Failure: A Love Story

Character breakdown

• Mortimer Mortimer- The lover, who survives loss.

• Nelly Fail- The youngest, in love with love.

• Jenny June Fail- The middlest, who’s never met a challenge she couldn’t conquer.

• Gertrude Fail- The eldest, wise beyond her years.

• John N. Fail- The brother, connects more with animals than his own kind.

Chorus 1-4- The storytellers.

• Dog- Somber, sickly, has seen some things.

• Moses- The snake, a sassy commentator.

• Mae- Mischievous bird, loves to salsa.

• December- Mae’s lovelorn companion.

• Some roles in Failure are animals and one may be asked to display animal like movement during callbacks.
CHORUS.
Nelly was the first of the Fail Girls to die,
followed soonafter by her sisters, Jenny June
and Gerty Fail
in that order.
Causes of death were
Blunt Object
Disappearance
and Consumption
also in that order.

Of course, plenty other Fails had died long before Nelly did.
Why, her own parents, Henry and Marietta Fail, drowned in the
Chicago River
some thirteen years back,
casualties of the Eastland Riverboat disaster.

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.

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."

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

CHORUS.
On street level,
the only passenger in the brand new Stutz Bearcat,
Marietta Fail, was in peak spirits.
The smoke-filled summer air smelled almost sweet,
when she was thirteen years old at a dog derby
in a land their eldest daughter, Gerty, only ever heard them refer
to as
The Old Country.
By fourteen, Marishka and Heiner were betrothed.
By fifteen they were wed,
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. C. 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.

CHORUS.
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.
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.

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,
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 start-
ing 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.

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.)

MORTIMER MORTIMER. Or not.

NELLY. I never ride in cars!
Cars are for cheats, gangsters, and corpses.

MORTIMER MORTIMER. And milkmen. Don't forget them.