

BELLE TAKES OFF
Or, The Last Ten Minutes

Book by Gordon Cox
Music by Lance Horne
Lyrics by Gordon Cox & Lance Horne
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ILANA

(October 1990: Seattle. ILANA, 16, in front of her mirror. She addresses the shoulder pads she's wearing.)

I miss you already.

I know you're still here, safely Velcro-ed in close to me. Hi. Hi. But I worry about missing you once you're gone. You've always been here for me. If I ever needed a shoulder to cry on, I had two extra, right here. You got me through braces. You got me through my bat mitzvah. You distracted the boys from my boobs, which keep getting bigger and it's starting to scare me. Your padding protected me from the ups and downs of middle school, and from self-consciousness, and from falling objects. But now I'm feeling that it's time to move on.

MATT

(December 1999: MATT on an airplane on the runway at Newark Airport. He dials a number on his cell phone.)

Hi Mom. It's Matt? Happy ten minutes to New Year's.

Yes. Mom, I have my seatbelt on. I don't even have to, we're still on the runway. No, we're delayed.

Because this trip is important to me.

The plane is not going to explode. The president of Continental is on the flight with me. No, he's in first class. The point is, the president of the airline thinks it's okay to be in a plane when it hits midnight, so so do I. And if it *is* the end of the world, I'd like to be flying. I want to start the millennium airborne. Is that hard to understand?

Listen. Mom. Just in case. I have something to tell you.

I love you too, but that wasn't it.

No, Mom, of course I love you, but that wasn't what I was going to tell you. I just, I need you to know that—um—

I don't like white chocolate. I never did. But somehow you got it into your head that I did, and when I was on tour you kept sending me care packages full of white chocolate and I just never had the heart to tell you that I was throwing it all out and it's something that's been weighing on me and it's something that I think you should know and also I think you should know that I'm gay.

DANYELLE

(May 1996: DANYELLE on top of a grand piano in a rehearsal room in Chattanooga. She's wearing a hoop skirt and her back is to us. She's giggling with a lover, whom she blocks us from seeing. Our invisible friend flips her onto her back and she squeals with delight. Her legs are up in the air and the hoop skirt covers the man and his manipulations. She sighs. She giggles. She giggles again, a little less convincingly. She's not being satisfied here. Finally, she tries to get his attention behind the hoop skirt. It's tough; the skirt's really big.)

Hey. Hey. Can you hurry please? I don't mean to rush you; you're doing great work. But if you could go down before the curtain goes up. We've got a lot to accomplish here and it's places in fifteen.

I'm sorry if I'm impatient, but I've got 25 years of chastity waiting to let loose. This Belle has rebelled!

Shit, did I say 25? I mean 23. Fuck it, I'm 25. My resume says I'm 23. Don't tell anyone. I'm 25 and every night I'm sure that half the 12-year-olds I'm playing to have gotten laid already. And laid well.

MATT

Mom?

I know you're shocked. No, I actually prefer dark chocolate. But what about the other thing?

Oh. Well, then, can I tell Dad?

When did you talk about it? I wasn't even *sexual* when I was eight, how could you have—?

No, I mean, thanks, the unconditional love is great. Listen, I gotta go, I'm about to take off. *(fishing for some sort of shocked reaction)* For California. For a week. With a guy. Who might be my boyfriend.

(disappointed) I will. Happy new year. I love you too.

ILANA

What if my shoulders are too narrow? What if my head is too wide?

I can't think like that. I am a woman now that I let Matt Trombetta get to third base. Tonight I will not wear shoulder pads. Kimberly Morgan will snicker, and I should care what she thinks because she's a junior. But Kimberly Morgan is a stuck-up bitch who still thinks Paula Abdul is cool, *and* she still wears stirrup pants. Natural shoulders are the way forward, like laser discs. Like the Bedazzler.

(She attempts to remove her shoulder pads, but can't bring herself to do it.)

I don't think I'll make it on my own.

DANYELLE

Don't think I haven't tried. There've been years of fumbings and misfires and closet cases. But you're perfect for me. A music director is just what I need. A man with big hands, and rhythm.

DANYELLE (*continued*)

Oh! Yes. There's good. This I like. Be my guest! Be my guest! Put your service to the test!

ILANA

Besides, when I was in Starbucks the other day after school, the girl I wanted to be wasn't wearing shoulder pads. She was wearing a baggy flannel shirt, and a little skirt, and Doc Martens.

DANYELLE

Chattanooga! That's fun to say.

ILANA

I could wear a flannel shirt *with* shoulder pads.

DANYELLE

I can't wait to tell people I lost my virginity in Chat-ta-noo-ga. Choo choo!

ILANA

No, I think that's a don't.

MATT

Sure, I can hold.

SONG: "Belle Takes Off"

DANYELLE

I WAS PURE AND PRIM AND PROPER
AND A PIER ONE IMPORT SHOPPER
WHEN I JOINED THE SHOW
WITH MY FIRST LEG UP
IN CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE

THEN I MET THE MAN WHO'D
MUSIC DIRECT
AND AT FIRST GLANCE I STARTED
TO SUSPECT
THAT HE WOULD BE ONE TO DRIVE
THE DRIVEN SNOW RIGHT OUT OF
ME

BUT THEN WHO COULD TELL FOR
CERTAIN
THAT BEFORE MY OP'NING
CURTAIN
I'D BE LYIN' ON A STEINWAY

ILANA

MATT

SHOULDERS UNPADDED

DANYELLE (*continued*)

FOR ALL TO SEE

NOW I WANT IT DEEPER, FASTER,
HARDER

AS I'M SITTIN' GETTIN' EATEN
BY MY MUSICAL DIRECTOR IN
CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE.

AS MY STOMACH STARTS TO
RUMBLE
I FIND THAT DOUBTS ARE PASSIN'
THROUGH MY MIND.

WILL THIS BABY GRAND
CONTINUE TO HOLD ME?

IS MY LATENT VIRGINITY
SOMETHING I'LL MISS?
DID I LEAVE MY STUDIO IN
INWOOD FOR THIS?
FOR THE MUSICAL DIRECTOR OF
THE SEVENTH SEMI-REGIONAL IN
CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE?

I HAVE GIVEN UP

AND MY LIFE IS BETTER FOR IT
I HAVE GIVEN UP

AND MY LIFE IS BETTER FOR IT
DROPPING WHAT I DON'T NEED IS
GOOD FOR ME.

GOODBYE.

ILANA (*continued*)

FOR ALL TO SEE
NOW IT'S TIME TO FREE THE
FASHION MARTYR

WILL I EVER FIND SOMEONE TO
HOLD ME?

HOLD ME?

I'LL MISS YOU GUYS.
I MISS YOU ALREADY.
GOODBYE.
THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING.

I HAVE GIVEN UP
APPLIQUÉ
AND MY LIFE IS BETTER FOR IT
I HAVE GIVEN UP
ASYMMETRICAL HAIRCUTS
AND MY LIFE IS BETTER FOR IT
DROPPING WHAT I DON'T NEED IS
GOOD FOR ME.
SO TONIGHT I AM DUMPING MATT.
TONIGHT I DON'T CARE WHAT
KIMBERLY MORGAN THINKS.
TONIGHT I'M GOING TO SEE
EDDIE'S BAND, WHICH IS NOT
CALLED BLUE OYSTER CULT,
IT'S CALLED—JAM PEARL.
JAM PEARL IS THE WAVE OF THE
FUTURE, AND I AM RIDING THAT
WAVE WITH MY HEAD HELD HIGH
AND MY SHOULDERS UNPADDED
FOR ALL TO SEE.

I'LL MISS YOU GUYS.
I'VE MISSED YOU ALREADY.
GOODBYE.
Thank you for everything.

MATT (*continued*)

Hi. It's Matt Trombetta. I'm gay. Talk to
you later. Bye.

WILL I EVER FIND SOMEONE TO
HOLD ME?
AH,
TO HOLD ME?

I HAVE GIVEN UP

AND MY LIFE IS BETTER FOR IT
I HAVE GIVEN UP

AND MY LIFE IS BETTER FOR IT
DROPPING WHAT I DON'T NEED IS
GOOD FOR ME.

GOODBYE.

HI.
It's Matt Trombetta. We haven't talked in a
really long time, and things were weird the
last time, but it's the new year, and it

DANYELLE (*continued*)

I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

WHEN I THINK OF YOU I FIND THAT
DOUBTS ARE PASSING THROUGH
MY MIND

SO IF WE COULD BRING THIS ORAL
PORTION OF
BEHIND THE SCENES CONTORTION
TO A CLIMAX
I'VE A NOTION
THOUGH A DAMSEL OUGHTN'T
GRUMBLE
I'D NEGOTIATE
DEVOTION FOR A SLIGHTLY
MIGHTY TUMBLE, AND IT SEEMS
PREOCCUPATION NOT TO MENTION
PENETRATION
AND I'M TRYING TO
BE PATIENT, BUT MY STOMACH'S
GONNA RUMBLE, AND I'M
GETTING INFLAMMATION WHEN
IT OUGHT TO BE A TREAT BUT I'M
JUST HUNGRY FOR A WHOPPER
AND I'M SITTING GETTING EATEN BY
MY MUSICAL DIRECTOR...
OR ELSE
I'M JUST LIKE CYNDI LAUPER WAS
WHEN I LIKED CYNDI LAUPER
OR BETTE MIDLER AT THE MEETING
BUT THE TWO OF US CONNECT
JUST LIKE A PARSONS AND A
HOPPER

ILANA (*continued*)

IT WAS AWKWARD

GOODBYE.

I'LL MISS
YOU GUYS.

BUT WHATEVER
IF I NEVER
SEE YOU
AGAIN, IT STILL DOESN'T CHANGE
HOW IMPORTANT YOU WERE IN MY
LIFE

AND FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH

FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH
WHAT IT'S WORTH

MATT (*continued*)

might be the end of the world, so
I'M SORRY I DIDN'T HANDLE THINGS
WELL WITH YOU.
I THINK I LED YOU ON.
WE WERE ON TOUR AND
IT WAS AWKWARD AND
I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO
SO I GOT THAT OTHER GIG AND I
WAS GONE WITH THE TWENTY-FIFTH
NATIONAL TOUR OF LES MIZ
AND I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO SAY
GOODBYE SO I DIDN'T
AND I BET THAT MADE YOU FEEL
SORTA EMPTY-CHAIRS-AT-EMPTY-
TABLES.
SO YOU ARE PROBABLY AT A PARTY AS
YOU SHOULD BE...

No.

AND I KNOW HOW YOU CAN HIT THE
CEILING,
AND I BET I REALLY LEFT YOU
REELING,
CUZ I KNOW YOU REALLY LEFT ME
REELING,
AND I COULD HAVE SAID GOODBYE
I COULD HAVE SAID YOU'RE RIGHT
I COULD HAVE SAID ANYTHING

IT WASN'T YOU, IT WAS ME.
WELL,
MAYBE IT WAS A LITTLE BIT YOU

I'M SORRY.

I WAS CONFUSED.

IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN YOUR
LIP GLOSS,
WHICH WAS TOO FRUITY.

BUT WHATEVER

IF I NEVER
SEE YOU
AGAIN, IT STILL DOESN'T CHANGE
HOW IMPORTANT YOU WERE IN MY
LIFE

AND FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH

FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH
WHAT IT'S WORTH

DANYELLE (*continued*)
 CAUSE HE'S REALLY INTO FEET 'N
 CAUSE I THINK HE'S AMBIDEXT...
 IF THIS IS
 THE LAST DAY
 OR MAYBE HE'S AFFLICTED
 WITH A
 FLAIR THAT'S JUST AFFECTION
 AND I'M SURE HE'D GET ADDICTED
 (IF HE GOT SOME GOOD
 DIRECTION)
 CAUSE RIGHT NOW
 HE SEEMS PERPLEXED AND I CAN'T
 SEE IF HE'S ERECT
 BECAUSE I'M SITTIN' GETTIN'
 EATEN BY MY MUSICAL DIRECTOR,
 THOUGH AFTER SAYING YES YOU
 WILL
 YOU CAN'T BE HOMOSEXUAL
 HE HASN'T MUCH AFFINITY FOR
 CLAIMING MY VIRGINITY IN
 CHATTANOOGA, TENNE...

ILANA (*continued*)
 IF THIS IS THE LAST DAY ON EARTH
 THE LAST DAY
 I'LL MISS YOU
 GUYS
 I'VE MISSED YOU
 ALREADY
 GOODBYE.

MATT (*continued*)
 IF THIS IS THE LAST DAY ON EARTH
 I'LL
 MISS YOU.
 I'VE MISSED YOU.

(1996: ILANA, the stage manager, enters, seeing DANYELLE on the piano, but not MATT under the skirt.)

ILANA
 Oh my God. Are you okay?

DANYELLE
 I'm fine. Stay there. I'm fine. I'm warming up. It's Alexander Technique.

(She lets out a moan.)

ILANA
 Matt's not out in the pit. Have you seen him?

DANYELLE
 Not for a few minutes now—*(another moan)*

ILANA
 Ten minutes to places.

DANYELLE
 Ten.

MATT (*muffled*)
 Thank you.

END OF PLAY