

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

**FAILURE:  
A Love Story**

Annotated Script for Dramaturgy Site

*Scroll down to see definitions and more information about specific names,  
places, and references in the script.*

NOTE: This is NOT the final rehearsal/production script!

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

## **THE FAILURES**

**NELLY FAIL:** The youngest

**JENNY JUNE FAIL:** The middlest

**GERTRUDE FAIL:** The eldest

**JOHN N. FAIL:** The brother

**MORTIMER MORTIMER:** The lover

**THE CHORUS:** The Chorus can take any number of shapes. Multiple people, one person, puppets ... Feel free to reassign some or all of the Chorus' lines to other characters. You want to have the Fails talking about themselves in third person? Awesome. **You want the two dead parents to comprise the chorus** (Oh, they're dead. Spoiler alert? )? Go for it. You want a trio of hear-no/see-no/speak-no evil monkeys narrating the story? Rock on. The chorus is there to be tailored to your specific production. Make it as simple or complex as you see fit.

Also, you'll notice a bunch of other characters such as "Henry Fail," "Grandfather Clock," "Gramophone," "Dog", "Grantland Rice." These roles can be played by members of the chorus, by other characters, pre-recorded, etc. Again, feel free to use your creativity and pull from the strengths and shape of your production.

It is possible, though not required, for the same actress to play all three Fail sisters. If you want the Fail sisters to be played by three different actresses (or even seven different actresses), by all means, sally forth.

All this to say, this play is meant to be tailored to fit the needs and size of your production. It is possible to tell this story with as few as four actors or as many as fifty. So, have fun.

### **A Note on Music**

Some of the songs referenced in this play are in the public domain ("Let Me Call You Sweetheart" and the chorus of "How Ya Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm?"), some are original songs ("The Feeling" and "I Don't Need Anyone"), and some require a license to be performed ("I Guess I'll Have to Change My Plan", "Lover Come Back to Me" and "I Can't Give You Anything But Love"). If the rights cannot be secured for those songs requiring a license, you may use alternative songs with similar themes.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

**FAILURE: A LOVE STORY Arcadia Rehearsal Edits Spring 2024**

NELLY: Nelly was the first of the Fail Girls to die,

GERTY: Followed soon after by her sisters,

JENNY JUNE: Jenny June

GERTY: And Gerty Fail

NELLY: In that order.

JENNY JUNE: Causes of death were

NELLY: Blunt Object

JENNY JUNE: Disappearance

GERTY: And Consumption

Also in that order.

MOTHER:

Of course, plenty other Fails had died long before Nelly did.

FATHER:

Why, her own parents, Henry and Marietta Fail, drowned in the Chicago River

Some thirteen years back,

MOTHER:

Casualties of the Eastland Riverboat disaster.

JENNY JUNE:

Oh, they weren't *on* the Eastland.

No.

They were in a brand new Stutz Bearcat

Rattling east along South Water Street

Toward the Ohio Street Beach

Where their middlest daughter,

Jenny June Fail,

Was about to participate in an otherwise all male diving competition.

GERTY:

As they passed the Old Chicago Board of Trade to their right,

Hundreds of pleasure-seeking picnickers boarded the Eastland to their left.

The air was busy with hubbub and merriment.

An unseen gramophone pleaded with the passengers,

"Let Me Call You Sweetheart. I'm in love with you."

JENNY JUNE and NELLY (singing softly under the following lines):

as GRAMOPHONE (*Underscoring the following.*)

*"Let me call you "Sweetheart," I'm in love with you.*

*Let me hear you whisper that you love me too.*

*Keep the love-light glowing in your eyes so true.*

*Let me call you "Sweetheart," I'm in love with you."*

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

GERTY:

On street level,  
The only passenger in the brand new DeSota Town Car,  
Marietta Fail, was in peak spirits.  
The smoke-filled summer air smelled almost sweet,  
And she thought to herself,

MOTHER: "This is living. This is absolutely living."

GERTY: She was about to remark as much to her husband, Henry, when --

FATHER:

Henry was in *no mood!*  
The brand new DeSota Town Car  
Had not been his idea.  
"We certainly didn't need a car to come to America,"

GERTY: He'd tried reasoning with his wife,

FATHER: "And we don't need one to stay here."

MOTHER:

But Marietta had already made up her mind  
They absolutely *required*  
The brand new DeSota Town Car.  
She knew it wouldn't be long before her husband came around to her way of thinking.

FATHER: What Henry Fail was thinking:

Absolutely nothing of note had ever happened to him in a car.  
He was about to remark as much to his wife, Marietta, when --

JENNY JUNE: To their left,

The overcrowded Eastland,  
Strained against its moorings  
As the white picnic-dressed passengers raced to the waterside edge of the ship.

NELLY: An amateur canoe race was amaturely canoeing by,

And the picnickers wished to wave them "good luck."  
All at once, the weight of the women in white became too much for the top-heavy  
Eastland, and

JENNY JUNE:

SNAP!

It broke free of its holdings,  
Toppled side first  
Into the Great Chicago River,  
Taking all of its picnickers with it.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

GERTY: Henry and Marietta Fail,  
Rattling by on South Water Street,  
Were each about to remark to the other  
About the Brand New DeSota Town Car  
When the Eastland rolled over and died.

MOTHER:  
Marietta cried,  
“Henry, look out!”

GERTY: And He did,  
Swerving the brand new South Water Rattling, Ohio Street Beach-bound DeSota Town  
Car right off the road and into the concrete feet of the Old Chicago Board of Trade,  
Destroying the building’s façade, and upsetting

NELLY: --but not dislodging—

GERTY: The overhead bust of Dr. Ian K. Bonner,  
Father of Illinoisan Psychiatry.

MOTHER:  
In shock from the collision, Mother Fail cried again,  
“Henry! Henry!”

JENNY JUNE:  
The smoke-filled summer air  
Struggled with sounds of drowning and crooning and dresses and dying.

FATHER:  
Henry Fail grabbed at the clutch,

NELLY: It came off in his hand.

FATHER:  
--He stomped on the brake--

JENNY JUNE: The town car slid backward

MOTHER:  
--“Henry, look out!”--

GERTY: Into the street

FATHER:  
--He laid on his horn—

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

NELLY: Over the hemp rope barricades

FATHER:

-- He looked to his wife --

JENNY JUNE: Over the River's edge.

GERTY: And before either Fail realized what had hit them,  
The Chicago River did.

NELLY:

Nearly 850 people onboard the ill-fated Eastland,  
Along with Henry and Marietta Fail  
And their Brand New DeSoto Town Car,  
Sank deep, deep into the Chicago River that morning.

JENNY JUNE:

The same River into which,  
At that very moment,  
Their middlest daughter,  
Jenny June Fail,  
Was diving.

MOTHER and FATHER

*[Finishing the song.] "Let me call you sweetheart, I'm in love with you."*

NELLY:

So, to suggest that death had not played a very prominent role in the Fail Family Saga  
Before the year of the Fail sisters' deaths, would be absolute applesauce.

MOTHER:

Marietta Fail had not always been a Fail.  
She started out a Marishka Peabody Failbottom, of the Nelson-Peabody Failbottoms.  
She first met her future husband

FATHER:

(and cousin by marriage)  
Heiner Failbottom,

MOTHER:

When she was thirteen years old at a dog derby

GERTY: In a land their eldest daughter, Gerty, only ever heard them refer to as  
The Old Country.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

JENNY JUNE: By fourteen, Marishka and Heiner were betrothed.

NELLY: By fifteen they were wed,

GERTY: And by sixteen, the newly married cousins were on a boat bound for America.

JOHN N.

Their only son

John N. Fail

Would like to state,

In the interest of historical context,

That the marrying of cousins

--Or, for that matter, distant siblings--

Was not an uncommon practice.

In fact, it occurred with some frequency.

Take for example,

Mr. and Mrs. H.G. Wells.

And, lest it seem too outdated for modern tastes,

Please be reminded that the joining in holy matrimony of first cousins is still legal in

Forty-three of the now fifty United States.

And Guam.

FATHER:

Upon entering the United States,

First order of business for Heiner and Marishka Failbottom

Was to have their bottoms chopped off

By an overzealous Ellis Island desk clerk.

Once bottom-less,

Henry and Marietta Fail were free to enter the streets of New York City,

Teeming with immigrants, opportunity and lice.

MOTHER:

Mr. and Mrs. Fail came to the States with nothing to their name

Except for one time honored skill,

Which had been the primary trade of the Failbottoms

(on both sides)

For over a hundred years:

Clockworking.

FATHER:

Since time was of the essence,

Henry Fail decided they must settle down somewhere in need

Of a solid Clockworks Shop.

In exchange for resetting the pocket watch

Of a tug boat captain in Queens Village,

They were tugged all the way to Toronto,

Where they revived the marine chronometer

In the Captain's quarters of a freighter headed for Superior.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

There, an offer to realign the grooves  
 On a rickety paddle boat  
 Bought them safe passage down the Mississippi  
 Where the gift of a perfect-fit quartz to the daughter of a river-barge operator  
 Admitted them to the Chicago River

MOTHER:

Straight to the corner of  
 Lumber and Love  
 Where a two story rickety wooden structure  
 Quickly became the  
 Fail Family home and Clock Shop.

FATHER:

Having floated halfway around the world,  
 Then halfway across the continent,  
 Henry cut the plank, and Marietta painted the letters  
 For the sign above the door at Lumber and Love:  
 "Fail Clock Works, Est. 1900: Open."

GRAMOPHONE (The Fail Sisters?)

*"I can't give you anything but love, Baby.  
 That's the only thing I've plenty of, baby  
 Dream awhile, scheme awhile  
 you're sure to find  
 Happiness, and I guess  
 All those things you've always pined for*

*Gee, I'd like to see you looking swell, baby  
 Diamond bracelets, Woolworth's doesn't sell, baby  
 Until that lucky day, you know darn well, baby  
 I can't give you anything but Love."*

GERTY:

In the span of a year, Mr. and Mrs. Fail had gone from  
 Heiner and Marishka  
 To Henry and Marietta  
 And finally to Mother and Father.  
 Their first daughter,  
 Gertrude Annelea Fail  
 Was born in the creaky upstairs bedroom  
 On Lumber and Love  
 At the very front of 1900.  
 The Fails were a family. And they were in business.



Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

JENNY JUNE:

“The Fail Clock Works Est. 1900: Open” was a roaring success.  
Situated, as it was, near the Chicago dockyards,  
Tardy men were forever stopping in for a tune-up,  
Usually requiring nothing more than a winding and a reminder to do so with regularity.

FATHER:

“The Wind and Remind”  
As Henry called it.  
“Penny a turn.”

Always prompt and orderly, Henry’s clocks gained a reputation in the industrious city:  
“A Fail Clock is a Working Clock.”  
And everyone HAD to have one.

MOTHER: It wasn’t long before Marietta joined him in the shop.

GERTY:

As a toddler, Gerty Fail spent her days  
With nothing but time on her hands,  
Time in all shapes and sizes.  
Tea timers, two timers, and time tuners.  
She loved to sit at the feet of the Grandfather Clock,  
Press her ear against its great glass stomach  
And listen to the steady oscillation of its guts.  
Her favorite game was a sort of  
“Toss the Cogs”  
Which made good use of the discarded parts  
On the end-of-day shoproom floor.  
Though the Fails could not provide much for their young Gerty,  
They gave her all the time she wanted.  
And more.

JENNY JUNE:

Which is why, at the funeral for the youngest Fail girl,  
Nelly Fail,  
There was a small uncomfortable laughter from the crowd, when her parents were  
described as “The *Late* Mr. and Mrs. Henry Fail.”  
Surrounded by so many clocks, the Fails had never been late for anything.  
Ever.

NELLY:

Which is also why, on the day of her very first diving competition, the middlest Fail girl,  
Jenny June,  
Did not understand why she couldn’t find  
The proud faces of her parents in the crowd.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

JENNY JUNE:

“Surely they can’t be *late*!”

She took second place in that diving contest, by the way.

Extremely proud of her red ribbon, the photographs from the event show two slippery  
Boys perched on graduated wooden blocks, and one gangly girl in an ill-fitted swim cap  
Squinting into the crowd for signs of her parents.

First place went to a Northside German boy named Johnny Weissmuler.

It was on that day that Jenny June Fail decided both the sport and the sportsman she  
would spend the rest of her life attempting to conquer.

GERTY:

A life which began, incidentally,  
In the creaky upstairs bedroom  
On Lumber and Love  
In 1907.

Her older sister,

A then six year old Gerty Fail,

Was not pleased.

She placed a customer’s broken kitchen clock in her new sister’s crib.

The problem with the clock: it ran in reverse.

Gerty was roundly scolded.

JENNY JUNE:

Unlike Gerty, who spent every hour indoors,  
Jenny June Fail was an immediate water bug.  
She took to the nearby river like a cog to a wheel.

MOTHER: Much to the chagrin of her mother,  
Marietta Fail.

NELLY: The River was  
--how should we put this?—

MOTHER: Disgusting.

JENNY JUNE:

But Jenny June never paid any mind.

She dove right in among the hog guts and grease cups  
And never a day was she sick.

FATHER:

As a young girl of the river,

Jenny June felt a certain connection to the city that somehow only her father understood.

Henry knew what it meant to know a city from the water up.

He understood his daughter’s need to pump herself through the veins of a place.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

And so he encouraged her river endeavors,

MOTHER:

A pastime which Marietta Fail was quick to point out to her eldest daughter, Gerty was  
“Not becoming of a young lady.”

GERTY and JENNY JUNE:

Gerty and Jenny June did not get along.

NELLY:

Thank heaven then for the arrival of the youngest Fail girl,  
Eleanor Elisabeth Fail.  
Nelly for short.

But Nelly was not short.  
Not in any way.  
She was long and lean,  
--Even as a child--  
Full of patience and listening and laughter.  
Her first word was “Yes” and her second was  
“Hooray!”

As a baby she was all laughter.  
Every hour on the hour,  
Henry Fail would set his baby daughter on the floor of the shop and wait for the hundreds  
of clocks to clang out the time.  
Little Nelly’s face would light up and her riotous giggle could be heard even above the  
din of the clock chorus.  
Neither Nelly nor her family ever tired of this.

Nelly united the affections of the Fail Family so unanimously  
That none could imagine a happier family.

JOHN N.:

But in 1910, Marietta Fail gave birth to a dead child  
She would have named Margaret.

FATHER:

And nobody knew  
Quite  
What to say.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

GRAMOPHONE (Recording?)

*“Let me call you sweetheart, I’m in love with you.  
Let me hear you whisper that you love me too.  
Keep the love-light glowing in your eyes so true.  
Let me call you Sweetheart, I’m in love with you.”*

NELLY: They buried the little girl in the North Avenue Cemetery

JENNY JUNE: On a tiny hill with a view of the water.

GERTY: They never spoke of her again,

MORTIMER (as Henry): But once a year, on the anniversary of her birth and death,

Henry Fail would take a watch and a sandwich

And spend the day at his late daughter’s grave.

JOHN N.:

Marietta Fail was never the same after that.

She was quiet,

Listless.

JENNY JUNE:

Everything she did, she did through a cloud of sadness.

Time became a torment to her.

NELLY:

She left broken clocks unfixed,

Preferring the ones that refused to tick.

GERTY:

When customers came to retrieve them,

Gerty quietly apologized and promised to fix them herself.

FATHER:

Marietta sat in her room

In her bed

Watching the hands of the coo coo clock spin.

JENNY JUNE:

It was during this time that the Fail Girls cranked into gear.

GERTY:

Gerty kept the Fail Clock Works in motion,

Becoming more and more her Father’s girl.

She cut her teeth on cutting teeth.

She discovered a method to replace a broken mainspring

Without removing the arbor from the barrel.

From her Father, she learned the proper way to lubricate the pivot seats

On the movement plates.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

She became  
In time  
An expert  
In time.

NELLY:

Jenny June set aside her daily river swims  
To redirect her attentions toward Nelly.  
It was Jenny June who witnessed Nelly's first steps,  
And promptly ran in to announce to her father and Gerty at the workbench that

JENNY JUNE:

"Nelly's almost ready to swim!"

FATHER:

Time went by like this for a while.

MOTHER:

GRAMOPHONE (*To the tune of "How Ya Gonna Keep 'Em Down On The Farm?"*)

*"Where did the time go  
Does anyone know  
When we were having fun?  
Why must the hands tick  
by on the clock  
Just like they're not  
Ever gonna stop?  
Where is the day  
We used to make hay  
All the day long in the sun?"*

*The stubborn hour hand says Time to go.  
I swear it wasn't there an hour ago.*

*Where did the time go?  
Does anyone know?  
When were having fun?"*

GERTY:

One day, a minute before noon on a weekday,  
With Marietta Fail cloistered in the upstairs bedroom,  
Gerty was helping her father polish the crystal of a newly restored LeRoy Pocket piece.  
Jenny June was playing "I'm going to eat your head" with her baby sister, Nelly.  
All the clocks struck twelve.

CLOCKS (EVERYONE):

Bong Bong Bang CLANG RING Coo coo DING DONG TICK BRANK BLING

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

GERTY: When---

WINDOW (JENNY JUNE)  
CRAAAAAAAAAAAAAASH!

FATHER:  
Dashing up the staircase so quickly  
That he dropped the LeRoy into Gerty's shaking hands,  
Henry Fail threw open his bedroom door.  
Marietta Fail, in her dressing gown,  
Hair and ribbons akimbo  
Pointed accusatorily at the jagged hole in their window.

MOTHER:  
"I won't take it anymore!"  
She screamed.  
"I won't listen to that damned thing mock me!"

JENNY JUNE:  
It was Jenny June Fail,  
Her sister Nelly on her hip,  
Who crept out of the shop,  
Beneath the "Fail Clock Works Est. 1900: Open"  
To find the guilty coo coo clock,  
Its springs and movements splayed across Lumber and Love.  
The dead coo coo bird hung limp from the tiny shutters  
Like the lazy tongue of a dead dog.  
Jenny June looked back toward her parents' bedroom window,  
Where she saw a hole in the glass and two adults wrestling standing up.  
She swore she could hear Marietta crying.  
But, the sounds of the tears were too small to belong to her mother.

She looked behind her.  
Nothing.  
She crossed over Lumber and Love,  
Her parents behind and above her struggling for understanding.  
Gerty stood in the front door, still holding the half-polished LeRoy,  
And looking to see if anyone else had witnessed the murder of the coo coo clock.  
When Jenny June ducked beneath the rope dividing the road from the river bank,  
She found a wicker bread basket,  
Dirty from the water,  
And a baby,  
Wet, hungry, and fussy.  
When the baby saw Jenny June's face it screamed with all its tiny might  
And Nelly giggled.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

NELLY:

It was a boy.

In one fist was a small river snake that seemed neither threatened nor threatening.

In the other hand, a scrap of wood bearing a message written in coal.

“I loved him best I could.”

And a name

JOHN N.:

“John N.”

JENNY JUNE:

The Fail Family now had a son.

JOHN N.:

And a snake.

MOTHER:

Marietta Fail’s recovery was quick and born of necessity.

The family raised the young John N. as if he was their own.

Indeed, he was.

NELLY:

But he was slow to blossom in the Fail home.

Always a bit uncomfortable with the bells and whistles of the workshop,

He preferred instead to be outside with the birds and river rats,

Or watching his sister Jenny June

Spring in and out of the same black tar waters

Which had delivered him to the Fail Family home.

JOHN N.:

A lover of all things fauna,

John N. Fail was forever bringing home new “animal friends.”

MOTHER:

Henry and Marietta Fail did their best to accommodate as many of these as they could.

But Marietta absolutely put her foot down when it came to rats.

JOHN N:

Such a shame, considering the plentiful supply of homeless *rodentia*

From the oh-so-near riverbank.

GERTY:

But, as young John N. grew bigger and healthier,

So did the snake which they had found in his grasp.

And, after one very necessary trip to the library,

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

Gerty Fail learned it wasn't a river snake at all. But a baby ball python,  
A non-venomous but, all the same, deadly constrictor native to the wilds of Africa.

GERTY (cont): Hm.

JENNY JUNE: As the snake grew larger and hungrier,  
JOHN N: The local rat population became less and less of an issue.

MORTIMER: (*remembering this*)

And so,  
By the year 1915,  
On the day that both Mother and Father Fail plunged backward into the river,  
A wise beyond her years Gerty Fail  
Was left with the charge of a well respected Clock Shop  
Two younger sisters both under the age of ten,  
An adopted brother,  
An anomalous ball python  
And no parents to her name.  
She was the same age as her mother  
The year she wed her father.

\*\*\*

FATHER:

Time soldiered on.  
Ten years later,  
As the nation nears the end of the "Era of Wonderful Nonsense,"  
So ill-prepared to face the uncertainty of the 1930's,  
The Fail children still live in the rickety two story  
"Fail Clock Works Est. 1900: Open"  
On Lumber and Love.

MOTHER:

But they are no longer children.  
Gerty Fail has taken up where her parents left off,  
Keeping Chicago's clocks and her family's shop running.  
At the ripe old age of 22, Jenny June Fail has devoted herself  
To Competitive Lake Swimming,  
Just like Johnny Weismuller.  
A very beautiful 20 year old Nelly Fail  
Seeks only the simple joys of days amongst friends and family  
And nights filled with jazz and jitterbugging.  
At an indeterminate age, the studious John N. Fail  
Busies himself pursuing an education in the veterinary sciences,  
Though nobody understands what exactly he plans to *do* with that.



Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER:

It is February, 1928.

And it is the last year of each of the Fail Sisters' lives.

*[The shop. Gerty alone with the clocks. The clocks "talk" to each other.]*

WALL CLOCK (FATHER)

Tick tock. Tick Tock . . . .

Pssst. Tick tock.

COUNTER CLOCK (MOTHER)

Tock tick. Tock tick.

WALL CLOCK (FATHER)

Tick tick tock.

COUNTER CLOCK (MOTHER)

Tick Tock?

WALL CLOCK (FATHER)

*Tock!*

GRANDFATHER CLOCK (JOHN N)

Gong! Gong!

COOCOO CLOCK (JENNY JUNE)

Oohoo oohoo oohoo! Whirrrrrrrriiirrrrrriiirrrrrrr.

ALL CLOCKS

Wtttttttrtrtrtrtrtrtr chlick! Shhhhck!

GERTY

Ahem.

ALL CLOCKS

tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick . . . .

WALL CLOCK (FATHER)

Gnnrrrrnnn TING!

GERTY

Quarter to Five? Already?

WALL CLOCK (FATHER)

Tick.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

GERTY

If you say so.

FRONT DOOR (JOHN N)

Bading Ding. Ding ding.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Good afternoon!

GERTY

Good *evening*.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Is it evening? I swear, I have a devil of a time with ... well, time.

GERTY

Then you've come to the right place.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Say, you're right. Mind if I have a looksie?

GERTY

Please.

COOCOO CLOCK (JENY JUNE)

*[A fancy whistle to indicate he's a good looking fella.]*

GERTY

Anything in particular I can help you with?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Oh, I don't need any help.

GERTY

Are you looking for something?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Nothing at all. I have everything I need.

COOCOO CLOCK (JENNY JUNE)

*[Whistle.]*

GERTY

Then, may I remind you we close at five o'clock? On the nose?

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Oh? What time is it now?

*[All the clocks, annoyed, tick a little louder.]*

GERTY

Please let me know if I can be of any use to you.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Okie Dokie, Miss...

GERTY

Fail. Like the sign says.

GRAMOPHONE (TBD)

*"I don't need anyone. All I need is you.*

*I'm not looking for someone. Now I've found you.*

*If I say that I'm lonely, it's only half true.*

*I'm only lonely for you.*

*[Trumpet solo underscores the following.]*

*booh bubh bubh bubh burm boorm borrm buurrrr; bruo doo doo doo.*

*Buh duh duh duh duh durm doom, broow doo doo doo.*

*Burr burr brurr bauhduh duh duh, bad ah doo dorrhh dhrrr*

*Drrrh Booruwww, bauhduh doo doo."*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Nice place you got here.

GERTY

I know. It's my place.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

You don't say? The whole place belongs to you?

GERTY

To our family, yes.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Oh, there's a, there's a Mr. Fail.

GERTY

Yes.

My father.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Ah, swell.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

GERTY  
He's dead.

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
Gee, I'm sorry.

GERTY  
May I ask what you are doing in a clock shop?

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
I'm sorry?

GERTY  
We only sell one thing, and from the looks of you, it's the one thing you've already got.

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
Oh? What've I got?

GERTY  
Time. Time on your hands, Time on your side. Time.

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
Darned if you don't got me figured out already, don't ya?

GERTY  
Let's see if I can nail this down.  
May I?  
You don't come from money, but you've never wanted for much, either.  
You tried your luck with the ponies, card games and crapshoots, but you played clean.  
You're not one of Al's boys; too many rings around your collar and not enough on your fingers.  
You took what you made at the races and bought into the market.  
Let me guess. G.E.? Sears Roebuck? Anything with two words in the title and a million men on the floor.  
You made a small fortune, and you used that to make a big fortune.  
Now you can't stop investing. You're infected with investments.  
Everything you ever suspected you might want is already yours. You're a millionaire, you're walking on air, and you're bored.

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
Gee.

GERTY  
Men like you don't have any respect for time.  
Especially other people's.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

I bet you don't even own a watch.

*[He pulls out a pocket watch and dangles it before her.]*

How did I do with the rest of it?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I'm not a millionaire.

Yet.

But the rest is pretty right on. How'd you do that? Say, you ain't one of them gypsy mind readers, are ya?

GERTY

I'm a Virgo. We don't believe in astrology.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

The name's Mortimer.

GERTY

Gertrude.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Can I call you Gerty?

GERTY

No.

Mortimer is your first name, or your family name?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Both.

GERTY

Your name is Mortimer ... Mortimer?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Yes.

GERTY

I've never met a man so successful he's named after himself.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

It's a family name.

GERTY

It would have to be.

That's a nice time piece. May I?

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Be my guest. It's been in the family for ages. Who knows how many Mortimers it's ticked off.

GERTY

It's beautiful.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I'm hoping to have it engraved. As a gift.  
Do you do that sort of thing?

GERTY

My sister does.  
She has an eye for penmanship.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Then I can't wait to meet your sister, Gerty ... *trude*.

GERTY

You'll have to wait, I'm afraid. She's out at the moment.  
But I can take down your message and see that she gets right to work on it.  
What would you like it to read?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

"Will you marry me?"

WALL CLOCK [*busting a spring*](FATHER)

Boy yoy yoy yoy yoying!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I'd like it to read, "Will you marry me?"  
You see, I don't have *everything*.  
Yet.

GERTY

If I may ... the sentiment might be all the sweeter if you included the young lady's name.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

That's the trouble, Miss Fail. I don't know the girl's name.  
I don't know what she looks like.  
I don't know where she lives.  
In fact, I've never even met her.

GERTY

In that case, good luck.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Thanks, I may need it.

GERTY

You'll need more than a watch, that's for sure.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I know she's out there, I just don't know anything else.

GERTY

Yes, that's clear.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

It's not as bonkers as all that.

Why? Do you know the name of the man you're gonna marry?

GERTY

I'm not getting married.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

What, never?

GERTY

Well, how should I know?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

But you *want* to be married?

GERTY

Maybe I do and maybe I don't.

Either way, it's no business of yours.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

You don't want to become an old spinster do ya?

GERTY

I hardly think that growing old while remaining unmarried qualifies one as a spinster.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

You might wanna consult a dictionary.

GERTY

Mr. Mortimer! I'm trying to be cordial, but I find your conversation tedious and invasive.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Gee, you'll never catch a fella with that attitude.

GERTY

I'm not trying to catch a fella!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Good, you're not catching one.

GERTY

I would *like* to close up shop.

At five o'clock. On the nose!

If there is nothing else you want ---

MORTIMER MORTIMER

You know what I want, Getrude-not-Gerty. It's what every guy with a ring around his collar instead of his finger wants.

Tell me, will I find what I'm looking for here?

COUNTER CLOCK (MOTHER)

Tickticktickticktickticktickticktick

Tickticktickticktickticktickticktick

GERTY

I can have it for you tomorrow.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

The watch or the ---?

GERTY

The watch, Mr. Mortimer! I couldn't *begin* to help you with the other matter!

*[She exits with the watch.]*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I---

Okey Dokey.

GRANDFATHER CLOCK (JOHN N):

Tisck Tisck Tock.

JOHN N (cont.):

Mortimer Mortimer had never been in a clock shop before.

In fact, it was rare that he found himself in *any* shop.

If a transaction didn't require a fitting or a negotiating, he preferred to have one of his people conduct it.



Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

But staring at his own face in the face of an 18<sup>th</sup> century Swiss Quarter Chiming Mantel Clock, he thought to himself,

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Perhaps I should get out more.

FATHER

The tick tick ticking of the many, busy instruments reminded him of the reassuring run of a ticker tape bringing him news of success after success.

MOTHER

The numbers on the faces of everyone in the room reminded him of the numbers on the minds of most of his Yes Men.

MORTIMER

“Yes. Yes,” thought Mortimer Mortimer, he could feel very much at home in a place like this. This is a place where he could succeed.

*[Calling off.]*

Hey, tell your sister she can take her time with that watch, won’t ya? I doubt I’ll meet the girl of my dreams before tomorrow.

GERTY

And that’s when Nelly Fail walked through the front door.

FRONT DOOR (JOHN N)

Bading. Ding Ding.

NELLY

I’m not late, am I!?

MORTIMER

She was the most beautiful girl

NELLY

I don’t want to miss it!

MORTIMER

He’d ever seen.

GRANDFATHER CLOCK (JOHN N)

Snap!

*[All the clocks strike five loudly and in their own ways. NELLY soaks in the sounds before giggling bigly.]* ALL BUT MORT AND NELLY – ADD SOUND

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

NELLY

Oh thank heaven!

I was afraid I'd missed the five o'clock chorus.

This darn newfangled wrist chronometer is always so slow. Of course, that's because I keep forgetting to wind it, Dum Dora. But, I like running behind. It makes me feel as if I have more time than I actually do. I don't believe we've met. I'm Nelly.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Mort--Mort---

NELLY

Nice to meet you, Mort Mort.

If you're looking for Gerty, you're too late. Shop closes every day at five o'clock. On the nose.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I'm ... not looking for anyone.

NELLY

Oh!! Do you know that song?! It's positively the berries!

Where's that gramophone? Oh *there* you are!

GRAMOPHONE (TBD) Cont. throughout...

*"I'm not looking for anyone,"*

NELLY

Hooray! *"Now I have you."*

GRAMOPHONE

*"I don't need someone,"*

NELLY

*"I only need you."*

GRAMOPHONE

*"If I say that I'm lonely,"*

NELLY

*"It's only half true."*

NELLY AND GRAMOPHONE

*"I'm only lonely for you."*

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

NELLY

Oh, isn't it just the cat's pajamas!?

Mr. Mort Mort, are you alright? You look like you've seen a ghost.

You'd better get yourself to a doctor. People oughtn't go around looking the way you do, it isn't healthy.

I know! You need some Tonsiline. That'll fix you right up. Father used to put it on everything. Even his clocks. "Why not?" he'd say, "It works for my little Nelly." And then we'd laugh ourselves silly.

Do you know the jingle?

*"Keep your hubby on the line.*

*Shoot that man some Tonsiline."*

GRAMOPHONE

*"Wah wah."*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

You have the voice of an angel.

NELLY

Of course I do. I'm a professional singer.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

You don't say!

NELLY

Well, not yet. But I will be.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

When?

NELLY

That's the part I haven't figured out yet.

Golly, you wouldn't happen to be a big time producer, would ya?

GERTY

For the first time in his life, Mortimer Mortimer wished he was somebody else.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

No. I'm not a big time producer.

NELLY

Just my luck, you're not a producer. Just my luck.

Only last night, I met three fellas at the Black 'n Tan, and not a one of 'em was a producer. Though all of 'em said they were.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I can give you everything!

NELLY

What?!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I can give you *anything*!

NELLY

Are you bananas?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Anything you want. Things you don't even know you want. *Anything*.

NELLY

Anything?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Everything.

NELLY

Really?

But Mort Mort, I hardly know you!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Then we don't got a minute to lose.

We gotta start getting to know each other right away.

NELLY

Why, what's the big rush?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Well, I figure I oughta know a thing or two about a girl before I ask her to be mine?

NELLY

Be yours!?

Now wait a minute! I'm a lady, and you're not even a big time producer!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Oh say you'll be mine, Nelly, gee, you just gotta!

NELLY

I don't *gotta* do nothing!

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

And I certainly don't gotta do nothing just because some rover shows up and tells me I gotta. I, for one, do not make a habit of running off with the first handsome fellow to look my way. I haven't done that in years!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

You really think I'm handsome?

NELLY

Well, of course you are, Mort Mort. Look at your face. Just look at it.

*[He can't.]*

Well, it's gorgeous. I didn't mean it, what I said before about people oughtn't go about looking the way you look. I think the way you look is fine.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

And I think the way you look is fine.

NELLY

Mort Mort, we have so much in common!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

See? We're perfect for each other.

NELLY

All the same, I think we should probably slow down.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Yes, my darling. We mustn't get carried away.

NELLY

You're right. We should kiss instead.

*[They do. The clocks hide their faces.]*

COOCCO CLOCK (JENNY JUNE)

*[Whistles.]*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Woweee! Nelly, where have you been all my life?

NELLY

I don't know. How old are you?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I'm twenty-six.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

NELLY

I think twenty-six is such a proper age for a man. Every man should be twenty-six at least once in his lifetime. But it's rather an unseemly age for a woman, don't you think?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I guess I'd never thought about it.

NELLY

I'm going to skip straight from twenty-four to grandmother, and I'm going to wear lace every day.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Is that what you want? It's important that I know EXACTLY what you want, because I've only just realized I'm going to spend the rest of my life trying to give it to you.

NELLY

Quick, without thinking, tell me your dreams.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

My dreams? Well, let's see...

NELLY

Without thinking! Without thinking!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Right! Last night, I was on a great boat in the shape of a panda. I was dressed like a mummy and eating a moon pie.

NELLY

I mean your hopes, Darling. Your dreams for the future.

GERTY

Though he'd made a fortune investing in futures, Mortimer Mortimer had never given much thought to his own. He never saw the point of concerning himself with anything but Right Now, for he'd never existed in any time other than Right Now. But Right Now, Mortimer Mortimer found himself face to face with his future.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

My dream is you.

I didn't know it.

How could I have?

But now I've found you, and it's suddenly as real to me as if it were carved into my skin. My dream is to love you.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

NELLY

Till death do us part?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Even beyond death, Nell.

NELLY

Call me Nelly.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Sorry. Nelly.

Do you think that maybe you could love me too?

At least until death?

NELLY

Of course I could, Mort Mort.

The question is, will I?

See, I don't want to fall in love with just anybody. I'm not looking for someone, I'm looking for someone in specific.

Someone handsome, debonair, sophisticated, a family man.

I want a man who knows how to wear pants so they don't wrinkle behind the knees.

I want a man who sings and who dances and understands flowers.

I want a man who smells like soap when he's clean and like a nice day at the beach when he's not.

I want a man who once loved –and I do mean with all of his little boy heart –*loved* a dog.

I want a man who rinses out the Brilliantine before laying his rich dark hair on the pillows I've fluffed expressly for the weight of his big tired head.

I want a big man.

I want a man who may not always be nice, but who is always always kind.

I want a man who eats wheat.

I want a man who reads the Bible out loud and the newspaper silent.

I want a man who says please and thank you and hunky-dory and means it.

I want a man I can help become a winner at his workplace by starting his day with Post Bran Flakes.

I want a man who speaks his mind and listens when I speak mine, even though we needn't say a word because we always -- the both of us -- know exactly what the other is thinking.

You know?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Exactly.

NELLY

Also, I want to be a movie star like Lillian Gish.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I may not know Lillian Gish,  
But I do know a guy who eats wheat.

NELLY

Let's you and me get out of here.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Yes ma'am. We can go for a drive in my car, if you like.

*[She slaps him.]*

Or not.

NELLY

I *never* ride in cars!

Cars are for cheats, gangsters, and corpses.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

And milkmen. Don't forget them.

NELLY

Oh, Mort Mort, I'm sorry I hit you. Let's never quarrel again.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

That's all jake, Nelly. I oughtta known better than to suggest you'd be fresh enough to go riding with a fella you just met. You're no dime-a-dance girl.

NELLY

Why not take a walk? Along the river.

Doesn't that sound romantic?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Baby, anywhere you're going is right where I want to be.

NELLY

I feel the need to tell you...

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Yes? What is, Nelly?

NELLY

I've never been so happy as I am at this very moment.

JOHN N.

She had less than a month to live.

NELLY: The courtship was brief.



Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER: Very brief.

NELLY: Not so brief as it's just been depicted here.

MORTIMER: No no. That's an exaggeration.

NELLY: But not a big one.

MORTIMER: The more they learned of each other

NELLY: The more they loved each other.

MORTIMER: And the more time they spent together

NELLY: The more time they wanted to spend together.

MORTIMER: And so they spent their time.

NELLY: They invested it

BOTH: In each other.

GERTY

And the investment was soon to pay off.

They were to be wed at the Fail Clock Works Est. 1900: Closed

On the corner of Lumber and Love,

JENNY JUNE

But not before Mortimer Mortimer had met and gained approval from every living Fail.

GERTY

Of course, he'd met Nelly's older sister, Gerty.

Approval there was pending.

JENNY JUNE: But the rest of the Fail Family,

GERTY: Sprightly Jenny June,

JOHN N: Somber John N.

GERTY: And his collection of zoological friends,

JENNY JUNE: Remained to be won over.

\*\*\*

JOHN N.

There comes a time

In the life of many creatures

When the pain of living becomes something closer to dying.

It's at times like these, when the only humane course of action is euthanasia.

MOTHER

John N. was never what you might call

A "People Person."

JOHN N.

First. Approach the animal, looking him straight in the eyes.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

FATHER

He'd never been at all at ease with most members of the human race.

JOHN N.

If the animal is a canine, approach from beneath the muzzle, do not show your teeth, but do maintain eye contact.

MOTHER

Often silent in the company of others,  
If John N. harbored any gay or entertaining thoughts,  
He played the gentleman and kept them to himself.

JOHN N.

Gently administer the sedative.  
*[He unscrews a flask and offers it to the dog.]*  
Pal?

MOTHER

But with animals,

JOHN N.

How you feeling, Pal?

MOTHER

He was a natural.

DOG (FATHER cont throughout)

Not good, Johnny. I got the shakes and the aches, the itches and the twitches.  
The only thing I ain't got now is a prayer.

JOHN N.

Don't say that.

DOG

Level with me, Johnny. It's bad, ain't it?

JOHN N.

I'm sorry, Pal.

Do your best to calm the patient. If you know he appreciates a nice scratch behind the ear, now's the time to do it. You want your friend—the patient – to be calm. Do this for as long as either of you needs.

DOG

We had a good run, didn't we?

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

JOHN N.  
We did.

DOG  
You remember the time I brought in that skunk from the drainage pipe?  
I thought I was bringing you something real swell—

JOHN N.  
Boy did my sisters go through the roof.

DOG  
Them's was good times.  
What're you gonna tell the others? The birds? And the snake?  
You gonna tell 'em I went to go live on a farm?

JOHN N.  
You? They'd never believe it.

DOG  
You got that right. Ha ha h—*cough cough cough*.  
Oh boy oh boy, this is ruff.

JOHN N.  
While putting the patient at ease, ready a syringe loaded with a complimentary  
antiarrhythmic agent. Take care you've diverted the patient's attention away from the  
injection site.

Can you ever forgive me, Pal?

DOG  
Look at me, Johnny. Look me in the eyes.  
You know and I know  
Just because something ends, that don't mean it wasn't a great success.  
Now do it.

JOHN N.  
So long, old friend.  
Give those cats in heaven hell.

*[John N. administers the poison, and Dog goes to sleep.  
Outside the Fail house.]*

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
Golly, Nelly, I'm awful nervous to meet your brother.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

NELLY

Don't be ridiculous. There's no reason to be scared of my brother.  
It's my sisters you should be scared of.  
Fix your collar.

NELLY (cont.)

In the two weeks they'd been courting, Nelly had not yet brought her intended upstairs to the Fail Family residence.  
And though she put up a strong front,  
She was every bit as nervous as Mortimer Mortimer.

NELLY

Ready?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

As I'll ever be.  
I love you.

NELLY

So they'll love you too.  
Now go on.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

You're not coming with me?

NELLY

Silly. They've already met me.  
Besides, I wouldn't want my family to swallow their opinions out of regard for me.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

No, we wouldn't want that.

As Mortimer Mortimer took the stairs,  
He was transported out of the rigid, mechanical realm of the downstairs shoproom  
Into the freewheeling indoor Eden of the upstairs livingroom.  
Birds took baths and women swam in the air  
While overgrown dinosaur snakes sat reading the morning paper  
And sipping up coffee.

MOSES (GERTY)

Sssslurp.

*[Mae and December, two feral monk parakeets, sit on their perches in the corner. Moses, the ball python is curled up in an easy chair flipping through the Chicago Sun Times with her tail.]*

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

DECEMBER (FATHER)

Hello.

MAE (MOTHER)

Yes?

*[The birds notice Mortimer. The animals freeze and stare.]*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Um.

Hello.

DECEMBER (FATHER)

*HE-LLO!*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

May I, uh, may I come in?

MAE (MOTHER)

Yes!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I, uh, gee, I guess I'm here to meet the Fail Family. Are they at home?

MAE

Yes.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Okey Dokey.

It's, uh, it's a nice day outside. Spring is on its way.

A little unexpected after such a heavy snowfall this—

What am I doing, I'm talking to a bird.

JOHN N. *[Enters, dragging a bag with a dead dog in it.]*

Who are you?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Hi!

DECEMBER

Hello Hello!

MORTIMER

You must be John N.

I was just having a little palaver with your parrot.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MAE

Yes!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

He's very agreeable.

JOHN N.

*She* is not a parrot.

*She* is a feral monk parakeet.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Well, like I always say, why have *one* parrot when you can have a *pair* a keet?

MOSES

Hiss.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I'm Mortimer. Mortimer.

JOHN N.

Do you like animals?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I like horses.

Especially when I pick the right one.

JOHN N.

Excuse me. I have to send an old friend down the river.

*[He exits, dragging the body bag.]*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Right-o.

*[To the birds.]*

You're more talkative than he is.

*[From off, we hear the gramophone. The sound gets closer as Jenny June "swims" into the room, belly down on a rolling desk chair. She wears a swim suit and a bathing cap. She is practicing her breast stroke across the apartment. The gramophone is somehow attached to the chair, and she strokes in time with the music.]*

GRAMOPHONE (TBD)

*"Let me call you sweetheart, I'm in love with you.*

*Let me hear you whisper that you love me too.*

*Keep the love-light glowing in your eyes so true.*

*Let me call you Sweetheart, I'm in love with you."*

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
Hi.

DECEMBER (FATHER)  
Hello hello. Hi Hi Hi Hi.

JENNY JUNE  
I don't know you.

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
I'm Mortimer. Mortimer.  
Mortimer Mortimer.

JENNY JUNE  
Morty, you're standing in my river.

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
I  
Am?

JENNY JUNE  
Hold this. [*The gramophone.*]

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
I -- Alright.

JENNY JUNE  
Don't let it skip, or I'll lose my pace.  
John N. is helping me train.  
He's teaching me to behave like a fish.

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
John N. Yes, I think I just met him.

JENNY JUNE  
Don't let the gramophone skip!

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
Sorry.

JENNY JUNE  
This here is what they call the "Australian Crawl."  
But I've never been to Australia. So, I call it the "Chicago Creep." How do you like  
*that?*

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Is it always done on a desk chair?

GRAMOPHONE (JOHN N)

*Screeeechhhh!*

JENNY JUNE

Do you want something, Mr.?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Yes.

I want to marry your sister, Nelly.

JENNY JUNE

I betcha do. Well, I don't know whatcha need me for. Nelly can marry whoever she takes a mind to.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I, I guess I was thinking I might need your blessing.

JENNY JUNE

*Of course* you need my blessing! Do you have any idea who I am?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

You're Jenny June Fa—

JENNY JUNE

I'm Jenny June Fail!

I'm surprised you ain't heard a me.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I have. Nelly talks about you all the time.

JENNY JUNE

I mean from the papers. I'm famous, you know?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I didn't know.

JENNY JUNE

You, sir, are having a one-on-one with Illinois's very first female competitive lake swimmer. How do you like *that*?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Competitive Lake Swimming? Who usually wins, you or the lake?



Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MOSES (GERTY)

Hiss.

JENNY JUNE

You let the music die. If this were the lake, I'd be drowning.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Good thing we're not in the Lake.

*[John N. re-enters, without the bag.]*

JENNY JUNE

There you are. Did you let this masher up here? He waltzes in, terrorizes the animals, interrupts my swim practice, and on top all that, now he wants to marry our sister. Whadya got to say about that?

JOHN N.

Alright.

JENNY JUNE

Alright?!?

JOHN N.

Alright.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Alright!

JENNY JUNE

John N. Fail! How can you say that? You don't even know the fella! He could be an absolute cad!

JOHN N.

He could also be wonderful.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Yeah!

JENNY JUNE

It doesn't matter whether he's wonderful or not. That isn't the point!

JOHN N.

You're right. Either way, it's not our place to interfere.

JENNY JUNE

Not our place? It's *Nelly*.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

JOHN N.

I think if a male of the species desires a mate of the same species, and if that mate is so inclined, what business is it of any other creature?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Well put.

JENNY JUNE

And that's all you have to say about it, huh?

JOHN N.

Yes.

Moses, come.

*[He and Moses exit.]*

JENNY JUNE

Oh, John N.! You're being contrary on purpose!

This isn't about *any* male of *any* species! This is about *this* male and *our* Nelly!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Gee, Miss Fail. I didn't mean to upset you.

If this is a bad time, I can always--

JENNY JUNE

No, it's the right time.

Only we never thought it would creep up on us so soon.

I'm sorry if we're giving you the cold shoulder, Mister, but she's our baby.

Surely you can understand why we ...why we ...

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Never want to lose her?

JENNY JUNE

Exactly.

You'll have to excuse John N. He's not so good with people. These animals are the only real friends he has.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Is there ... something "wrong" with him?

JENNY JUNE

If there is, he's my brother. And I love him no matter what.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Nelly thinks the world of him.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

JENNY JUNE

Nelly's a nice kid.

And if you ever even make her think about crying, I'll see to it I'm not the only one swimming in Lake Michigan, ya got it?

DECEMBER (FATHER)

Hello!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Got it.

JENNY JUNE

Well.

This calls for a drink.

Flip that record over. I like the other side for dancing.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Dancing?

JENNY JUNE

Yes. I take my membership in the Women's Temperance League very seriously.

Which is why I only drink when I'm dancing.

You like Whiskey? Of course you do. Don't run away.

*[She mounts her swivel chair and "swims" off.]*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Make it a double?

*[Looking around. Flips the record.]*

GRAMOPHONE (TBD)

*"Where did the time go*

*Does anyone know*

*When we were having fun?*

*Why must the hands tick*

*by on the clock*

*Just like they're not*

*Ever gonna stop?*

*Where is the day*

*We used to make hay*

*All the day long in the sun?*

*The stubborn hour hand says Time to go.*

*I swear it wasn't there an hour ago.*

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

*Where did the time go?  
Does anyone know?  
When were having fun?"*

*[Relaxing a bit, Mortimer loosens his paper collar. He crosses to the window and opens it, taking in a breath of that crisp Chicago spring air. He does a little dance around the room, and sings a verse of "Where Did The Time Go?" to Mae. December looks jealous.]*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Why, Miss Parakeet, care for a turn around the floor?

MAE (MOTHER)

YES!

DECEMBER (FATHER)

HELLO!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I'll bring her right back to ya.

*[Mortimer dances with the stand-up bird cage as if it's his dance partner, while December squawks. When Mortimer "dips" the cage, the door unlatches, and Mae instinctively flies out.]*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Great George!!!

*[He runs around the room trying to catch a flabbergasted Mae, but she flies out the open window before he can catch her. December is crest fallen. Mortimer looks to December, no idea what to say.]*

DECEMBER

Hello?

*[A noise from off, someone's coming. He quickly stands in front of Mae's empty cage. The rest of the scene for Mortimer becomes about not letting anyone see that Mae is gone.]*

JOHN N. *[Entering.]*

Where is she?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Who? The bird? What bird?

She who? I'm sorry. What?

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

JOHN N.

Where's Jenny June?

We're supposed to work on her form.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Ah, yes, she ... went to the store.

For birdseed.

For two birds.

Two of your birds. Who are still here.

DECEMBER

HELLO! HELLO! HELLO!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

*[Imitating Mae as best he can in the back of his throat.]* YES!

JOHN N.

She didn't say anything about going to the store. Jenny June tells me everything.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

She told me to tell you, and that you should go find her.

*[Bird noise.]* YES!

*[John N. approaches Mortimer, sniffs him, can't decide if he likes the scent or not, exits.]*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Ah, gee, December, I'm sorry. Listen, I'll get you another bird. Another bird just like Mae. One of her sisters, maybe. You'll love her, just love her.

DECEMBER

It won't be the same.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

----

Did you just—?

GERTY *[Entering from the house.]*

Mr. Mortimer!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Miss Fail!

GERTY

What are you doing?

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I was about to have a drink!

With your sister!

Not Nelly!

Jenny June!

I mean!

I don't drink as a habit.

Only when Jenny June's dancing.

Not that we were dancing!

I—

GERTY

Where's John N.?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

He just flew off.

I don't think he likes me.

GERTY

That means he likes you.

Anyway, I'm glad it's just us.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

You are?

GERTY

I admit, I didn't think much of you when you came into the store.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

But then I worked my indelible charm, is that it?

GERTY

You make somebody I love very happy.

And that makes me happy.

Here.

*[She hands him a brown paper package.]*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Hey, my grandfather's watch. I forgot all about that.

GERTY

Read the inscription.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

"Will you marry me,

My darling Nelly?"

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

GERTY

The penmanship isn't as delicate as Nelly's  
But I couldn't have her making her own gift, could I?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Thank you! Thank you, Gertrude.

GERTY

Call me Gerty.

MORTIMER: With Gerty's gift of his own gift,

NELLY: --Soon to be Nelly's gift--

MORTIMER: Mortimer Mortimer was set for the wedding of a lifetime.

JENNY JUNE

On the morning of the ceremony, not a single wild flower could be found along the river bank. Jenny June Fail had plucked them all and transformed the shoproom of The "Fail Clock Works Est. 1900: Closed" Into a cathedral of blue violets and trumpet creeper.

JOHN N

Her brother, John N. Fail,  
Still mourning the unexplained disappearance of his dear friend, Mae the Monk Parakeet,  
Begrudgingly agreed to keep all budgerigars upstairs for the ceremony.

GERTY

Their sister, Gerty Fail, had busied herself retooling their mother's wedding dress,  
Taking it in and up, and fitting it just right for the first of the Fail sisters to walk  
Down the aisle.

NELLY

Nelly Fail would like to point out  
The year was 1928, and the dress was over twenty years old.  
The tradition of wearing white on your wedding day had not yet become the fashion,  
Lest anyone make "assumptions."

\*\*\*

NELLY

Early on the morning of the ceremony,  
Nelly Fail ran to South Water Street in Marietta's wedding dress,  
To the place where her mother and father  
Had fallen backward into the river  
In a Brand new DeSoto Town Car  
Some thirteen years back.  
She knew she ought to be at home helping her sisters ready the shop,

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

But she needed one final blessing before entering into the happiness that would  
Define the rest of her life.

“Oh, Mother, oh Father.  
I don’t know if you can hear me,  
But if you can, I want you to know that it’s a beautiful day in Chicago.”

MOTHER

Indeed it was.  
The morning sky was powdered blue.  
The river ran still and soundless.

FATHER

Nary a car nor a pedestrian troubled the street.  
So nobody noticed  
The bright green Parakeet streak across the sky

MOTHER

And perch on the bust of Dr. Ian K. Bonner,  
Father of Illinoisan Psychiatry,

JENNY JUNE

The same bust which had been upset

NELLY

—but not dislodged—

GERTY

by the crashing of a brand new DeSoto Town Car into the Old Chicago Board of Trade  
Some thirteen years back,

NELLY

The same bust which had been slowly losing itself from the building’s façade ever since,

MORTIMER

And the same bust which, bearing the unexpected weight of the nonindigenous bird,  
Finally leapt from its own perch  
And began its downward plunge into the nearly vacant street below.

NELLY

I want you to know  
That I am happy.  
And I am loved.

GERTY

And that’s when the bust of Dr. Ian K. Bonner,



Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

Father of Illinoisan Psychiatry,  
Knocked Nelly Fail on the head,  
Over the banister and into the tranquil river below.

MORTIMER

As with so many things in life  
--death, love, moving vehicles --  
She never saw it coming.

MAE (MOTHER)

Yes yes yes!

JOHN N

An old barkeep, a congenial fellow named Dodd,  
Was on his way to home from work  
Or to work from home.  
In either case, he was the only person to witness the final moment of Nelly Fail's life.  
A longtime customer of the Fail Clock Works, he recognized the young girl at once.  
He screamed for police, for help, anybody!

GERTY

Gerty was the first of the Fails to learn the terrible news,  
Followed soonafter by her siblings,

JENNY JUNE: Jenny June

JOHN N: and John N. Fail,

GERTY:

In that order.

Reactions to the news were

Shock,

JENNY JUNE: Disbelief,

JOHN N: and Anger.

GERTY: Also in that order.

MORTIMER

Mortimer Mortimer,  
Arrived at the shop  
At Lumber and Love  
With a skip in his step,  
A freshly engraved watch in his pocket,  
And no idea that he was no longer a groom.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

*"Let me call you sweetheart, I'm in love with you.  
Let me hear you whisper that you love me too.  
Keep the love-light glowing in your eyes so true.  
Let me call you Sweetheart, I'm --- "*

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

NELLY

All the clocks in the room struck noon.  
And what should have been a day of celebration  
Became a day of mourning.

*[Mortimer sets the watch down, and leaves.]*

NELLY: Nelly was the first of the Fail Girls to die,

GERTY: Followed soonafter by her sisters,

JENNY JUNE: Jenny June

GERTY: And Gerty Fail

NELLY: In that order.

NELLY

Time continued on  
And so did the Fails.

GERTY

Gerty Fail continued mending clocks,  
Throwing herself even deeper and deeper into the work.

JOHN N

John. N. Fail continued his research on feline inoculations,  
Though he had difficulty convincing his veterinary cohorts  
--Many of whom spent their careers preventing hoof and mouth disease at the nearby  
slaughter houses—  
That the animals he treated were not perhaps better candidates for extermination.

JENNY JUNE

Mortimer Mortimer, on the other hand,  
Well,  
Following Nelly's death, he was paralyzed by grief.  
He sat down on the bottom-most step of the Fail Family stairs,  
And fell asleep.  
In the story of his sleep,  
He was safe from the sadness of being awake.

Eventually, the Fail Family took pity on him.

They transferred him upstairs to Nelly's former bedroom, where he slept uninterrupted  
For nearly two weeks.

*[John N., Jenny June, December, and Moses in the living room.]*

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

GRAMOPHONE (TBD)

*"I guess I'll have to change my plan  
I should've realized there'd be another man  
I overlooked that point completely  
Until the big affair began  
Before I knew where I was at  
I found myself up on the shelf And that was that.  
I tried to reach the moon But when I got there  
All that I could get was the air  
My feet are back upon the ground  
I've lost the one girl I found."*

MOSES (GERTY)

Psst. Aren't you worried about him?

JOHN N.

Do you think I ought to be?

MOSES

It's too early to be hibernating.  
And he doesn't seem the type for molting.

JOHN N.

He's sad.

MOSES

Aren't you sad?

JOHN N.

Of course I am.

MOSES

Then why aren't you hibernating?

JOHN N.

Perhaps I'm more accustomed to sadness than Mr. Mortimer.

MOSES

Perhapsssss.

JENNY JUNE

December's looking awful pitiful, John N.

JOHN N.

He misses Mae.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

JENNY JUNE

It looks like he's pulling out his feathers.

JOHN N.

He's destroying himself.

Out of loneliness.

JENNY JUNE

Is that common?

JOHN N.

Loneliness? I think so.

JENNY JUNE

You should set him free.

JOHN N.

Then who would keep me from destroying myself?

JENNY JUNE

Please don't say things like that, brother.

JOHN N.

It's alright.

I've grown quite used to living alone.

JENNY JUNE

You live with all of us.

Me and Gerty and—

And now Mr. Mortimer.

JOHN N.

Yes, now I have Mr. Mortimer.

JENNY JUNE

What do you think he's doing in there?

JOHN N.

The same thing December is doing in *here*.

Destroying himself

Out of loneliness.

JENNY JUNE

At that moment, Jenny June Fail made a life changing decision.

"Excuse me."

[Exits.]

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MOSES

Was it something I said?

*[Nelly's old room. Mortimer vacant-eyed on the edge of the bed. He takes a great big sigh, but before he completes it---]*

JENNY JUNE *[Barging in]*

Alright! I've made up my mind!

Are you ready?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I—

JENNY JUNE

I am going to be the first woman ever to swim across Lake Michigan.

How do you like *that*?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

The first woman?

But not even a man has done that.

JENNY JUNE

Exactly.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I wish you great success, Jenny June.

JENNY JUNE

I was hoping you'd say that.

Because, you're going to be my trainer.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

What? But I can't swim.

JENNY JUNE

You know what your problem is, Morty? You're bogged down in the details. I say swim, you say can't. I say live, you say won't. I say love, you say, already did. Now, I've made a decision, and I won't tolerate anything other than absolute support in the matter. Put this on.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

You expect me to wear a bathing suit?

JENNY JUNE

You'd look pretty funny swimming without it.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER MORTIMER

But but but---

JENNY JUNE

But but but, my caboose!

Don't you see, Morty? You're killing yourself in here. I miss her too. Like the dickens. But Nelly wouldn't want us to wallow in sorrow. She'd want us to dive back in and push through.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I don't know, Jenny June.

JENNY JUNE

Listen, it doesn't mean we ain't sad any more.

It means we ain't dead.

Now up. Up!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

But, why do you want to swim across Lake Michigan?

JENNY JUNE

The good lord wouldn't a put it there if he didn't want someone to cross it.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Yes, but why you?

JENNY JUNE

He wouldn't a put *me* here if he didn't want it to get crossed.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

But Lake Michigan is disgusting. You'll die.

JENNY JUNE

Of course I will.

And so will you.

And so will every other sucker you ever do meet.

In the meantime, I'm gonna do something outrageous!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Jenny June, I won't hear of it!

JENNY JUNE

It ain't up to you.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER MORTIMER

But ... but I forbid it!

JENNY JUNE

I'm doing it.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

As your brother-in-law ... almost –  
I couldn't bear to lose you as well.

NELLY

It was the first time the two of them had ever touched hands.

JENNY JUNE

Sit in the boat.  
Make sure I don't drown.  
That's all you have to do.

GRAMOPHONE [*Underscoring the following. Keeping time.*]

*"I can't give you anything but love, Baby.  
That's the only thing I've plenty of, baby  
Dream awhile, scheme awhile  
you're sure to find  
Happiness, and I guess  
All those things you've always pined for*

*Gee, I'd like to see you looking swell, baby  
Diamond bracelets, Woolworth's doesn't sell, baby  
Until that lucky day, you know darn well, baby  
I can't give you anything but Love."*

NELLY

And that is how Mortimer Mortimer became the trainer  
Of Illinois's very first female competitive lake swimmer.

MORTIMER MORTIMER [*Timing her with his pocket watch as she "swims."*]

Stroke, breathe, stroke, breathe, stroke, breathe, stroke, breathe!

NELLY

Countless laps around the upstairs living room,  
Turning like cogs around the shop room floor.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Good time. You lost two seconds that round!

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

NELLY

Surprisingly, Mortimer Mortimer made for an okey doke swim coach.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I don't see you breathing out there. You want to swim all the way to Indiana holding your breath, be my guest, but I don't suggest it.

JENNY JUNE

You ever smelled Indiana?

NELLY

Day swimming. Night swimming. Dry land. River. Lake. Ice.

Once, Mortimer Mortimer suspended Jenny June from the ceiling with an exercise belt So she could practice floating through air.

But John N. walked in on the pair, and seeing his sister dangling half naked from the rafters, promptly fainted.

MORTIMER MORTIMER [*In a boat as Jenny June swims beside him in the water.*]

I don't see you taking this seriously.

If you're tired, I can always call Trudy Ederle home from the Olympics. I'm sure she'd be happy to take your title.

JENNY JUNE

Can it, won't ya? I'm making history!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Can you do it without all the splashing?

You're causing a tsunami in Saugatuck

GRANTLAND RICE, RADIO SPORTS ANNOUNCER (FATHER)

Move over, Trudy Ederle. There's a new lady swimmer in town.

That's right, Chicago's own Jenny June Fail has been reported as "in training" to become the first lady swimmer ever to swim across Lake Michigan, a feat even some ships have trouble accomplishing. Her trainer, a newcomer, Mr. Mortimer Mortimer had this say:

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I don't know anything about swimming but I do know if anyone can do it, Jenny June Fail can.

JENNY JUNE

I'm confident I can—

GRANTLAND RICE

That's all the news that is the news. Reporting sporting, I'm Grantland Rice.



Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

NELLY

The more they trained together  
The more they liked each other.  
And the more time they spent together  
The more time they wanted to spend together.

MORTIMER: And so they spent their time.

JENNY JUNE: They invested it

BOTH: In each other.

GERTY: And the investment was soon to pay off.

*[End of Gramophone music.*

*John N. and Mortimer listening to Jenny June and Grantland Rice on the wireless.]*

GRANTLAND RICE

It's official, ladies and gentleman. The date for Lady Swimmer, Jenny June Fail's historic attempt to swim Lake Michigan is set! This Saturday at three o'clock in the a.m., miss Fail's trainer, Mortimer Mortimer, will board a tug boat with a gramophone to help the young lady keep up her pace. Anything can happen in the waters of the world's deadliest lake. This reporter, for one, will be waiting with anticipation on the shores of Michigan City to see if Miss Fail lives up to her name. Tell me, Miss Fail, are you scared at all?

JENNY JUNE

I wouldn't say I'm scared.

Not on the wireless.

But I would say that one of the things that makes lake swimming so interesting is that you never know what mood the lake will be in.

GRANTLAND RICE

If the lake is rough and foggy on Saturday, will you turn in and go home?

JENNY JUNE

Absolutely not. Why, foggy days are some of the best days. When the weather is clear, You can almost make out the shores of Indiana in the distance. That's when it's the worst.

GRANTLAND RICE

I'd think being able to spy your destination from the water would make things all the easier, but you say no?

JENNY JUNE

Think of your life. If you could see where it was going to end, would that make living it easier?

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

GRANTLAND RICE

And a lady philosopher too, Ladies and Gentlemen.

JOHN N. [*Turning off the wireless*]

Aren't you worried?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Worried? Nah. Jenny June'll be swell. She'll show 'em all. You'll see.

JOHN N.

But what if she doesn't? What if she gets sick? Or has a cramp? What if she suddenly goes under?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

She never has.

JOHN N.

Are you going to protect her? You can't even swim.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

There will be others in the boat with me. Reporters.

JOHN N.

They don't care if she makes it or not. All they want is a story.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

That isn't true.

JOHN N.

Do you care about my sister?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Of course I do.

John N., what's gotten into you?

JOHN N.

I'm not so good with people, you know.

There are things that, when I say them to my animals, sound right,

But when I say them to another person, they sound all wrong.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Is this about Nelly?

JOHN N.

It's about you.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
Me?

JOHN N.  
I think if you're in love with my sister,  
You should just tell me.

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
In love? With Jenny June?  
To be honest, I never thought about it.

NELLY  
To be honest, he had.

JOHN N  
I think you should think about it.

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
I couldn't have feelings for Jenny June.  
I'm still in love with Nelly.

JOHN N.  
I think, if a male of the species desires a mate of the same species, and if that mate is so inclined, what business is it of any other creature?

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
That's a very scientific way of looking at it.

JOHN N.  
I know I may look and sound like a creep, but there are feelings in me that---  
I hope the two of you are very happy.. *[Exits.]*

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
What an odd bird.

*[He turns the wireless back on.]*

GRANTLAND RICE  
Tell the boys and girls at home, Miss Fail,  
Who're ya doing this for?

JENNY JUNE  
For me, of course.  
And my parents.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

GRANTLAND RICE

They must be very proud.

JENNY JUNE

They're dead.

GRANTLAND RICE

Surely a steam powered gal such as yourself,  
Has got a special fella fueling the fire?

JENNY JUNE

I do.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

You do?

JENNY JUNE

There's only one man for me,  
And that man is Johnny Weissmuller.

GRANTLAND RICE AND (MORTIMER MORTIMER)

Johnny Weissmuller? (Johnny Who's Muler?)

GRANTLAND RICE

I was unaware the two of you were romantically involved.

JENNY JUNE

We aren't.

Yet.

But he's the only one for me. I can feel it in my gills.  
Put that on that wireless, "Feel it in my gills."

GRANTLAND RICE

And how long have you felt this way toward the Three-Time Olympic Gold champion?

JENNY JUNE

Last summer, Johnny Weissmuller personally rescued three people from a sinking ship off the Oak Street Beach where he happened to be training.  
If Johnny Weissmuller had been training in the Chicago River thirteen years ago, perhaps my parents would be here to watch me swim on Saturday.

GRANTLAND RICE

You heard it here, folks, the love-smitten swim kitten, Jenny June Fail---

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER MORTIMER [*Turns off the radio. Suddenly, a song and dance number.*]  
**EVERYONE – LET'S MAKE THIS RIDICULOUS**

*What is happening to me?  
 Can this be believed?  
 Lightning's shot right through me  
 When I ought to be bereaved.  
 All these months I've idled  
 Saddened and forlorn.  
 All at once I'm wild,  
 And a new feeling is born.*

*I feel a distinct and precise  
 What I think must be dislike  
 For Johnny Weiss  
 Muller.*

*I must confess. I cannot lie.  
 The truth is this: I do not like  
 That Johnny Weiss  
 Muller*

*I can't describe, nor can I hide  
 This feeling I found deep inside.  
 His kind of fine upstanding pride  
 Is something I cannot abide.*

*What girl would ever swoon for me  
 Over Neptune in BVD's?  
 I never want to hear his name  
 Again.  
 Again.*

*If he should catch a cramp and drown  
 I'd be the happiest chap in town.*

*Yes Johnny  
 I'm talking to you.  
 Johnny  
 Wiessmu, that's who.  
 I don't like  
 Johnny Wei Ay Ayee ah ayeee ah ayeee  
 Ssmuller.*

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

GERTY

The Friday before that Saturday swim, Jenny June and Mortimer Mortimer waved “so long” to John N. Fail, as he boarded the Grand Trunk Western Steamer to Michigan City, where he would wait to greet his sister at the finish line.

MORTIMER

On their way home from Union Station, Mortimer Mortimer stopped by the Marshall Fields to pick up a can of sheep grease to slather on the swimmer to guard against cold and chaffing.

JENNY JUNE

Also, Jenny June Fail couldn’t help but suspect a nice grease bath might make her seem less of a foreign object in a lake already bubbling with Chicago’s slaughterhouse refuse.

MORTIMER: Once home, Mortimer Mortimer retired to Nelly’s former room.

JENNY JUNE: And Jenny June retired to hers.

BOTH: Neither slept.

ALL CLOCKS (ALL)

TickTickTickTick

TickTickTickTick.

Morning!

MORTIMER: Mortimer Mortimer grabbed the gramophone and a bag of dried apricots.

JENNY JUNE: Jenny June was already practicing her steadied breathing,

NELLY: When they discovered each other at the top of the stairs.

MORTIMER MORTIMER AND JENNY JUNE

Morning!

JENNY JUNE

Good morning.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Are you all set?

Of course you are. You’ve been set forever.

Nothing frightens the great Jenny June Fail.

JENNY JUNE

I’m scared.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

You are?

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

JENNY JUNE

What if I don't make it?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Then you'll try again.

And again.

Until you do make it.

JENNY JUNE

What if I don't *make* it?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I'll be right beside you in the tug boat.

JENNY JUNE

Morty, before we go, there's something I have to tell you.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Yes?

JENNY JUNE

It's something I should have told you long ago.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Say it.

JENNY JUNE

You mustn't touch me.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

What?

JENNY JUNE

No matter what happens,

You *must not* touch me.

If you do, it's considered assistance, and I will be immediately disqualified.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

But, what if you—?

JENNY JUNE

For any reason!

Alright?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Yes. Alright.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

JENNY JUNE

Alright.

Also, I think I've fallen in love with you.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Good, me too.

JENNY JUNE

Ok.

Let's go.

GERTY

The beach front was quiet.

One or two reporters, a medic, Mortimer Mortimer, Gerty and Jenny June.

Once Jenny June was greased up, she fastened her swim cap and goggles.

Gerty Fail boarded the tug boat, and began cranking the gramophone in a steady  $\frac{3}{4}$  time.

GRAMOPHONE [*Underscoring the following.*]

*"Let me call you sweetheart, I'm in love with you.*

*Let me hear you whisper that you love me too.*

*Keep the love-light glowing in your eyes so true.*

*Let me call you Sweetheart, I'm in love with you."*

JENNY JUNE: Jenny June took three deep breaths,

NELLY: And Mortimer Mortimer said what he could not have known

Would be his final good bye.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I promise not to touch you.

But my eyes will be on you the entire time.

I promise.

JENNY JUNE

See you on the other side, Morty.

NELLY

Jenny June Fail jumped into Lake Michigan.

Mortimer Mortimer tiptoed into the tug.

They were off!!!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Stroke. Breathe. Stroke. Breathe.

GERTY

She seems to be doing that all on her own, Mr. Mortimer.



Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

Why don't you sit?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I have to stay trained on her.

After all, I'm her trainer.

Stroke. Breathe. Stroke. Breathe.

JENNY JUNE

Hour after unforgiving hour passed.

Jenny June Stoked breathed Stoked, breathed.

GERTY: In the boat, Gerty Fail worried.

MORTIMER: Mortimer Mortimer Watched.

JOHN N

On the opposite shore,

John N. Fail waited with flowers and bunting and crowds of swimthusiasts.

A brass band sat ready to strike up as soon as the tug boat was spotted.

NELLY

But, the tug boat was hours out still,

Floating alongside the determined, greasy Jenny June Fail.

Mortimer watched.

And watched.

And watched.

But, true to his word,

He did not touch her.

GERTY

She's seizing up. She's cramping.

Mortimer!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

She's alright. I've got my eyes on her.

JENNY JUNE

She was more than alright.

She was out of sight.

MORTIMER

Except for Mortimer's sight.

He watched. Held his breath.

JENNY JUNE: She stoked breathed.

MORTIMER: Holding breath. Watching.

JENNY JUNE: Stroking breathing.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

Swimming. Succeeding.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

“Let me hear you whisper that you love me too.”

CHORUS (ALL? EACH IN TURN?)

Stroke

Wait

Watch

Breathe.

Stroke

Worry

Watch

Breathe.

Gulp

Spit

Cramp

Breathe

Swim

Stroke

Pulse

Breathe.

GERTY

I see them!

I see the shore.

Jenny June, I see the shore.

JOHN N

In the not-so-far-off distance, John N. Fail waved a victory bouquet.

In the boat, the reporters turned to look at the shore.

The medic turned to look at the shore.

MORTIMER

Mortimer Mortimer turned to look at the shore.

“Jenny June! I see it. I can see the finish line!”

When he returned his gaze to the water--

GERTY

--Jenny June was gone.

No one,

Not the reporters

Nor the medic

Nor her sister Gerty Fail,

Not even her biggest fan, Mortimer Mortimer

Had seen her go under.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MOTHER

But, suddenly, and without witness,  
Jenny June Fail disappeared.  
Never to be seen again.

GRAMOPHONE

*"Let me call you sweetheart, I'm in love with you ..."*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

No!

NELLY

Mortimer Mortimer leapt from the boat,  
Crashing into the concrete waves.  
Forgetting both his promise not to touch her

JENNY JUNE

And the fact that he could not swim,

FATHER: At that moment, consumed with love for his star athlete,  
He didn't care.

GERTY: But Gerty did.

JENNY JUNE: Without hesitation, she too leapt from the boat.

NELLY: Cameras flashing.

JENNY JUNE: The tuft of burned exposure powder dancing with the thickening puffs  
from the tug,

NELLY: Gerty Fail looped her forearm around the chest of a quickly sinking Mortimer  
Mortimer,

JENNY JUNE: and with great effort, kept the both of them afloat,

NELLY: As the tug boat, full of worries and witnesses, floated out to rescue them.

JOHN N

When the boat hit the Indiana shore,  
John N. Fail ran to meet it.  
The brass band began to play, but—

MORTIMER MORTIMER

No!

No music.

No music

Ever again.

NELLY

All the clocks in the world struck noon.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

JENNY JUNE

And what should have been a day of celebration  
Became a day of mourning.

NELLY: Nelly was the first of the Fail Girls to die,

GERTY: Followed soonafter by her sisters,

JENNY JUNE: Jenny June

GERTY: And Gerty Fail

NELLY: In that order.

JENNY JUNE: Causes of death were

NELLY: Blunt Object

JENNY JUNE: Disappearance

GERTY: And Consumption.

GERTY

*[Cough.]*

GERTY

Also in that order.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Gerty?

GERTY

I'm – *cough*.

John N.—

*[She faints, John N. catches her.]*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Let's get her home.

JENNY JUNE: The fans disbanded.

NELLY: The band fanned out.

JENNY JUNE:

Mortimer Mortimer and John N. Fail

Carried the shivering Gerty Fail

Onto a train

Into a musky cab

Back to Lumber and Love

NELLY:

Through the front door (bad ding ding.) of the

Fail Clock Works Est. 1900: Closed,

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

Up the stairs,  
 Into her room,  
 Into her bed.

GERTY  
*Cough*

MORTIMER  
 Mortimer Mortimer sat beside her  
 Stroking her hair  
 Stroking her forehead.  
 Begging her,

“Breathe.”

JENNY JUNE  
 Stroke,

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
 Breathe.

JENNY JUNE  
 Stroke.  
 Until she fell into a turbulent sleep.

GRAMOPHONE (TBD)  
*“The Sky was blue  
 And high above  
 The moon was new  
 And so was love  
 This eager heart of mine was singing  
 Lover where can you be?”*

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
*“You came at last  
 Love had its day  
 That day is past.  
 You’ve gone away.  
 This aching heart of mine is singing.  
 Lover come back to me.”*

JOHN N.  
*“When I remember every little thing  
 You used to do  
 I’m so lonely.  
 Every road I walk along*

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

*I walk along with you  
No wonder I am lonely."*

MORTIMER MORTIMER, JOHN N., and GRAMOPHONE

*"The sky is blue  
The night is cold  
The moon is new  
But love is old  
And while I'm waiting here  
This heart of mine is singing"*

GRAMOPHONE

*"Lover come back to me."*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

*"Lover come back to me."*

JOHN N

John N. Fail walked vacant from his sister's room.

There, in the center of the living room:

An empty desk chair,

The same desk chair on which, only yesterday, his sister Jenny June  
Had practiced her stroke.

GRAMOPHONE (JENNY JUNE)

*"Lover come back—  
Lover come back—  
Lover come back—  
Lover come back—  
SCRREEEECH!"*

JOHN N

John N. Fail picked up the desk chair,  
Dragged it by its neck into the master bedroom,  
And —with all his might -- flung it  
Through the same window his mother had sent  
The mocking coo coo clock  
The same day he was discovered  
By his sister, Jenny June.

JENNY JUNE: CRASH

JOHN N: The glass rained down.

JENNY JUNE: Stroke!

NELLY: The chair landed in the middle of Lumber and Love.

JENNY JUNE: GONG!

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

JOHN N: And shattered into splinters and springs.

NELLY: If Mortimer Mortimer heard the defenestration of the desk chair,

JENNY JUNE: (And how could he not?)

NELLY: He didn't move from Gerty's bedside.

JOHN N

John N. walked gravely down the stairs,

A ghost descending his own gallows.

He walked through the front door,

FRONT DOOR (NELLY)

Bading ding. Ding.

JOHN N

To the middle of Lumber and Love

Across the crunching glass.

He bent to examine the mess he had made

When something caught his eye,

Something flickering, bright,

Something alive.

There, atop a rusted can of Heinz Baked Beans,

In the very spot where a young Jenny June Fail had discovered her baby brother,

Was a bright green feral monk parakeet.

"Mae!"

MAE (MOTHER)

Yes. Yes!

NELLY

But as quickly as he had spotted her,

She was gone.

And so was John N.

JOHN N.

Come back! Come back!

JENNY JUNE

That was the last anyone heard of John N. Fail

For quite

Some

Time.

NELLY: Meanwhile,

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Breathe.

Gerty.

Breathe.

GERTY

Where

Am I?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

You're home.

GERTY

Where is

My family?

NELLY

He didn't have the heart.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

They're on their way.

GERTY

*Cough.*

NELLY

It's no secret that Gerty Fail had saved Mortimer Mortimer's life.

It's also no secret that's what gave her the sickness that would take her own.

The Doctor called it Consumption

The cure he said was "Constant vigil. Constant."

The doctor asked if she had any loved ones.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I'm her brother-in-law,

Almost,

Twice.

JENNY JUNE

"Look after the girl," said the doctor,

"Don't take your eyes off her.

But unless you want what she's got,

You must not touch her."

MORTIMER

Mortimer Mortimer thanked the doctor,

Showed him down the stairs



Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

And out the front door.

FRONT DOOR (NELLY)

Bading ding. Ding.

JENNY JUNE

Then went upstairs

And began ignoring everything the doctor had told him.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Breathe.

CHORUS (ALL REST?)

Stroke.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Breathe.

GERTY

*Cough*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Come on, Gerty. Come back to me.

FATHER

Though it had been less than a year since he'd first stepped foot through the Fail family front door,

Mortimer Mortimer no longer felt like a young man.

He felt tired, and heavy, and old.

MOTHER

If he had a home, he'd forgotten it.

If he had a job, he'd lost it.

His life, day in and day out, became Gerty,

The last of the Fail girls.

FATHER

Some days with Gerty were better than others.

NELLY: Some days were nights.

JENNY JUNE: Some nights were unimaginable.

NELLY: And sometimes

JENNY JUNE: Every once in a many, many times

NELLY: He would recall something Nelly had said

JENNY JUNE: Or something Jenny June had done.

MORTIMER: He would share it with Gerty,

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

GERTY: And the two of them would share a momentary smile.

NELLY: Followed by a dark cloud of sadness

JENNY JUNE: For all they had lost.

GERTY

*Cough.*

JOHN N

The other residents of the home,

Faired no better.

In the absence of John N.,

Moses was starving,

And December the Monk Parakeet was in dire need of both food and affection.

MORTIMER

Mortimer Mortimer, when he thought of it, would do his best to feed them both,

But he had no idea what to feed an exotic bird and a giant snake,

So he fed them tins of boiled beets,

Then shut the door and returned to Gerty's bedside.

JENNY JUNE

Everything in the Fail Family home

Was dying.

Including the clocks.

And why not?

No one had wound them.

NELLY

One night, during one of Gerty's rare but peaceful rests,

Mortimer Mortimer crept downstairs to the shop room.

The lights were off.

Click.

The room was inappropriately silent

But for the ticking of one clock.

GRANDFATHER CLOCK (JOHN N)

Tick.

NELLY

Presiding over the Shoproom like a great Patriarch.

GRANDFATHER CLOCK

Tock.

NELLY

The Grandfather Clock.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

Alive and ticking.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

How do you keep going?

JENNY JUNE

Mortimer Mortimer stuck his finger in the old clock's face,

And without asking permission

Proceeded to do the one thing which you are absolutely never supposed to do to a clock.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Take me back.

NELLY

He unwound it.

He pried the hands away from their forward path,

Dragging them over time already passed.

Around him, the clocks began to tick again.

CLOCKS

Tock tick Tock Tick.

NELLY

Over all the Back-Thens leading up to the Right-Now.

GRAMOPHONE

*"Baby love but anything you give can't I"*

MOTHER

Night into day into morning into night,

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Take me back. Bring them back to me.

FATHER

Moses grew firm and fat.

December and Mae canoodled like lovebirds.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Bring them back. Bring them back.

NELLY

Customers went and came.

People flew down and up the stairs.

But still no Fail Sisters.

Sunday Saturday Friday Thursday

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
BRING THEM BACK! BRING THEM BACK!!

|        |                               |
|--------|-------------------------------|
| JOHN N | JENNY JUNE (following JOHN N) |
| 5      | no Jenny June                 |
|        | NELLY                         |
| 4      | no Nelly                      |
|        | FATHER                        |
| 3      | no matter when                |
|        | MOTHER                        |
| 2      | no matter                     |
| 1      |                               |

FRONT DOOR (JOHN N)  
Ding. Ding bading.

NELLY  
Until.

*[It is the morning that Mortimer Mortimer first entered the shop. All the clocks are active and alert.]*

WALL CLOCK  
Isn't it about time?  
Psst! Isn't it?

COUNTER CLOCK  
Should be any minute now

WALL CLOCK  
Minute now minute now.

COUNTER CLOCK  
You think she'll remember?

WALL CLOCK  
Remember? It's a *memory*.

GRANDFATHER CLOCK (JOHN N)  
Will you two please pipe down?!

COOCOO CLOCK (JENNY JUNE)  
Ooo hoo, Oo hoo! Sounds like Gerty's not the only one wound a little too tight today.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

ALL CLOCKS

Shh shhh shshhh here she comes, she's here. Tick tock tick tock.

GERTY [*Healthy, younger. Enters.*]

Ahem.

ALL CLOCKS

Oh hi, Gerty. Hello. Good evening.

MORTIMER MORTIMER [*From his current space in time, unsure if any of this is real.*]  
Gerty...?!

GERTY

Good afternoon.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

It can't be ---

WALL CLOCK

Psst. . . your line is "It's evening."

MORTIMER MORTIMER

It's evening.

GERTY

Is it evening? I swear, I have a devil of a time with ... well, time.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

You didn't used to. You used to be so sharp.

GERTY

Say, you're right. Mind if I have a looksie?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Please.

Gerty, everything's breaking down and I don't got any idea how to fix it.

COOCOO CLOCK (JENNY JUNE)

Watch it buddy. That's not the way this moment went down.

Don't get any coo coo ideas, coo coo.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

How

How can I help you?

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

GERTY

Oh, I don't need any help.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Are you waiting for something from me? Is there something I can do?

GERTY

Nothing at all. I have everything I need.

COOCOO CLOCK

Ooo, she runs a little fast, that one!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

But, you don't have everything. You're --

GRAMOPHONE (NELLY)

*"You have I now any, thing need Don't I.*

*You found I've now someone. for Looking not I'm.*

*True half only it's lonely. I'm that say I if.*

*You for lone ly only I'm."*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

What is this, Gert? What's happening?

COUNTER CLOCK

Might as well tell the guy.

GRANDFATHER CLOCK (JOHN N)

It's a memory, kid.

And it's yours.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

But it feels so ...

GRANDFATHER CLOCK (JOHN N)

Present? Of course it does.

After all, you are having this memory in the present.

If it were happening in the past it wouldn't be a memory yet, would it?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Gerty, I'm so scared.

GERTY

Scared? Of what?

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I'm scared that I'll lose you.

WALL CLOCK

Watch it, Watch it.

GERTY

Lose me? But I'm right here. I'm always right here.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I'm afraid you're going to die.

COUNTER CLOCK

No no no! She doesn't know she's going to die yet!

WALL CLOCK

We should really move this along!

She'll go crazy from all this death talk tick tock.

GERTY

Don't be ridiculous.

Of course I know I'm going to die.

It's one of the few things I do know.

What I don't know is when.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Gerty—

GRANDFATHER CLOCK

Watch it, kid. If you could see where your life was going to end, would that make living it easier?

GERTY

That's a good question. What do you think, Mortimer?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I don't know. I don't know. You saved my life.

And I have no idea how to help you.

GERTY

Well, surely my sisters can help.

Oh.

Oh no.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Oh Gerty,  
Oh geez, Gerty, please don't cry.  
I spend all day watching you suffer,  
I can't bear to watch you suffer in my dreams.

GRANDFATHER CLOCK

It isn't a dream, kid.

WALL CLOCK

It's a memory.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

You should never have tried to save me.  
I'm a dead man  
An empty tank of a guy.  
You shoulda let me drown.

GERTY

But that's not how it happens, is it?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I don't know why anything happens the way it does.  
I don't have an answer for anything anymore.

GERTY

I can have it for you by tonight.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

The answer?

GERTY

The watch, Mr. Mortimer. I couldn't begin to help you with the other matter.

*[She holds up the pocket watch which he takes from her.]*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

What is this?

GERTY

Don't you recognize it? It's your pocket watch.  
You gave it to me the day we met.  
This moment, in fact.

MORTIMER MORTIMER *[Reading the inscription.]*

"Will you marry me,



Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

My darling ...  
 Jenny June?"  
 You changed it!  
 But ... but I never told you--

COOCOO CLOCK (JENNY JUNE)  
 She's not blind. She's got two working peepers!

GERTY  
 I could see you falling in love with her.  
 You started to look at her in the same way you looked at Nelly.  
 The same way I have to remind myself not to look at you.

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
 Me? But why would you look at me like you were in ...  
 Love?  
 Gerty.  
 Why didn't you say something?

GERTY  
 By the time I knew it, you were deeply in love with my sister.  
 And then with my other one.  
 When you love someone,  
 You're happy when they're happy.  
 You're sad when they're sad.  
 That's the theory, anyway.  
 Who am I to stand in the way of all that happiness?

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
 I wish there was something I could do for you,  
 Something I could give you.

GERTY  
 You already have.  
 Out of all the moments from your past,  
 You chose to relive this one.  
 And that's very flattering, but you can't live in the past, Mr. Mortimer,  
 You can only dwell in it.

COUNTER CLOCK  
 Oh, don't let them see me cry.  
 They'll think I'm broken.

GERTY  
 I probably miss you upstairs.  
 I should be on my way.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Please don't leave me.

GERTY

I have to, Mr. Mortimer.

This is what memories do. They fade.

GRANDFATHER CLOCK

Hurry! Hurry, Ms. Fail. I'm running out.

We're all running out.

GERTY

I'm running out!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

But, Gerty, I—

You can't leave now.

You can't leave now when I—

GRANDFATHER CLOCK

Sorry, kid,

There's just

No

More

TIME!!

MORTIMER MORTIMER

GERTY, I--!

*[All the clocks die. The memory is over, but Mortimer still holds the re-inscribed watch.]*

JOHN N

The Grandfather clock ticked its last tock

And died.

*[Silence.*

*Mortimer alone in the quiet. A moment, then.]*

MOTHER: All alone in the silence of the once-noisy shop,

FATHER:MMortimer Mortimer knew one thing only.

MOTHER: He knew that he loved her.

MORTIMER: He had always loved her.

NELLY: The fact that he was only just now aware of this love

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

JENNY JUNE: Made it no less true.

MORTIMER

Mortimer Mortimer had lived to become  
The man who loved every one of the Fail Girls  
And married none.

*[He's come back upstairs into her room.]*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Gerty?

Are you awake?

GERTY

Almost.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

How are you feeling?

GERTY

I'm fine –*cough cough cough*

I'm lying.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Is there anything I can. ...

GERTY

Yes?

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Do you think-- ?

Would it be alright if I loved you?

GERTY

Oh, Mortimer,

I decided I loved you a thousand times.

Take care of my brother

*Cough*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I'll try.

GERTY

I'm not asking.

Take care of my brother.

He's not good with

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

*Cough*  
People.

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
I promise.

GERTY  
Promise me one more thing?

MORTIMER MORTIMER  
Anything.

GERTY  
When people mention me and my sisters,  
Please don't let them say that we are "Late."  
If people ask about us,  
Tell them we're "on our way."

NELLY  
And with that, Gertrude Fail  
Was on her way.

NELLY: Nelly was the first of the Fail Girls to die,

GERTY: Followed soonafter by her sisters,

JENNY JUNE: Jenny June

GERTY: And Gerty Fail

NELLY: In that order.

JENNY JUNE: Causes of death were

NELLY: Blunt Object

JENNY JUNE: Disappearance

GERTY: And Consumption

Also in that order.

GERTY: The clocks on the first floor had already stopped,

NELLY: And could not strike noon.

JENNY JUNE: So Mortimer Mortimer took a hammer  
And struck all the clocks.

ALL CLOCKS  
Crash!  
Bang!  
Clang!!  
Smash!!  
Rrrrratttlebash!!!

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

NELLY

From the carnage of the fallen clocks,  
Mortimer Mortimer gathered splinters of wood.

GERTY

From these scraps,  
He fashioned a coffin.

JENNY JUNE

This took a number of days considering all he had to work with  
Were tinker's tools  
And Veterinary supplies.

GERTY

When, at last, he finished his coffin made of clockworks  
He gently  
Oh so gently  
Placed the eldest Fail Girl in the wooden embrace of her shoproom coworkers.

NELLY

Having done this,  
He sat down at Gerty's work bench,  
And did not move from that spot  
Until he had taught himself  
The art of engravature.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

"Will you marry me,  
Gerty Fail?"

JOHN N.

So focused was Mortimer Mortimer  
On the third rededication of his grandfather's pocket watch  
That he did not notice John N. Fail in the door way,  
A tattered butterfly net in his grip.

"I couldn't save her.  
Every time I came close,  
She flew away,  
And I lost her.  
I guess I'm not so good with animals either."

JENNY JUNE

Without another word between them,  
They picked up Gerty's coffin,  
Took it through the front door,

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

FRONT DOOR (NELLY)

Bading ding. Ding.

FATHER: Beneath the Fail Clock Works Est. 1900: Closed,

MOTHER: Across Lumber and Love,

JENNY JUNE: Over the remaining rubble from the desk chair and window,

JOHN N: And down the river bank where Jenny June Fail had discovered her brother.

MORTIMER: Mortimer Mortimer placed his crudely etched pocket watch on the top of the coffin,

GERTY: Hoping that if it did slip off into the river,

JENNY JUNE: Perhaps it would find its way to Jenny June

NELLY: Or Nelly,

MORTIMER

And each would know it was meant for her

At one time

And always.

JOHN N.

The men pushed the clock casket

Out to its river grave yard.

For they loved her, you see?

And as the men who loved her, they knew it was not in any dirt that a Fail sister belonged,

But in the river,

In the lake

In the waters which had given and taken

Everything.

GRAMOPHONE (THE SISTERS)

*"Let me call you sweetheart, I'm in love with you.*

*Let me hear you whisper that you love me too.*

*Keep the love-light glowing in your eyes so true.*

*Let me call you Sweetheart, I'm in love with you."*

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I JUST WANT TO MARRY THE PERSON I LOVE!!!

FATHER

It was at this moment that John N. Fail

Remembered something he'd learned from a very dear friend.

JOHN N

"Just because something ends,

That don't mean it wasn't a great success."

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

JOHN N (cont)

With that,  
John N. Fail left his nothing-in-law on the river bank,  
Crossed over the desk chair and window,  
In the middle of Lumber and Love  
Through the front door,

FRONT DOOR (NELLY)

Bading ding. Ding

JOHN N.

Up the stairs,  
Into his room,  
And opened the cage of a very frail December.

“I’m sorry, Old Boy.  
I couldn’t bring her back.  
But she’s out there.  
Tell her I say hello.”

*[He releases the bird, who flies out the window.]*

DECEMBER (FATHER)

Hello! Hello! Hellooooo!

JOHN N.

Moses,  
I’m sorry I left you.  
You must be starving something awful.

MOSES (GERTY)

*Groaaaaan...*

JOHN N.

I know you’re in pain.  
So am I.  
There comes a time  
In the life of many creatures  
When the pain of living becomes something closer to dying.  
It’s at times like these, when the only humane course of action is euthanasia.

JENNY JUNE

He lifted the top from his starving friend’s terrarium.

JOHN N.

How about one final snack, hunh?

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

MOSES

I couldn't.

That would be tragic.

JOHN N.

It wouldn't be tragic.

It's would just be the end.

Come on, Friend.

Let's end this

Together.

JENNY JUNE

John N. Fail stretched out on his bed,

And waited for his last remaining friend to strangle and eat him.

GERTY (as Moses)

Moses, always a good pal,

Did his best to oblige.

He managed to slump out of his glass home,

Slither glumly across the floor to his brother's bedside,

Heft himself up the bedpost,

And stretch out beside a peacefully slumbering John N. Fail.

And then

Moses died.

JENNY JUNE

Far from starving,

Moses had been woefully overfed

While John N. was away.

NELLY

How was Mortimer Mortimer supposed to know that an adult Ball Python only eats every few weeks,

And even then, never tins of boiled beets.

JOHN N.

So, as John N. Fail lay in bed,

Awaiting his death by snake,

He had no way of knowing

He was failing

Even as he slept.

JOHN N. [*Waking.*]

Moses?



Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

GERTY

Downstairs,  
In the Fail Clock Works  
With no clock working,  
Mortimer Mortimer  
Swept up the battered clock debris.

JOHN N.

We have to bury Moses.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

Alright.

JOHN N.

I was in love with Jenny June.  
My whole life.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I know.

JOHN N.

You never said anything.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I'm not blind. I've got two working peepers.

JOHN N.

You took her from me.  
And then she was taken from both of us.  
They all were.

How do you go on?

I don't understand how you lose someone,  
And just  
Go on.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I guess we'll find out?  
Let's go drop your snake in the river.

GERTY

Which they did.

MORTIMER

Mortimer Mortimer made good on his promise to Gerty.  
He stayed in the Fail Family home and watched after John N.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

At first, the two men did a fair amount of watching each other,  
Each equally afraid the other might do himself in.  
Finally, they grew accustomed to living out their lives alone  
Together.

JOHN N.

Eventually, John N. Fail opened up an animal treatment center in the former Fail Clock  
Works shop room,  
The first of its kind in the great city of Chicago,  
Dr. John N. Fail ran the clinic, and Mr. Mortimer Mortimer ran the books.  
They hung a sign on Lumber and Love that read  
“The Fail Sisters Hospital for Animals Est. 1930: Open”  
And it became a well loved site along the Chicago River path.

MORTIMER

Above the sign was a shattered window.  
They never fixed it.

JOHN N.

Instead, they boarded up the door to the master bedroom,  
Allowing the birds, raccoons, rabbits, snakes, rats, squirrels and vermin to come in and  
out of the room as they pleased  
Through the smash in the window.

GERTY

Without the constant ticking of the clocks,

NELLY

Time flew by without either of them realizing.  
The two men grew very old together in the home of their loved ones.

JENNY JUNE

Once, over breakfast,  
Mortimer Mortimer looked up from the funny pages,

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I guess we really are old bachelors now aren't we?

JOHN N.

You are.  
I may still marry yet.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

I wonder what it is to be married.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

JOHN N.

There are so many ways to love another person.  
Marriage is just one of those ways, I suppose.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

But what do you think it means?  
To be married?

JOHN N.

I think marriage is a classification  
For two people who are very very very good friends.  
Forever.

MORTIMER MORTIMER

We've had some very good friends, haven't we?

MOTHER

And as John N. went back to clipping a comatose tabby cat's tail,  
Mortimer Mortimer observed,

MORTIMER MORTIMER

You know, you're really not so bad with people.

JENNY JUNE

That night John N. Fail had the most wonderful dream.

JOHN N.

He dreamt that all his friends and loved ones  
Came floating down the river on a brand new DeSoto Town Car,  
And docked at the corner of Lumber and Love.  
There was music playing on board the floating DeSoto.  
And everyone was dancing,  
His Mother and Father  
His sisters, Nelly, Jenny June, and Gerty,  
His old dog pal, and his dear friend Moses.

They beckoned to him over the jazz,

"Come on, John N."

"Come join us."

He walked through walls of the

"Fail Sisters Hospital for Animals Est. 1930: Closed",

Boarded the floating brand new DeSoto Town Car,

And drifted up the river with the trash, the detritus,

And everyone he'd ever loved.

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

FATHER

The next morning, John N. Fail  
 Did not wake up from his dream.  
 He was 82 years old,

JENNY JUNE

We think.

NELLY

Mortimer Mortimer lived even longer.  
 He survived a great depression,  
 Two World Wars,  
 And everyone he'd ever cared about.

MORTIMER

On the morning of what was to be the last day of his life,  
 When he was so old he could no longer remember who he was or what he had been,  
 Mortimer Mortimer awoke in the downstairs bed  
 His nurse had made up for him  
 Since the stairs had become too much for his failing legs.  
 The river was just beginning its morning shimmer,  
 When Mortimer Mortimer thought he saw something through the shoproom window.  
 He grabbed for his glasses and shuffled closer to the window to get a good look.  
 He flung wide the front door,  
 Which had long since lost its chime.  
 Shuffled under the "Fail Sisters Hospital for Animals Est. 1930: Closed"  
 Across the middle of Lumber and Love,  
 Over the spot of the coo coo clock and the desk chair,  
 And ungracefully down the bank of the river,  
 Now paved with concrete.  
 Without rolling up the legs of his pajama bottoms,  
 He placed his varicosed feet in the water.  
 The water was so cold it felt like the River was tattooing itself on his body.  
 But he was smiling,  
 Because he remembered.

GERTY

You can reverse the flow of the river,  
 You can plumb the lake for the clearest, stillest water,  
 But it won't bring them back.  
 All that remain are the stories,  
 And Mortimer Mortimer  
 Could hear the stories.

NELLY

As he walked happily out into the silvery river,

Failure: A Love Story, Dawkins

A single flash of green flew across the water and landed on the opposite bank,  
Then another,  
Then another.  
Until there were fifty, more, maybe a hundred feral monk parakeets  
Painting the river front a bright and remarkable green.  
The shore was awash with unbelievable history  
And Mortimer Mortimer walked out to meet it,  
Another character in the story of the water.

JENNY JUNE

When the nurse arrived that day  
She found no one at home.

NELLY: But she did find a message

GERTY: Carved into the surface of the shoproom table:

MORTIMER MORTIMER

“Tell them I’m on my way.”

THE END

THANK YOU