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Yankee Doodle Dandy

By Robert Buckner

I call it a hit.

What'll your review say?

- I like it too, so I guess I'll pan it.

- That's logical.

My publisher resents Cohan

impersonating the president of the U.S.

Says our young readers dream

of being president.

"I'd rather be right than be president."

Cohan may find out he isn't either one.

- See how George does it at his age.

- I remember him when I was little.

Congratulations, George, old boy.

You did a great job.

- Thanks.

- Congratulations, Mr. Cohan.

- You had him down to a tee.

- But we're still on dangerous ground.

Imitating the president,

a lot of people won't like it.

It's good, clean fun.

Didn't they enjoy it in Boston?

Never could do anything wrong in Boston.

Greatest man in the U.S. Played by the

greatest actor. Nothing wrong with that.

Especially when the greatest actor

is my husband.

- This could be treason.

- A dollar-a-year man will take care of you.

A lot of them would like

to shoot actors.

Save these telegrams.

Government needs paper.

You've got a list with everybody

but Hirohito.

- We'll bring him in.

- Here's the one I sent.

- Will you read our cleverness?

- What makes you think I didn't?

I didn't know there was that much love left

in the entire Western Union codebook.

Hold that. Thank you. Thank you.

- Don't bother me.

- It's from the White House.

- Well, that bothers me.

- Here.

You read it.

These aren't my reading glasses.

"George M. Cohan,

The Alvin Theater, New York.

The president requests that you call
upon him at your earliest convenience...

...in regard to a personal matter.

Kindly reply for definite appointment
at White House.

Stephen T. Early,
secretary to the president."

There you are, Sam.

There you are. What did I tell you?

Coming at a time like this,
with everything on his mind...

...this is not just a casual invitation.

This is important.

- I think we're in trouble.

- Don't worry.

They don't telegraph you
to come and be shot at sunrise.

- He doesn't get up that early.

- I've got a run-of-the-play contract.

Fine time to make lame jokes.

I'm worried, Sam.

I'm really worried.

Halt!

- What can I do for you?

- I've got an appointment.

- The name, please?

- Cohan. George M. Cohan.

All right, sir. If you'll wait
just one moment, I'll call.

This is Sgt. Lewis
at the Pennsylvania Avenue gate...

- Good evening, Mr. Cohan.

- Good evening.

- We've been expecting you.

- Thank you.

Why, your coat's wet.

- Didn't you come in a car?

- No, I walked up from the station.

Washington's a great town to walk in.
Always get a kick out of it.
Yes, indeed.
Won't you come with me?
I was supposed to be off duty
this evening, Mr. Cohan...
...but when I heard you was coming, I
thought I'd like to see if you look the same.
- That depends on when you saw me last.
- It must have been 30-some years ago.
I was valet for Teddy Roosevelt.
He got me a seat up in the gallery.
The play was George Washington Jr...
...and you was just singing and dancing
all about the grand old flag.
Mr. Teddy used to sing it in his bathtub.
- It was a good old song in its day.
- It was.
And it's just as good today
as it ever was.
Come in.
Well, hello there.
How's my double?
Your double isn't too sure.
Give me time to work on that.
- I was told you knew all the answers.
- There was a time when I thought so.
- Right now, I wish I did.
- Yes, so do I.
- Sit down, Mr. Cohan.
- Thanks.
You know, I'm a little bit nervous.
- I'm sorry I missed the opening of your show.
- Maybe just as well.
Don't worry about it.
We understand each other perfectly.
I think so.
Herald Tribune says that you make a better
president in I'd Rather Be Right than I am.
Don't forget,
that's a Republican newspaper.
I can remember you and your family
very well. The Four Cohans.
Do you really?

That's a long time ago.
Yes. It was while I was
attending school near Boston.
I was a pretty cocky kid those days.
Pretty cocky kid.
A regular Yankee Doodle Dandy.
Always carrying a flag in a parade.
- I hope you haven't outgrown the habit.
- Not a chance.
That's one thing I always admired
about you Irish-Americans.
You carry your love of country like a flag,
right out in the open. A great quality.
I inherited that.
I got that from my father.
He ran away to the Civil War at 13. Proudest
kid in the whole state of Massachusetts.
So you've spent your life telling the
other 47 states what a great country it is.
I never thought of it that way before,
but that's about the size of it.
And I lost no time either.
It started with a very funny incident
about 60 years ago.
It was in Providence, Rhode Island,
on the 4th of July.
There weren't so many stars then,
in the flag or on the stage...
... but folks knew more were coming.
They were optimistic,
happy and expectant.
The beginning of the Horatio Alger age.
My father played in a variety theater,
breaking in a single.
No one was more expectant than he was,
unless it was Mother.
She was busy on a smaller production.
- Message come yet?
- No word, Jerry.
- Take a bow.
- I can't. I gotta get out.
- Watch that border!
- I gotta find out what's happening.
Oh, for heaven's sake, Jerry.

Take up number three.

You're on. Go ahead. Lights up.

- Bye, Sally.
- You can't run through the streets in that.
- They'll put you in jail.
- They'll have to catch me.
- Don't forget, you're on again at 4:15.
- Don't worry, I'll be back.
- These things take hours sometimes.
- My wife never held up a show in her life.
- Can I get through here?
- The Irish are up in the head of the parade.
- I'm not in the parade. I wanna get through.
- Not a chance, brother.

You don't say!

We'll get you there in a jiffy.

Here, this'll give you courage.

Charge!

Nellie.

- She all right?
- She's fine.

What is it?

Well, all signs point to its being a boy.

He just got here,
and he's sleeping already.

All babies sleep 20 hours a day.

That's why most
never amount to anything.

- What'll we call him?
- I don't know.
- What do you say?
- Seeing that he arrived on the 4th of July...
...what about George Washington Cohan?

Has a nice patriotic ring to it.

What do you think?

The George is fine, but the Washington
may be too long for a billboard.

How about a nice, short Irish name?

Dennis or Michael.

George Michael Cohan.

Yes, I like that name.

Gosh, I forgot.

Hey! It's a boy!

Oh, Jerry.

Heavenly day, Nellie,
he's crying with a brogue.
The first thing I ever had in my fist
was the American flag.
I hitched my wagon to 38 stars
and 13 stripes.
I was 6 or 7 before I realized they weren't
celebrating my birthday on the 4th of July.
Then my folks had a real break when
my little sister, Josie, made her entrance.
She grew to love show business
just as she loved everybody and everything.
We toured the kerosene circuit on a show
called Daniel Boone on the Trail.
Everybody doubled in brass.
Dad walloped the bass drum.
They teamed me with a donkey.
I was a good Democrat even in those days.
Mother and Josie threw out handbills.
Their smiles would've sold tickets
to wooden Indians.
They kept putting new stars in the flag, and
the Cohans kept rushing out to meet them.
We had jokes to match every cornfield.
We sang at every milk station.
We trouped through depression and inflation,
part of the country's growing pains.
Froze in winter, and roasted in summer.
But it was a good life.
It's a lucky family
that dances together every day.
1891 found our fortunes
flat as a pancake.
Then came jobs for the whole family
in a show called Peck's Bad Boy.
We opened in Brooklyn.
The town was known for spirited audiences
even before it had a ball team.
- Hammering on opening night!
What are you doing here?
- I'm the star of this play.
- You have the leading part, yes.
That means I'm a star...
...and there should be a star on my

dressing-room door. Law of the theater.

- Yes, Jerry, give the devil his due.

- I know, but I'm nervous.

I'll go blank.

I won't be able to remember a line.

Don't worry. If you stick,

I'll throw you the line. You too, Mother.

- It's to jail you're going, me boy.

- Oh, there.

Henry's not really a bad boy.

He's just mischievous, that's all.

Mr. Schults, that should take care
of the damage, don't you think?

Henry, I want you to promise
the cop and Mr. Schults...

...that from now on,

you will always be a good boy.

I'll promise, but I can still lick
any kid in town!

- Fine work, Georgie.

- Thanks.

- Great, Georgie. Great!

- Nice going, kid.

- Real piece of acting there.

- Son, you're going places.

- Boy, you sure rolled them in the aisles.

- Thanks, but why are you surprised?

You could've told during rehearsals
that I'd be a sensation.

Listen, there's nothing
to this acting business.

I wonder what took me so long
to become a star.

Excuse me. Hey! Call rehearsal

for 10:

Jerry, the time has come
for George's first spanking.
That's right.

I'll hold him, you hit him.

Not me. I don't hit hard enough
to make an impression.

I can't do it. He'd think I'm jealous
because he got more laughs.

Don't think I'm not, either.
Several gentlemen to see you outside,
Mr. Cohan.
Gentlemen of the press, I presume.
It's started already.
Will you excuse me?
Let's see how tough he is!
Ought to be arrested,
every one of those hoodlums.
It seems to me you're taking this
very calmly, Jerry.
Your own son almost murdered
in cold blood.
The way I figure, it's a fine tribute
to Georgie's acting.
The way he plays the part,
every tough kid...
...will want to take a punch
at Peck's Bad Boy.
What? Have I gotta go
through that every night?
Yes. And matinees Wednesdays
and Saturdays.
Georgie, those boys did you
a great favor...
...and they saved me a lot of trouble.
Most actors give their whole lives
to their profession without scoring a hit.
You're lucky.
You're a hit at the age of 13.
I've been in this business a long time.
I've never met a performer...
...who in the long run wouldn't rather
be a great guy than a great actor.
That is, until I made your acquaintance.
Can't I be both?
Chances are, the way you're going,
you won't be either.
If the hoodlums don't get you,
a committee of actors will.
Actors are considered a very bad risk
by insurance companies.
Any actor with a conceit like yours,
we just couldn't afford the premium.

What your father really means
is you're too sensitive.
You're too anxious to make good.
You love the theater too much.
Oh, I know you can improve
if you want to.
Sure I can. Just watch me.
From now on, I'm Peck's Bad Boy

only from 8:

- That's a boy, Georgie.
- I promise, Mother.
And don't forget, Wednesdays
and Saturdays, 2:30 till 5.
Yes, sir. And the other 21 and a half hours,
I pattern myself after Dad.
Well, you could find a better example,
but that's the general idea.
Jerry, what do you know!
Ed Albee's coming backstage to see you.
- Albee!
- Albee! That's B.F. Keys' partner.
That's bigtime vaudeville!
We're big time!
He didn't send for us.
He's come here to see us!
It may be better
if I spoke business to him.
I thought you said
you were going to reform.
I'm sorry.
When he comes in,
I want you to keep quiet.
- Look at the condition of this dressing room.
- Get the cheap makeup off the table.
Hurry up!
Quick, Georgie!
Get the stuff off that shelf.
That's right.
Albee will be right in.
He just stopped at the water cooler.
If he offers you a cigar,
don't take it.
I'll take it. It'll impress him

if he thinks I can smoke.

- Get behind that curtain.

- But...

Hurry up! I don't wanna hear a word.

I don't want to even hear you breathe.

Josie, fix the chairs.

The other one.

Here, take this.

Oh, Jerry.

- Sit down, Nellie. Sit down.

- All right.

Come in.

Mr. E.F. Albee.

- Hello, Cohan.

- Albee. Meet Mrs. Cohan.

How do you do?

- Sit down, Mr. Albee.

- Thank you.

I saw your show tonight. Not bad.

Have a cigar?

No, thanks.

Your show's no good for vaudeville, but

I've seen a lot worse right here in Brooklyn.

We're opening a new theater in Philadelphia
on the 4th of July.

If you fix up a good vaudeville act...

...we'll double your salary, give ten weeks'
guarantee and third or fourth billing.

- Double our salary?

- You'll be with the best variety artists.

Vesta victoria, Eddie Foy, Ward & vokes,

Lottie Collins, Charlie Case...

Just a second.

I'm George M. Cohan. You're opening

a theater in Philadelphia on July 4th?

- Yes, that's right.

- That's my birthday.

That isn't why we're opening the theater.

The salary's all right,

but how have you got the nerve...

...to offer us third or fourth billing
after my performance tonight?

Is this kid in your show?

Am I in the show! Who do you think

was Peck's Bad Boy?

I beg your pardon.

I didn't quite recognize you.

You didn't? Then maybe you're not
the showman you're cracked up to be.

- George!

- George!

Well, now, maybe I'm not.

Maybe you're not quite ready
for the big time yet.

Mrs. Cohan. Mr. Cohan.

Good night.

Mr. Albee!

- How do you do, Mr. Albee?

- Good evening.

- Can I call you a carriage?

- If you will.

Carriage for Mr. Albee!

You see what happens
because you wouldn't lay a hand on him?

A mother doesn't do any punishing.

She gives her permission.

Have I your permission?

You certainly have.

Shouldn't you get my permission too?

- Not on the hand, he has to play the violin!

- All right, not on the hand.

Not on the mouth, he has to sing!

All right, not on the mouth.

Come here.

Here's one place without any talent!

- Who were Lewis and Clark, George?

- Acrobats?

- Look at this swell write-up we got.

- Write-up?

You found us whenever new states
sprouted on the prairie.

We played every town in America
that had a theater.

- Any mail for Mr. Cohan?

- No. Your father picked up his mail.

I mean for Mr. George M. Cohan.

The next 10 years rushed by
like a circus train.

Dad seemed content with the sticks,
but I was straining at the leash.
- Here's your mail, Mr. Cohan.
- Thanks.
Couple of tickets for the show.
We were playing stock in Buffalo.
And being versatile,
I was playing my mother's father.
- Oh, Daddy, he's left me.
- All is for the best, my daughter.
In life we trip, but right ourselves.
I was correct about man's love.
First, he considers his pleasure
or his honor or his purse.
Only secondly does he think
of the woman he says he loves.
Now I must go life's journey alone and
struggle on my weary way to find peace.
Courage, Emily, courage.
Living has taught your father
many things.
Among them,
to take the bitter with the better.
The road to happiness is paved
with heartaches and stones.
They're all yours, sweetheart.
Good luck, honey.
There's a young lady. One of those
stage-struck kids would like to talk to you.
Show her in.
All right, miss.
- Mr. Cohan will see you.
- Thank you.
He's all yours.
I'm 18. I sing and I dance,
and I'm going to New York.
Should I?
Oh, Mr. Cohan. You're so old,
and so experienced in the theater...
...so fatherly.
Do you think it's wise?
I mean, my being 18, singing
and dancing, and going to New York.
Well, that's very wise.

I mean, being 18 is very wise.
As for New York, The Four Cohans
open there this fall with their new show...
...with a new cyclorama
and two carloads of scenery.

- Really? When are you leaving here?
- Tomorrow night, right after the show.

Oh, I can't leave till Wednesday.
I graduate from high school Tuesday.
That's too bad.

Georgie... Excuse me. You haven't forgotten
we have a date tonight, have you?
Oh, no, no. Of course not.
We're going roller-skating.
Roller-skating on a night like this?
Why, there's a moon out.
I'll be ready in five minutes.

- Pippino, isn't she?
- Yes. Is she your daughter?
- I'm not married.
- Your niece, perhaps?

She's just a kid with the show.
We've been dating.
Isn't she a little too young for you?
No. She's getting along in years.
She's 17.

Well, shall I sing for you?
I know I have talent,
even if I am from Buffalo.
We haven't got any piano handy.
Then I'll dance.
That's rather old, isn't it?
Everybody's done that.
You don't want to be just an imitator.
Oh, no.
Here's a step I made up myself.
But on the other hand, you don't want
to be too original, either, do you?

- No.
- I'll tell you what you do.

You sit right here,
and I will give you an idea of what I mean.
It may not be much. I'm not the dancer
I used to be, but then who is?

Now watch carefully, now.

Oh, no, no!

- Don't you like it?

- But your heart!

My heart is every bit as good
as it ever was.

Oh, so fast!

Such excitement at your age.

- Sit down and rest.

- Thanks.

Maybe I have overdone it a little.

Look at the perspiration on your brow.

Your wrinkles!

What happened to your wrinkles?

I do have to make up older
than I actually am.

How old are you?

Not yet 70.

You seem different from when I first came in.

Even your voice sounds younger.

It's a gift I have.

I'm always as young as the people I'm with.

And you've made me feel very young.

- Very young.

- I'm glad.

Now, let's make plans.

Which manager shall I take you to see first?

Erlanger? Good old Abe's a very nice fellow,
but maybe a little bit too soon.

Tony Pastor?

Well, that's better.

Albee, Coster, Beall and Proctor...

Wait a minute, little girl. Don't let an old
white beard and eyebrows frighten you.

In show business,
you'll see a lot of those.

I'm not sure I wanna go
into show business now.

A girl with your talent and ability? There
are very few who can sing, dance and act.

How do you know I can do those?

You've never seen me.

I don't have to see you.

I can tell a trouper a mile away.

I feel as though I've known you
for years. What's your name?
- Mary.
- That's a very pretty name.
Now, Mary, you calm down.
Let's go and have a bite to eat.
I always eat after the last show.
Are you hungry?
I've been sitting in the theater since 2:00
trying to get up courage to come backstage.
You must be hungry after seven shows.
We'll have a nice cold bottle and a bird.
What's a cold bottle?
That's what we in show business
call a piece of pie and a glass of milk.
Aren't you going roller-skating
with that pipperino?
I'm tired of picking her up.
What's the matter, darling?
Got it.
Pretty good.
There's a contract on my desk already
made out. Get it.
Hey!
If any of The Four Cohans ask how
you like their act, tell them it was fair.
Ladies and gentlemen,
my mother thanks you.
My father thanks you.
My sister thanks you.
And I thank you.
- Nice going.
- That's tearing them out of their chairs.
All set up for you. Go get them.
After the way we went tonight
we're ready for New York.
If we're a hit here,
it's a cinch in New York.
- Nice going, kid.
- Thanks.
Oh, Mr. Cohan, just a minute.
Pretty fair act you folks have got.
- They seemed to like it.
- That's a soft audience.

- Got any open time?
- From now on.
- I'll make an offer.
- We'd be glad to talk.
Fine. Fine. You know, they're always a
soft audience here on Wednesday. Pushover.
- Did you catch it?
- Oh, you were wonderful, George.
- But I don't know, I miss that beard.
- Did you get up on that number?
It's a lovely song, George.
I've learned it by heart.
Good. I rehearsed it with the orchestra.
You'll do it this show.
He knows your key.
You just follow him for tempo.
But there's a notice. You can't
change your act after the first show.
The manager expects me to sing
"The Wedding of the Lily and the Rose."
Who were they applauding,
the manager or me?
- Now go on out there and do it.
- Oh, George, I can't move.
I can't go out there,
not without rehearsal.
What are you worried about?
You're doing a George M. Cohan lyric
to a George M. Cohan melody.
- Yes, but it's my voice.
- A George M. Cohan discovery.
Nobody ever had a better start.
There's your introduction, go on.
Good luck, kid.
Ten consecutive weeks in New York.
That's the big time.
When you leave New York,
Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago...
- Just look at her.
- Excuse me.
What's going on here? Take your
makeup off. I'll be back in just a minute.
Bill, what is this? What's she singing?
Who told her to switch that number?

She's supposed to sing
"The Wedding of the Lily and the Rose."
- Who told her to switch that number?
- I don't know.
You don't know!
Bring down that curtain! When she finishes
the chorus pull out the houselights.
Wait a second. See how that song goes.
- The song is gone. Pull out the lights.
- Don't do it, Charlie.
Say, who does she think she is? Who
does she think is running this theater?
The only reason I put her on was
because the dog act got drunk.
- It'll be all right in the morning.
- She was your idea.
- And a very good idea too.
- Now I know who got the dog act drunk.
Who, me? Why I've never been
in a saloon in my life.
Now look at that. Could you ask
for anything more than that?
Mr. Dietz, she's wonderful.
Don't you think so?
Don't do that! Don't do that!
Pull out the lights.
Pull down that curtain.
Get your props together, you're on next.
Start limbering up, you follow the jugglers.
You get that curtain up. You can't ring
down on a George M. Cohan song.
A George... oh, I see!
It's your song. You wrote it.
You can tell that by the applause.
Now, Mary, I want you to do an encore.
Do one more chorus and really do it.
Oh, no, you don't.
Young lady, listen.
If you're gonna try junk like that,
you'll do it on a split beat time.
But you'll not be singing
that in my theater.
You take a little tip from me.
Start packing.

If you've got any squawks, unload
them on me. I started all this.
Listen, squirt. Any more interference and
you'll be blacklisted in show business.
You won't be able to get
into a stage door of any theater.
What's more, as for those songs of yours...
...they won't be played on a hurdy-gurdy.
- Are you trying to threaten me?
- Mary, don't pay any attention to him.
- Get me the key to your dressing room.
Drunk or sober, the dog act goes on
on the next show. And look here...
Bring down the curtain!
Cohan, you're fired! You're canceled.
You're washed up!
You and your whole family!
Oh, things were tough.
But at least I was in New York.
I had a trunk full of songs and play
scripts and a heart full of confidence.
I'm glad I had it.
I'm sorry, I can't use this, Cohan.
Youth needs confidence. I'd learned my job
the hard way, all over the United States.
Guys who'd never been past the corner
cigar store said my stuff was no good.
A kid had to believe
in himself to buck that.
- What do you think?
- I didn't like it. Didn't appeal to me.
What do you mean it didn't appeal
to you? I'm the senior partner.
- I make the decisions.
- Well, what did you think?
- It didn't appeal to me either.
- Which proves you have no ear for music.
He's got no ear for music. I'm the senior
partner. I have a wonderful ear for music.
- The libretto is a grand story, isn't it?
- I laughed all the way through it.
That's my cue. If Harold laughs
then I know it isn't funny.
Why don't you have Mr. Cohan sing?

Maybe you didn't like "Harrigan"...

...because I haven't got much of a voice.

- I think you have a lovely voice.

- Don't you think so, Mr. Dietz?

- Yes. If you'd like a job answering phones...

Are you or are you not going
to produce my play?

If you think I'd put my wife's money
in that trash, you're crazy.

That's it, Mary. That's enough.

They've had their chance.

- Have you an appointment?

- Yes. I'm Sam Harris.

I want to see them
about this melodrama.

- We don't teach them their business.

- We're busy. We have no time.

You don't know it,
but your days are numbered.

You're making room for the likes of me.

Someday, Mr. Senior Partner...

...you're gonna come to me and
admit you were wrong.

In 20 years of show business, I never
once admitted I was wrong.

- That's his department.

- And your wife's money...

- Excuse me. I have an appointment.

- Who are you?

My name's Sam Harris. I have a
melodrama here called Wildflower.

Wildflower.

One, two, three, four, five, six,
seven, eight, nine, ten. Horses.

Oh, and Indians.

Come on. Don't let a couple like that
get under your skin. No sense in crying.

- Buffalo is such a beautiful city.

- Is that what you're crying about?

It's a beautiful city,
but I hate to go back to it.

Don't worry, you won't have to.

I'll show them.

I'm gonna have my name posted and

plastered up and down Broadway.
Now, you stick along,
we'll whip them to a standstill.
- I never really thought of leaving.
- We'll make this business holler for help.
That's what we'll do. They'll all hear
from us. Every one of them.
I'm the senior partner.
I'll do the throwing out.
You don't have to throw me out.
I know the way.
That's the last time I'll
ever bring you a play.
That's my department.
I will take it to Clower and Erlanger.
They don't always think of box office.
- Thanks.
- Too expensive.
Didn't even read the second act. Probably
the biggest forest fire ever on a stage.
I think he's a little upset.
by this time in Buffalo.
The juggler just paid
three weeks back board.
Put him at the head of the
table so he doesn't reach.
Where shall I put the magician?
Until he's paid he sits at the foot
of the table with the Cohans.
- Starvation corner.
- And put the goulash at the head.
Keep everything but the noodles and
syrup out of the reach of the Cohans.
Noodles and syrup are just
enough to keep them alive.
Anybody who owes me two month's
board bill I just keep alive.
I don't have to wait on them.
- Good evening.
- Good evening, madam.
Oh, no, no, no.
From now on, this is your seat.
- Oh, thank you.
- And you, master magician...

...you sit over there with the Cohans.
Madame, some day I hope you will give
me the pleasure of sawing you in half.
I just heard today that Hammerstein
was bringing over the Scotch actor.
Harry Lauder at 2500 bucks a week.
Hammerstein's a great showman. A lot
of people have never seen a Scotchman.
Take some goulash, Mrs. Cohan.
Did you have that appointment
with that man about your booking?
Oh, yes. He's gonna give work
to the act any day now.
What happened to that Boston offer?
That was a mighty sweet proposition.
Four weeks' guarantee, \$300 a week,
and top billing.
Well, we didn't take it.
You see, it just wasn't right.
Any act that lays off as long as
you have, any offer's all right.
- Butter?
- Thanks.
We just thought we'd rest
a few more weeks.
Yes, my brother's writing some new
material. We're just not ready to open.
You're not fooling anybody.
Everybody knows that you, Nellie and
Josie can get work anytime, any place.
But nobody wants Georgie.
He's made trouble in every theater
this side of San Francisco.
You can't lay off just because every
manager in town has blackballed Georgie.
His family hasn't blackballed him.
We may take a lot of hard knocks and
make a lot of sacrifices...
...but if they want our act, they'll take him
too. We're not breaking up our act or family.
All right, all right. Let the blackballs
fall where they may.
Madame Bartholdi,
champagne for everybody!

- Swell.
- Even if I had it, who would pay?
Dietz & Goff. They're producing
Little Johnny Jones.
- George, really?
- They went crazy about the book.
Dietz said to heck with his wife's
money. He's gonna use his own.
Second round of champagne on me, if
you had it. Pass that goulash down.
Oh, George. Think of those billboards.
Book, music and lyrics all by
George M. Cohan.
- Oh, Georgie, l...
- Take it easy, Josie.
There's enough water on the goulash now.
Dad, I'm gonna be tied in rehearsal
for the next few months.
Why don't you and Mom and Josie
take other offers in the meantime.
Well, I hate to see the act split up,
but if you think so.
Oh, sure. Play all that stuff
around Chicago for Sullivan.
- The money's good. The jumps are short.
- Good idea. You get tired resting too long.
But it won't be the same going back
on the road without you, Georgie.
We'll be like a carriage
with only three wheels.
But you will admit I was a bumpy wheel.
You'll roll along easier without me.
- No, Georgie, no.
- You will.
If there's a part for a bicycle rider, I
used to be known as "venus on Wheels."
I always knew you weren't a cook.
- How's everything going, George?
- Not so good. Not so good.
I've been pounding the pavement
so long my socks have bunions.
- Mac, would you put a head on that?
- You bet I will.
The villain turns and says:

"I'll tell who you are unless
you help me hold up this train."
Think fast. It's due in 10 minutes.
You'll have the audience standing.
I know, I know. The hero helps him.
Gets shot in the leg.
- And the girl nurses him back to health.
- No. He gets shot in the arm, not the leg.
- Do you know what happens?
- I won't be in the theater to find out.
I will be on the street watching
a musical comedy.
Before I put \$ 10,000 into a show...
...it must have songs, dances,
and a lot of girls.
Women, women. Little rose petals.
The big scene is where the hero saves
the girl from a burning forest fire.
It won't be terribly expensive.
I know where I can get a cheap fire.
You don't need much of a fire.
Just enough to burn that manuscript.
- I've been looking all over town for you.
- What?
We gotta go to Dietz & Goff
and sign papers.
- Papers?
- What papers?
- What papers?
- I see. You don't want to talk about it.
- You haven't discussed our musical?
- Musical?
- Remember what we promised.
- I haven't said a word.
Good. Dietz said it was the best musical
he's read. Even allowed Goff to agree.
When I told him about those 20 ponies
and 20 showgirls all coming...
- Ponies and showgirls?
- Just a minute...
...would you tell me what
you're talking about?
- You got the check?
- Yes.

- That's mine.
- No, no, no. We won't argue about it.
- Glad to have met you.
- That's minor.
- Come on. We can't keep Dietz waiting.
- You are a fine guy.

You have girls up your sleeve, you have ponies and showgirls and you don't tell me?

- What's it about?
- We gave our word to Dietz.

We haven't got time.

It's about Todd Sloan.

- The famous jockey.
- Yeah. Come on.

Jockey sounds swell.

Just my luck to miss out on it.

Well, good luck, boys.

You forgot your manuscript. Say, before we sign up with Dietz & Goff...

...I made some change in the lyric of "Yankee Doodle."

- "Yankee Doodle"?
- You shouldn't have. It was perfect.

You'll like this.

It gives the number added value.

- May I listen a little?
- Think we should?
- Well, I don't know.
- If you promise to be quiet.
- I promise.
- All right. Come on.
- There's a piano in the private room.
- "Yankee Doodle." "Yankee Doodle."
- Yankee Doodle Candy.
- Dandy. "Yankee Doodle Dandy."

Yankee Doodle Candy.

Thank you. Yankee Doodle Candy.

I have heard enough.

I will never forgive you for trying to pawn a forest fire on me...

...when you had that musical.

- Yes, but we gave our word to Dietz.

I can't understand it. Why is Dietz's wife's money better than my wife's money?

Why?

Must you give it to Dietz & Goff?

Must you give it?

Well, I don't know. I like Dietz,
but I'm not too fond of Goff.

I'm crazy about Goff but

haven't got any use for Dietz.

Gentlemen, you are in perfect agreement.

- I will give you a check to bind the deal.

- Here.

- Thank you. What's your partner's name?

- I don't know.

What's my partner's name?

Well, don't toy with the kid at a time
like this. Tell him. George M. Cohan.

George M. Cohan. C-o-H-A-N.

- And what is my junior partner's name?

- Sam H. Harris. Shake.

- Hello. What should I write?

- Cohan and Harris.

Cohan and Harris.

That's it, ladies and gentlemen,
it's all over.

Yankee Doodle let them down.

So they'll either pasture him in clover or
have him hauling rubbish in London town.

Women, women. Little rose petals.

It's wonderful. You got them
eating from your hand.

- My congratulations.

- Thanks.

- As long as those critics don't eat my leg.

- Don't worry.

You have a smash hit. It's in the air.

You can't stop anything that's in the air.

All right. On the boat.

Remember, Jones, watch for the

skyrocket. If it goes off, you'll know...

...that I've obtained papers that'll prove
you innocent of throwing the Derby.

It'll mean complete vindication. So stick
on the pier and watch for the skyrocket.

Thanks, pal. I'll be watching.

Goodbye, Johnny. And don't worry,

we still believe in you.

- Thanks, kid. That'll help a lot. Bye-bye.

- Goodbye.

That was your department!

Is it the robin that heralds the first
breath of spring?

How can you think of robins in the
spring when we're freezing in Illinois?

Hey, Jerry. Did you see the way
they're billing you in Waukegan?

- Come here. Look at that. Funny, isn't it?

- "Jerry, Nellie and Josie Cohan...

...family of George M. Cohan,
the Broadway sensation."

- Hey, the kid's doing all right.

- Look at that.

Well, that's true. He is
the biggest thing on Broadway.

I know, but it ain't right.

We can build our own reputation.

- We'll be billed as The Three Cohans.

- All right. No need to get excited.

Don't think I'm jealous of Georgie's
success. Even though I am a better actor.

Of course you're not jealous.

Everybody knows that.

There'll be no stopping George. All he
needs is experience and he'll be a genius.

He mustn't know I'm a better actor.

It might interfere.

Still, it does look a little funny,

George being the toast of Broadway...

...and you folks gathering crumbs
in the tank towns.

- Is either of you fellows Jerry Cohan?

- I am.

It's from George.

"Impossible to find three clever actors
named Cohan for my new show...

...anywhere in New York.

- Return immediately for rehearsals."

- What'd I tell you?

The four of us back together
again. And on Broadway!

Even in the kitchen
you sound like a Tetrizzini.
In Buffalo they say I have a nice little voice.
A lot they know in Buffalo.
In Buffalo they thought I was an old man.
- Well, how do you like your part so far?
- Oh, I like it.
It's small.
I'd be afraid to try anything bigger.
You got something on the leading lady,
the best song in the show.
Here it is. It's finished.
- Come on.
- Well, what about the lyrics?
I'm gonna give it to you now.
Sit down and give me a pickup.
Yeah.
Gee, I never cared much
for my name before.
It's kind of common.
Gee, there are millions of Marys around.
I didn't write it for the millions of Marys.
I wrote it for one particular,
very special Mary.
It's a wonderful feeling
having your name written in music.
- Not bad music either, huh?
- Nope, it isn't.
How will everybody know I'm the Mary?
I want to make sure that everybody
knows it was written for me.
They'll know, all right.
When they look at you singing that song
and then look at me looking at you...
...they'll know.
- Oh, George.
- Take it up an octave.
- George.
- Better.
Excuse me for butting in,
I've been looking all over town for you.
Strange that I should find you here.
Hello, Mary.
George has just written me a new song

for the show. Think I'll be able to do it?

Of course.

You've got a nice little voice.

That is not a little voice.

You need an ear trumpet.

We've got to go. We've got to see

Fay Templeton before she goes on.

- What does she want to see us about?

- We want to see her.

You need a leading lady,

you've got your ingnue.

- George!

- Fay Templeton, not bad.

If she can do two years in the turkey

she's in, she can do four for us.

- Will she take it?

- I don't know.

- At least you can get her autograph.

- Or she can get mine.

- Bring her back to supper after the show.

- We will, if she's still speaking to us.

A flower, mister?

- Here you are.

- Would you like to buy it?

Thank you.

One thing in our favor

is Erlanger's on our side.

- He's got influence with Miss Templeton.

- You take Erlanger and I'll tackle Templeton.

You don't tackle a star like Miss Templeton,

you approach her and very tactfully.

Well, if it's tact that does it, it's done.

If you get me in to see Miss Templeton

I'll get you passes to my next show.

Look, Dietz.

Looks naked without Goff.

- Where's Miss Templeton's dressing room?

- Upstairs.

Tell you what I'm gonna do, I'm gonna see

that Miss Templeton gets your flowers.

My respects to Mrs. Dietz.

Now that was a very sweet gesture.

You've got to remember,

Fay, we're having a tough time...

...lining up a vehicle for you.
Now, you should listen to this man.
- He's just written a big hit.
- One hit.
He may be a flash in the pan,
for all we know.
And I heard about Little Johnny Jones.
And I read the critics.
Of all the loud, vulgar, flag-waving...
Well, it was a wow.
I haven't laughed so much in years.
That fellow's got the golden touch.
Maybe so, but not for me, Mr. Erlanger.
What I want is a quiet,
dignified musical play.
I want to perform in a theater,
not a boiler factory.
Come in.
- Hello, Harris. How are you, Cohan?
- Hello, Abe.
- Everything's all right. She'll see you.
- That's fine.
- Fay, may I present Mr. Harris?
- How do you do?
And Fay, this is Mr. Cohan.
George M. Cohan.
How do you do?
We were just talking about you.
Miss Templeton's never seen your work.
Been sick or in Europe?
No. I've been right here
on this stage for two years.
Oh, buried.
Don't misunderstand me,
Miss Templeton.
Well, I've never been
at a loss for words before...
...but right now, standing
in your presence, why, I hardly...
Well, I'd prefer to have
these flowers speak for me.
- Why, Mr. Cohan, how sweet of you.
- It was nothing at all. It's something...
Excuse me for breaking in on you,

Miss Templeton...

...but I would like to present
my own flowers, my own way.

Mr. Cohan, I thought...

- Drunk.

- Is he?

May I have the honor of supping with you
at Rex's tonight after the show...

...and drinking champagne out of your...

Pardon me, slipper?

Mr. Dietz, haven't you forgotten that
your junior partner does all the drinking?
Yes, but on special occasions I take over.

- May I put these in water for you?

- Well, really, I...

I never saw Dietz drunk before.

- Well, shall we get down to business?

- If you like, Abe.

George, how would you like to do a play
with one of the biggest stars in America?

What do you think I've been doing?

You see what I mean, Fay?

Isn't he a card?

Positively a riot.

Yes, well.

George, what's your new story like?

That is, I mean, can you write
a play without a flag?

Miss Templeton, I can write a play
without anything except a pencil.

- Laugh. Well, look...

- There's really no use discussing anything.

I'm afraid I would never please the people
who revel in your antics and fireworks.

You're being modest, Miss Templeton.

If you'd let yourself go, you'd be
just as entertaining as the rest of us.

You might even have fun yourself.

Abe, isn't it about time
for the curtain to go up?

If you haven't time now,
maybe you'll give us time after the show?

I'm sorry, after the show

I'm going home to New Rochelle.

It's only 45 minutes from here.
Thank heavens, it's like a thousand miles...
...from all the noisy,
neurotic people in our profession.
- Now, Miss Templeton, you can't...
- Fay, I wanted...
That tact of yours, that wonderful tact.
What are you thinking about?
- Well, have you thought it over, Fay?
- I'm not interested in Mr. Cohan or his plays.
Now, you're making a great mistake.
He's the most original thing on Broadway.
You know why? Because he's the whole
darn country squeezed into one pair of pants.
His writing, his songs,
why even his walk and his talk.
They all touch something
way down here in people.
Don't ask me why it is, but it happens
every time the curtain goes up.
- It's pure magic.
- I'm bored by magic.
I know his formula. A fresh young sprout
gets rich between 8:30 and 11:00 p.m.
Yes, that's just it, Fay.
George M. Cohan has
invented the success story...
...and every American loves it because
it happens to be his own private dream.
He's found the mainspring
in the antique clock.
Ambition, pride, patriotism.
That's why they call him
the Yankee Doodle Boy.
Now, if you'll take a tip from me
you'll do just what I'm doing.
You'll hitch your wagon
to his star right now.
Abe, I've got to change for the second act.
Fay, don't make up your mind too quickly.
Take a little time to think it over.
Who's locked my door?
- Who is it?
- What's going on here?

He'll be through in a minute.
Excuse me, Miss Templeton,
I didn't realize who you were. Come in.
- May I?
- Well, of course.
What does this mean?
Mind telling me why you're still here?
- It's ready and waiting and dedicated to you.
- What?
When you made that speech you said
you lived 45 minutes from Broadway.
That struck me as a perfect title
for a show and a song.
During the first act
you've written this new song?
- Strange surroundings, so it took longer.
- He's worked so hard. At least hear him.
- It'll only take a minute, won't it?
- Depends on the encores.
Well, you certainly are persistent.
All right, go ahead.
- Mind if I change?
- Thank you, Miss Templeton.
Thank you very, very much.
Go ahead, George, play it.
That's good. It's rather different.
You like it, Miss Templeton, do you?
Excuse me!
That's only a chorus number.
He's got one number called "Mary"
that's just perfect for you.
- She doesn't sing that.
- She is going to!
Shut up. Wait till you hear this,
it's the best thing he's ever done.
"Mary"?
This looks very interesting.
- You wouldn't like it.
- Lf it's like "45 Minutes From Broadway"...
- Well, it isn't, and besides...
- George!
- Don't spoil everything.
- She can't have that.
- You gotta let her have it.

- She's gonna sing it!

- She can't sing it!

- She will sing it.

With Abe's money and your brains
we'll be able to make a million.

Come in.

A little early for Christmas, isn't it?

Well, I was just passing the flowers
and they threw in the candy.

George, I'm sure our song will live forever.

I've been playing it since you left
and the neighbors haven't complained once.

What happened with Fay Templeton?

Oh, she's dying to play the part,
but I haven't made up my mind yet.

- Ham or bacon?

- Bacon.

Good, ham makes me self-conscious.

You're hesitating about having
Fay Templeton in your show?

Big stars are always temperamental
and hard to get along with.

Asking impossible terms and conditions.

I'll take my coffee black.

- I think you ought to give in to her.

- But, darling.

- No matter what she asks?

- No matter what she asks.

Why are you so concerned
with Fay Templeton?

I don't care for her,

I'm looking out for you.

Think what it means for you
to have a star like Templeton in your show.

Always worried about me, aren't you?

Ever think about yourself?

Not much lately. Haven't had time.

The minute I saw you without your beard...

...I knew here was a little boy
who needed a lot of looking after.

So I gave myself the job.

There are a lot of singers, you know,
but very few really good looker-afters.

Darling, how would you like

a lifetime job of looking after?
Leading lady, run of the play. Maybe a few heartaches after the curtain goes up...
...but I can guarantee you some laughs.
- How does it sound?
- I think I might like it, Mr. Cohan.
Could I see some of the script?
Not bad for a first reading.
The coffee's boiling over.
- Darling, something I forgot to tell you.
- Yes, dear?
I gave your song to Fay Templeton tonight.
Darling, did you hear me?
- I gave your song to Fay Templeton tonight.
- Yes, I know.
I knew you did, dear, when you brought the candy and flowers.
It's a wonderful song, George.
Best you've ever done. It'll live for years.
Thanks, Sam, but I still think Mary should have sung it.
Oh, that's all right.
Fay has the song, but I have the author.
Look at Cohan.
He's got them lined up at the box office.
I've never seen the guy and his name all over the place, look at that.
"Cohan and Harris present
George Washington Jr.
Starring the author and composer
George M. Cohan."
I wonder what the M is for?
Oh, modesty.
- Hello, Mr. Foy.
- How are you?
- Enjoyed your show last night.
- Thank you.
- You always appear in the kind of stuff I like.
- Thank you. That's very nice of you.
"George M. Cohan and his royal family.
Books and lyrics, music and directed by
George M. Cohan. Printed by Sam Divensky."
That must be Cohan's alias.
Certainly gave himself good billing,

this George M. Cohan.

You don't have to memorize it,

they're all over town.

I'd like to forget it. Hey, fella,

you connected with this turkey?

- You think it's a turkey? I hear it's good.

- That's a malicious rumor to gyp the public.

Who is this Cohan? Where is he from?

- Is he an upstart?

- He's been through the mill.

Played everything: Bigtime vaudeville,

rep shows, even followed dog acts.

Must have looked like an encore.

Say, is he as good as Foy?

- Who?

- Foy, Foy. Eddie Foy.

- Oh, pardon me.

- Pardon me, I didn't quite catch the name.

- Would you mind spraying it again?

- Eddie Foy.

The star with the big show down the street

with a chorus of 70.

Why, I thought they looked

a little younger than that.

I hear now that Cohan's in town,

Foy's gonna retire.

Foy won't retire till he's 90.

Will it take him that long

to discover he has no talent?

I hear when he tries to sing

the orchestra puts up umbrellas.

Tries to sing? Why, he's a genius.

He keeps his audience glued to the seats.

That's one way to keep them in the theater.

Cohan does it with talent.

He produces his own plays,

writes his own books, lyrics and music...

...plays the leads, and is a great dancer.

- He dances, eh? When does he practice?

When you write your own plays you don't

have to practice. Cohan's done all right.

He's given the world Yankee Doodle Dandy.

What's Foy done for his country?

He gave them seven kids.

- Does he dance?

- One of the best.

When does he get time to practice?

Say, listen, young fella,
my name's Eddie Foy.

I know it. I'm George M. Cohan.

Oh, so you're Cohan?

Well, if I said anything accidental
to make you mad, I'm darn glad I did.

I don't blame you. I'd feel the same way
if I were up against Cohan.

- What do you like to drink?

- Oh, Moxie.

I can supply it.

The attraction inside is bigger than I am.

Come and see it when your show closes.

We took the red from the flame of dawn.

The dawn of a new nation.

And the white was the white
of the snow at valley Forge.

The blue was the blue of the free, open sky.

And the stars were

the 13 sisters by the sea...

...who built their home

and called it "Liberty."

Right!

Right again!

That's the spirit!

And that government of the people...

... by the people,

for the people shall not perish...

... from the earth.

May I have your autograph, Mr. Cohan?

To what do you attribute

your continued success, Mr. Cohan?

Oh, I'm an ordinary guy who knows
what ordinary guys like to see.

Front row center, the greatest
show on earth, the people.

To the people. God bless them.

Here, chick, chick, chick, chick!

Oh, it's such fun, Mother,

having cows and chickens.

Everything's running so smoothly.

It's always been a dream of ours, Mary.
We kept hoping for 20 years
it might come true someday.
Imagine knowing how to feed chickens,
or how much to feed them.
And you're a farmer only three weeks.
Jerry and I've seen
a lot of chickens in train windows...
...and we always wanted some of our own.
You know, watch them hatch
and feed them, and eat them.
If we only could. They're so pretty.

- Georgie?

- Yeah?

- What'd you get Dad for his birthday?

- Nothing much, just a smoking jacket.

- Is it bright? Will he like it?

- It's silk, and very red, and very yellow.

- That'll do it. Look what I got him, Georgie.

- Now, there's a present.

- That must have set you back.

- Dad needed a new watch.

His old one's so loud,
you can hear it right through his coat.
My future husband helped me pick it out.
Your future what?

Husband. We're getting married
as soon as Fred's road tour is over.
So Little Josie's gonna get married, huh?
It doesn't seem that long ago...

- What happens to The Four Cohans?

- Oh, just a simple case of subtraction.
You know, one from four leaves three.
Three Cohans.
That's only arithmetic.
One Cohan from Four Cohans
leaves nothing.
Mom and Pop know?
Mom's been working on
the wedding dress for weeks.
What are you thinking about, Georgie?
I'm going to write you the most
terrific wedding march ever put on paper.
It'll pack the pews.

Dad, tell Josie just because she's getting married that's no reason to break up the act. We're just as much an institution as marriage is.

No one knows that any better than I do...

...but we want to settle down and raise a family.

What's the matter, can't he raise a family and be a stage manager too?

Oh, George.

George, I'm afraid your mother and I are breaking up the act before Josie is.

You hear that?

All three of them, walking out on me.

- Well, it's been a 40-year run, remember.

- We're giving our two weeks' notice, George.

All we'd like to do now is spend the rest of our days here on this farm.

You can't do that. You can't put an actor out in the grass, fresh air kills him.

We've gained nearly 10 pounds apiece.

You can work it off, the show's ready for rehearsal.

- They're grand parts in it for both of you.

- No, George, I...

We've had good times together.

Well, new shows need new faces and new feet to go with you.

From now on, it's just you alone, son.

- Well, what's this?

- A surprise, Dad.

- Happy birthday!

- Happy birthday, Mr. Cohan!

- Here we are.

- Which one do you want to open first?

- Make your wish.

- I have.

Good one, Dad.

- Which should I open first?

- How about opening this one?

I'll open this one, you open that one.

- This will match your new suit.

- I think someone gave me that last year.

- It looks fine.

- It looks grand.
It's made from that old backdrop you
like so well. Fireproofed and everything.
- Oh, darling, that's a lovely watch.
- I'm so glad you like it, Dad.
- This is better than being on next to closing.
- The only trouble is it's three minutes fast.
Dad, press the little button on the side
and see what happens.
It plays "one on one"
and segues into "Dixie."
- Here's more ties that you won't like, Jerry.
- Well, I'll have to open up a store.
- Here's a letter from George.
- Don't read it now. That's between us.
You haven't written me in 20 years.
I'll open it now and read it.
George, this isn't your party.
Now sit down and let him read his letter.
- Sit down.
- Come on, Dad.
Probably only a bill for his jacket anyway.
"Dear Dad, this is your 62nd birthday,
and God bless you.
Maybe I've never told you before,
but no son ever had a better dad...
...or one to be prouder of.
You and Mother have always given me
more love and understanding...
...than I ever deserved.
And all the luck I've had is due
to the things you two have taught me.
Nothing I can do could
ever repay the debt...
...but here's a little present
for you and Mother.
From this day on,
you and I are partners...
...in every theater and
theatrical property I possess.
Half and equal.
The Cohan Theater,
the Astor, the Gaiety...
...and the Grand opera House in Chicago.

And all my plays and songs,
as long as they...
...or you and I, live."
These are not my reading glasses.
Why didn't somebody give me
some reading glasses for my birthday?
"Wish you all my love.
Your son and partner,
George."
Well, George, on behalf
of your mother and myself, I...
There she goes, stealing the scene again.
One success followed another.
But there was one challenge I hadn't met.
Critics said musicals and cheap
comedies were all I could write.
I'd wave a flag, they said.
Nothing else.
So I wrote a legitimate drama.
Very deep and very significant.
No music, no gags, no flag-waving.
I called it Popularity.
The title showed how hard I was hoping.
I couldn't attend the opening because I was
appearing in The Yankee Prince.
- Open it up.
- Keep it closed, Buck.
Cohan, you're surely not going
to your dressing room now.
- You're good for another five curtain calls.
- That's enough for tonight.
- Mr. Cohan, are you sure you're feeling well?
- I feel all right.
- Any news on Popularity?
- No, but they should be ringing down now.
You'd think Sam would let me know.
Well, it's a good sign. They probably
couldn't tear themselves away.
- What time is it?

- 7:
- That clock right?
- Yes, sir.
Wonder what's keeping them.

They ought to be here by now.
Maybe something's wrong.
Got the reports on the minstrel show.
- What'd we lose this week?
- Oh, 10,000, more or less.
- What's the total loss so far?
- A few dollars under 200,000.
That include the cost of the red ink?
Popularity better be a hit.
A lot of dough sunk into that too.
Eddie, find out what's keeping them.
- What did the papers say about the show?
- Here they are. Rave notices again.
Rave notices. That's bad.
The better notices you get,
the more it costs you.
All except the last act.
- Alexson suggests a new finish.
- Oh, I see, a new finish.
How about Saturday night?
- Close it?
- Close it.
Saturday night.
- Give the company two weeks' salary.
- All right.
- Well, good evening.
- Good evening.
- Hello, dear.
- Hello, Mom. Darling.
Well, Dad, I was worried about you.
Sit down, sweets, right there.
You sit down.
That theater's awfully cold, George.
- Better have more heat put in.
- Take care of that.
Remember that skating act from Camden?
They were there.
I wonder where they got the money.
Fagan, Feeny and Riley.
I remember them well.
Well, come on. Tell me.
How'd it go?
The audience loved it.
Every minute of it.

The sets were beautiful, George.

- Why so quiet, Sam?

- The toughest house I've ever seen.

The critics walked out
at the end of the second act.

Come on, Dad. Come on.

Let's have it.

Well, there's no use
beating around the bush.

Pretty bad, George.

Could've been a lot better.

All right, you write a bad play.

The only thing to do is forget about it.

Everybody's entitled to one failure.

Let's go to Delmonico's, have the party.

Just as if the show was a hit.

You take the girls on over there,
and I'll see you in about a half-hour.

I got some things
I want to talk over with Sam.

Those critics have been after me for years.

They'll gang up on me and do a good job.

But I'll beat them to it. I'll take an ad
in every paper alongside their reviews...
...telling the public we got the greatest show
in town, sold out for 10 weeks in advance.

It'll be my word against theirs.

- Georgie, you can't do that.

- Why not?

You got too big a reputation.

Listen, you can't disappoint the public.

We stuck our necks out,
we got clipped.

Georgie.

You can't do this.

You'll always regret it.

- Sit down and take this.

- We'll be sorry.

- To the theatergoing public.

- George...

To the theatergoing public.

I wrote a play called Popularity.

Mr. Harris and I produced that play.

In the opinion of people we respect,

it is a bad play.
In this, we heartily concur.
It is a very bad play.
I do humbly apologize and ask forgiveness...
...for having presented anything
of which you couldn't possibly approve.
There will be five more performances.
Please miss them.
Signed...
Happy?
It's a wonderful second-act curtain.
Send copies of this
to all the New York papers.
Extra! Lusitania torpedoed
by German sub! Extra!
This is it, George.
And we were worried about
the success or failure of a show.
Now we've really got
something to worry about.
Seems it always happens.
Whenever we get too high-hat,
too sophisticated for flag-waving...
... some thug nation decides we're
a pushover, all ready to be blackjacked.
And before long we're looking up anxiously
to be sure the flag's still waving over us.
Left foot.
Right foot.
On your toes.
I used to be a model.
You'll look awful pretty peeling potatoes.
- On your way, wise guy.
- Next.
Left foot.
Right foot.
Take this paper and report
to Sgt. Cooper for your examination.
Next. Name, please.
Oh. George M. Cohan.

Occupation:

Actor, author, composer and producer.

Address:

Devonshire Hotel.

- How do you know so much about me?
- Don't you recognize me, Mr. Cohan?
I was a clerk at the Friars Club.

- Age:

- Doesn't even give me a chance to lie.
Thirty-nine? I'm sorry, Mr. Cohan.
You're overage. Thirty-one's the limit now.

What's 8 or 9 years? The Germans
won't ask me for a birth certificate.

Oh, I know how you feel, Mr. Cohan.

But you've got to be young and tough.

It's no picnic. All those hardships,
the mental strain...

...trenches,
the fighting, the marching.

- The ma'am-selles.

- I hope.

No, you'll never be able to stand it.

Hardships and physical strain?

You don't know what you're talking about.

This war's a coffee klatch compared
to a musical show.

I'd like to see one of you do what I do in a
performance and be on your feet at the end.

I'll give you an idea of what I mean.

Thank you very much

for your entertainment, Mr. Cohan.

But I'm afraid we have more need
of you here than over there.

But that'll make the war last a year longer.

- Goodbye, Mr. Cohan.

- Thank you, major. Thank you.

Pick it up, soldier.

Keep singing, Nora.

- Where are the lights?

- I suppose the generator's gone again.

Hit your lights and play them on the stage
so we can keep going, will you?

Boys, hit your lights and keep them on

the singer until the others come up, will you?

Everybody sing!

We'd won the world war.
Manhattan went wild with postwar hysteria.
But I spiked my shows with prewar stuff.
The sentiment and humor an older
America had aged in the wood.
Still, it was lonely on the main stem.
Mother and Josie were gone.
Dad was by himself on the farm
and had grown very old.
Every night I went to the theater,
I expected a phone call.
Well, finally, it came.
You'd better give him two more cc's.
May as well try to make him
as comfortable as possible.
Yes, doctor.
If you have to get
back to town, Dr. Llewellyn...
...I'll be here all night.
- It's all right. I'll wait till George gets here.
- Cigarette, doctor?
- Yes, I will. Thanks.
I remember I was a kid in medical college in
Baltimore when I first saw The Four Cohans.
They were a great act.
Yes, they were.
I always thought George M.'s sister
was the loveliest dancer I'd ever seen.
I can't help thinking
a theatrical era is dying in there.
His sister and his mother gone
and now the old man.
In some ways, I think he was
the best performer of the lot.
Well, I'd settle for his age.
There never was anything dull
about his life, either.
And he's lived to see his son
an American institution.
I'd settle for that too.
- Hello, doc.
- Hello, Mr. Cohan.
- How is he?
- Resting quietly.

I think you'd better go in alone.
We can't... We can't do that.
Wait till George gets here.
- Where's George?
- Here I am, Dad. Here I am.
Oh, that's good.
I'm glad you came.
The booking office has
been calling up all day...
...and they want us to play Des Moines...
No, don't worry about that.
We're not going to. I've canceled it.
We're gonna pick it up on the way back.
- How'd it go tonight?
- Oh, fine. Fine. Yeah.
It's not every kid that gets
a chance to play Peck's Bad Boy.
That's right.
Were you...? Were you nervous?
Did you remember your lines?
Oh, sure. Every one.
I can lick any kid in town.
Don't you upstage your mother,
or I'll whale the tar out of you.
Oh, don't worry, Dad.
I'll never do that.
I'll play the show
with one foot in the trough.
No, no. We'll be billed as The Four Cohans.
You're not going to break up the act.
Don't worry, Dad. They never will.
We won't let them. Won't let them.
- How many curtain calls did you take?
- Six. Six curtains.
- That's pretty good for a drama.
- Yeah.
- Did you make a speech?
- I thanked them for us.
I said, "My mother thanks you.
My father thanks you.
My sister thanks you.
And I thank you."
Well...
...it was a good combination, Sam.

Worked well for a long time.
Now that it's all over, who was the senior partner and who was the junior partner?
You mean who was Dietz
and who was Goff?
I'll bet it was the first firm in the history of show business to have two senior partners.
- You know how I feel, don't you, Sam?
- Sure. I understand.
When Dad died, with him went the last link with The Four Cohans.
All the backslapping and the applause, well, became unimportant. No more fun in it. Didn't mean anything anymore with Dad, Mom and Josie gone.
So Mary and I are going away to enjoy ourselves...
...visit all those places we've always wanted to see.
Old theaters where nobody ever even heard of us.
You'll have to go to Timbuktu.
Got it booked.
George, you've always been the one with the words.
I never was much of a hand at saying things.
But we've done more than make a lot of money.
And lose a little.
Sometimes friends drift apart.
Let's not let that happen to us.
No matter how legal dissolution of this partnership is, Sam...
...50% of me will always be in this office.
I'll remember that when the rent is due.
You'll be more successful than ever.
But if ever the rent does come due, and you can't meet it, well...
And, by the same token, if I get stuck in Madagascar, you'll hear from me.
You'd better get out of here.
That ship will sail without you.
Seasick pills.

I won't go to the boat with you.
You know how red my nose gets.
We thought you guys weren't
speaking to each other.
Can we have a picture of you
tearing up your contract?
Well, that's impossible.
We never had a written contract.
The only contract we've ever had:
Hold that pose, will you?
We want to show it to our legal department.
Life was less full, but it was
by no means empty.
I still had Mary.
A playmate as well as a helpmate.
We set out to rubberneck at the world.
Nelson Monument. It's a good thing
I wasn't born an Englishman.
With the history their flag has,
I'd have waved myself to death.
Oh, George.
I didn't know you could yodel.
Learned it on the farm.
Nothing but hog-calling with frost on it.
It takes two men to impersonate
a horse on Broadway.
And you always have trouble
catching the front end.
Folks always come back to where their
heart is. And we came back to the farm.
The farm we Cohans had dreamed of
when farmers were envying us.
Hey, mister. Our radiator needs some H2O.
Can we use your well?
Sure, go ahead.
Help yourselves.
Come on, Jack.
- Let's make this hop-up solid.
- Okay, Jackson. Come on.
- Radiator busted?
- No, it's only got high blood pressure.
What are you gonna do
when the tires give out?
Oh, it'll run a lot smoother on the rims.

"Stix nix hix pix."

- Greek. I'll bet that's Greek talk.
- That ain't Greek. That's Russian.
- "Stix nix hix pix."
- That's show business talk.

Here, I'll translate it for you.

Stix:

Hix:

Small towns refuse rube pictures.

"Stix nix hix pix."

Stix nix hix pix.

- I thought that was new jive talk.
- New what talk?
- Jive talk.
- Oh.

- Are you an actor, sir?

- Used to be.

- What were your pictures?

- Oh, not in pictures.

I was on Broadway,

the legitimate theater.

- Oh. What's your name, sir?

- Cohan.

- Coen?

- Cohan. George M. Cohan.

- I guess you must've been before our time.

- Yes, guess I was.

- Were you ever in some big shows?

- Yeah, a few.

- Like what?

- Oh, like Little Nellie Kelly...

... The Tavern, Ah, Wilderness!

Raised in a vacuum bottle.

I guess your parents must have seen me.

Fathers and mothers.

Maybe they have.

I never heard them talk about it.

Ever hear of a song called

"Give My Regards to Broadway"?

- I don't think so.

- No, sir. Who sang it?

- Who sang it?

- Was it a theme song or something?
A follow-up to
"Beat Me, Daddy, Eight to the Bar"?
Or "Jeepers Creepers."
Come on, kids. Time's a-wasting.
We gotta scram now.
Swinging session!
Thank you very much, Mr...
- What was your name again, sir?
- Cohan. George Cohan.
Goodbye, Georgie.
You're cute!
- Nice old guy. Let's go!
- We've got places to go and things to do.
Bye!
They did that.
I'm not angry,
but it's very discouraging.
Kid asked me my name, I said, "Cohan."
He asked me again, I said, "Cohan."
Never even heard of me.
But you've been away from
the theater for years, George.
Nine or ten generations
have grown up since then.
Naturally they don't remember you.
Nobody's got that good a memory.
Why not? Many generations remembered my
father and mother in vaudeville.
That's because they were real troupers.
They stayed with it.
Your father could do a good buck
and wing when he was 60.
- What makes you think I can't?
- I'd hate to see you try it.
Your father never sat around an orchard,
listening to his arteries hardening.
Nothing wrong with my arteries.
No, not right now because
those kids got you all worked up.
You're picking on me for a reason, Mary.
You're trying to get a rise out of me.
Come on. Let's have it. What is it?
All right. Here it is.

I got a long-distance call
from Sam Harris this afternoon.
What about?
He's producing a new show
by Kaufman and Hart.
They're good writers.
Nothing I can do to improve their stuff.
Sam thinks you could,
if you played the lead.
Play the lead?
What is the matter with that man?
Hasn't he got any sense at all?
- What's he trying to do? Spoil all our fun?
- But are you having fun, George?
When we were in Europe,
you haunted every theater...
...not knowing a word
that was said on-stage.
Going back, congratulating the actors.
They didn't know what you were saying.
Just to smell the greasepaint again.
You think I'm stage-struck. I only go
to the theater to get out of the night air.
Fun? I'm having a wonderful time.
I'll have nothing to do with Broadway.
Sam says it's a great part. No other actor
in the world but you could do it.
That's just more of that Harris con.
He needs me as much as
he needs a hole in the head.
He really does need you, George.
He's in trouble.
If positions were reversed,
he'd help you out. You know he would.
Besides, he never said so,
but Sam's broke.
- Can you think of any more reasons?
- Yes. I want you to.
Well, that settled it.
I've never refused you anything, have I?
We'll do it.
- Come on. Let's get packing.
- We're all packed.
- What?

- We're all packed, dear.
Now you can start getting mad all over again
because I told Sam I'd talk you into it.
What are you laughing about?
Just full of news, aren't you?
Telling me all kinds of things.
I want you to know
I knew it all the time.
I was listening in on the phone downstairs
while you were talking to Sam.
Why, you devil!
You knew it all the time!
And what's more, I phoned Sam
right back and told him I'd play it.
Oh, I ought to pop you.
You... oh!
Good work, kids.
I'll see you at 11 in the morning.
And then came your wire.
And I was really worried.
Here I am going on like Tennyson's Brook,
giving you my life story.
I'm sorry.
You should've stopped me.
Why, I wanted to hear
the story of your life.
It has a direct bearing
on my sending for you.
Do you know what this is?
Congressional Medal of Honor.
Let's see what the inscription says.
"To George M. Cohan.
For his contribution to the American spirit.
'Over There' and 'Grand old Flag.'
Presented by act of Congress."
I congratulate you, Mr. Cohan.
I understand you're the first person
of your profession to receive this honor.
You should be very proud.
I am proud.
In fact, I'm flabbergasted.
For the first time in my life, I'm speechless.
- You're sure there isn't some mistake?
- Quite sure.

But this medal is for people who've given
their lives for their country.
I'm just a song-and-dance man.
Everybody knows that.
A man may give his life to his country
in many different ways, Mr. Cohan.
And quite often, he isn't the best judge
of how much he has given.
Your songs were a symbol
of the American spirit.
"Over There" was just as powerful
a weapon as any cannon...
...as any battleship we had
in the First World War.
Today we're all soldiers.
We're all on the front.
We need more songs to express America.
I know you and your comrades
will give them to us.
Mr. President,
I've just begun to earn this medal.
It's quite a thing.
Well, it's the best material we could find,
what with priorities and all.
Goodbye, sir.
And I want you to know that
I'm not the only one that's grateful.
My mother thanks you. My father
thanks you. My sister thanks you.
And I assure you, I thank you.
And I wouldn't worry about this country
if I were you. We've got this thing licked.
Where else in the world could a plain guy
like me come in and talk with the head man?
Well, that's about as good a definition
of America as any I've ever heard.
- Goodbye, Mr. Cohan, and good luck.
- Goodbye, sir. And good luck to you.
What's the matter, old timer,
don't you remember this song?
Seems to me I do.
Well, I don't hear anything.