France
On the North Atlantic
Hollywood
Monte Carlo
A Principality in Middle Europe
The Dakotas

Act One

SCENE I

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The curtain rises on an ornate, lavish room. A chaise is downstage right, a table up right, and a grand piano up left. Two suits of armor flank the center French door. A BUTLER, preceded by a BARTENDER, is ushering a young man into the room. It is PATRICK DENNIS. He carries a tape recorder.

LITTLE ME

BUTLER Right this way, please. If you'll kindly wait here, I'll try to locate Miss Poitrine.

PATRICK She is expecting me. Patrick Dennis, the author? I'm going to work with her on her autobiography.

BUTLER Oh, yes. She asked to be informed just as soon as you arrived. *(He opens the small door which is the breastplate of a suit of armor and picks up the telephone which is hidden there)* Chapel, please.

PATRICK Chapel? She has her own chapel?

BUTLER Oh, good morning, Padre. Would you kindly inform Miss Poitrine that Mr. Dennis is waiting here in the Rumpus Room.

PATRICK The Rumpus Room?

BUTLER Thank you, Padre . . . Oh, and bless you too. *(He hangs up the phone and turns to PATRICK)* She'll be here directly.

PATRICK Her own chapel. Incredible. *(The BARTENDER opens the piano top, which reveals a hidden bar. PATRICK is astonished, then crosses to the table covered with photographs of BELLE and various men. He reads the inscription)* "Belle and Fred on honeymoon."

PATRICK Well, she was married again, wasn't she?

BUTLER To the entire table.

PATRICK Extraordinary woman.

(Chimes sound. The BUTLER motions to the BARTENDER to prepare the drink)

BUTLER Excuse me.

(OLDER BELLE sweeps into the room. She is large and flamboyant)

OLDER BELLE Mr. Dennis! . . . Mr. Dennis! *(She sweeps past him directly to the BARTENDER to her drink. The BUTLER exits)* Patrick! . . . My first meeting with my Boswell! *(She takes PATRICK's hand)* I do hope I didn't keep you waiting. But I just couldn't dash out of the chapel.

PATRICK I understand.

OLDER BELLE It's my portrait. I'm sitting for a stained-glass window.

(She drinks and returns the glass to BARTENDER's tray. The BARTENDER goes to the piano)

PATRICK How . . . inspiring.

(The BUTLER reenters, followed by THREE HAIRDRESSERS)

BUTLER Excuse me, madam. The hairdressers are here from New York.

OLDER BELLE Oh, dear. We're terribly busy, darlings. Why don't you do the poodles first?

PATRICK That really isn't necessary. During the next few days you can go about your daily routine as though I weren't here. I'll just follow you around with my tape recorder. *(He opens it up)* Have you ever used one?

OLDER BELLE Indirectly. I once found one under my bed in a hotel room in Atlantic City . . . *(She goes to the chaise and sits)* But we don't need to mention that.

PATRICK Oh, but we do! Today, the reader can spot a phony life story in the table of contents. They want the truth. Names, dates, places, vivid descriptions . . . (*Music starts*) Leave out the "intimate" details, and you can kiss the Book-of-the-Month Club goodbye.

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OLDER BELLE The truth! . . . What a challenge!
(BELLE, PATRICK *and the* SERVANTS *sing* "The Truth")

LITTLE ME

DENNIS
The all-revealing truth?

BELLE
The mass-appealing truth!

DENNIS
The blood-congealing truth?

BELLE
The ir-regardless truth—

BOTH
The truth!

MEN (*Spoken*)
The truth!

BELLE
As through a haze
I see a Doubleday's—
And shining in a windowful
Of Arthur Miller plays,
The truth!

MEN
The truth?

BELLE
An odyssey
Entitled "Little Me"
As told to Patrick Dennis in its whole en-
tirety
By me!

DENNIS

The truth!

BELLE

All hail to "Little Me"
The book that's bound to be
Prohibited from passage through the mail—
But nonetheless on sale
Throughout the land!
And printed by demand
In Esperanto,
Japanese
And Braille!

With the areas I'll expose,
I'll annihilate Gypsy Rose;
As for practic'ly Proustian prose:
Mary Astor,
Meet your master!
Stack me up with all three Gabors,

MEN

Oh-oh!

BELLE

I'll reduce 'em to cut-rate stores!

MEN

Oh, no!

BELLE

And Louella dear, you'll get yours
With the end-all
Casey Stendhal
Truth!

MEN

Truth!
Truth!
Truth!

The D. H. Lawrence truth!

BELLE

With an index!

MEN

In floods and torrents, truth!

DENNIS

Illustrations!

BELLE

The plain, plebeian truth,

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MEN

Inspirational!

LITTLE ME

DENNIS

The Brendan Behan truth!

BELLE

Educational!

MEN

In black and white, the truth!

DENNIS

Do you mean it?

BELLE

You're goddamn right, the truth!

DENNIS

In the language of Thoreau,
Rousseau

BELLE

And Harriet Beecher Stowe!

ALL

For God and Home and Underpriv'leged
Youth—

The truth!

The truth!

The truth!

The truth!

*(After the number, BELLE sits on the chaise as two
HAIRDRESSERS begin to work on her hair. The BUT-
LER, BARTENDER and one HAIRDRESSER exit)*

PATRICK All right, Belle. You're a writer now. Tell it
all. From the very beginning.

OLDER BELLE Little Me . . . Chapter One . . . "The Belle's First Toll" . . . It was May in the little town of Venezuela, Illinois . . . and a brand-new century got up out of bed, yawned and got dressed. Good morning, 1900 . . . Say Hello to Belle Schlumpfert.

(She smiles at PATRICK, pleased with her prose. Fade-out)

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*Collected Plays
of Neil Simon*

Light comes up behind scrim on a tumbledown shack in Drifters' Row. In the distance are all the fine and stately homes of the Bluff.

LITTLE ME

OLDER BELLE I lived alone with Momma . . . As the years passed glumly by, we were as poor as church mice, living in a tumbledown shack in Drifters' Row . . . (YOUNG BELLE, aged sixteen, steps out on the ramsbackle porch. BELLE is lovely, starry-eyed and well-stacked. Dressed raggedly) By the time I was sixteen, I had bloomed into a lovely and delicate young flower. In fact, there were those who thought I had overbloomed. Girls shunned me and boys were afraid of me. And so, with the exception of a few workmen on the Rock Island Line, no one wanted to play with little me . . .

(Blackout on OLDER BELLE. She, PATRICK and TWO HAIRDRESSERS exit. Lights come up on Drifters' Row and the scrim goes up. MOMMA steps out on the porch wearing a flaming-red dress)

MOMMA Well, Belle, honey, I'm off to work.

BELLE All right, Momma. Say hello to Mrs. Louise for me.

MOMMA Not Mrs. Louise, baby, *Madam*. She's French . . . How do I look, baby?

BELLE Like a bright-red angel . . . Oh, Momma, when I grow up I wanna be a nurse just like you.

MOMMA I'm not really a nurse, sugar . . . I just like to make people feel good. Well, I gotta go. And, sweetie, don't forget to throw out the garbage.

BELLE All right. Momma, will you be home early?

MOMMA No, hon. We got two new girls today, and I gotta stay late and take inventory.

(She exits. GEORGE MUSGROVE runs on stage. GEORGE is skinny and freckle-faced, the same age as BELLE)

GEORGE Hya, Belle.

BELLE Oh, hello, George . . . What have you got there?

GEORGE Cards. Let's cut the deck. High card for a kiss.

BELLE I can't, George. I've got to throw out the garbage. And, George Musgrove, put away those cards. You should try to lead a clean, decent life like the folks up on the Bluff.

(She exits into the shack)

GEORGE The Bluff! The Bluff! That's all you ever think about. You stick your nose up too high in the air, Belle, and you'll get disappointment up both nostrils.

(GEORGE exits as three young kids from up on the Bluff enter. All are well-dressed and carry picnic baskets)

BRUCEY Come on, girls, we'll be late for the picnic.

RAMONA You can go on ahead if you want, Brucey, we're waiting here for Noble.

BRUCEY You're always waiting for Noble. You'd think just 'cause he's captain of the football, baseball, boxing, debating and tumbling teams, he was something special.

RAMONA Well, he *is!* There's nothing Noble Eggleston can't do. *(She looks off to the right)* Ooh, there he is! *(She yells and waves)* Noble! . . . Noble, here we are! *(Suddenly a young boy comes in, tumbling across the stage, flipping hand over hand right past the group)* Wait, Noble, you're going too fast.

(The boy flips right off into the wings, then comes quickly back and stands there breathing hard. He has a big smile)

NOBLE Hi, gang! I guess I must have overtumbled.
(NOBLE EGGLESTON, sixteen years old, is an Edwardian Jack Armstrong, clean of body, mind and spirit)

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RAMONA Hi, Noble . . .

LITTLE ME

NOBLE May I carry your basket, Ramona?
(He takes her picnic basket)

RAMONA Noble, you're so strong . . . *(Points to his neck)*
Is that a new muscle?

NOBLE *(Nods and flexes the muscle on his neck)* It came out last night . . . while I was sleeping. Say, gang, where are we?

BRUCEY I took a shortcut. This is Drifters' Row.

RAMONA *(Aghast)* Drifters' Row! I've never been down here before. *(Sniffs)* What's that horrible odor?

NOBLE *(Sniffs)* Smells like Poverty!

RAMONA It gives me the creeps. *(She shivers)* Let's get out of here.

BRUCEY Yes. Let's go.
(They all start to go except NOBLE)

NOBLE Wait, gang! *(They all stop and turn to him)* I just got a swell idea. Where are we all going to now? A picnic, right?

BRUCEY AND OTHERS Right!

NOBLE And where did we just come from? Another picnic, right?

BRUCEY AND OTHERS Right!

NOBLE And where are we all going to after this picnic? To lunch!

BRUCEY AND OTHERS Right!

NOBLE Well, I say . . . Instead of eating seven or eight meals today, we take our baskets chockful of good food and give them to a worthy starving family of our choice?

(They all look at one another, puzzled)

BRUCEY But why?

NOBLE Why? Because that's the democratic way. Eat until you think you're gonna bust, and then give away the leftovers . . .

BRUCEY You're crazy, Noble. Come on, girls.

(He pulls one girl offstage)

RAMONA Are you coming, Noble?

NOBLE I'll be with you in a minute, Ramona. Just a minute. *(She exits. He crosses to the porch of the shack)* Hellooooo, is anyone in that thing? *(He moves upstage of the porch)* Helloo!

(Just as he looks directly into the door YOUNG BELLE appears with a large pail of garbage. She hauls back to throw it out and they both freeze as the arc picks up OLDER BELLE to the right)

OLDER BELLE It was then, with that pail of garbage in my hands, that I saw Noble for the first time in my life. The moment I saw him, my heart brimmed with passion, and yet, the only words I could find to say were . . .

(Blackout on OLDER BELLE just as YOUNG BELLE heaves the pail of garbage at NOBLE)

YOUNG BELLE Oh! I'm awfully sorry.

NOBLE *(Smiles and wipes the garbage off)* That's all right. You've got to throw your garbage somewhere.

BELLE Oh, what a mess . . . Can I get you anything?

NOBLE *(Examining contents on his shoulders)* No, I don't think you left anything out. It's all here.

BELLE Here, let me help you brush it off.

(She raises her hand to brush NOBLE's shoulder)

NOBLE Oh, no . . . you don't have to.

(He puts his hand up and they touch. At the touch, their "I Love You" theme plays from out of nowhere . . . She removes her hand and the music stops. They both react)

BELLE What was that?

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NOBLE I don't know. You touched me . . . And you turned something on. *(Belle touches him again experimentally. The music starts. She removes her hand and again it stops. He looks puzzled)* Well, anyway. My name is Noble Eggleston, and I live up on the Bluff. In the biggest and best house.

LITTLE ME

BELLE Oh! And I'm Belle Schlumpfert.

NOBLE Gosh, that's a pretty name.

BELLE Thank you.

NOBLE You're welcome. I was just passing by, and I heard you people starving and I thought I'd come and bring you this basket chockful of good food.

BELLE Oh, gee, that's sweet of you. But no, thank you. I couldn't accept a gift.

NOBLE It's not a gift. It's charity! I feel sorry for you.

BELLE Thank you. Gee, that's very nice of you, Noble. Thank you.

(RAMONA comes back onstage)

RAMONA Noble, come on. We're all waiting.

NOBLE I'll be with you in a minute, Ramona. *(RAMONA exits)* Belle, this Saturday night my mother is throwing me a Sweet Sixteen party. If you're through eating by then, would you come?

BELLE Me? Up on the Bluff? Oh, yes, Noble, I'd love to.

NOBLE Good. Then, I'll see you Saturday night . . . *(He extends his hand and they shake. The love theme plays even louder this time. He withdraws his hand and the*

music stops) I'd better go before we wake up the whole neighborhood.

BELLE Little me up on the Bluff! Maybe I'm aiming too high . . .

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*Collected Plays
of Neil Simon*

(And she sings "The Other Side of the Tracks")

But my heart says, "Reach for the stars!"

And my heart I cannot deny—

Though it's my hard luck

That I'm sorta stuck

On the farthest one in the sky . . .

So my eyes are destined to wander,

And my brain no more to relax—

For there's nothing farther out yonder

Than the other side of the tracks!

On the other side of the tracks,

It's a long and difficult climb—

But the air up there

On the bill of fare

Is a choice of lemon or lime!

And the muscles keeping your nose up

Are the only muscles you tax—

Oh, I envy someone who grows up

On the other side of the tracks.

(The chorus sings "Rich Kids Rag")

1ST GIRL

We—are the wealthy children from
the right side of the tracks.

1ST BOY

That's right.

2ND BOY

We're rich.

3RD BOY

He's right.

1ST GIRL

We're here to celebrate Noble
Eggleston's sixteenth birthday.

2ND GIRL
He's cute.

3RD GIRL
Oh.

4TH GIRL
Oh.

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5TH GIRL
Oh.

LITTLE ME

6TH GIRL
Oh.

1ST GIRL
Hey.

ALL
What?

1ST GIRL
Let's do our favorite dance.

ALL
Swell.

1ST GIRL
The rich kids rag.

ALL
Oh, boy!
Get set
Ready
Go.

(They dance)

*Collected Plays
of Neil Simon*

Interior of the Egglestons' elegant living room. Rich boys and girls are dancing. During the number they all attempt to out-snob each other. After the number NOBLE and RAMONA enter. NOBLE keeps looking around the room. BENTLEY, the butler, enters)

RAMONA Noble, you haven't paid any attention to me the whole evening. Who are you looking for?

NOBLE *(Still looking around)* I'm not looking for anyone. Why should I be looking for anyone?

(MRS. EGGLESTON, NOBLE'S mother, comes down the stairs. She is an elegant, overpowering woman. She has a purple velvet case in her hands)

RAMONA Noble, there's your mother. Good evening, Mrs. Eggleston.

NOBLE *(Turns to his mother)* Oh, good evening, Mother. May I take this opportunity to thank you for this wonderful party. I just realized I'm sixteen years old today. I'm not a child anymore. I'm a full-grown, mature man. Ready to take his place in the world. I suddenly have hopes and desires. Suddenly I'm a man! At last—a man!

MRS. EGGLESTON Blow your nose!

NOBLE Yes, Mother.

(He takes out his handkerchief and blows his nose)

MRS. EGGLESTON I too am aware of the importance of this day, Noble. And on this occasion, I'd like you to have these.

(She gives him the case)

NOBLE (*Opens the case*) Thank you, Mother. Gosh . . . a set of matching trust funds! That's swell! Oh, Bentley, would you kindly put these in my piggy vault.

(*The BUTLER crosses to NOBLE*)

BUTLER Yes, sir. And there's a strange young lady at the door . . . from Drifters' Row.

NOBLE (*Happy*) That must be Belle! Show her in.
(*BUTLER goes up the stairs and exits*)

LITTLE ME

MRS. EGGLESTON Drifters' Row? Noble, have you gone mad?

NOBLE I don't understand, Mother.

MRS. EGGLESTON Noble, you can't afford to be seen with that kind. You're an Eggleston. Our family goes back nearly four hundred years, to the earliest *rich* people. Remember your heritage, Noble. Our good name can only be perpetuated if blue blood marries blue blood. No other color will do, Noble. It must be a deep navy blue.

(*She turns to go*)

NOBLE But, Mother . . . Mother . . . Please . . .

MRS. EGGLESTON I'm sorry, Noble.

(*She exits. NOBLE looks after her glumly as BELLE enters wearing MOMMA's red dress. Everyone in the room stops and turns to look at this strange creature from another world. NOBLE crosses, looking for her. She is fixing her skirt. NOBLE backs into her and the music plays rhapsodically*)

NOBLE Belle!

BELLE Noble!

(*The snob RICH KIDS whisper and point at BELLE*)

NOBLE (*Takes BELLE's arm and pulls her aside*) Gosh, Belle—you look so pretty in your dress, I hardly recognize you without your rags.

BELLE You look nice too, Noble.

NOBLE Well, I *always* look nice. I was thinking about you all week. Last night I went by your house, but you were still eating . . .

BELLE I've been thinking about you too, Noble.

NOBLE You know, Belle, my mother says you're not good enough for me, and yet, I have a feeling for you . . . that . . . I could never have for a *nice* girl. (*He grabs her hand and sings "I Love You," with BELLE and the chorus*)

NOBLE

I love you
As much as I am able
Considering I'm wealthy
Considering you're poor

BELLE

That's very nice because
I love you!

CHORUS (*Echo effect*)

She loves you, she loves you, she loves you . . .

NOBLE

I know it!

BELLE

As much as I am able

CHORUS

Considering her background

BELLE

Considering your mother
Considers me a boor—
My passion will endure for you

NOBLE

And I will always love you

BELLE

My heart I'll keep secure for you

NOBLE

Though other girls are so far above you—

To show you
I am democratic
Considering you're riffraff—
And I am well-to-do
As Noble

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CHORUS

Noble-Noble-Noble-Noble

NOBLE

And worthy of the label

LITTLE ME

CHORUS

Label-label-label-label

NOBLE

As much as I am able

NOBLE and BELLE

I love you.

(After the song, MRS. EGGLESTON and RAMONA approach)

MRS. EGGLESTON Noble! Who is this . . . person?

NOBLE Mother, this is Belle Schlumpfert from the wrong side of the tracks. Belle, this is my mother, from the right side.

BELLE How do you do, Mrs. Eggleston.

MRS. EGGLESTON *(Ignores her)* Noble, I want this person out of the house.

NOBLE But, Mother—please . . . Can I . . . Mother . . .

(MRS. EGGLESTON gives him an icy stare and crosses left with RAMONA)

NOBLE *(Reluctantly turns to BELLE)* I'm sorry, Belle. It's nothing personal . . . It's just *you!*

BELLE I see. Before your mother would ever accept me, I must have what you have. Wealth and culture.

NOBLE And don't forget social position.

BELLE Very well, then. If that's what I need, I'll go out into the world and get it. Will you wait for me, Noble?

NOBLE I certainly will.

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MRS. EGGLESTON (*From across the room*) Noble!

NOBLE (*To BELLE*) But you'd better hurry.

*Collected Plays
of Neil Simon*

BELLE (*Starting to exit*) I'll be back someday, Noble. Wait for me . . . Wait for me.

(She stumbles on the stairs. Everyone breaks out into loud laughter. MRS. EGGLESTON exits. BELLE bursts into tears and exits—on the platform)

NOBLE (*Runs up the steps and stomps his foot*) All right—stop it! (*The laughter stops abruptly*) Well, have we all had our big laugh? Do we realize what we've just done? We've just thrown out the girl with the kindest heart . . . the purest soul . . . and the best build in town!

(Blackout)

Exterior of the Eggleston home. BELLE enters crying. Suddenly GEORGE MUSGROVE, with a valise, comes running by. He stops.

LITTLE ME

GEORGE Belle, Belle, I've been lookin' all over for you. I came to say goodbye.

BELLE Goodbye?

GEORGE A friend of mine just opened up a chain of crap games in the Middle West. Maybe someday I'll be able to send for you.

BELLE Thank you, George, but I'm going to be busy myself for the next few years.

GEORGE Doin' what?

BELLE Looking for wealth, culture and social position.

GEORGE You're making a mistake, Belle. Someday you're gonna get kicked right in the heart. But if you ever need me—remember, all you've got to do is snap your fingers . . . *(He snaps his fingers)* . . . and George Musgrove will be there.

BELLE I'll remember, George.

GEORGE So long, Belle. I'm goin' to Chicago to grow up.

(He exits)

BELLE *(Looks after him, then says with determination)* I will get there someday . . . I will! *(She sings "The Other Side of the Tracks"—reprise)*

On the other side of the tracks
That is where I'm goin' to be—
On the other side
Of the great divide
Between fame and fortune and me!
Gonna put my shadows behind me,
Give my inhibitions the ax—
And tomorrow morning you'll find me
On the other side of the tracks!

On the other side of that line,
Where the life is fancy and free,
Gonna sit and fan
On my fat divan
While the butler buttles the tea!
But for now I'm facin' the fences,
And I can't afford to relax—
'Cause the whole caboodle commences
On the other side of the tracks!

So I'm off and runnin'
Over the rail—
I'm goin' gunnin'
After the quail!
Off and runnin'—
Send me my mail
To the great big world on the other side
The great big world on the farther side
The great big world on the other side
Of the tracks!

On the other side
On the other side
To the great big world on the other side
Of the tracks.

Lights up on OLDER BELLE seated at a table with a standing mirror, trying on tiaras and much-bejeweled bracelets, being shown to her by a handsome and finely tailored SALESMAN. She is also narrating to PATRICK DENNIS and the tape recorder.

LITTLE ME

OLDER BELLE I was determined to win Noble. But to accomplish my new ambition, I knew I had to seek my fortune in the outside world.

PATRICK (*Into the mike*) Chapter Two . . . "Goodbye Green Pastures, Hello Blue Horizons."

OLDER BELLE To travel took money. I thought perhaps I might borrow it from our friends and neighbors in Drifters' Row—(*Throws the jewels on the table and turns to the SALESMAN*) No, Jacques, these are too formal. I just want something to knock around the pool in. (*To PATRICK*)—never realizing that at the moment these poor people were facing a dilemma far worse than little mine.

(*Blackout*)

*Collected Plays
of Neil Simon*

Interior of a small-town bank. PINCHLEY JUNIOR and MISS KEPPLEWHITE are arranging papers on the desk.

MISS KEPPLEWHITE Hurry, hurry, Mr. Pinchley will be in any second.

JUNIOR I'm doing it as fast as I can.
(He drops a book)

MISS KEPPLEWHITE And be careful. You heard him yesterday. One more stupid mistake and you're fired.

JUNIOR Do you think he really would? His own son?

MISS KEPPLEWHITE *(Reacts)* Watch it! The Grouch is here!

(NURSE wheels in eighty-eight-year-old AMOS PINCHLEY to the left of the desk. He is withered and sour. A cane rests in his hand. His head is down and he seems to be dozing)

JUNIOR G-good morning, Father.

NURSE One moment, please. An eighty-eight-year-old man needs a little more time than most of us to get started in the morning. *(She leans over and says in the old man's ear)* Good morning, Mr. Pinchley. *(She shakes him gently. PINCHLEY stirs. His head rises slowly, then his lips start to quiver. Life is slowly awakening within him)*

PINCHLEY Gemumba . . . Gemumble . . .

NURSE He's coming around.

PINCHLEY Goomorbaw . . .

NURSE That's it, Mr. Pinchley. Come on.

PINCHLEY Goo mormee . . . Goo mormee . . .

NURSE Come on. Get those lips moving.

PINCHLEY Goo mormee . . . morming . . . Goo morming . . .

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NURSE That's it. That's it! You're almost up!

LITTLE ME

PINCHLEY Morning . . . Morning . . . Good morning!
Good morning!

(He growls)

NURSE He's all right now. He has another two hours before he goes under again . . . I'll be back at twelve. Goodbye, Mr. Pinchley.

(He mutters and chuckles as she goes, as though he enjoys being nasty)

JUNIOR *(Smiling but fearful)* Good morning, Father.

PINCHLEY Good morning, Nincompoop! Well, let's start making money . . . Money money money money . . . That's the most important thing. What's first?

JUNIOR There's a crowd of dirty people outside. From Drifters' Row.

PINCHLEY Probably come to grovel and beg.

MISS KEPPLEWHITE Shall I call the Fire Department and have them hosed out?

PINCHLEY No. I haven't had a good grovel and beg in weeks . . . Show them in.

(MISS KEPPLEWHITE nods and exits)

JUNIOR It's about those evictions, Father. Don't you think we're being too harsh? I mean, maybe we should show them a little kindness.

PINCHLEY Kindness? *(He swings his cane savagely. JUNIOR ducks just in time)* This is a bank, son, not a mother!

(MISS KEPPLEWHITE enters, followed by a group of people)

MISS KEPPLEWHITE Come in, please. And wipe your feet.

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(They all pause and wipe their feet. They walk in. At the head of the group are MOMMA and MR. KLEEG)

*Collected Plays
of Neil Simon*

PINCHLEY Well? Well?

KLEEG (Steps forward. He is afraid, as they all are, of the power of men like PINCHLEY) Er . . . Mr. Pinchley.

PINCHLEY Sir.

KLEEG Sir . . . We poor people of Drifters' Row have come to ask—

PINCHLEY Beg!

KLEEG —beg you to listen to our plea. We've been given our eviction notice.

PINCHLEY Oh my.

KLEEG The sheriff says if we don't have the money, he's going to throw us out tonight.

PINCHLEY Oh, that's terrible.

KLEEG Can't we have a little time?

PINCHLEY How much time would you need?

KLEEG Next week.

PINCHLEY When next week? Say, Monday?

KLEEG Yes, yes, Monday.

PINCHLEY Would you have all of it by Monday?

KLEEG Yes, yes, all of it. Can we stay, Mr. Pinchley?

PINCHLEY No, but it was fun getting your hopes up. Hee, hee, hee!

JUNIOR But, Father . . .

(PINCHLEY brandishes his cane)

KLEEG Come on, folks. It's no use.

(They all nod and start out, when BELLE enters)

BELLE Wait! *(They all stop and turn)* Are you going to give up without a fight? Are you going to let yourselves be treated like animals?

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MOMMA Belle, be quiet!

BELLE No! It's time someone spoke up to him. *(She turns to PINCHLEY)* Mr. Pinchley, you're a mean, miserly, nasty, rotten old man!

(They all gasp)

JUNIOR Nobody ever talked to my father like that.

(PINCHLEY is shaking, cannot get his mouth open)

MISS KEPPLEWHITE Mr. Pinchley, are you all right?

JUNIOR He's choking on anger! Try to get his mouth open.

(MISS KEPPLEWHITE forces PINCHLEY's mouth open)

PINCHLEY You! *(He points the cane at BELLE)* With the dimples and the big mouth! Come closer.

JUNIOR *(Crosses right, pushing people to the side)* Everyone else out, please . . . This isn't going to be pleasant.

MOMMA Don't say anything foolish, honey. He's a powerful man.

(They all exit, leaving BELLE, JUNIOR and PINCHLEY alone. He stares at her)

PINCHLEY Come closer, Dimples. *(BELLE nervously moves in closer. PINCHLEY takes his cane and measures the distance between him and BELLE)* A little closer. *(BELLE moves within striking distance)* Good! I want to kill you, I don't want to wound you. Now, say it!

BELLE You're a mean, miserly, nasty, rotten old man—

PINCHLEY *(Raises his cane)* And here it comes!

BELLE —and everyone in this town bates you!

LITTLE ME

PINCHLEY (*Stops at the top of his swing*) Hates me?

BELLE Yes, *bates* you, Mr. Pinchley . . . you're a hated man. (*She takes the cane from PINCHLEY and puts it on the desk*) I feel sorry for you, because there's no one in this whole wide world who really loves you.

PINCHLEY That's a lie. That's a dastardly lie—and I'll prove it right now. Nincompoop! (*Points to JUNIOR*) You love me . . . don't you?

JUNIOR I respect my father. Because he is rich and powerful.

PINCHLEY (*Smiles and nods*) And what else?

JUNIOR (*Puzzled*) And what else is there?

PINCHLEY You know . . . (*Trying to prompt him*) Lo—
lo—

JUNIOR Lo—?

PINCHLEY Lo—

JUNIOR Lo—?

PINCHLEY Lo—

JUNIOR Lo—?

PINCHLEY Love!

JUNIOR Love, Father?

PINCHLEY (*Screams*) Yes, love, you idiot! Get out of here and don't come back till you love me.
(*JUNIOR runs out*)

BELLE He didn't even know the meaning of the word. The plain truth is . . . no one likes you, do they, Mr. Pinchley? (*PINCHLEY bows his head*) It's not a pleasant thing, is it? To be hated?

PINCHLEY I'm not crazy about it, no . . . Nobody seems to like me. Even on Christmas Eve the carolers stand outside my window and sing threatening Christmas songs.

BELLE I'm really not surprised.

PINCHLEY That's just because I'm a rich, rotten old man.

(He is breaking down)

BELLE That's not true, Mr. Pinchley. You're only rotten on the top . . . *(Music starts under the dialogue)*
Everybody has a little good in them . . . somewhere.

39

PINCHLEY *(Hopefully)* Even me, Dimples?

LITTLE ME

BELLE Even you!

(And she sings "Deep Down Inside," joined by
PINCHLEY)

BELLE

Somewhere, there's a darn' nice fella,
Deep down inside!

PINCHLEY

Deep down inside?

BELLE

Deep down, in the ol' subcellar—
Somewhere, though I think he fell a-
Sleep down inside—
Deep down,
Dig-a, dig-a
Deep down inside!
(Speaks) You try it now!

PINCHLEY Gosh, I'm ashamed.

BELLE Go on!

PINCHLEY All right. Here goes.

(Sings)

Sometimes, I am darn' near human
Deep down inside!

BELLE

Deep down inside, Mr. Pinchley?

PINCHLEY

Deep down, where the bass is boomin'

Sometimes, gotta take that broom 'n
Sweep down inside—
Sweep down,
Dig-a, dig-a
Deep down inside!

(Speaks) Hey, I like it!

BELLE Keep going!

BELLE and PINCHLEY

No man is a true Pariah, deep down inside—
Deep down inside—

PINCHLEY

Deep down, in the old spare tire!

BOTH

No man is a true Uriah
Heep down inside!
There's a lover that you just can't keep down—
Deep down inside!
Deep down inside!

(After the first chorus, PINCHLEY's emotions are soaring)

BELLE *(Elated)* We found it, Mr. Pinchley. We found that little bit of good in you.

PINCHLEY You think some people would like me?

BELLE Try it and see.

PINCHLEY All right, I will. *(Screams)* Junior!
(JUNIOR rushes in)

JUNIOR Did you scream, Father?

PINCHLEY How about you and me—going out and having dinner sometime?

JUNIOR *(Overwhelmed with emotion)* Oh, Daddy!

PINCHLEY *(Turns to BELLE)* He called me Daddy!

BELLE He likes you.

PINCHLEY And I don't even like him.

*(They continue to sing "Deep Down Inside," this time
joined by JUNIOR)*

JUNIOR

In even the worst of varmints
You'll find a good deed

41

BELLE

Down under the outer garments
Of malice and greed

LITTLE ME

PINCHLEY

That little gold streak is shining,
Believe it or not!

ALL

That is, if you don't mind mining
'Til
You hit rock bottom!

JUNIOR

Strip down,

BELLE

Rip down,

PINCHLEY

Meet a real pip down

JUNIOR

Deep down

BELLE

Deep down

PINCHLEY

Inside!

JUNIOR

Deep down

BELLE

Deep down

PINCHLEY

Inside!

JUNIOR
Slip down,

BELLE
Zip down,

PINCHLEY
Take a little trip down!

JUNIOR
Go down,

BELLE
Low down,

PINCHLEY
Meet a good Joe down

ALL
Under your hide—
On that shovel get a real good grip
And
Dip down in-
Down down in-
Dip down inside!

PINCHLEY (*To BELLE*) Gosh, do you think . . . *other* people would like me too?

BELLE Of course, Mr. Pinchley. If you'll only give them a chance.

PINCHLEY Oh . . . all right, I will. (*Screams*) *Other people!* (*All the people from Drifters' Row rush in*) Other people . . . I'm tearing up all the mortgages on Drifters' Row! You can live there for free! (*They all say "Free?"*) And Monday . . . the painters are coming! (*They all say "Painters?"*) And starting this winter—heat!

(*They all say "Heat!" They cheer and join in another chorus*)

CHORUS
Three cheers for Pinchley, he's true blue!
We knew evinch'lly he'd come through!
'Cause

TWO MEN

Pinchley is a real nice human
Deep down inside!
Deep down inside!

PINCHLEY

Deep down, there's a vi'let bloomin'!

43

CHORUS

Pinchley ain't a low, inhuman creep down in-
side—

LITTLE ME

ONE MAN

He's a fella with a heart *that* big—

CHORUS

All you've gotta do is dig, dig, dig!

ALL (*As dance starts*)

Stoop down,
Snoop down

BELLE and PINCHLEY

Get the real poop down

ALL

Deep down
Deep down
Down where?
Deep down
Deep down

PINCHLEY

Right there!

ALL

Swoop down
Troop down

BELLE and PINCHLEY

Bring a little group down

ALL

Get down
Set down

BELLE

Meet a good bet down

ALL

Under your hide!

BELLE

(Don't let down)

ALL

Then rise up and give a hip, hip, hip
Hip!

Three cheers for Pinchley, he's okay!

We knew essinch'lly he's grade-a,

'Cause

No man is a mean old geezer

Clear down inside!

BOYS

(No mean geezer)

ALL

Peer down inside!

GIRLS

(He's a pleaser)

PINCHLEY

Here down in the geezer-freezer!

ALL

No man'll deny that he's a

Dear down inside—

PINCHLEY (*Speaks*) Dear Miss Schlumpfert—you've
been such a comfort!

ALL

Deep, deep, deep down—

Deep down inside!

In even the worst of varmints

You'll find a good deed—

Down under the outer garments

Of malice and greed

That little gold streak is shining,

Believe it or not!

That is, if you don't mind mining
'Til
You hit rock bottom!

Somewhere there's a darn nice fellow
Deep down
Deep down
Inside!
Slip down,
Zip down,
Take a little trip down!

45

LITTLE ME

Go down,
Low down,
Meet a good Joe down
Under your hide—
On that shovel get a real good grip
And
Dip down in-
Dip down in-
Dip down inside—

Somewhere there's a darn nice fella'
Down in the old subcellar
Somewhere there's a darn nice fella'
Deep down inside!

(The people from Drifters' Row exit)

BELLE Look, Mr. Pinchley. Now *everyone* likes you.

PINCHLEY That's all because of you, Dimples. And now that you did something nice for me, it's only right that I do something nice for you.

BELLE *(Gesturing)* No. No.

PINCHLEY What's right is right. What would you want more than anything else in the whole wide world?

BELLE Oh, that's easy. To leave Venezuela. And go to some great center of culture, like Peoria, and learn the really important things in life—diction, manners and French cooking!

PINCHLEY Well, that takes money.

BELLE Yeah.

PINCHLEY (*Takes out bankroll and blows dust from it*)
Here it is.

46

BELLE (*Takes the bankroll*) Oh, thank you, Mr. Pinchley, thank you. (*She kisses him on the cheek*) Look! Even I like you! (*She exits happily*) Whee!

*Collected Plays
of Neil Simon*

PINCHLEY And you know what? (*He beams*) *So do I!* (*He sings*)

Three cheers for Pinchley

He's true blue.

He's a fella with a heart that big,

All you gotta do is dig, dig, dig.

(*The music swells up—lights fade out as he wheels himself off*)

OLDER BELLE *and* PATRICK *are on a golf course* A GOLF PRO *has his arms around her, demonstrating a swing.* PATRICK *carries the tape recorder and pulls a caddy rack.*

LITTLE ME

OLDER BELLE Thanks to my kind and generous benefactor, I moved to Peoria to begin a new life. (*She swings the club. To the PRO*) How'm I doing, Arnold?

PRO Just fine, ma'am. Just fine.

OLDER BELLE (*To PATRICK*) But back in Venezuela the local gossipmongers began their evil work. (*She is moving left across the stage*) And oh, how they could twist the truth. The fact that sweet old Mr. Pinchley spent every weekend with me in my hotel in Peoria was grist for their mill. But good banker that he was, he was merely trying to protect his investment. However, my good character was besmirched. And then, on one peaceful Saturday afternoon in June, my character received the worst besmirchment of all.

(*Blackout*)

*Collected Plays
of Neil Simon*

A hotel room in Peoria. BELLE, in a negligee, is balancing a book on her head, walking up and down and enunciating clearly.

BELLE How-now-brown-cow. Brown-cow-how-now.
(There is a knock at the door) Entrez—come in!
(The door opens. There stands PINCHLEY, without wheelchair)

PINCHLEY Hi, Dimples.

BELLE Mr. Pinchley!

PINCHLEY Hello there . . . Dimples!
(He walks in, gives a little skip and a bop)

BELLE Mr. Pinchley—you're walking!

PINCHLEY And skipping and hopping and jumping.
Thanks to you, I found out my legs weren't lame—
they were just nasty!

BELLE Oh, Mr. Pinchley, isn't that wonderful!

PINCHLEY You know what I did yesterday, Dimples?

BELLE What?

PINCHLEY I smiled. I smiled from nine to one, took a
half-hour for lunch, and smiled till six.

BELLE Imagine that.

PINCHLEY All because of you, Dimples. You know,
Dimples, there's a big difference in our ages—I'm an
octogenarian and you're a teen-agenarian—well, I'll
give you a business proposition . . . Will you marry
me?

BELLE (*Crosses right in astonishment*) Marry you?

PINCHLEY And in return, when I go I'll leave you wealth, culture and social position.

BELLE But . . . I love another boy. You'd never be happy with me.

49

PINCHLEY Happy? Happy? (*He takes a gun out of his breast pocket*) Do you see that?

LITTLE ME

BELLE A gun!

PINCHLEY Yes, a gun. I bought it as a present. I was going to shoot myself for my birthday.

BELLE Oh no!

PINCHLEY Oh yeah. But I don't have to do that, Dimples, not if you say you'll marry me. What do you say, Dimps?

BELLE (*Reacts*) Wealth, culture and social position . . . I say—yes! (*PINCHLEY puts the gun back in his breast pocket*) And thank you for everything, Mr. Pinchley. Thank you.

(She throws her arms around him and hugs him tightly. We hear a gunshot. PINCHLEY feels his heart. His legs begin to shake. He sits down on the bed)

PINCHLEY I think you thanked me right through the heart.

BELLE (*Sobs*) Oh no!

PINCHLEY Oh yeah.

BELLE Is it bad?

PINCHLEY The bullet's about an eighth of an inch above my heart. I mustn't move . . . or I'll die.

BELLE You mustn't die. (*She shakes him vigorously*) You mustn't die.

PINCHLEY That's it!
(He dies. Blackout)

*Collected Plays
of Neil Simon*

Prison bars come up from the floor. An arc picks up BELLE behind them. A NEWSBOY enters shouting headlines.

NEWSBOY Extra . . . "Millionaire Slain in Love Nest" . . . "Sweet Little Old Man Murdered" . . . "I Didn't Do It Says Well-Built Teen-ager" . . . Read all about it . . .

(Two men enter and buy a paper, and both read the headline)

NEWSBOY . . . "Girl Guns Geezer" . . . Get your paper . . . Extra . . . *(He exits. The two men look at each other. They are the Buchsbaum brothers, BERNIE and BENNY—two squat, dyspeptic middle-aged men)*

BERNIE Are you thinking what I'm thinking, Benny?

BENNY I'm thinking what you're thinking, Bernie.
(They cross to BELLE, behind bars)

BERNIE Miss Schlumpfert?

BENNY *(Going to left of the bars)* How do you do.
We're—

BERNIE —the Buchsbaum Brothers.

BENNY I'm Benny!

BERNIE And I'm Bernie!

BENNY Benny and Bernie!

BERNIE The Buchsbaum Brothers!

BELLE Lawyers?

BENNY No!

BERNIE Bookers.

BENNY Yes!

BERNIE In vaudeville.

BENNY Vaudeville bookers.

51

BERNIE Benny and Bernie Buchsbaum.

BENNY The Vaudeville Bookers.

LITTLE ME

BELLE How do you do?

BERNIE How do we do?

BENNY Tell her how we do.

BERNIE Sensational—

BENNY —is how we do.

BERNIE But with *you*—

BENNY We'll do better

BERNIE —is how we'll do.

BENNY "Dimples"—

BERNIE How would *you*—

BENNY —like to be—

BERNIE —a star!

BELLE A star?

BENNY A star!

BERNIE For the Buchsbaum Brothers . . .

BENNY Vaudeville circuit.

BERNIE Top billing.

BENNY Fancy salary.

BERNIE Spic-and-span dressing room.

BENNY Like a star.

BELLE But I'm in jail!

BERNIE (*Smiles, happily*) A talented kid.

BENNY For thirty cents' worth of bullets—

BERNIE —you got a million dollars' publicity.

BELLE But I can't sing and I can't dance.

BENNY Singers we got!

BERNIE Dancers we got!

BENNY *Killers* we ain't got.

BELLE But I'm on trial for my life. (*Bernie and Benny sing "Be a Performer"*)

BOTH

So resulting from a few illegal capers
You are starring in the papers
Just go over with a jury and in jig-time
Join the Buchsbaums in the big time!
So you'll try a little trill
From *Traviata*

(*BELLE tries and fails*)

So it's not your style sonata!
When a girl has got
What you have got a lotta
You know what you've got?
You've got something hot!

BERNIE

So here's a good tiding

BENNY

If men you are killing

BERNIE

A talent you're hiding

BENNY

To be a performer!

BOTH

So be a performer!

BENNY

And soon you'll be riding

BOTH

If God should be willing
The crest of your life!

BENNY

You ain't a Pavlova

53

BERNIE

An Eleonora Duse

LITTLE ME

BENNY

But looking you over

BOTH

You'll be a performer
You'll be a performer

BERNIE

A lollapalooza

BENNY

And rolling in clover—

BOTH

Just pass the test of your life!
So up the river
They would send you—
But with Mother Nature helping to defend you
Who could send you
Very far?

BENNY

Sobbing in a dress that clings to
All the things you are!

BERNIE

So listen to Bernie

BENNY

And listen to Benny

BOTH

Forget the attorney
And be a performer
And be a performer
We mean a performer

BENNY

Unless you, God forbid,

BERNIE

Get hung for what you did

BOTH

Ho, ho, you naughty kid—
Just fulfill this small request of your life—

BENNY

So be a performer!

BELLE

I'll be a performer!

BOTH

You'll be thankful all
The rest of your long and healthy—
(knock wood)—life!

ANNOUNCER (*Offstage, over mike*) Hear ye, hear ye.
This court is now in session.

The State of Illinois vs. Dimples Schlumpfert.

(*Light hits MRS. EGGLESTON above scrim with her right hand raised*)

MRS. EGGLESTON I do. She was a cheap, vulgar gold digger!

(*Blackout, then light up on MISS KEPPLEWHITE above scrim with her right hand raised*)

MISS KEPPLEWHITE I do. She was a sixteen-year-old vamp!

(*Blackout, then light up on another witness above scrim—a WOMAN who stands with her right hand raised*)

WOMAN I do. I never met her but I'm sure I wouldn't have liked her!

(*Blackout, then light up on witness stand below scrim. NOBLE EGGLESTON, in a college sweater with large letters H and Y on the front, stands there with the DEFENSE LAWYER*)

NOBLE (*Hand raised*) I certainly do!

DEFENSE LAWYER Your name is?

NOBLE Noble Eggleston.

DEFENSE LAWYER You were away at college when the unfortunate incident occurred, were you not?

NOBLE Yes, I were.

DEFENSE LAWYER Tell me, Mr. Eggleston, what university do you attend?

NOBLE Harvard and Yale. I won a double scholarship.

DEFENSE LAWYER And what are you studying at Harvard and Yale?

56

NOBLE Medicine and law. I hope some day to become a legal doctor.

*Collected Plays
of Neil Simon*

DEFENSE LAWYER And your records show that in every year in high school you were voted the most brilliant and most popular student in your class.

NOBLE And best-looking three out of four. One year I had a little complexion trouble.

DEFENSE LAWYER Then, do you, the pride and honor of Venezuela, Illinois, after searching down deeply into your heart and conscience, believe that that lovely, fragile young girl is capable of murder?

NOBLE Belle Schlumpfert is the sweetest, kindest thing I've ever known. I love her . . . and a person as good as I am could never love a murderess.

DEFENSE LAWYER Thank you. You may have saved her life.

NOBLE It was my pleasure!

(Blackout)

VOICE OVER P.A. The Buchsbaum Brothers proudly present . . . direct from her triumphant two-week trial . . . Miss Dimples Schlumpfert and her police escort.

LITTLE ME

(Roller drop comes down. BELLE and FOUR POLICEMEN enter. They sing "Oh! Dem Doggone Dimples")

BELLE

Oh!
Dem Doggone Dimples!
Oh!
Dey did it again!
Tell me why a little indentation
Should start a criminal investigation!
Oh!
Dem doggone dimples!
If
I ever go to da pen—
Oh!
Oh!
Oh!
Oh!
Dey did it again!

POLICEMEN

At eighty-eight

BELLE

Oh!

POLICEMEN

He seemed the fatherly kind
You wouldn't think

BELLE

Oh!

POLICEMEN

That it would enter his mind
But sure enough

BELLE

Oh!

POLICEMEN

His shining armor corroded—
As she expressed it when the gun exploded
“Boom”—

BELLE

Oh!
Dem doggone dimples!
Oh!
I never know when—
Oh!

POLICEMEN

Oh!

BELLE

Oh!

POLICEMEN

Oh!

BELLE

Dey'll do it again.
Oh!

POLICEMEN

Oh!

BELLE

Uh-oh!
Dey did it again!

*(BELLE and the POLICEMEN exit. They return for
another bow)*

Lights come up on OLDER BELLE, in white coveralls, sculpting a clay figure. PATRICK DENNIS, in a tiger skin, is posing. He is also holding the tape recorder.

LITTLE ME

OLDER BELLE In my very first public appearance, I was a smash hit. (*BELLE and her POLICE ESCORT, who have frozen their bow, now unfreeze and exit*) After seeing my performance, the critic for the *Chicago Daily Tribune* said: "Dimples Schlumpfert is the best singing acquitted killer in town . . ."

PATRICK You were on your way up.

OLDER BELLE Only to come crashing down again. (*She pushes PATRICK's arm down, and the statue's*) I was fired six weeks later when the Buchsbaum Brothers found a new headliner, Peaches Davis, who shot her millionaire husband at the wedding.

PATRICK And you were on your way down.

OLDER BELLE But determined to bounce back up again. (*She pushes PATRICK's arm up again as well as the statue's*) Which I did . . . all the way up to the Skylight Roof on top of the Breakstone Hotel. I was a pioneer in the annals of entertainment. I had the distinction of becoming the very first Camera Girl ever to take a picture in a night club.

(Blackout)

*Collected Plays
of Neil Simon*

In the dark a flashlight explodes. The lights come up on the Skylight Roof. BELLE, dressed as a camera girl, has just snapped a picture of a smiling group. The camera is an old, huge affair mounted on a tall tripod.

BELLE Thank you. Your picture will be ready in just two weeks.

(She lifts the camera and tripod and moves to another place. NOBLE, MRS. EGGLESTON and RAMONA enter. They follow the HEADWAITER to a table. BRUCEY, who is seated at a table with friends, rises and comes downstage. The HEADWAITER exits)

BRUCEY Noble! Noble Eggleston!

NOBLE Brucey! You son of a gun! How are things at Princeton?

BRUCEY Rah, rah.

NOBLE Rah, rah.

BRUCEY What are you doing in Chicago?

NOBLE I'm here to announce my engagement.

BRUCEY Well, say . . . congratulations.

NOBLE I'd like you to meet my fiancée, Ramona VanderVeld, the girl my mother picked out.

BRUCEY Well, the best of luck to both of you.

NOBLE Thanks a lot. And Rah. Rah.

(BRUCEY returns to his table. NOBLE sits down at the table with his mother and RAMONA)

MRS. EGGLESTON Noble, why don't you have a picture taken with Ramona?

NOBLE Gosh, that's a wonderful idea. Oh, Camera Girl!

BELLE (*Turns and comes down to NOBLE*) Yes, sir. Would you—

61

NOBLE Belle!

LITTLE ME

BELLE Noble!

NOBLE Belle . . . What are you doing working here as a Camera Girl?

BELLE I'm working here as a Camera Girl.

NOBLE Oh!

BELLE You never answered my letters, Noble.

NOBLE Yes, I did. Every one. I know, because I gave them to my mother to mail . . .

BELLE Hello, Mrs. Eggleston.
(MRS. EGGLESTON *turns away*)

NOBLE It's no use. She still can't stand you. But I still think about you. Every minute of every waking day, my thoughts are only of you. (*RAMONA coughs. He turns to her*) Oh, this is my fiancée, Ramona Vander-Veld.

BELLE Your fiancée?

NOBLE My mother picked her out.

BELLE But you promised.

NOBLE But my mother—

BELLE You said you'd—

NOBLE But my mother—

BELLE Oh, Noble!
(*She bursts into tears and runs off*)

NOBLE Belle, wait—

MRS. EGGLESTON Noble!

NOBLE No, Mother. I've tried to fight it—with every ounce of blue blood in my veins—but it's no use. I love her, and there isn't anything you can say or do to change it.

62

MRS. EGGLESTON We're going home!

NOBLE I'll get the coats.

(They all exit. THREE FRENCH GIRLS enter. They sing)

ALL

Messieurs et dames

1ST GIRL

Bon soir

2ND GIRL

Bon soir

3RD GIRL

Bon soir

1ST GIRL

Enchanté

3RD GIRL

Enchanté

2ND GIRL

Ze Skylight Roof is proud to present

3RD GIRL

Ze toast of *cinq*—five continents

1ST GIRL

Direct from Gay Paree—

ALL

Ho Ho

3RD GIRL

Ze one

1ST GIRL:

Ze only

*Collected Plays
of Neil Simon*

2ND GIRL
Ze debonaire

ALL
Ze man-about-town

1ST GIRL
He sings

3RD GIRL
He dances

2ND GIRL
He struts
Ze expert on ze affaires of ze heart,

ALL
Monsieur Hot Stuff himself,
Val du Val.

(Musical play-on. Spotlight hits curtain and VAL DU VAL enters, wearing a straw hat. Thunderous applause from the patrons)

VAL Sank you, ladies and gentlemen, sank you, sank you, sank you. Or as you say in English—*Thank you!* But now, I would like you to meet my assistant, Colette—the very beautiful, the very wonderful Colette. *(COLETTE appears, a pretty, dark-haired girl carrying a drum)* Colette travels with me and she lives in the same hotel, in separate room . . . *(Kisses her hand)* . . . sometimes. And now I should like to sing at you about love. *(A chair is brought out and placed for VAL so he can sit at a piano made by the hands of the girls in his show)* Not the little love that goes plinky-linky-plink . . . *(As he pretends to play, the real piano in the pit makes the actual sounds)* . . . but the French love that goes BOOM-BOOM. *(His elbow pounds the keys)* My famous “BOOM-BOOM” song.

(VAL and the GIRLS sing the “Boom-Boom” song)

VAL
Poor Pierrot, I hear him yet
In pursuit of his Pierrette

With the same old urgent message to impart
 What it was she never found out—
 For the point was always drowned out
 By the vi'lent cannonading of his heart (BOOM-
 BOOM)

He'd say, "Pierrette"—
 And clear his throat.
 "Lest we forget—"
 (And here I quote:)

If ze girl BOOM-BOOM
 And ze boy BOOM-BOOM
 And zey get togezzer and zey both BOOM-
 BOOM
 C'est Le Grand BOOM-BOOM
 Et Le Grand BOOM-BOOM
 Zats ze one BOOM-BOOM for me!

Oh, a stray BOOM-BOOM occasionally may
 Prove a gay BOOM-BOOM and carry you away;

But ze prime BOOM-BOOM—
 Zat's sublime BOOM-BOOM—
 Won't be true,
 Not if you
 All ze time BOOM-BOOM!
 What I mean is, my chérie—
 Save Le Grand BOOM-BOOM for me!
 (*They dance*)

ALL

Oh a stray BOOM-BOOM occasionally may
 Prove a gay BOOM-BOOM and carry you away
 For ze dream BOOM-BOOM—
 Zat supreme BOOM-BOOM—

VAL

Is for two
 People who
 Like a team BOOM-BOOM!
 What I mean is, my chérie

ALL

Save Le Grand BOOM-BOOM for me!

(After the number there is great applause. VAL bows, then runs off through the curtains. It is a section of a room with a ledge and window. BELLE has climbed up on the ledge and is just about to jump when VAL comes in and grabs her)

65

VAL Why do you do this crazy thing? Why?

BELLE *(She buries her face in her hands)* Let me go. Let me go. I have nothing left to live for.

LITTLE ME

VAL What a shameful thing to say. A pretty girl like you.

BELLE But you don't understand. The boy I love . . . is going to marry someone else.

VAL Love! I thought so. Let me tell you a little story. There once was a French boy who was een love wiz a French girl. They were very much in love. They were going to get married een the leetle town where zey lived. One day a man from ze city meets ze girl. He is charming . . . he is clever . . . and soon ze girl runs away wiz him, leaving ze poor French boy in tears. He too wanted to keel himself—but he didn't. After a while he got over it, and today, he is a famous person in France. I suppose you've already guessed I am telling a story about myself . . . But now I have Colette and I am very happy.

BELLE When did you meet Colette?

VAL I just told you. When I took her from that French boy in the village.

BELLE Do you really think I'll get over it too, maybe?

VAL Of course you will. When it comes to love, always leesten to a Frenchy.

(A tall, attractive MAN in tuxedo enters)

MAN Second show, Val.

VAL Yes. *(To the MAN)* Keep an eye on her. She likes to jump. *(VAL goes through the curtain into the night club. The HEADWAITER enters, goes to VAL, gives him a note and exits)*

MAN Is there anything ya need?

BELLE No, I'm all right now.

MAN Remember what I once told ya, Belle? If ya ever need me, all ya gotta do is—

BELLE —snap your fingers! (*He snaps*) George! George Musgrove! Gosh, you really *did* grow up since Drifters' Row . . . What are you doing here?

GEORGE I own this club, baby.

BELLE *Your* club?

GEORGE That's right. And I got a cozy little apartment right downstairs.

(*There is a drum cue as the lights come up on VAL in the night club*)

VAL Ladies and gentlemen. Ze management has asked me to make two very important announcements. The first one: Zere will be a special New Year's Eve show, six dollairs a couple with noisemakers. And ze second announcement ees: (*He looks at a piece of paper*) *World War I* ees declared! (*Pandemonium. A MAN rushes by*) Where are you going?

MAN War is declared!

VAL War! That's terrible!
(*He rushes off*)

BELLE War! Oh, George, how terrible.

GEORGE Don't worry about it, baby. The Allies are eight-to-five favorites. How about you and me goin' down to my apartment and playin' a game of two-handed romance?
(*He bites her neck*)

BELLE But I still love Noble.

GEORGE Forget him. It ain't in the cards for you two.
(*He bites her neck again*)

BELLE Don't, George . . .
(*She walks away from him*)

GEORGE Don't fight it, Belle. Our hearts are shuffled.
Let's cut the deck!

(GEORGE, *in the empty club, sings "I've Got Your Number"*)

You've got no time for me—
You've got big things to do!
Well, my sweet chickadee,
I've got hot news for you!

67

LITTLE ME

I've got your number—
I know you inside out—
You ain't no Eagle Scout
You're all at sea.

Oh, yes, you'll brag a lot,
Wave your own
Flag a lot;
But you're unsure a lot—
You're a lot
Like me,
Oh—

I've got your number—
And what you're looking for—
And what you're looking for
Just suits me fine:

We'll break those rules a lot
We'll be damned
Fools a lot—
But then, why should we not—
How could we not
Combine?
When I've got your number, and
I've got the glow you've got—
I've got your number
And baby, you know, you've got mine.

What do you say, Belle baby? This is big George talking.

BELLE Well, I... (*Music rhythm and beat catch* BELLE.
GEORGE comes up to her and playfully snaps her garter)
Oh, stop it, George.

GEORGE I'd tango on a dime for you, Belle baby.

BELLE You know I'm not that kind of girl, George.

GEORGE I know. I know.

68

BELLE (*On second garter snap*) Oh, George! (*Again music and beat catch BELLE*) Oh, well . . . it's wartime.
(*She stretches out her arms to him*)

*Collected Plays
of Neil Simon*

GEORGE (*Sings*)

I've got your number, and, baby, you know
You've got mine!

(*GEORGE picks BELLE up and carries her offstage*)

OLDER BELLE, PATRICK *and a* BALLET MASTER. *She is taking a ballet lesson and is dressed accordingly.*

LITTLE ME

OLDER BELLE The next morning, George left to join the Navy, but he left me with renewed faith in myself . . . a will to live—and pregnant. Once again my overgenerous nature had brought me nothing but trouble . . . Those first nine months of the war were very difficult for me *and* America!

PATRICK (*Into the mike*) Chapter Three . . . “Talcum and Gun Powder”!

OLDER BELLE Noble was commissioned a captain in the Army Air Corps because of his brilliant football record . . . and sailed for France before he could marry Ramona. One night, still in a delicate condition, I was invited to a “Farewell, Doughboy” party by some friends from my vaudeville days.

(*Blackout*)

*Collected Plays
of Neil Simon*

A small, gaily decorated apartment. SOLDIERS and GIRLS are dancing to the music of a pianola. BELLE enters. She is about six months pregnant.

1ST GIRL Hey, everyone, look who's here. You remember Belle Schlumpfert . . . Miss Dimples.

BELLE (*Shyly*) Hello.

2ND GIRL Gee, we're glad you could come, Belle. How've you been?

BELLE Oh, just fine. A little sick in the mornings.

3RD GIRL Hey, Belle, there's someone here we want you to meet.

BELLE Gosh, girls, I don't think I'd be very good company.

1ST GIRL He's real sweet.

2ND GIRL A typical American farm boy.

3RD GIRL I think this is his first party. He's in the kitchen. Making fudge.

1ST GIRL I'll call him. (*She shouts*) Oh, Fred! Fred!
(*FRED POITRINE enters in an ill-fitting uniform and thick glasses. FRED is a happy poor soul. His afflictions do not seem to bother him. FRED goes happily through life with a smile, and no catastrophe can dampen his high spirits*)

FRED (*Sings*) "Mademoiselle from Armentières, parlez-vous . . ." (*He shakes hands with one soldier, then crosses to a couple who are kissing passionately. FRED taps him on the shoulder*) Bert, snap out of it.

Let's have some fun . . . "Mademoiselle from Armentières . . ."

1ST GIRL Fred! Hey, Fred . . .
(*She waves*)

FRED Hi! Who's talking?

71

1ST GIRL It's me, Fred.

2ND GIRL He has a little trouble with his eyes.

LITTLE ME

FRED (*Gives 1ST GIRL a piece of paper*) Here's your song sheet. We're gonna sing "Mademoiselle from Armentières . . ."

1ST GIRL Later, Fred. We'd like you to meet a wonderful person.

2ND GIRL Fred, this is Belle Schlumpfert.

BELLE Hello.

FRED Hi. I'm Fred Poitrine. U.S. Army . . . 646717. That's my serial number in case you can't remember my name. Gosh, this is a swell party!

1ST GIRL Well, we'll leave you two to get acquainted.

2ND GIRL See you later, Fred.

(BERT and his GIRL cross left directly in front of FRED)

FRED Hya, Bert, Hey, Bert, hi! Hi, Bert! (*MAN ignores him*) That's my best friend, Bert. He's crazy about me. I talk to him after lights out in the barracks. I talk to him about the farm and the cows and the chickens and the eggs. I keep talking all night long. I keep talking and talking and talking and talking. Last night his gun went off right near my head, but it was an accident.

BELLE What do you do in the army, Fred?

FRED I'm a rear guard clerk.

BELLE What's a rear guard clerk?

FRED In case of defeat, I type up the surrender. Say, can I get you a drink or something? (*He crosses in front of BELLE*) A glass of beer or some punch?

BELLE (*Looks down*) Oh, no, Fred. I'm only allowed to have milk.

FRED I respect you for that . . . (*He turns and sees BERT about to kiss his GIRL*) Hya, Bert . . . What are you so moody about? Whyn't you have some fun? (*BERT looks disgusted and moves away. FRED turns back to BELLE*) That's my best friend, Bert.

BELLE It's nice to have a buddy, isn't it?

FRED It sure is. He promised to show me what to do with my bayonet, later.

BELLE Gee, you're a very sweet boy, Fred. And you have such a kind, gentle face . . . Your eyes are brown, aren't they?

FRED No, they're blue. My glasses fell in the fudge . . .

(*A SERGEANT rushes in*)

SERGEANT (*Blows his whistle*) Attention, doughboys, all members of the Twenty-fifth Illinois are shippin' out. Report to barracks immediately.

(*He exits. A loud moan goes up from all*)

2ND GIRL Well, kids, let's make this the last dance.

FRED Hey, wait a minute. Instead of dancing, why don't we all get married?

2ND GIRL (*Astonished*) Get married?

FRED Yeah.

2ND GIRL Gee, that's a great idea. How about it, everybody?

(*They all cheer and rush for a partner. FRED looks at each girl hopefully as she passes right by him. He is disappointed. Then he turns and sees BELLE*)

FRED You remember me, Belle . . . 646717?

BELLE Yes, Fred.

FRED Oh, good. Something tells me we need each other. What I want to ask is . . . would you marry me?

73

BELLE Me? You mean you want to marry me? But why, Fred? You hardly know me.

LITTLE ME

FRED I guess it's because I'm kinda lonely, and I guess it's because I want someone to come home to . . . and I guess it's because you kinda remind me of my mother.

BELLE Do I?

FRED Yes. She's fat too.

BELLE Oh, but—Fred, don't you know why? Look at me? Look at my condition.

FRED Well, if it bothers you, don't drink so much milk.

BELLE Oh, Fred, you're so innocent. Don't you understand . . . I'd only want to marry you for your name.

FRED Fred? You like it so much?
(A SOLDIER rushes in with a PREACHER)

SOLDIER Hey, everyone. I just woke up a preacher. He says because of the war, he'll make a special allowance and marry us all right here and now.
(They all cheer)

FRED What do you say, Belle?

BELLE Oh, Fred, the answer is yes. And do you know what I'm hoping for more than anything else in the whole wide world? A boy!

FRED Well, you don't have to hope anymore—I am a boy!
(The PREACHER stands on the couch as he begins to

Speak, all the couples group themselves about him in a tight knot)

PREACHER Will you all gather neatly before me, please.

74

FRED (*He is trying to get everybody together*) Come on, everybody . . . get a girl. We're getting married.

*Collected Plays
of Neil Simon*

(*FRED moves behind the group lined up in front of the PREACHER. There is no space for him and finally he elbows his way next to BELLE and another GIRL. He stares at the other GIRL.*)

PREACHER Dearly beloved, we are all gathered here on this joyous occasion to join this crowd in holy matrimony. Do you men of the Twenty-fifth Illinois promise to love, honor and cherish these girls?

MEN We do.

PREACHER And do you, lovely flowers of American womanhood, promise in sickness and health, war and peace, to love and obey, this gallant platoon?

GIRLS We do.

PREACHER Then, with the power vested in me, I now pronounce you men and wives. (*They all kiss. FRED is still looking at the PREACHER*)

BELLE (*Turning to FRED*) Fred, aren't you going to kiss me?

FRED I don't think it would be very proper.

BELLE Why not?

FRED I just married this girl.
(*Points to the GIRL next to him*)

BELLE No, Fred, you married me.

FRED No, you married this fellow right here.
(*Points to the MAN on the other side of BELLE*)

BELLE No, Fred. He married her.
(*Points to the GIRL standing next to the MAN*)

FRED We ought to get it straightened out. Did anyone happen to notice who I married?

3RD GIRL Belle. You married Belle.

FRED I did? Oh, good. (*The PREACHER gets down off the couch and exits*)

75

BELLE (*Takes FRED downstage*) Well, Fred, now that we're married, you can kiss me.

LITTLE ME

FRED Kiss you? Gosh, I never counted on that.
(*BELLE closes her eyes and waits. FRED reacts shyly*)

BELLE Fred, haven't you ever been kissed before? (*He shakes his head shyly "no"*) Oh, come on, Fred, it's easy.

FRED (*Has difficulty making the connection*) What do we do with the noses?

BELLE One on each side.

FRED Oh . . . You go to the right, or else we'll crash.
(*FRED again has difficulty*)

BELLE Closer, Fred . . .

FRED What do you do with your teeth?

BELLE Your lips cover your teeth.

FRED The lips cover your teeth? Isn't nature wonderful?

BELLE Don't talk anymore, Fred. We're going to kiss now. (*They kiss . . . then part*) Fred, you're blushing.

FRED I have to blush. It's the only thing that keeps me from fainting.
(*Fred sings "Real Live Girl"*)

FRED

Pardon me, miss,
But I've never done this
With a real, live girl—
Strayed off the farm
With an actual arm-

Ful of real, live girl!
Pardon me if your affectionate squeeze
Fogs up my glasses and buckles my knees
I'm simply drowned
In the sight and the sound
And the scent
And the feel
Of a real,
Live
Girl!

(They kiss. The SERGEANT reenters)

SERGEANT Okay, Yanks. Let's go.
(Everyone ad-libs goodbye and leaves)

FRED Gosh. Well, this is it, Mrs. Poitrine.

BELLE Mrs. Poitrine . . . From now on I'm Belle Poitrine.

SERGEANT Let's go, Poitrine.
(He exits)

FRED They're calling you, Belle.

BELLE No, they're calling you, Fred.

FRED Oh, I guess it must be something about the war . . . Goodbye, Belle. Bye.
(He starts to go)

BELLE Fred! *(He stops)* Come back to me. *(He nods . . . then turns and walks back to her)* Not now. After the war.
(He leaves again)

FRED Oh, after the war . . . Hey, Bert, wait for me. Why are you running?
(He runs off)

(Blackout)

The dark stage is suddenly aglow with bursting gunfire, accompanied by cannon roar and bomb whistles. It stops, and light comes up on 2ND GIRL reading a letter. She is surrounded by girls and BELLE.

2ND GIRL (*Reading*) "Dear Suzie, we're finally at the front. It's pretty rough on all of us. Miss you terribly."

(Blackout, then light comes up on a SOLDIER in no man's land behind her. Blackout)

3RD GIRL (*Lights comes up on her as she reads*) "Dear Kitty, we're in on the big push now. I've got your picture in my pocket and it keeps me going."

(Blackout, then light up on another SOLDIER, bayonet in hand, in no man's land. Blackout, then light up on BELLE seated on the couch amid the other girls)

BELLE (*Reads*) "Dear Belle, at last I'm in action."

(Blackout. Light up on FRED downstage left at typewriter. FRED starts to type and repeats aloud)

FRED "Dearest Quartermaster, please send us two dozen of your very finest officer's dinner napkins . . . as we are . . ." (*He catches his pinky in the keys*) Oh, Medic, Medic . . .

(Blackout, then light up on the GIRLS again, BELLE reading a telegram)

BELLE "The War Department regrets to inform you that your husband, Private Fred Poitrine, died in action from a serious digit wound."

(BELLE's head lowers)

3RD GIRL You should be very proud of him, Belle.

BELLE Yes. My only regret is that Fred never saw Baby.

(2ND GIRL is behind the couch and holding BABY in a pink blanket)

78

2ND GIRL And she wants her momma.

BELLE Sweet angel. Poor Baby. She had two fathers and never saw either one of them.

(MOMMA rushes on, holding a newspaper)

*Collected Plays
of Neil Simon*

MOMMA Belle . . . Belle . . .

BELLE Not now, Momma, please!

(She looks down at the telegram)

MOMMA It's about Noble!

BELLE Noble??

(She quickly crumples the telegram and throws it away and stands up holding BABY)

MOMMA Listen! (She opens the newspaper and reads)
"France. November 12th. Allied Flying Ace, Colonel Noble Eggleston, nine-time winner of the Victoria Cross, was shot down today over the front lines."

(BELLE drops onto the couch)

MOMMA "Colonel Eggleston has to his credit twenty-seven enemy planes destroyed in the air, thirteen on the ground . . . and six in the factory."

BELLE Momma, is he alive?

MOMMA "Colonel Eggleston is believed to be alive but until further confirmation he will be listed as missing in action . . . There will be a two-minute silent prayer today at the Harvard-Yale game. A minute for each side!

BELLE He's alive, I know it. Noble's alive. He *must* be! (She gets up) Momma, take Baby.

(She hands her BABY)

MOMMA Belle, where are you going?

BELLE To France. To finish the job that men like Fred and Noble started. My personal goals must wait now. Our boys need cheering up. And I'm going to do it with my God-given talent.

MOMMA That's Momma's little girl!

79

BELLE I won't be back until I've found Noble. Goodbye, Momma. *(She kisses MOMMA)* Goodbye, Baby! *(She kisses BABY)* Hello, France!

LITTLE ME

(Blackout)

(Light up on NOBLE in trench coat, helmet and goggles . . . sitting on a bench. A GERMAN SOLDIER in pointed helmet enters carrying a package)

GERMAN SOLDIER Vell, Herr Prisoner of War Eggleston, how are you feeling today?

NOBLE You'll get no information from me, Jerry.

GERMAN SOLDIER Brave *Schweinehund*. Ah, I have for you a package.

NOBLE A package from Ramona. Ramona sent me a package? *(He opens the box)* Oh, she knitted me some socks—no, they're cookies!

GERMAN SOLDIER We also have for you a newspaper . . . from Illinois.

(He hands it to NOBLE)

NOBLE *(Reads)* A newspaper from Illinois . . . Belle! She's in France. I've got to see her. I've got to escape and see her.

GERMAN SOLDIER Escape? From here? Impossible.

NOBLE Oh, yeah. *(Points)* Oh, there's the Kaiser. *(The SOLDIER turns his head. NOBLE punches him with all his might in the stomach. The SOLDIER does not even blanch. He looks at NOBLE)* How about a bribe?

GERMAN SOLDIER A bribe, yes!
(Blackout)

*Collected Plays
of Neil Simon*

It is the base hospital somewhere in France. The remains of a church are up left. SOLDIERS are seated on camp stools and an old church pew and talking when one SOLDIER runs on.

1ST SOLDIER Hey, you guys! Good news! Guess who's coming?

2ND SOLDIER Reinforcements?

1ST SOLDIER No. Better yet—Belle Poitrine.
(The SOLDIERS get up)

3RD SOLDIER Is she bringing all of her girls?
(1ST SOLDIER nods "yes")

SOLDIERS "Real, live girls!"

2ND SOLDIER Hey, Sarge, you've seen her before.
What does she really look like?
(The SOLDIERS surround the SERGEANT)

SERGEANT Well, she's got red hair . . .

2ND SOLDIER And?

SERGEANT And . . . blue eyes . . . I tell you, fellows,
she's terrific.

ALL SOLDIERS *(Sing)* "Real, live girl!"

4TH SOLDIER Hey, did you boys hear what happened
at Belleau Wood? *(They all crowd around him)* C Com-
pany got lost with six of them.

3RD SOLDIER Germans?

4TH SOLDIER No. Belle and her girls.

1ST SOLDIER Well, what happened?
*(The SOLDIERS huddle around 4TH SOLDIER, who
whispers)*

2ND SOLDIER No, kidding?
(Again they huddle)

81

ALL SOLDIERS Chee . . .

ALL *(Sing)* "Real, live girls!"
(They sing "Real, Live Girl")

LITTLE ME

ALL
Nothing can beat
Getting swept off your feet
By a real, live girl—
Dreams in your bunk
Don't compare with a hunk
Of a real, live girl!
Speaking of miracles, this must be it!

2ND SOLDIER
Just when I started to learn how to knit—

ALL
I'm all in stitches
From finding what riches
A waltz can reveal
With a real,
Live
Girl!
(They dance)
Real, live girl.

Real, live girl.
I've seen photographs
And facsimiles
That have set my head off in a whirl—
But
No work of art
Gets you right in the heart
Like a real, live girl—
Take your statues of Juno
And the Venus de Milo—

2ND SOLDIER
(*Mee lo*)

4TH SOLDIER
When a fellow wants—you know

ALL
We know

Who wants substitutes—
I'll overlook
Everyone in the book
For a real,

3RD SOLDIER
Sexy Sally or Suzabelle—

ALL
Take your Venetian
Or Roman or Grecian
Ideal—

4TH SOLDIER
I'll take something more use-a-belle

2ND SOLDIER
Girls were like fellas.
Was once my belief—

ALL
What a reversal—

2ND SOLDIER
And what a relief!

ALL
I'll take the flowering hat
And the towering heel
And the squeal
Of a real,
Live
Girl!

2ND SOLDIER (*Speaks*) That's charming, absolutely
charming.

ALL

Real, live girl.
Real, live girl
Go be a holdout for Helen of Troy—
I am a healthy American boy—

I'd rather gape
At the dear little shape
Of the stern
And the keel
Of a full-time vocational,
All-operational

Girl!

(After the number, BELLE and the GIRLS rush on, shouting greetings. The GENERAL enters and crosses to BELLE.)

83

LITTLE ME

GENERAL Miss Poitrine, we've been looking forward to this for some time. I'm General Milton "Over-the-Top" Schreiber. I'd like to welcome you to our base hospital.

BELLE Thank you, General.

GENERAL *(Taking her right a few steps)* Miss Poitrine, how can the Army ever thank you? You've worked miracles for these boys of ours. With your singing and dancing and writing letters and assisting in major operations.

BELLE America is my nation too, General.

GENERAL I think I'll be able to repay you in some measure. I've some news about your Colonel Eggleston.

BELLE Noble? Is he alive?

GENERAL Very much so. He escaped from an enemy prison camp, stole a plane, captured Field Marshal Werner Schlecter and flew back to France, taking important aerial photographs on the way.

BELLE That's Noble. Never too busy to help his country. Where is he now?

GENERAL He's in his plane most of the time. He only comes down for fuel and mail . . .

(A NURSE enters from the door in the church ruins)

NURSE General, we're having trouble with 107 again.

GENERAL The Frenchman, eh? Pity. No one seems to be able to help the poor chap.

BELLE What is it, General?

GENERAL A French officer. Amnesia. Total loss of memory. We found him wandering around in no man's land asking what side he's on. And he has a letter. He keeps reading it and crying.

BELLE Perhaps I might be able to do something. Could I try, General?

GENERAL Can't see what harm it would do. Nurse!
(The NURSE opens the door and a FRENCH OFFICER, with a dazed look, appears. He reads a letter)

BELLE Val! . . . Val!

GENERAL You know him?

BELLE It's Val du Val, the great French entertainer. He once saved my life.

NURSE *(Taking VAL's arm)* Come along, sir.

VAL *(Indignant)* Take your hands off me. Do you know who I am?

NURSE No.

VAL Neither do I . . . I don't know who I am.
(He sighs and goes back to reading his letter as he goes to the church pew)

BELLE *(Goes to VAL)* Val . . . Val, look at me. Look at me, Val. Don't you remember me?

VAL (*Looks at her, shakes his head*) No . . . No, I don't remember.

BELLE (*Turns to GENERAL*) What caused it, General?

GENERAL It was an emotional shock. I believed it was caused by that letter. He won't let anyone see it.

85

BELLE Val, you may not remember me, but I want to help you. Won't you tell *me* what the letter says?

LITTLE ME

VAL (*Looks at her and nods*) The letter? It says . . .
(*He double-talks in French*)

BELLE What does that mean?

VAL I don't know. I forgot French.

GENERAL I can translate. It's from his sweetheart, Colette.

BELLE (*Takes the letter from VAL and gives it to the GENERAL*) Colette. She used to assist him in the act.

GENERAL (*Reads*) It says, "My darling. A year I have waited for you. I love you, I need you, I miss you and I have jilted you. A French girl needs romance, so I married my cousin who is too short to go in the army."

VAL Colette . . . Colette . . .

BELLE Do you remember Colette?

VAL No. But whoever she is, she should drop dead.
(*Grabs the letter from the GENERAL*) Did you hear that letter?

GENERAL It's no use. He's been jilted by his girl, so he's trying to block out all memory of her.
(*A SOLDIER rushes on stage*)

SOLDIER General Schreiber. Report from headquarters, sir. We have to evacuate the hospital. The enemy big guns have advanced to within two miles.
(*In the distance we hear two loud cannon booms*)

VAL What was that?

GENERAL The enemy cannons.

VAL Boom-boom?

GENERAL That's right. Cannons go boom-boom.

VAL Boom-Boom.

BELLE Wait, General, I think I have an idea.

GENERAL I'm sorry. We have no time.

BELLE But it could save his whole future.
(Cannons)

VAL Boom-Boom?

GENERAL Very well. But please hurry.

BELLE Thank you, General.

GENERAL (*To a SOLDIER*) Prepare the trucks for evacuation. And get a very fast car for me.
(SOLDIERS and NURSES start to move out.)

BELLE (*Goes to VAL as cannons are heard again*) Val, listen to me. We haven't got much time. The Germans are coming closer.
(*They sing "Boom-Boom"*)

VAL Boom-Boom?

BELLE Val, listen to the cannons. Val, try to remember.

(*She sings*)
"If ze girl—
(Cannons)

VAL Boom-Boom . . .

BELLE

"And ze boy . . .
(Cannons)

"And zey get together and zey both . . .
(Cannons)

VAL

Boom-Boom . . .

BELLE (*Speaks*) That's it, Val, that's it . . .

"C'est La Grande . . .

(*Cannons*)

VAL

Boom-Boom . . .

87

BELLE

"Et La Grande . . .

(*Cannons*)

LITTLE ME

VAL

Boom-Boom . . .

BELLE & VAL (*Sing together*)

"Zat's ze one Boom-Boom for me."

VAL I remember. I'm Val du Val, ze great French entertainer. Oh, yes, I remember.

(*He does a tap dance*)

BELLE Yes, Val, you remembered . . .

(*They embrace*)

VAL Oh, Belle, thank you, thank you. You made me remember. Belle, you mustn't leave me now . . . I need you. Promise you'll never leave me.

BELLE Yes, Val, I promise . . . I'll never leave you.

GENERAL Ready to move out, Captain?

VAL (*Snaps to attention*) The name is Du Val, General. Val du Val. Big *V* little *d* big *V*. Wait for me. (*Turns to BELLE*) I want to get my gun, my helmet and my orchestrations. (*He throws her a kiss*) Wait for me.

(*He exits into the hospital*)

GENERAL It's a miracle. With just a little understanding, you've accomplished what our best doctors couldn't do.

(*Cannons. A SOLDIER comes in from the right. ANOTHER SOLDIER races across the stage*)

SOLDIER General, we don't have room for all the equipment. What'll we do, sir?

GENERAL Just take the medicine and the beer.

(The SOLDIER salutes and exits. Suddenly the door flings open and there in a trench coat, aviator's helmet and goggles stands NOBLE)

NOBLE Belle!

BELLE Noble!

(The "I Love You" theme is heard. They rush to each other, stop, and then embrace. The GENERAL exits)

NOBLE *(Releasing BELLE)* We're still in tune, Belle.

BELLE Oh, Noble, it's so good to see you. Are you all right, darling? Tell me the truth. You look tired.

NOBLE I am a little tired. I was just shot down.

BELLE Oh, Noble, I've missed you so. Do you ever think of me?

NOBLE Think of you? I've named my plane after you. It's called "The Flying Riffraff."

(The GENERAL enters with TWO SOLDIERS. He sends ONE SOLDIER off. Cannons are heard again)

GENERAL We're about to move out, Colonel.

NOBLE I realize that, sir. *(To BELLE)* Belle, look. We don't have much time. Tomorrow morning at six o'clock I have a dogfight appointment with Baron von Richthofen and his entire Flying Circus.

BELLE Oh, Noble, no . . .

NOBLE Yes. *Somebody* has to do it, Belle. Eddie Rickenbacker's got the mumps.

BELLE Oh, Noble, I'm so worried.

NOBLE Belle, I want to ask you one question. Will you marry me tonight?

BELLE Marry you? But I haven't got wealth, culture or social position.

NOBLE Belle, in these ravaged days all of us are equal.
If we wait until after the war is over, I'll be *better*
than you again. What do you say, Belle?

BELLE Oh, darling, yes. Of course, of course.
(They embrace)

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NOBLE Good. I'll get an overnight pass.

BELLE But, Noble, what will your mother say?

LITTLE ME

NOBLE My mother? When you get back home, just
tell her we got married. *(Gets to the door and turns)*
No, you better tell her I got killed.
(He exits into the hospital)

GENERAL Congratulations, Miss Poitrine.
(Cannons. A SOLDIER enters)

SOLDIER General, we're all ready to move out, sir.

GENERAL Good. Start that group out immediately.

SOLDIER Yes, sir.

GENERAL Get all the men into the trucks and put the
girls in my car.

SOLDIER Yes, sir.
*(He exits. The hospital door flies open and VAL with
helmet and beaming happily appears)*

VAL Ready, Belle?

BELLE *(Runs up to him. Joyously)* Val, I have wonder-
ful news. I'm going to Paris to marry Noble.

VAL Who am I? Where am I?
(He exits through the door)

GENERAL I'm afraid he's slipped back again.

BELLE But why?

GENERAL Du Val thinks you've jilted him. Just as Co-
lette did. He would have been all right if you had
stayed with him . . . but of course, that's not your
concern.

(The door opens and there is NOBLE in trench coat and goggles)

NOBLE *(Turns and yells back inside)* I never saw you before in my life. Crazy Frenchman. *(To BELLE)* Ready, Belle? Excuse me, General.

BELLE *(Fighting back tears)* I—I'm sorry, Noble, but I've changed my mind.

NOBLE What do you mean?

BELLE I mean . . . I can't marry you.

NOBLE But you've got to. I just put a deposit down on a hotel room.

BELLE Don't you understand what I'm trying to say, Noble? *(The great lie)* I—I don't love you anymore.

NOBLE I don't believe you, Belle. You just don't stop loving a person like me just like that.

BELLE I'm sorry, Noble. *(Cannons)* Please go away.

NOBLE Very well, goodbye, Belle.

BELLE Goodbye, Noble.

(They shake hands. The "I Love You" theme plays)

NOBLE Well, I guess there was one left over.
(He exits into the hospital)

BELLE *(In tears)* Oh, Noble . . . He doesn't understand. He'll never understand.
(Cannons)

GENERAL All right, let's get these men moving. We've wasted enough time already. Are you coming, Miss Poitrine?

BELLE In a second, General. But first I'm going to repay someone an old favor—I'm going to marry that great French entertainer.

VAL *(Enters from the door)* Val du Val, that's me!
(He does a tap dance)

BELLE Hello, Val!

VAL Boom-Boom, Belle.
(They embrace)

GENERAL All right, let's move out.
(The GENERAL exits. The troops move up the ramp.
VAL *salutes, throws a kiss and exits. Next we see him*
carrying a wounded soldier up the ramp. Cannons)

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LITTLE ME

BELLE *(Sings, with tears in her eyes)*
But wherever you may be, oh Noble,
Save La Grande Boom-Boom for me.
(VAL waves to her)

Curtain

The first of these was the
the second was the
the third was the
the fourth was the
the fifth was the

the sixth was the
the seventh was the
the eighth was the
the ninth was the
the tenth was the

the eleventh was the
the twelfth was the
the thirteenth was the
the fourteenth was the
the fifteenth was the

the sixteenth was the
the seventeenth was the
the eighteenth was the
the nineteenth was the
the twentieth was the

the twenty-first was the
the twenty-second was the
the twenty-third was the
the twenty-fourth was the
the twenty-fifth was the

the twenty-sixth was the
the twenty-seventh was the
the twenty-eighth was the
the twenty-ninth was the
the thirtieth was the

the thirty-first was the
the thirty-second was the
the thirty-third was the
the thirty-fourth was the
the thirty-fifth was the