

(MAN)

You hear that static? I love that sound. To me, it's the sound of a time machine starting up.

The overture begins.

#1 – Overture

Alright now, let's visualize. Imagine if you will, it's November 1928. You've just arrived at the doors of the Morosco Theatre in New York. It's very cold — remember when it used to be cold in November? Not anymore. November's the new August now. It's global warming — we're all doomed — anyway... It's very cold and a heavy grey sleet is falling from the sky but you don't care because you're going to see a Broadway show! Listen!

(He settles back and listens for a moment)

Isn't this wonderful?

(He listens)

It helps if you close your eyes.

(He listens)

A kettle on the stove begins to whistle. MAN runs over to the stove and dances while he makes himself a cup of tea.

Overtures. Overtures are out of style now. I miss them. It's the show's way of welcoming you. "Hello, welcome. The meal will be served shortly, but in the meantime, would you like an appetizer?" That's what an overture is, a musical appetizer. A Pu-pu platter of tunes, if you will.

(He listens)

Oh! Something new! What could it be? Sounds like a dance tune. Kind of rollicking. Maybe involving pirates! Don't worry. There are no pirates.

He runs back to his chair as the music segues from a mono recording to a live orchestra.

Now. Here it comes. The moment when the music starts to build and you know you're only seconds away from being transported.

The overture builds to its conclusion.

The curtain is going up. I can't wait!

#1a – Opening Scene

ALL

A WEDDING, A WEDDING
A WEDDING'S COMING OUR WAY
A WEDDING, A WEDDING, TODAY
DING-A-LING, DING-A-LING, DING-A-LING
IT'S REALLY HAPPENING
TRULY HAPPENING
ALMOST HAPPENING
SURELY HAPPENING

MAN

Well there you have it, all the guests have arrived. We have a bride who's giving up the stage for love, her debonair bridegroom, a harried producer, jovial gangsters posing as pastry chefs, a flaky chorine, a Latin lothario, and an aviatrix; what we now call a lesbian. And, of course, my favorite character, the Drowsy Chaperone. What more do you need for an evening's entertainment?

He turns up the volume.

ALL

WEDDING BELLS WILL RING!
WEDDING BELLS WILL CHIME!
WEDDING BELLS WILL CELEBRATE
A HAPPY WEDDING TIME
WEDDING BELLS WILL DING
WEDDING BELLS WILL DONG
WEDDING BELLS WILL DING-A-LING
AND WE WILL DING
ALONG!

TRIX

HOW I LOVE
LOVE A WEDDING
YES I LOVE
LOVE A WEDDING
AH!
LISTEN TO THOSE BELLS
WE WILL DING
ALONG!

MAN

Wasn't that wonderful! "And we will ding-a-long"; I don't even know what that means! Alright, I'll lead you through this record as best I can. Don't worry; it won't be hard to follow. So, we begin with a welcome from the love struck groom.

ALL Laugh

ROBERT

Well, I just wanted to thank you all for coming. I tell you I must be some lucky fellow. Why, who would have thought that I, Robert Martin, would be marrying a glamorous showgirl, and that that glamorous showgirl would be willing to give up a successful career for me, Robert Martin.

ALL

Oh!

ROBERT

Now, if it weren't for prohibition, I'd say let's raise a glass -

DROWSY

(*Drowsy raises a glass*)

Here! Here!

ROBERT

-to Miss Janet Van De Graaff—the most beautiful girl in the world.

GEORGE

Absolutely not!

ALL

(*gasp!*)

ROBERT

Excuse me?

GEORGE

The groom mustn't see his bride on the day of the wedding. It's bad luck!

MAN

I hope you heard that, because that's the plot. Basically. Hang on for the ride!

UNDERLING

Breakfast will be served in the Arabian Room.

GEORGE

(*to CHAPERONE*)

Say, It's a little early in the day to be drinking, isn't it?

DROWSY

I don't understand the question.

GEORGE

Look. You keep Janet away from Robert, you understand? You're the chaperone that's your only job.

DROWSY

Aye, Aye Mon Capitan.

JANET

Oh, Robert! Who's my little monkey?

ROBERT

I am! I'm your little monkey.

JANET and ROBERT exit.

MAN

So, the Bride and Groom are whisked away, and we turn our attention to the B plot which involves the Producer.

KITTY

Mr. Feldzieg?

FELDZIEG

Getting married and leaving show business.

KITTY

Mr. Feldzieg?

FELDZIEG

Doesn't she know I got obligations?

KITTY

Mr. Feldzieg, I can be your leading lady. You said it yourself—I'm useless in the chorus.

FELDZIEG

Kitty! For the last time, you ain't got what it takes.

KITTY

But, I been taking lessons; Singing. Acting. Ballet.

FELDZIEG

Ballet?

KITTY

Yeah. I'm pretty good too. Last week I auditioned for Swanee Lake.

MAN

A little annotation; Kitty and Feldzieg were a couple in real life. Jack and Sadie Adler. Now, this a familiar comic construct: a stupid woman and her long suffering companion. Well, she appears stupid, but in the end she does something clever and makes everyone wonder whether it's all just an act. The irony here is that Sadie actually was quite stupid; Jack had to explain all the jokes to her apparently. But, still, she had a wonderful career on the stage. At that time, the theatre was the only place where stupid people could earn a decent living. This was before television, of course.

FELDZIEG

Kitty I don't have time for this!

Enter Gangster #1 & Gangster #2

GANGSTER #1

A petite four, Mr. Feldzieg?

FELDZIEG

Not now.

Gangster #2 stops him.

GANGSTER #2

Perhaps a nice profiterole.

FELDZIEG

Boys, I'm not hungry.

GANGSTER #1

Then perhaps we could give you something else to chew on.

GANGSTER #2

Yeah. Something that ain't food.

FELDZIEG

What?

GANGSTER #1

Your confusion is to be expected. Although we stand here before you in the guise of innocent pastry chefs, we are also—

GANGSTER #2

and primarily—

GANGSTER #1

—employees of a certain individual.

FELDZIEG

A certain individual?

GANGSTER #2

A certain individual...

GANGSTER #1

...who happens to be largest single investor in Feldzieg's Follies. He has sent us here—

GANGSTER #2

As pastry chefs...

GANGSTER #1

... to express his concern about Ms. Van de Graaff's impending nuptials.

GANGSTER #2

Specifically...

GANGSTER #1

...that if she gets married and leaves the show...

GANGSTER #1 & GANGSTER #2

...then there ain't no show.

KITTY

(*to the Gangsters*)

Say, don't I know you?

GANGSTER #2

No, you don't.

KITTY

Have you ever spent any time in Toledo?

GANGSTER #1

Have you ever spent any time in a coma?

KITTY

No, but I have a cousin in Seattle.

FELDZIEG

Kitty. Boys, you tell your boss this wedding is never going to happen. You have my word.

GANGSTER #2

Oh, we'll take your word, alright.

GANGSTER #1

But, to go back on that word — would be a recipe for disaster.
Now, we hope we have made ourselves perfectly Èclair.

GANGSTER #2

One cannoli hope.

GANGSTER #1

You biscotti be kidding me.

GANGSTER #2

A trifle much?

GANGSTER #1

Don't tart with me.

FELDZIEG

Alright. You can drop the pastry chef routine.

GANGSTER #1

Alas, we ganache.

GANGSTER #2

We're on the lamb.

GANGSTER #1

(slapping him)

Lamb's an entrée, you macaroon.

#2b - Macaroons!

Kitty takes a pastry. Gangster #1 & Gangster #2 curtsey.

MAN

The gangsters were played by interchangeable vaudeville duo the Tall Brothers: John and Peter Tall. They were born Abram and Mendel Moslowskowicz, but were renamed at Ellis Island by a sarcastic immigration official. They were an early example of the typical Broadway gangster: full of word-play and stylized movements, not very intimidating. Unless you find dancers intimidating, which I do but for reasons that would not be appropriate to this situation.

GANGSTER #1

We'll leave the matter in your hands, Mr. Feldzieg. In the mean time, feel free to browse the desert carousel.

GANGSTER #2

Try the Toledo Surprise

GANGSTER #1 & GANGSTER #2

It's to die for.

Gangsters exit.

KITTY

Holy Cats, Mr. Feldzieg! They're Gangsters.

FELDZIEG

Very perceptive. Now go powder your face!

KITTY exits.

I've got to stop this wedding but how? Oh Lord in Heaven how! How?

MAN

I always thought that moment was a little overplayed. So with the story well on its way, let's go to the Groom's room.

SCENE 2: ROBERT'S ROOM—MORNING

#3 – *Robert's Entrance*

Robert is putting on his tux. He stares into the mirror and fumbles with his bow tie.

ROBERT

Hey there, handsome. Show me those pearly whites.

MAN

The groom was played by the dashing Percy Hyman. He started out as the All Bright toothpaste man. His fabulous smile adorned every tube. All Bright was hugely popular in the early twenties, because it contained cocaine. It's true. If you looked at the label it was the fifth ingredient down, right after 'sugar'. Anyway, it wasn't long before he became a huge matinee idol.

ROBERT

Now don't you worry. It's perfectly normal for a groom to be nervous on his wedding day. It is? Of course.

MAN

I love Percy Hyman. Now, some people say he was a bad actor, but to those people I say, "shut up".

#4 – *Cold Feet*

ROBERT

HEY THERE MISTER MIRROR MAN
SHAKIN' AND A'QUAKIN'
TREMLIN' LIKE DEM FRAIDY CATS DO
SOMETHIN' BIG BE BOTHERIN' YOU

You know what you got...

COLD FEET
COLD FEET
BROTHER YOU GOT COLD FEET
YOU CAN MAKE 'DEM COLD FEET HOT
WITH A LITTLE RHYTHM

YOUNG FEETS
OLD FEETS
CAN BE UNCONTROLLED FEETS
RHYTHM MAKE 'DEM COLD FEETS TROT

Aldolpho enters.

ALDOLPHO

La la la la la la -

MAN

In walks Aldolpho; self proclaimed ladies man. Aldolpho, is played by former silent film star and world-class alcoholic Roman Bartelli. He was the one who later drank himself to death at his Chateau in Nice, remember? It was five days before they found the body and by that time it had been partially consumed by his poodles? Well, he was only partially consumed.

FELDZIEG

Excuse me. I don't believe we've met.

ALDOLPHO

I am Aldolpho.

FELDZIEG

You are Aldolpho?

ALDOLPHO

Yes, I am Aldolpho

FELDZIEG

Not, the Aldolpho.

ALDOLPHO

Yes, I am Aldolpho.

FELDZIEG

Funny, you don't look like a scoundrel.

ALDOLPHO

Yes... What?

FELDZIEG

Why, just now I overheard the Groom saying that Aldolpho is a scoundrel. I just heard him say that.

ALDOLPHO

What? Aldolpho a scoundrel!

FELDZIEG

Those very words.

ALDOLPHO

Aldolpho is a scoundrel!

FELDZIEG

It's like I'm hearing it again.

ALDOLPHO

This is outrageous! He is saying this to peoples... to beautiful ladies, with breasts for making love. Why, I must... I must...

FELDZIEG

You must, you must take matters into your own hands.

ALDOLPHO

Yes, I must take-a this groom into my hands and kill him!

FELDZIEG

Yes. No. Don't kill him. Just hurt him enough so he can't get married.

ALDOLPHO

Show me to this groom. Wait.

FELDZIEG

What?

ALDOLPHO

What kind of man is this groom? A big man?

FELDZIEG

Well...

ALDOLPHO

A burly fellow?

FELDZIEG

Well, he's big on the outside—

ALDOLPHO

No. No. No. Aldolpho will not fight big men—small, pale, wheezy, little dwarf people that aldolpho can

(*mimes swinging a golf club*)
punt far away. But no big men!

FELDZIEG

So, you're a lover not a fighter.

ALDOLPHO

Yes, Aldolpho is a lover of beautiful ladies. Some say I am the King of Romance.

FELDZIEG

Well, you know what they say, the best way to get revenge on a man is through his...?

ALDOLPHO

Door!

FELDZIEG

No... The best way to get back at a man is through his...

ALDOLPHO

Window!

FELDZIEG

No... Revenge, back at a man... through his...

ALDOLPHO

Through his, there is no other ways!! I'm not Santa Claus coming down chimney.

FELDZIEG

Through his woman!!

ALDOLPHO

Ahh! Through his woman!!

FELDZIEG

Yes Aldolpho! You must seduce his woman!!

ALDOLPHO

His woman!

FELDZIEG

His bride!

ALDOLPHO

Aldolpho will make love to bride! That will show people Aldolpho is no scoundrel!
Show me to this bride! Wait!

FELDZIEG

What?

ALDOLPHO

What kind of woman is this bride? A big woman?

FELDZIEG

No...

ALDOLPHO

A burly woman?

FELDZIEG

No. She's the cat's pajamas.

ALDOLPHO

Pajamas?

FELDZIEG

She's a looker. An attractive woman!

ALDOLPHO

Ah! Show me to this cat in pajamas! Aldolpho will make her purrr-r.

FELDZIEG

Stop it.

ALDOLPHO

Like a cat in pajamas

FELDZIEG

Ahhhh!

Aldolpho and Feldzieg leave.

MAN

Roman Bartelli chewing the scenery. You certainly couldn't get away with a performance like that nowadays, could you. Mature contemporary audiences are too sophisticated to enjoy broad racial stereotypes on the stage, so we've banished them to Disney. Let the children sort it out.

#6c – Spit Take

SCENE 4: ENTRANCE HALL—AFTERNOON

Tottendale and Underling enter. Underling is carrying a tray with a single glass on it.

TOTTENDALE

Underling?

UNDERLING

Yes Madam.

TOTTENDALE

The Pastry Chefs have been kind enough to provide the liquor for the party, but remember Underling, we have to be discreet.

UNDERLING

Yes, madame.

TOTTENDALE

It is prohibition, after all.

UNDERLING

I'm aware of that, madame.

TOTTENDALE

We'll have to use code words. For instance, if someone asks for a glass of ice-water, it means they want a glass of vodka. Have you got that?

UNDERLING

Yes, madame.

TOTTENDALE

Are you sure? Maybe you should write it down.

UNDERLING

I understand, madam. A glass of ice-water is a glass of vodka.

TOTTENDALE

What's a glass of ice-water?

UNDERLING

Vodka.

TOTTENDALE

Ice water?

UNDERLING

Vodka.

TOTTENDALE

Ice -

UNDERLING

Vodka.

TOTTENDALE

Well, you see, that's settled then. One less thing to do. Underling, might I please have a glass of ice-water? I found our meeting with the pastry chefs rather trying and I would enjoy a glass of refreshing ice-water.

UNDERLING

Your ice-water madame.

He hands her a glass of water. She takes a sip and spits it in his face.

TOTTENDALE

That was pure vodka, you poop!

MAN

I hate this scene.

TOTTENDALE

Well, now I do need a glass of ice-water!

UNDERLING

A glass of "ice-water" madame?

TOTTENDALE

Yes, ice-water. Are you going deaf?

UNDERLING

Would that I were.

MAN

You can see where this is going can't you. It's really just a series of spit takes.

UNDERLING hands her the glass.

UNDERLING

Your "ice-water" madame.

She drink and spits it in his face.

TOTTENDALE

That was pure vodka, you poop!

MAN

You know, in some ways the Drowsy Chaperone was quite progressive. A black actress playing the Aviatrix, for instance.

UNDERLING

Your "ice-water" madame.

She drinks, and spits in his face again.

TOTTENDALE

That was pure vodka, you poop!

MAN

Yes, some elements were quite progressive, others were stale in 1928, you know what? I'm going to skip ahead.

TOTTENDALE

(spit)

That was -

(spit)

That -

(spit)

That -

(3 head takes)

- poop!

Where do you think you're going?

UNDERLING

To find some lime juice, madam.

TOTTENDALE

Lime juice? For heaven's sake why?

UNDERLING

I'm going to wring out my eye brows and make myself a gimlet.

MAN

(mopping the stage)

Now, you're probably asking yourself, "what was that routine doing in the show?" Well, it's very simple: there's a song coming up, and they needed something to allow for the set change. It's mechanics. It's like pornography. Let me explain what I meant by that. In pornography the story is simplistic - "how do I pay for this pizza" being the classic example. My point is, as in a musical, the story exists only to connect the longer, more engaging... production numbers. What? Well, what kind of a society do we live in if we can't discuss the similarities between pornography and musical theatre?

SCENE 5: JANET'S BRIDAL SUITE—AFTERNOON**JANET***(looking in the mirror)*

In a few hours I'm going to be Mrs. Robert Martin. Oh, my head is spinning.

MAN pulls down the Murphy bed revealing a longing DROWSY. She has an empty glass in her hand.

DROWSY

Yes, life is a mad whirlwind.

MAN

This is a really interesting scene. This is the only time in the show that Jane Roberts and Beatrice Stockwell are alone together on stage. Jane Roberts was a emerging star, but Beatrice Stockwell was already well established and a force to contend with.

JANET

I'm so full of apprehension, but I suppose that's normal, considering the circumstances. Have you ever been married, Chaperone?

DROWSY

No. I drink for pleasure, not out of necessity.

UNDERLING enters.

UNDERLING

Your "ice water" madam. I'm afraid we're fresh out of olives.

JANET

Have you ever been married Underling?

UNDERLING

Heavens no madam. If I'm going to serve a woman I prefer to be paid for my efforts.

UNDERLING exits.

JANET

Oh you two. I know it seems crazy to give up a successful career to marry a man I hardly know, but somehow, for some reason when I look into his eyes... his big, monkey eyes...ah gee... I get all woozy. And that's love isn't it?

DROWSY

Not necessarily. The wooziness could be caused by any number of things. I mean, I'm woozy right now and I'm certainly not in love.

MAN

Now, Beatrice Stockwell was famous for her rousing anthems. She entertained and inspired the troops in every major world conflict up to and including the Falklands war. Of course, by that time she was in her late eighties and her anthems didn't so

(DROWSY)

AS WE STUMBLE, BUMBLE, FUMBLE...
PLUMBLE
AS WE STUMBLE ALONG

MAN

Don't you just love her?

#7a - Stumble Playoff

Basically, she sings a rousing anthem about alcoholism. That's what I love about her. She just does her own thing, when she wants, regardless of the needs and concerns of others. My mother was like that.

JANET

Well, that was quite inspiring, chaperone. But, I'm still conflicted. Oh. Please. Just tell me. Is Robert the man for me?

DROWSY

My dear, that's something you'll have to decide for yourself.

JANET

But, I just don't know if he loves me.

DROWSY

Why don't you ask him? Why don't you say, "Roger, do you love me?"

JANET

It's Robert. And I'm not allowed to see him. In fact, it's your job to keep me away from him.

DROWSY

You're right. And I take the responsibility very seriously. However, I'm just this moment feeling terribly, terribly drowsy. I'm afraid I have to have a lie-de-down. Now whatever you do, don't go wandering through the garden seeking out your fiancé to ask him the question upon which your future happiness depends.

The Chaperone reclines, and closes her eyes.

JANET

Oh, thank you, Chaperone. I just have to know if he loves me.

Janet sneaks out.

DROWSY

Such a skinny little fool. Still, I envy her. Oh, when will love come crashing though my door?

ALDOLPHO enters

ALDOLPHO

La la la la la.

MAN

Look who it is! It's Aldolpho come to seduce the bride.

ALDOLPHO

I am Aldolpho!

MAN

Try not to think of the poodles while you're listening to this part.

ALDOLPHO

I am Aldolpho. And you are bride.

DROWSY

No, I am not.

ALDOLPHO

Whaaat? This is bridal suite, you are the only one here. Therefore you must be bride.

DROWSY

Interesting argument, but I'm afraid you are a moron.

ALDOLPHO

Whaaat?

DROWSY

Me—no—bride. Perhaps I could take a message.

ALDOLPHO

Yes, very good... Dear Van De Graaff bride, I must make love to you, and transport you to the place of ecstacy, sooner is better, signed Aldolpho, King of Romance.

DROWSY

Well, you saw through my little ruse. You've found me out.

ALDOLPHO

Ahh, so you are the bride.

DROWSY

Apparently, yes. Take me, Aldollface.

ALDOLPHO

No, no, no, not Aldollface—Aldolpho. You must remember my name for when we are making love and you are screaming you must say the right name or it will spoil everything. How can I make you remember?

SCENE 6: TOTTENDALE'S GARDEN—AFTERNOON

ROBERT

I'M AN ACCIDENT WAITING TO HAPPEN
LA DA DA DA DA DA DA DA DA

Janet enters

JANET

Robert, look out!

ROBERT

Don't worry, madam. I'm getting married today, so I have to wear a blindfold.

JANET

A blindfold?

ROBERT

I'm sorry. Who am I speaking to anyhow?

JANET

Why, it's me. I mean... Mimi. Mimi from France.

MAN

This scene couldn't be more ridiculous.

JANET

So, you are marrying Janet Van De Graaff, non?

ROBERT

Oui.

JANET

I hear she's very beautiful.

ROBERT

Oui.

JANET

And glamourous.

ROBERT

Ahh, oui. Oui.

JANET

Is it true that she has an exceptionally broad range and excels at playing both comedic and dramatic roles?

ROBERT

Say, I'm having trouble placing your accent. What part of France are you from?

JANET

Oh... the middle part... where they make the... toast. You were telling me about your, how do you say it in English; fiance?

ROBERT

That's right.

JANET

Well, tell me, when was the moment when you knew that she was the only one for you.

ROBERT

It's a funny story, actually. We were standing on the Lido deck of the Isle de France—

JANET

Yes?

ROBERT

I was amusing her with stories of my father's oil interests—

JANET

And then what happened?

ROBERT

I looked into her eyes, her big glamorous eyes, and I felt all woozie—

JANET

And then you fell! Uh... and then you fell?

ROBERT

Yes. Right on my keister. And I said, "well, I guess I don't have my sea legs yet".

JANET

(lost in the moment)

But we haven't left the dock.

ROBERT

That's what she said. And that's when I knew it must be love.

JANET

And then you said...?

ROBERT

And then I said...

#9 – Accident Waiting To Happen

THERE WAS A TIME I COULD STOP ON A DIME
FORBEARANCE WAS ONE OF MY TALENTS

SCENE 9: INTERMISSION MONOLOGUE

The curtain falls. The man remains on stage.

MAN

And that's that. The curtain falls, and it's time for the intermission. At least it would be, if we were actually sitting in the Morosco Theatre watching The Drowsy Chaperone, which of course, we are not. I don't like intermissions. They ruin the magic, you know? They yank you back into reality. One moment you're lost in a glamorous world of music and romance, and then, bang, you're surrounded by tourists. Crinkling candy wrappers and nattering about the lack of women's restrooms. It's cruel.

(takes out a Powerbar and starts eating)

Oh, it's a Powerbar. I have a bit of a blood sugar issue. I have to eat small meals all day long or I get jittery. I know it's rude, but you wouldn't like the alternative believe you me. Believe you me.

(he changes the record)

I remember my wedding day. I didn't eat breakfast and the ceremony wasn't until four in the afternoon. Aaaah! I do, I do! Are you surprised that I was married? Well, there you are: you shouldn't go making assumptions about people, should you? I'm a very complicated person. I have to pee now. I'll be quick, I promise, and while I'm gone, you can listen to the beginning of Act two.

(disappears behind the curtain)

SCENE 16: WRAP UP**MAN**

Well that's it: it's ruined. One note away from the end of the show and the mood is broken.

(pause)

I should just start the record again from the beginning. No. I can't do that, can I? Oh, it's so frustrating. You have to understand, I love this show so much. And I've never even seen it. My mother gave me the record. This was just before my father left us. Oh, he didn't leave because of the record, although I'm sure it didn't help matters. Look I know it's not a perfect show; the spit take scene is lame and the monkey motif is labored. But none of that matters. It does what a musical is supposed to do: it takes you to another world. And it gives you a little tune to carry with in your head, you know? A little something to help you escape from the dreary horrors of the real world. A little something for when you're feeling blue. You know?

#19 – *Finale Ultimo*

AS WE STUMBLE ALONG
ON LIFE'S FUNNY JOURNEY
AS WE STUMBLE ALONG
INTO THE BLUE

Possible gag: Tottendale begins strumming a ukulele on the word "BLUE."

WE LOOK HERE AND WE LOOK THERE
SEEKING ANSWERS ANYWHERE
NEVER SURE OF WHERE TO TURN OR WHAT TO DO

ROBERT

I'M AN ACCIDENT WAITING TO HAPPEN

The company joins him on stage, they join in.

MAN
STILL WE BUMBLE OUR WAY

JANET
I DON'T WANT TO SING TUNES NO MORE

MAN
THROUGH LIFE'S CRAZY LABYRINTH

GEORGE
WEDDING BELLS WILL RING
WEDDING BELLS WILL CHIME