

Cherchez La Femme

by Honoria Mary Robertson Dick

A MELODRAMA

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CAST

RICHARD	Lord Richard Bellendon	(Dicky)
PETER	Pierre De Chanteclair	(Peter Crower)
FOTHERINGAY		
DESIREE	Desiree Dupleix	(Louise)
CHERIE	Cherry Sargent	(Mimi)
SALLIE	Sallie Chalmers	(Fifi)
GIRL		
ANNOUNCER		
VELVET JOE		
APACHE	(Le Decoupeur)	
SOLANGE		
BOBBY	Robert Hilton	

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Honorina Mary Robertson Dick was born in Yorkshire, England but lived much of her adult life in Perth, Western Australia. Honorina read English Literature and Classics at the University of Western Australia and wrote a series of 13 original melodramas in the 1970s-early 2000s. They were performed exclusively by an amateur cast at St Michael's Anglican Church Mt Pleasant and St Christopher's Anglican Church Bicton-Attadale for church fundraising purposes.

It was Honorina's wish that her melodramas be made available for other theatre groups to adapt and perform as required.



RICHARD

Fotheringay! You may congratulate me – I’ve just bowled a maiden over.

FOTHERINGAY

Indeed mi lord and whom, may I ask, was the fortunate lady?

RICHARD

Cricket! Fotheringay, cricket! And what’s more, playing on a sticky wicket I lobbed one of mi balls over the boundary slap into Lady Pinkerton’s lap.

FOTHERINGAY

Oh! What a thrill for her ladyship.

RICHARD

Now I’m off to inspect the estate farms – all needing repairs and I don’t have to tell you that, financially, we’re in queer street – the result of a gambling grandfather. Makes one feel very downhearted.

FOTHERINGAY

Mi lord, in times of despair my old dad used to say “You’ve just got to keep your pecker up and keep trying.”

RICHARD

Keep my pecker up! Well it’s not always easy but from now on that will be my apophthegm (*pronounced: ap-o-them*)

FOTHERINGAY

Mi lord?

RICHARD

Maxim maxim motto old thing. Henceforward every time you see me droop, just remind me to keep my pecker up.

FOTHERINGAY

Certainly mi lord, and there is a foreign gentleman waiting to see you, here is his card. He has a very odd accent mi lord, American I would say.

RICHARD

French name – American – can’t be so, but show him in.

FOTHERINGAY

Monsieur (*pronounced: mos-yur*) de Chanteclair (*pronounced: Chahnt-e-kleer*).

PETER

Good morning, have I the pleasure of addressing Lord Richard Bellendon?

RICHARD

You do! And in what manner can I help you, Monsieur de Chanteclair?

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Exit left Fotheringay

PETER

I have come from Louisiana, America, on a very peculiar commission –

RICHARD

That word “commission” fills me with foreboding!

PETER

Peculiar, but happy commission. I am the executor of the estate of the late Madame Vance of which you are one of two legatees.

RICHARD

Never heard of the lady – there must be some mistake!

PETER

You know perhaps of Alicia Adair – the youngest sister of your late maternal grandmother?

RICHARD

My great-aunt Alicia – something of a high-flyer – ran off with some disreputable colonial – never mentioned in the family – actually sounded to me like a gal with guts.

PETER

Indeed she was – and the disreputable colonial was a Shanghai banker who died in his middle years leaving his widow – your great-aunt Alicia – a vast fortune which she in turn, being childless, left to you and one other with a certain proviso.

RICHARD

Did she, by Jove! And what exactly constitutes a vast fortune?

PETER

Give Richard a card

This is the total sum of which you will receive half if the proviso is met.

RICHARD

Fotheringay! A reviver – a large reviver.

FOTHERINGAY

Oh mi lord – don’t droop – remember...

RICHARD

I’m not drooping you fool – I’m having the vapours – we’re saved from penury – every house on the estate shall have a new roof – new... not water Fotheringay, but scotch!

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PETER

You have not yet heard the proviso Lord Richard.

RICHARD

Drop all that lord stuff, mi friends call me Dicky and I feel sure we are going to be the best of friends. Now – the proviso.

PETER

The late Mr Vance had one sister who had one son. The son married a French woman, they had one child, a daughter who if she lives would be about your age. We know that the son and his wife were killed sometime during the Great War but not what happened to the child. The proviso is, that within one year you have to find her or to establish her death as she is the co-legatee. Otherwise...

RICHARD

Otherwise what?

PETER

If she is dead you inherit the entire estate, if you cannot find her or establish her demise the entire estate comes to me and I don't want it.

RICHARD

Not want a magnificent fortune – oh come old bean, you're pulling my leg.

PETER

I happen to be as wealthy as was Mrs Vance, and you and the lost girl are the pair she wished to inherit. You are her only relatives.

RICHARD

Well, I must say that's jolly decent of you but how on earth am I to find a gal when I don't even know her name? Or where she lived?

PETER

Her name is Cherry Sargent, her mother's maiden name was Dupleix (*pronounced: du-play*) and they lived in Provence.

RICHARD

Provence! What a challenge – but I shall remember my maxim.

PETER

What maxim is that?

RICHARD

To keep my pecker up in every adversity. Now do you mean to help me?

PETER

I certainly do.

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RICHARD

Then let's get started – Marseilles first – there must be some official records we can check Fotheringay! Pack our grips, we are going to France with Monsieur de Chanteclair.

FOTHERINGAY

France mi lord – a den of iniquity – full of temptations – dim-lit cafés, gambling casinos – lakes of wine – seductive music and worst of all – seductive women!

RICHARD

(Repeats after Fotheringay)

Temptations – dim-lit cafés – gambling casinos – wine – seductive music – seductive women.

Fotheringay, pack the bags at the gallop, we're wasting time. Fotheringay steered mi pater through all these shoals and he speaks French like a native. *[Shake hands]* Pierre, I know we are going to have an absolutely rippin' time.

PETER

My friends at home in the USA call me Peter.

RICHARD

I find that easier than Pierre – I wonder where Mam'selle Cherry is – if she exists? En evant to la belle France to cherchez la femme. Temptations beware!

Exit

-END OF ACT ONE-

DESIREE

Cherie! Cherie! Oh! This must be?

CHERIE

Miss Sallie Chalmers – Madame Desiree.

SALLIE

I know I'm not very good looking but I can sing and dance and please give me a chance in the chorus.

DESIREE

But you are charming – with a little help in deportment I am sure you will be acceptable, but first we must audition you to ascertain your talent. I see you are in rehearsal costume so join with us and learn our theme song – the words will be a very good guide to you as they are to us. Ladies!

SONG: Keep Young And Beautiful

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CHERIE

Desiree you must engage her – please.

DESIREE

Sallie, you are engaged, but alas! I must tell you that it will be for a very short time – the show is closing and we have no other prospects of employment.

SALLIE

Even a short time will help me to gain some experience – some, what we Americans call, “class”. You see madame, I’ve had a haphazard life travelling with my late father who was a professional gambler and I want more than anything to learn how to dress and talk and to be a really sizzling hostess – I know it’s ambitious of me but I’m willing to work really hard to achieve my object. I’ve seen you both on and off stage madame and I want to be like you.

CHERIE

Ah Sallie, you cannot imitate Desiree, she is an original, what we French call *enchanteresse* (*pronounced: en chan-tris*).

DESIREE

Non! Non! You give me *couleur de rose* – she flatters me.

SALLIE

I would say she is also what she said you were.

GIRL

Enters with telegram

Madame Desiree, a marconigram for you.

CHERIE

Oh what dreadful disaster is now about to befall us? I am trembling with trepidation – what is it? Tell me! Tell me!

DESIREE

I do not believe it! I cannot believe it! C’est merveilleux – a miracle. Oh Cherie, Cherie.

CHERIE

Don’t cry – don’t cry my darling Desiree.

SALLIE

If it’s a miracle you should be laughing.

DESIREE

See I am laughing – I am so happy – after all these years I, we, are returning to France, to Paris [*pronounced: Pa-ree*].

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CHERIE

Paris – how is this – when? When?

DESIREE

I have been engaged for a season with The Folies. Two items – alone and with an item of my choice – ah Cherie, do you realise what this means? I can start you on a stage career in France – I am distracted.

CHERIE

You mean distraught! Desiree – the trio – the trio – in Sallie we have the trio!

DESIREE

C'est bon – an inspiration Cherie – of course you were too young to remember Paris, and Sallie, I will introduce you to the most beautiful city in the world if you will come with us.

SALLIE

Will I.

CHERIE

But I do remember Paris, after all I did spend all my school holidays with you when you were premier chanteresse with The Folies, and you lived on the left bank and it was oh so gay.

SALLIE

And I was in Paris for several months with my father after his spectacular wins playing in the casino at Monte Carlo.

DESIREE

Paris – oh Paris!

SONG: The Last Time I Saw Paris

Trio – I Love Paris In The Springtime

TOGETHER

Oh! Paris!

SALLIE

Madame you have opened a whole new world for me to explore.

DESIREE

(Not a Pandora's Box I hope).

CHERIE

So much to organise – the costumes – the passages – to leave immediately this show ends.

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SALLIE

I will help – I know exactly how to arrange shipping and transport.

CHERIE

But have we enough money for our fares ma tante?

DESIREE

Just enough so en evant ma petite and Sallie.

Exit – Cherie & Sallie

Shall I disclose the reason for this recall – non! It shall be my secret.

Reads:

“To take part, as one of the original performers, in a season of nostalgia”.
So! I am much older – but not too old, and I do this for ma petite Cherie, she needs security and a settled life, and I must arrange my own future – teaching perhaps! Desiree put these morbid thoughts aside – remember that in France a woman’s age is of little consequence provided she has je ne sais quoi – and I flatter myself I still have something to offer.

-END OF ACT TWO-

RICHARD

There he is again – that fella is following us.

PETER

What fellow? I can’t see anyone – you’re imagining things Dicky.

RICHARD

No, I’m not – seen him several times prior – wish I could get a good look at his phiz.

PETER

O bother your imagination – we’ve been months swanning around Provence and where has it got us? I’m beginning to despair.

RICHARD

No use flopping down and giving up Peter – pecker up – shoulders to the wheel and all that. When I’m batting on a sticky wicket, I just keep me eye on the ball and bang it as hard as I can. Now in this instance the ball is Cherry so let’s review the little information we do have –

Girl enters

- Oh what a peach.

Girl sashays across stage

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PETER

Dicky! Stop ogling the mam'selles – keep your mind on the target.

RICHARD

Oh I am, I am.

PETER

What lead do we have?

RICHARD

Not much – Marie Dupleix had a young sister name of Louise – known as a sweet singer – this Louise sold the farm – disappeared taking young Cherry with her – end of lead.

PETER

No trace of anyone named Louise Dupleix but – suppose she worked as a singer? If she can't be traced in the obvious towns like Nice or Cannes, where would she go?

TOGETHER

Paris!

RICHARD

Paris of course, that's where we should be looking, she's probably chirping her life away in some smoky café, unless she married.

PETER

The records in Paris will tell us her married name.

Girl crosses the stage, Richard follows her

Dicky come back!

Enter Fotheringay

FOTHERINGAY

A small aperitif to calm your mind Monsieur Peter. Mi lord has an eye for the ladies but never with any serious intent; his escapades are all of short duration; he has yet to know an enduring passion and when he does – speaking in terms of cricket – he'll be knocked out by a bouncer.

PETER

Never having been in love myself, I'll take your word Fotheringay.

FOTHERINGAY

Never sir? What a tragedy and you in your prime! Am I to take it that we departing for Paris?

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PETER

We are, and Fotheringay, Paris will be our last hope.

FOTHERINGAY

As my old father used to say “keep your pecker up monsieur Peter”. It is always wiser to wear a belt as well as braces rather than be caught with your trousers down. I sir – speaking figuratively – shall be your belt and braces in Paris, which well I know of old.

-END OF ACT THREE-

ANNOUNCER

Mesdames et messieurs – je presente – la belle Desiree – avec Mimi et Fifi.

Enter stage left – Desiree, Cherie & Sallie

SONG: Ladies in Waiting

DESIREE

Well done ma petites – and how do you like being Mimi and Fifi? And the darlings of The Folies?

CHERIE

I’m bubbling like champagne – I adore Paris.

SALLIE

Me! I feel like a tall poppy – popping out of my skin into bloom.

DESIREE

Ah! To be so young! Now go out and enjoy all that Paris has to offer. Take a fiacre through the Bois de Boulogne or sit under the stars at a side-walk café.

CHERIE

I’m hungry and I have heard of a café that is all the rage – very de luxe - this is the card with the name and address of it.

SALLIE

Les Deux Magots – ugh – I wouldn’t eat anything there – magots!

CHERIE

Oh Sallie, Sallie, you must learn the French language – nothing is ever as it seems – it is a language of nuances and subtleties so beware of saying yes to any French question you don’t fully comprehend.

DESIREE

It is magot (pronounced: ma-go) and it is a word used for – how do you say – baboons – simpletons. Les Deux Magots – two simpletons. And remember that

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French is also a language of love.

CHERIE

That's all they think about Sallie. Come along and see what fortune favours us with. Bon nuit Desiree. I feel excitement in the very air.

SALLIE

Fortune is a fickle jade so I'll bet she is probably French. Bon nuit madame.

DESIREE

Bon nuit – ah youth – but Cherie is right, there is something in the air tonight. Ah Cherie what is it?

CHERIE

There is a man madame – he is standing outside your dressing room and he will not go without seeing you.

DESIREE

Bring him to me here Cherie.

FOTHERINGAY

Good evening madame. My name is Fotherigay – pardon me madame, but have we not met?

DESIREE

I am sure not, I never forget a face and you are English Mr Fotheringay?

FOTHERINGAY

I am. I came to you for information.

DESIREE

What information?

FOTHERINGAY

I am endeavouring to trace a chantris named Dupleix – I wondered if you have any knowledge of her?

DESIREE

Dupleix! I do not – how do you say compris English nor do I know of this Louise Dupleix. Pardon m'sieur I am very tired – bon nuit.

Exit Fotheringay

DESIREE

Who can want to trace Louise Dupleix – a name obliterated over twenty years ago. I do not like this – she must not be traced. I need to think. Pense a bien – I will join the petites as Les Deux Magots.

Exit centre

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PETER

Ah! Fotheringay any luck? I checked the Moulin Rouge and Maximes but no-one has heard of the lady in question. Where is Lord Richard?

FOTHERINGAY

Mi lord is checking at the lesser known cafés and cabarets – I had expected him home by this time but when one – to put it in French – cherchez la femme there may be unexpected delays.

PETER

You mean decoys Fotheringay old bean – well I was a bit of a gay dog in my youth, still can't help flirting with an attractive female and the French women are tres belle.

RICHARD

I have found the most luscious, exciting, entrancing, attraction quite by chance.

PETER

Louise Duplex?

RICHARD

Bother Louise thing-a-me-bob – I have found the café cabaret where Solange is dancing.

PETER

Who is Solange?

RICHARD

The little cutie I met in Provence – the gal I followed that day in Nice. She's what the French call une petite bonne bouche.

PETER

A delicate morsel! Dicky, you are incorrigible – I do wish you would exert some control and keep your mind on our search.

RICHARD

Come on Peter old chappie – this is my first visit to gay Paris.

FOTHERINGAY

Not your first mi lord.

RICHARD

You can't count childhood visits – I was only sixteen when last in Paris and all that interested me then was the Eiffel Tower.

PETER

You can't compare an interest in the Eiffel Tower with this Solange female.

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FOTHERINGAY

Mi lord! M'sieur Peter. I took the liberty of visiting The Folies and was emboldened to ask Madame Desiree if she knew of any M'selle Duplex. I venture to suggest that my interview was not unsuccessful.

RICHARD

Don't tell me she fell into your arms Fotheringay.

PETER

Stop this flippancy – explain Fotheringay.

FOTHERINGAY

When I mentioned M'selle Duplex she turned quite white and though she understood English, she then immediately spoke in French and pretended not to comprehend my question. I believe she knows this M'selle Duplex because she said "Louise" Duplex and I had not disclosed that name. I enquired only for M'selle Duplex.

RICHARD

Oh well done Fotheringay, but if she pretends not to understand English how do we approach the problem of interrogation?

PETER

Me – Dicky, me. French is my native language.

RICHARD

Obviously madame is not willing to divulge information even if questioned in French.

PETER

Then we must arrange for her to do so by devious means. As I am bilingual I have an advantage, but she must be made to accept me as an American.

RICHARD

Your name would give you away.

PETER

Anglicise it.

RICHARD

My dear old chappie! Your name is untranslatable.

PETER

Well invent one – I will have to give this problem a great deal of thought.

RICHARD

And while you are thinking, I'm going out to dine at "Les Deux Magots" and to see Solange dance.

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Exit Fotheringay

PETER

Did you say “Les Deux Magots”?

RICHARD

Yes, a new de luxe café/cabaret.

Fotheringay brings hat and stick

PETER

That café is owned by my friend Jack Hilton, who asked me to call on his son who is managing it while learning the hotel business. I'll come with you. It will take my mind off the problem of Louise Duplex. Just collect my wallet, won't be a sec.

Exit Peter

RICHARD

Louise! Louise! Seems to me the whole of Paris is warbling Louise.

SONG: Louise

PETER

Fotheringay tells me the café is featuring an apache (*pronounced: a-pash*) dance and that is very exciting to see.

RICHARD

Aren't the apache the Paris hooligans?

PETER

Yes! But I don't suppose they will be so, probably professional performers.

Exit

BOBBY

Bon soir m'selle, je...

SALLIE

It's no use gabbling in French. I don't understand it.

BOBBY

You're an American.

SALLIE

I sure am – so are you. I'm Sallie Chalmers.

BOBBY

Robert Hilton – Bobby to my friends. Are you alone?

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SALLIE

No, I will wait for my friend Cherie – here she is.

BOBBY

Waiter – a magnum of champagne for this lady – with my compliments, I do hope I shall see you again – later?

CHERIE

Oh! Ouch! You imbecile – you’ve kicked my ankle.

RICHARD

I am so sorry – are you hurt?

CHERIE

Saying sorry doesn’t help. I’m a dancer in The Folies and you’ve crippled me.

RICHARD

Surely that’s an exaggeration m’selle. Let me look at your injury.

CHERIE

Look at my ankle?

RICHARD

And a very pretty ankle I must say.

CHERIE

How dare you sir – if you had not been hanging around swooning over that female you would not have bumped into me.

RICHARD

I was looking for the maître d’ (*pronounced: ma-tra*).

CHERIE

You were drooling over that female you clumsy oaf.

RICHARD

Look here – I was clumsy but I have apologised and what more can a fella do? Here is my card, please advise me of your progress, I am sure you are more angry than hurt and to atone for my clumsiness – cry quits and do me the honour of dining with me tomorrow.

CHERIE

Well – I was rather hasty – the shock of the pain. So now I apologise to you Mr Bellendon and I accept your invitation to dine with you tomorrow.

RICHARD

Here at the same time m’selle?

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CHERIE

Mimi – just Mimi. Why! Desiree!

DESIREE

I was feeling full of ennui – I need joie de vivre – some excitement.

SALLIE

Madame this is a rare pleasure – isn't the café just too handsome? I mean...

CHERIE

She means she has just met a very handsome young man.

Exit

RICHARD

Peter – I say Peter – what is wrong with you?

PETER

I am – bon gre, mal gre.

RICHARD

Whether willing or not what?

PETER

I have received the coup de grace.

RICHARD

For goodness' sake speak English – are you all right?

PETER

I am suffering from what we French term la grande passion.

RICHARD

Golly gee! For whom? When did this happen?

PETER

The woman in the silver dress – I must meet her.

RICHARD

Well, don't look so dejected old chap – come on, keep your pecker up. Ask the maître d' to introduce you – and voila!

PETER

No! No! That's not the way to approach a lady – it seems like a casual pick-up. I will ask Bobby Hilton who she is and send over my card to see if she will receive me.

BOBBY

Hello Peter, it's good to see you – dad told me you would be in Paris.

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PETER

Bobby, meet Dicky Bellendon. Who is the lady in the silver dress?

BOBBY

Silver dress – oh, she is the darling of The Folies – Madame Desiree.

PETER & DICKY

That's Desiree!

PETER

Oh fickle fate! I can't send over my card or she will know my real name and she must think I am an American.

RICHARD

Wait! She's sitting with Mimi – the m'selle I bumped into. I'll introduce myself to her companions then introduce you Peter.

BOBBY

I have met the blonde girl – Sallie Chalmers – she's an American so why don't I take both of you over and introduce you, Peter, as an old friend and a great admirer of Desiree?

PETER

But I've never seen her perform.

RICHARD

Finesse old chap, you're an expert at it.

PETER

I can't go into explanations Bobby but introduce me as Peter Crower, say I am an American entrepreneur and Bobby, forget my real name until I give you leave to remember it.

BOBBY

Ok Peter.

RICHARD

There he goes again.

PETER

Who goes?

RICHARD

That fella who's following us – ever since Provence – I'm not imagining it.

PETER

I didn't see anyone.

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RICHARD

Can't get a look at his face – very smooth – just slips by.

PETER

Just coincidence Dicky – Dicky! It's "that" female again.

BOBBY

That's Solange – he'd do well to avoid her – has a very jealous lover and she delights in making him jealous. There he is talking to that tall guy in the black hat. They call him Le Decoupeur – the meat carver. He is about to dance with Solange – come over here.

Exit – all except Richard

Apache Dance – Solange and Le Decoupeur

SALLIE

How exciting to have a man so jealous of one.

CHERIE

Look Sallie, your handsome maître d' is coming towards us – and he has that clumsy Mr Bellendon with him and another man.

BOBBY

Madame Desiree – may I introduce my friend Mr Peter Crower, an American entrepreneur who is a great admirer of yours, and Richard Bellendon his companion.

CHERIE

Mr Bellendon and I have already met.

SALLIE

So have I and Bobby, I mean the maître d'.

DESIREE

Messieurs, it is always pleasant to meet one's admirers.

PETER

Would it be presumptuous to ask you ladies to share our table?

DESIREE

Why not! It will be a pleasure messieur. Parlez vous français? Do you speak French?

BOBBY

Very badly and understand less.

PETER

Nor I.

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RICHARD

No, I don't, can't even make a run in French.

CHERIE

So! We meet again Mr Bellendon and I take it that your suit did not prosper?

RICHARD

Not Mr – Lord – no it didn't and please call me Dicky.

CHERIE

Lord Bellendon!

SALLIE

A real live lord!

CHERIE

Well lord or not, you shouldn't go around bumping into hapless females.

RICHARD

Let me tell you I am renowned for my dexterity. I am a demon bowler and pretty handy with a bat and very hand at silly mid-on.

SALLIE

What's he talking about?

CHERIE

Cricket Cherie, you Americans don't understand it.

RICHARD

But you do?

CHERIE

I have seen both Hammond and Sutcliffe playing at Lord's.

RICHARD

Oh how jolly – do tell me more – it's fascinating.

DESIREE

Mimi was educated at an école in England m'sieu.

PETER

Madame, I do not wish to converse about Mimi. I want to converse with you. I want to get to know you – to know you very well.

DESIREE

M'sieu Crower!

PETER

My name is Peter and – let's get out of here and have a quiet supper together –

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let me see – how about a gypsy orchestra and champagne and oysters under the stars aboard a bateau on the Seine? Please don't refuse, let me...

DESIREE

No woman could refuse such an invitation. Even a Frenchman could not have offered a more tempting assignation. I come!

Exit – Peter & Desiree

SALLIE

Wow! Even for a Yank that's fast work!

CHERIE

And of course I ride – never happier than when I'm off hunting.

RICHARD

Do you – oh I say, there goes Solange – please excuse me but I look forward to seeing you tomorrow night.

SALLIE

Well I must say I feel like a shag on a rock between you two couples, a romantic assignation on one side and sporting event on the other.

CHERIE

Sallie, forgive my rudeness, it is so long since I met someone with the same interests as myself. You know he is rather sweet.

SALLIE

Bit of a gay blade don't you think?

CHERIE

In all honesty, who can blame him for chasing after Solange, she definitely has "it".

SALLIE

What exactly is "it"? Can we attain it?

CHERIE

I think we possess it but don't know how to project it.

SALLIE

Then we have to find out immediately (before I meet Bobby).

CHERIE

"It" is, I think, what the French would refer to as oh là là! A tantalising allurements that invokes in men that spring feeling.

SALLIE

Well I'm not big on allurements.

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CHERIE

But you have springtime in your heart and that lasts forever.

SONG: When You've Got A Little Springtime In Your Heart

SALLIE

Desiree has "it" – did you see the look on Mr Crower's face when he met her?

CHERIE

Desiree can handle him – just as she handles all her admirers.

SALLIE

He said he was an entrepreneur so he's probably getting down to business in a social atmosphere but he sure looked bedazzled.

CHERIE

Well you don't need gypsy music and stars to arrange a business contract. I think he is more interested in the woman rather than the singer. What I can't understand is why he didn't approach her while we were in America.

SALLIE

Very odd! Oh I say Cherie, the maître d' is coming over to me.

CHERIE

Off you go – give him the oh là là! Bon nuit Cherie! I wish I had accepted a supper invitation from someone. Paris is not a city in which to be alone, even with a good book.

Exit

FOTHERINGAY

Now don't get into a tizzy mi lord. Young ladies, especially such as M'selle Solange (brazen hussy) play fast and loose with gentlemen.

RICHARD

Well she's not going to get me on a lead. I'm meeting her after I dine with M'selle Mimi and if she goes off with that obnoxious meat carver, I'm through.

FOTHERINGAY

This M'selle Mimi – is she a lady mi lord?

RICHARD

Indubitably.

FOTHERINGAY

And have you enquired as to her name and antecedents?

RICHARD

Why should I? But I say Fotheringay, she knows all about cricket, all the terms

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even a leg glance and she rides a hunter. M'sieu Peter not in yet?

FOTHERINGAY

No mi lord.

RICHARD

It's my belief he's pursuing Madame Desiree for more than information – never seen a man so smitten.

FOTHERINGAY

Who would not be so! I do wish I could remember where or when I have seen her.

RICHARD

She is quite well known Fotheringay – travelled all over Europe and America. You've probably seen a poster of her. Anyway I'm for bye bye. Night old pal.

FOTHERINGAY

Night mi lord.

DESIREE

I have had a most enjoyable tête à tête with you Peter, I had forgotten how much I could enjoy myself and I thank you so very much.

PETER

You know, you have told me nothing of yourself or your career Desiree. Your years in the theatre must have given you a wide knowledge of other performers and it is my object to trace a performer, probably not well known and who would have been around say twenty years ago.

DESIREE

Twenty years is a long time ago – who was this person?

PETER

Her name – and she could have married and changed it – was Louise Duplex.

DESIREE

That name! So your object in inviting me to dine was to obtain information. Well I am sorry your effort has been wasted. Louise Duplex is dead.

PETER

Wasted effort! No! No! Desiree – this has been an enchanted evening and I...

DESIREE

Release me, release me, you go too fast for me – we have only just met.

PETER

Cherie! Cherie! I must tell you – je – I must say it in English.

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SONG: Darling, Je Vous Aime Beaucoup

DESIREE

This is ridiculous, I am not some, some Solange, available for a night's entertainment – just because I am a stage performer. I take leave to inform you m'sieu that I am a lady of unimpeachable virtue and you have insulted me.

PETER

What have I done, or said to anger you so? My darling Desiree – I am not trying to – I mean – I want you to be my wife, to marry me.

DESIREE

Marry you! You are suffering from le grand mal – we have met for but a few hours.

PETER

I adore you, and yes I am sick with love for you. I have never before loved any woman.

DESIREE

At your age – never been in love! M'sieu!

PETER

In and out of love a dozen times but never loved, there is a difference, this feeling makes a fella – well! I am proposing not a liaison but marriage.

DESIREE

Please – I misunderstood – don't be so dejected Peter. I don't know anything about you and I have commitments.

PETER

Who is he?

DESIREE

Not a man. I am, how do you say? Bewildered.

PETER

Give me the opportunities for you to get to know me, all about me, and all I ask is that you consider my proposal and give me your answer at the end of your season with The Folies.

DESIREE

On the last night of the season you shall have my answer, I promise.

PETER

Come my love, I will take you home.

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CHERIE

Another performance over and I go to dine with Dicky Bellendon. I wish it was at a café other than Les Deux Magots and without Solange around.

SALLIE

Why Mimi! I do believe you've taken a shine to Lord Gigolo.

CHERIE

Oh la la! Your French expressions Sallie! He is certainly not a gigolo. Do you think he will notice that I'm wearing a new dress?

SALLIE

What man ever notices a woman's dress – he'll just look into your big blue eyes and drown.

CHERIE

Silly! But he is so very *comme il faut* (*pronounced: ko-mel-fo*). Come along or your handsome Bobby will be wilting away.

SALLIE

I thought that gaining some polish and performing in The Folies was the height of my ambition but now – well we all have silly dreams.

CHERIE

Desiree dreams of me being famous like her and for her sake I pretend, but though I love Paris I am so much happier living in the country. Ah well *c'est la vie* and tonight is ours.

Exit centre

PETER

Hello Bobby – how's business?

BOBBY

Say Pete, business is booming, had to engage extra waiters. I have your table ready.

RICHARD

An extra chair Bobby – for Fotheringay – my valet de chambre – general factotum and dear old friend.

BOBBY

And Madame Desiree and the two young ladies – they are coming?

RICHARD

To Bobby

You're blushing old bean – yes they're coming – Fifi or is it Sallie? Will be here.

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Where is Solange?

BOBBY

The apache number has just finished – try her dressing room.

PETER

It's time that affair was nipped in the bud.

FOTHERINGAY

Otherwise I fear that mi lord may be so nipped by Decoupeur. May I enquire if your meeting with Madame Desiree yielded any information?

PETER

She certainly understands English and speaks it, she declared Louise Dupleix dead so we can check for a death certificate. I can't understand why she became so agitated at my enquiry. She still thinks I don't understand French which is an advantage I wish I didn't have to use.

FOTHERINGAY

Perhaps we are looking for information in the wrong quarter. You may recall my visits to Paris with mi lord's father? I think it is time to renew acquaintance with some old friends who had – er – theatrical interests embodied in patronage of the arts so to speak.

PETER

One of these days I'd like to hear the history of your life Fotheringay!

FOTHERINGAY

There have been moments M'sieu Peter.

PETER

Here comes Richard looking like a thundercloud too!

FOTHERINGAY

And Decoupeur glaring at mi lord in a manner that bodes ill. Did you find the young person mi lord?

RICHARD

I certainly did – in the embrace of that – that butcher.

SONG: Paper Doll

CHERIE

Hello Dicky! Is anything wrong? You look so downcast.

RICHARD

She – Solange, threw me over for that animated magot.

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CHERIE

Are you broken-hearted Dicky?

RICHARD

Oh no! Just wounded pride, I'm mad at myself for being such a fool, she's been using me to make that hooligan jealous.

CHERIE

At moments like this you've just got to keep your pecker up Dicky.

RICHARD

But that's the motto I adopted from Fotheringay.

CHERIE

Who is Fotheringay?

RICHARD

My man, butler, in charge of everything at home, always been with us. He would like to meet you I know, you've such...

CHERIE

Why are you staring at me so?

RICHARD

You have such beautiful eyes.

CHERIE

Have I?

RICHARD

And you're such jolly good company. It's such a balmy night, would you care for a stroll along the banks of the Seine?

CHERIE

Oh yes – you can tell me all about your home and cricket.

RICHARD

I wasn't intending to talk about cricket. So a stroll and then a ride in a fiacre through the park.

CHERIE

And dancing?

RICHARD

And supper – we're going to have an absolutely rippin' time Mimi.

CHERIE

Mimi is only a stage name, my real name is Cerise (*pronounced: Sa-rizz*).

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RICHARD

What a pretty name for such a pretty girl – let's scoot out of here.

Exit

SALLIE

I thought Mimi would be here.

BOBBY

C'est l'amour – she left with Dicky Bellendon.

SALLIE

I saw you at The Folies tonight Bobby.

BOBBY

Came to see you Sal. Why so sad?

SALLIE

It is now only a month to the end of the season, already the leaves are falling at the approach of autumn and then I shall be going back to the States – parting with all my friends, looking for work...

BOBBY

Not all your friends, and I have a job in mind for you. Sallie, we have a whole month to be together so let's get going – now.

Exit

PETER

Fotheringay, do something about getting Dicky's faucet fixed, it's – are you feeling alright?

FOTHERINGAY

Faucet – Fawcett – that's where I saw her, waiting at the church.

RICHARD

Hello Peter! Who was waiting at the church?

FOTHERINGAY

Madame Desiree – she might have been your stepmother.

PETER

His what?

RICHARD

My stepmother?

FOTHERINGAY

Fawcett mi lord.

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RICHARD

But I am Richard Fawcett Bellendon.

FOTHERINGAY

Exactly!

PETER

This is no time for riddles, what has Dicky got to do with Desiree?

FOTHERINGAY

Mi lord Richard was barely two when his mother died. Several years later his Papa – Lord Percy – and myself came to Paris, he had not at that time succeeded to the title so he was Percy Fawcett. I knew he had formed an attachment to a young French lady but he wanted his Papa's approval and until that was obtained would not reveal her name to me or anyone. Meanwhile the lady had gone to inform her relatives of her intentions.

PETER

Not Desiree – no not Desiree!

RICHARD

This is all news to me – never thought mi father had so much go.

FOTHERINGAY

Your Papa made all the arrangements convinced of his Papa's approval. He and the lady were to inspect the church on the day of her return. Alas! The day before that meeting your Papa made an unexpected visit to her apartment where he found –

PETER

What! What did he find?

FOTHERINGAY

A bonne – a nurse with a little baby. When he asked to whom the baby belonged, she replied “to my mistress of course”. Devastated he wrote asking for an explanation. I was to watch for the young lady and see that the letter was delivered to her. I gave the letter to a young boy and saw it put into her hands. She never replied and disappeared from Paris leaving no trace to follow. Your Papa returned home, but I never forget a face and that lady was Madame Desiree.

PETER

So that is her mysterious commitment – a child, how old?

FOTHERINGAY

Now about twenty years of age.

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RICHARD

Boy or girl?

FOTHERINGAY

That I am unable to answer.

RICHARD

Was it – was it?

FOTHERINGAY

Certainly not – your Papa was in Paris for only three months.

PETER

Not one word has Desiree even hinted at, how could she so deceive one!

RICHARD

Tit-for-tat old boy – de Chanteclair becoming Mr Crower.

PETER

Throughout this last month we have been barely separated and tomorrow night ends her season with The Folies when she promised me an answer to my proposal.

RICHARD

Well I'm pretty sure it will be yes because Cerise tells me that Desiree is...

PETER

What did you say?

RICHARD

Because Mimi, I mean Cerise, told me...

PETER

Oh you idiot! You English never learning any language other than your own – Cerise is a French Cherry.

RICHARD

Cherry! You can't mean the Cherry!

PETER

What is her – Mimi – Cherry – oh bother – what is her surname?

RICHARD

Never asked her – would have done when I asked her to marry me.

PETER

So the wind blows in that quarter, well she is a lovely girl Dicky.

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RICHARD

Confound it – I'm certainly playing on a sticky wicket – bowled out by a real bouncer – how can I propose, she'll think it's for her money.

FOTHERINGAY

But she doesn't yet know that she has any money, and if I may be so bold you gentlemen have missed the point. If, as I believe, Madame Desiree is the jilted lady then Madame Desiree – must be Louise Dupleix.

PETER

Too simple and explanation – unless –

RICHARD

When was mi father in Paris?

FOTHERINGAY

Twenty years ago, 1907 to be exact.

PETER

And the Sargents killed in 1916, so who did that baby belong to?

RICHARD

You can't think that Louise or Desiree if it is she, passed off her child as her sister's?

PETER

No! No, I won't believe that.

RICHARD

Well there is one way to find out – ask her.

PETER

Not tonight – I'll wait until tomorrow night to catch her at a moment unawares.

Exit

CHERIE

Have you seen Sallie? She hasn't been around all day and slipped off as soon as our number was over, she's been giggling and bubbling and all she would say was that she would meet us at Les Deux Magots later on.

DESIREE

Cherie – you are meeting Dicky, yes!

CHERIE

Yes – oh yes ma tante, I don't want to hurt you but I do not want a stage career and I think that Dicky...

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DESIREE

Is going to propose? Ma petite, your happiness and security are all I ever wanted for you so go with my blessing. After all you have seen each other every day for over a month so you must be very sure of your affection.

CHERIE

I could say the same of you and a certain M'sieur Crower.

DESIREE

Cheeky one – but your news has made an important decision for me. I have promised Peter my answer to his proposal on this, the final night of The Folies.

CHERIE

You didn't tell me that he had proposed, darling Desiree – I am so happy, you deserve all the happiness in the world. But hurry, you have only a few minutes to making your entrance, I will be waiting for you to come off stage.

Exit

DESIREE

Peter! This is an unexpected pleasure but I am due on stage almost at once.

PETER

Desiree – what was your connection with Percy Fawcett and to whom did that child belong? I demand an explanation.

DESIREE

Percy Fawcett! How do you know of this?

PETER

Percy was the father of Richard Fawcett Bellendon and his man, Fotheringay, was entrusted with the letter delivered to you at the church. He never forgets a face and finally remembered where he had seen you and told us your story. I demand to know if you are Louise Duplex.

DESIREE

You demand, you demand, and so yes I am Louise Duplex, what is that to you m'sieur!

PETER

And the baby?

DESIREE

There is the door m'sieur, and if you do not leave immediately I will have you escorted out – my past life is not your affair.

PETER

Desiree, listen, I –

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DESIREE

Go! Go! Out! Out!

Exit Peter

How dare he demand – and Percy Fawcett, a name forgotten for years, come back to haunt me on a night such as this. Oh Peter, how could you think... my call – and my answer to Peter – so different now:

SONG: Love's Last Word Is Spoken Cherie

SOLANGE

M'sieu! M'sieu! Where is Richard – please, please?

PETER

He has just arrived.

SOLANGE

You must hurry, hurry, they will move her and I don't know where.

RICHARD

Steady on Solange! Hurry for what?

SOLANGE

They have kidnapped M'selle Mimi they say she is very rich and worth a lot of money.

RICHARD

Who are they?

SOLANGE

The American gangster - Velvet Joe they name him - and Decoupeur helped, he thought it was a joke but that man has a gun – oh help my lover please.

PETER

Velvet Joe must have got wind of the inheritance and followed us here.

RICHARD

That fella – you said didn't exist.

FOTHERINGAY

I overhead m'selle – where have they taken M'selle Mimi?

RICHARD

My lovely Cherry wrested from me. Where Solange? Where?

SOLANGE

That Velvet Joe has her in the cellar with my lover.

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PETER

Solange, lead us to the cellars – quietly now.

RICHARD

Fotheringay – break down the door.

PETER

It will take the three of us to do that.

FOTHERINGAY

I promised you that I would be your belt M'sieu de Chanteclair.

RICHARD

He is a black belt karate expert – watch him.

PETER

Grab the villains – Fotheringay, hold his other arm, take his gun.

RICHARD

My darling Cerise – you are safe now I promise you.

CHERIE

One moment – take that you meat carver – and that, you villain.

RICHARD

How splendid – what a wonderful lady Bellendon you will be.

CHERIE

Oh Dicky!

RICHARD

Why, he was one of the new waiters, didn't recognise him without his hat.

SOLANGE

Don't hurt my lover.

VELVET JOE

If I go down, he goes with me.

RICHARD

Take him and vanish – go to Australia or Argentina and forget Paris.

Exit

PETER

Now we can go back upstairs.

DESIREE

Cerise, Cerise, Cherie ma petite what has happened to you?

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CHERIE

They came to my dressing room and bound and gagged me – Decoupeur say it was a joke but that Velvet Joe said I was an heiress and worth a big ransom – I tried to tell them I am only a poor working girl.

PETER

And so you are worth a very big ransom – if you are indeed Cherry Sargent and the legitimate child of the late Gerald Sargent and his wife Marie Sargent née Duplex.

CHERIE

But they were my parents weren't they tante Desiree?

RICHARD

Were they madame?

DESIREE

Of course they were.

PETER

And who was the mother of the baby Percy Fawcett saw in your apartment?

DESIREE

Marie Sargent, my sister who had returned to Paris with me to meet Percy.

RICHARD

Always thought mi father had more hair than wit.

PETER

Cherry Sargent, you and Dicky are co-legatees of Alicia Vance, Dicky's great aunt and the wife of your great uncle on your father's side.

CHERIE

Dicky, we're somehow related.

RICHARD

Going to be related much more closely – at least, now that you are a millionairess well!

DESIREE

A millionairess! And I have been worrying about your future.

CHERIE

Dicky will take care of my future.

RICHARD

And I won't be jilting you at the church like mi father did to Desiree.

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CHERIE

Your father and my aunt Desiree!

PETER

The trouble with your aunt is that she never lets a fella finish a conversation – Desiree I came tonight to tell you that all I wanted was to establish Cherry's identity – I didn't care whether you were her mother.

DESIREE

Her mother – you thought I could be her mother, oh you...

RICHARD

Now, now, listen to me. M'sieu Pierre de Chanteclair is from New Orleans, Louisiana, and executor of great aunt Alicia's estate, actually he is French and lives in France most of the year.

DESIREE

But why Mr Crower – why the deception?

PETER

A long story and a lifetime in which to tell it to you. You promised me an answer, I beg you for it now.

DESIREE

You beg? Ah when you beg I give you everything – but never, never demand. My love – yes – I mean oui ma Cherie, je vous aimee.

SALLIE

Go on Bobby – my friends we have an announcement to make, Cherie you said l'amour was all the French thought about and I guess it's in the air because –

BOBBY

Meet Mrs Robert Hilton – we were married this morning.

GIRLS

Now we're no longer ladies in waiting.

PETER

I can only add that I'm positively crowing with happiness.

FOTHERINGAY

As mi old father used to say, all you have to do is keep your pecker up and keep trying.

FINALE: Louise

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