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*Dramatic Publishing*

# **JOHN LENNON & ME**

**A Play in Three Acts**

by

**CHERIE BENNETT**

Based on the novel *Good-bye, Best Friend*

by

**CHERIE BENNETT**



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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Based on the novel GOOD-BYE, BEST FRIEND by  
CHERIE BENNETT

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CHERIE BENNETT and DANIEL WEISS ASSOCIATES INC.,  
published by Bantam/Doubleday/Dell MCMXCII;  
HarperPaperbacks, MCMXCIII  
Printed in the United States of America

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(JOHN LENNON & ME)

*Cover design by Susan Carle*

For all the people who know what it feels like  
to be on the outside looking in.

*JOHN LENNON & ME* was publicly workshopped under the title *CANDY STORE WINDOW* at Mississippi State University, Starkville, Mississippi, October 22-26, 1992, under the direction of Dr. Jeffery Elwell.

Star	Molly Burns
Courtney Cambridge	Heidi Bevill
Sally Kasem	Sarah Ashmore
Dr. Scott Rhodes	Ryan Lamar
Nurse Janice Bobrin	Lucy Fullen
Ina "The Torturer" Tortunesky	Holly Hunter
Julie Rowen	Brittany Bill
Claudia Grubner	Christy Brumfield
Jeff Levine	Chris Reed
Tom Lowell	Andrew Watkins
Annie	Danielle Louys

*JOHN LENNON & ME* received its world premiere on March 29, 1993, at the Shalom Theatre, Jewish Community Center of Nashville, Nashville, Tennessee, under the direction of Cherie Bennett, associate director Robert Kiefer, produced by Shalom Theatre and Jeff Gottesfeld, Esq.

Star	Julia McFerrin
Courtney Cambridge	Jennie Smith
Sally Kasem	Lana Taradash
Dr. Scott Rhodes	Robert Locknar
Nurse Janice Bobrin	Marcy Murphree
Ina "The Torturer" Tortunesky	Layne Sasser
Julie Rowen	Jodi Kraft
Claudia Grubner	Tamara Tweedy
Jeff Levine	Ryan Shogrun
Tom Lowell	Andy Delicata
Flunkies	Yoni Limor, Ben Wolf
Additional teens	Sara Maceyunas, Michelle Haas, Irene Friedlander, Jack Frost, Sara Fuchs

The world professional premiere was at The Phoenix Theatre, Indianapolis, Indiana, in the summer of 1993.

# JOHN LENNON & ME

A Play in Three Acts  
For 3 male and 7 female players, expandable\*

## CHARACTERS

STAR (aka Stella Grubner) . . . . . 13, has cystic fibrosis  
COURTNEY CAMBRIDGE . . . . . 13, has rheumatic fever  
SALLY KASEM . . . . . 13, has brittle diabetes  
JULIE ROWEN (can double as ANNIE and FLUNKY) . . . 13  
TOM LOWELL (can double as LEE and FLUNKY) . . . . 13  
JEFF LEVINE . . . . . 15, on the verge of a breakdown  
CLAUDIA GRUBNER . . . . . 30-45, Star's mother  
"THE TORTURER" (Ina Tortunesky) . . . . .mid-40s or older,  
a medical technician  
DR. SCOTT RHODES . . . . . late 20s, chief pediatric resident  
NURSE JANICE BOBRIN . . . . . 20-35  
FLUNKY #1 & FLUNKY #2 . . . . . teenagers,  
Star's magical assistants  
LEE & ANNIE . . . . . teenage patients

\* CASTING NOTE: With doubling, the cast can be as small as ten or as large as sixteen or more (by adding more teens as patients or Flunkies) depending on the wishes of the producer.

TIME: The present.

PLACE: HEART HOUSE

A residence attached to a hospital for seriously or terminally ill young people, in Nashville, Tennessee.

## ACT ONE

**AT RISE:** *The stage is lit as the audience enters. The barest elements of the set are in place, fully seen by the audience. The last song on a half-hour pre-set tape (could be all old Beatles tunes) might be "She Loves You." The house lights remain on until STAR asks for them to be turned off during her opening monologue. As the song begins, all the FLUNKIES appear on stage. During the song they dress the entire set in perfectly synchronized movements. It should be comic, clever, a whirlwind. They finish exactly as the song finishes. STAR has, several minutes earlier, casually taken a seat in the house as if she were simply another member of the audience. She wears an oversized t-shirt with a picture of John Lennon on it, over which is a flashy denim jacket, jeans, and a backwards New York Jets baseball-style cap. She carries a small backpack and a portable tape deck. When the opening song ends and the FLUNKIES finish, she stands up in the aisle of the theatre and gets the audience's attention, addressing them conversationally. There is something of the stand-up comic about her.*

**STAR.** Excuse me, could I have everyone's attention? Hey, over here! *(She ad libs with some audience members, shaking hands, complimenting them on their outfits as she heads towards the stage.)* What's your name? *(Audience member gives name.)* Audience, I'd like you to meet *(That*

*person's name.*) And (*That person's name.*) I'd like you to meet the audience! Let's all say hello to (*That person's name.*) On the count of three, hello (*That person's name.*) One, two, three—HELLO (*She says that person's name with the entire audience.*). Cool! You guys are great! So, listen, is everyone comfortable? (*She checks with someone in the front row.*) Good, because I know how it sucks if, like, your butt is stuck to the seat or you have to pee or something. Listen, before we go any further, I want to introduce you to the hardest working dudes in show business, my buds, my homies, the Flunkies! (*The FLUNKIES hit muscle poses.*) Let's give 'em a round of applause! Thanks! Bye guys, see ya later! (*FLUNKIES jog off.*) Hey, you in the booth! Kill the house lights! (*The house lights go out. A spot remains on STAR.*) Thanks! Allow me to introduce myself. Contrary to what it says on my birth certificate, my name is not Stella Grubner. I renamed myself Star—no last name, thank-you-very-much. I mean, Stella?? What could my parents have been thinking?? Well, Claudia, my mother—you'll meet her later—tells me that when I was born, she and my father lived in New York City. She was an actress and my dad was a stand-up comic. When my mom got pregnant with me, she was in rehearsal for a revival of this famous play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Because of me, she had to drop out. So she named me Stella, after the character she never got to play. My dad split when I was, like, two. Then Claudia ran out of money, which is how we ended up moving to Franklin, this little town outside of Nashville, into my grandparents' house. I plan to run away to New York when I'm seventeen, to become a very famous actress. I figure the sooner the better, since there's a chance I won't live to see my twentieth birthday. Not that I buy that. But the thing is, I have cysitic



fibrosis. I was born with it. Don't worry (*She says the name of the audience member we met earlier.*), it's not catchy. When I was ten I looked it up in a medical dictionary. After all the technical stuff, it said: "the average life expectancy is twenty-five years. This disease is always fatal." Fatal. As in dead. I admit that one threw me for a minute. But then I read that last line again. "The average life expectancy is twenty-five years." Well, I am not average. I am extraordinary. So, right then I decided I'm not going to die. I'm just not.

*(A light comes up on a girlie-looking room with twin beds, complete with icky precious inspirational posters.)*

STAR. That's my room at Heart House. It's a place for sick kids. I've probably slept more nights there than I've slept in my own bed. The good news is it doesn't look like a hospital. The bad news is that if I'm at Heart House, it means my health has taken (*Melodramatically.*) A Turn For The Worse. (*The light goes out on the room.*) I got admitted again a few weeks ago—and I thought it would be the usual, no problem, you know? But it wasn't. Everything changed. If I live long enough to get really famous, I'll tell it on "Letterman." But just in case I don't, I'll tell you the whole thing now. And it's the total truth, or my name isn't Star.

*(Blackout. A song, such as the one that was played at opening, blasts from STAR's portable tape deck. Lights up on a hallway. She turns down the music, and we hear kids' voices calling to her as she walks down the hall towards the room. She waves regally to them.)*

LEE (*offstage*). Star! Looking good!

STAR. Yo, Lee, how they hanging?

ANNIE (*offstage*). Hey, Star! Welcome home!

STAR. Home?? Get a grip, Annie!

KEVIN (*offstage*). Whoa, Star, great jacket! Where'd ya get it?

STAR. One of my lovers—Jim Carrey, I think. (*She enters the room and throws her backpack on the bed closest to the window and turns both inspirational posters around. On the back of one is an autographed poster of Patrick Swayze covered with kiss marks, the other is a poster of John Lennon covered with kiss marks. Sarcastically.*) Ah, Heart House, how do I love thee? Let me count the ways.

(*STAR plops down on the bed. SALLY KASEM appears at the door.*)

SALLY. Hi! (*Freezes in the doorway, a juvenile, too-eager grin on her face.*)

STAR (*to audience*). That's Sally Kasem. She's a brittle diabetic. Plus, she's a few fries short of a "Happy Meal," if you catch my drift. (*Re-enters scene.*)

SALLY. Where have you been?

STAR. Home.

SALLY. Really? That's a coincidence! I was home, too!

STAR (*to audience*). You see what I mean. (*Re-enters scene.*)

SALLY. I don't know how you do it, Star, but you always do it. I begged to get the corner room this time, but there was totally no way. I'm stuck in 1-A with some asthmatic kid who talks out loud to her Barbies.

STAR. Gruesome.

SALLY. And you waltz in and get the corner room again. Hey, maybe I could transfer in here!

STAR. Nope. I'm getting a roommate. Janice told me down-stairs. Her name is Courtney something-or-other. She's never been here before.

SALLY. Well, I don't see why some new girl should get the best room. Do you think that's fair? Because I don't.

STAR. How come you're here again, anyway?

SALLY. Oh, they need to regulate my insulin again or something. I don't see why I have to have insulin.

STAR. Because you have diabetes.

SALLY. Well, yeah, I know that. But it isn't fair! How come you're back?

STAR. Same old same old. So, how's the local talent?

SALLY (*stymied for a moment, then she gets it*). Oh! You mean (*She spells.*) B-O-Y-S! A bunch of babies. Oh, except for one cute guy in 2-B. He just came in yesterday. I saw him go into his room, but I didn't talk to him. Other than that, there's just Dr. Scott.

STAR. Never say "just" before you say "Dr. Scott."

*(As if on cue, DR. SCOTT RHODES appears in the doorway and freezes in some macho pose, revealing a Superman t-shirt under his lab coat.)*

STAR (*addressing audience*). Tell me he isn't a total hunk. Claudia says he has "body of death." Fortunately, Claudia is too old for him, whereas I am mature for my age. (*Re-enters scene.*) Yo! Dr. Scott!

DR. SCOTT (*closes lab coat, bounds into the room, gives SALLY a small wave and crosses to hug STAR*). Hey, kiddo! Janice told me you were here. I thought I'd pop in and say hello.

STAR. Hi!

DR. SCOTT. How ya doing?

STAR. Oh, fine.

DR. SCOTT (*doubting*). Star...

STAR (*reluctantly*). Okay, I coughed up some blood last night. Not much, though.

DR. SCOTT. Dr. Pemrose said to start you on IV antibiotics.

STAR. Yeah. I feel great, though. Don't I look great?

SALLY. You're not supposed to fish for compliments. Right, Dr. Scott?

STAR (*ignoring SALLY*). Well, don't I?

DR. SCOTT (*laughing*). Yeah, you look great. Your hair got longer.

STAR. That's because I haven't been here for three months—I think that's a record for me. Not that I didn't pine away for you and everything. (*SALLY giggles. STAR shoots her a look that says "You are so juvenile."*)

DR. SCOTT. You are going to be hazardous to some guy's health when you start dating.

STAR. Not some guy, lots of guys...I hope! Hey, you want to come back later and play some poker? I brought my lucky deck!

DR. SCOTT. Last time we played for pennies you took five bucks off me. I think your lucky deck is only lucky for you.

STAR. Well, of course. That's the whole poi—(*She begins to cough, a dry, metallic sound. She has trouble catching her breath. DR. SCOTT soothes her until she stops coughing.*)

DR. SCOTT. Better? (*STAR nods.*) How many thumps are you doing each day?

STAR (*still trying to catch her breath*). Please. Don't talk to me about thumps. At home Claudia's giving me two, but The Torturer says I have to start doing three a day. It's her idea of a good time.

*(A light comes up on the opposite side of the stage. We hear THE TORTURER'S theme music: maybe "Jaws." We see INA TORTUNESKY, aka THE TORTURER. She wears a nurse's uniform and army boots.)*

STAR *(to audience)*. That's her, Mrs. Tortunesky—The Torturer. If she was green she could pass for The Incredible Hulk. She used to be an army nurse, but she retired. Personally, I think she did this just so she could make my life miserable. Whenever I'm at Heart House, she wakes me up every morning at six a.m. for physical therapy by barking commands in my face. *(As THE TORTURER barks her commands straight out to the audience, STAR lip-synchs the words at the same time.)*

THE TORTURER *(whacking the air with her hand)*. Lie still!  
Turn over! Now, cough! Cough!

STAR *(to audience)*. All the time she's yelling this stuff, she's whacking me as hard as she can. It's supposed to keep me from choking to death on—okay, this is disgusting—thick mucus. Personally, I'd like to whack her to death! After that I have to breathe this crap called Pulmozyme through an oxygen mask, and then she whacks the hell out of me again. I really hate her. *(The light goes out on THE TORTURER. STAR re-enters scene.)*

DR. SCOTT. She's actually not a bad person. She's just kind of...serious.

STAR. Serious? She's sadistic! I heard she whacked one CF kid so hard he flew off the bed and landed in the corner like a hockey puck. And then she yelled *(Star imitates THE TORTURER)* "Score!!"

SALLY *(giggling)*. Wow, that's great, you sound just like her!

DR. SCOTT. I admit you have talent, but you have to realize, she's trying to help you.

STAR. Go back to the part about how I have talent.

DR. SCOTT. Maybe you'll become an actress.

STAR. Maybe? Do you realize there are thirteen-year-olds starring in TV series, and in really big movies? I'm getting too old to be discovered young!

SALLY (*to DR. SCOTT*). Everything is so dramatic with her.

STAR (*with dignity*). That's because I'm a professional thespian.

*(From the hallway we hear a female voice singing something like "Oklahoma!" with great enthusiasm. NURSE JANICE BOBRIN, the owner of the voice, appears in the doorway and freezes, a manic grin on her face.)*

STAR (*to audience*). That's Janice Bobrin, one of the live-in nurses. She gives new meaning to the word "perky."

JANICE (*rushing to STAR*). How's my favorite singing partner?

STAR (*back in the scene*). Still tone-deaf.

JANICE. Oh, pooh, that doesn't matter! Hey, tonight is sing-along night in the lounge! Isn't that great? I got the sheet music for "Oklahoma!" (*Or another appropriate song.*)

STAR (*to audience*). Who would have guessed. (*Re-enters scene.*)

JANICE. I taught Sally yesterday so that she could help lead the sing-along! She's my super helper, aren't you?

SALLY. I guess so.

JANICE (*clearly in love with DR. SCOTT*). You'll be there, won't you, Dr. Scott?

DR. SCOTT (*trying to figure out how to get out of it*). Gee, I—

JANICE. It'll be so much fun! It starts out: (*She starts to sing.*) Come on, Sally, you join in! (*JANICE and SALLY sing badly together.*)

STAR (*over their singing*). Isn't there, like, a mime section you could teach?

DR. SCOTT (*over their singing*). Gee, would you look at the time—

*(Into the doorway steps COURTNEY CAMBRIDGE. She holds a small suitcase, a stuffed animal, and looks scared to death. She is dressed in expensive frills, a hair bow, and patent leather shoes, as if she was 8 instead of 13. Everyone notices her and all the noise stops.)*

COURTNEY (*clearing her throat*). I...I...

STAR (*to audience*). My roommate, Courtney Cambridge. Prettier than me. Taller than me. Tits. It was hate at first sight. (*Re-enters scene.*)

COURTNEY. I'm sorry to interrupt...

DR. SCOTT. Courtney!

COURTNEY. Am I in the right room?

DR. SCOTT. Sure you are! Everybody, this is Courtney Cambridge, one of my favorite patients.

COURTNEY (*faltering at the door*). Maybe I should have waited downstairs with my parents...

DR. SCOTT (*leading COURTNEY into the room*). No, no, it's fine. (*DR. SCOTT puts his arm around COURTNEY's shoulder.*)

STAR (*to audience*). One of his favorite patients? And he had his arm around her! His hand was extremely close to her left boob. He didn't have his arm around me and I didn't have a left boob *or* a right boob. I felt like snatching her

perfect blonde hair out of her head. Dr. Scott introduced her to everybody, saving me for last. (*Re-enters scene.*)

DR. SCOTT. And this is your roommate, Star.

COURTNEY (*wide-eyed*). Your name is really Star?

STAR (*too, too bored*). Uh-huh. (*DR. SCOTT leads COURTNEY to the other twin bed, where she sits on the very edge. SALLY reluctantly rises.*)

DR. SCOTT. Are your parents downstairs?

COURTNEY (*nodding*). Filling out forms.

STAR. That'll take forever.

DR. SCOTT (*gently, to COURTNEY*). Why don't you lie down?

COURTNEY (*clutching her stuffed animal for dear life*). No, no, I'm fine.

JANICE. I hope you'll come to our sing-a-long tonight, Courtney! Sally, right now you and I have a date to take some of your blood.

SALLY (*moving reluctantly towards the door*). It isn't fair! I feel like a pincushion!

JANICE. Oh, pooh. Come on, we'll sing. It'll help, you'll see! (*JANICE puts her arm around SALLY and leads her out, singing again.*)

DR. SCOTT. You just relax, Courtney. You'll have another EKG soon, and I'll be back to see you later.

COURTNEY. Okay.

STAR (*calling to DR. SCOTT*). Hey, don't forget our poker date! You bring the beer!

DR. SCOTT. Be nice. (*DR. SCOTT exits.*)

COURTNEY. They let you have beer?

STAR. Sure. And on Sundays we have champagne.

COURTNEY. That's a joke. Right?

STAR (*to audience*). And I thought Sally was dumb. (*Re-enters scene.*)



COURTNEY (*looking at the poster of John Lennon*). I really like your poster.

STAR. He was the most talented person who ever lived. And he died so young.

COURTNEY (*horrified*). Paul McCartney is dead???

STAR. That's Lennon. John Lennon.

COURTNEY. Oh. Sorry.

STAR (*to audience*). She's killing me. (*Re-enters scene.*) So. How old are you?

COURTNEY. Thirteen.

STAR. Same as me. What are you in for? (*STAR starts coughing deeply. She's embarrassed, and finally gets control of it.*)

COURTNEY. Do you have a bad cold or something?

STAR. Cystic fibrosis. It's this lung thing—no problem. So what about you?

COURTNEY (*in a shaky voice*). I'm not sure. I just had this bad sore throat. I didn't tell my mom right away because I didn't want to miss the big away game we had. So then it got worse and worse. It turned out to be strep throat, and that turned into rheumatic fever. And now they think it did something to my heart.

STAR. Can't be that bad. Your lips and your nails aren't blue. If something is mega-wrong with your heart, you turn blue.

COURTNEY. Are you sure?

STAR. Yep.

COURTNEY. Thanks for telling me. No one will tell me anything.

STAR. Yeah, well, that's how doctors are.

COURTNEY. I've never been sick before. Well, I had the measles when I was a kid, but you know what I mean.

STAR (*breezily*). Oh, sure.

COURTNEY. You don't seem very sick, either. Except for your cough.

STAR. No problem.

COURTNEY. Yeah, I guess not. (*COURTNEY relaxes a little. She settles back on the bed. Confidentially.*) You know, I was so nervous coming up here. Walking down the hall, I saw some really sick-looking kids. Two of them were bald!

STAR. Chemo.

COURTNEY. That means they have cancer, right? It was so horrible! I just prayed I wouldn't have a really sick roommate.

STAR. Why?

COURTNEY. It would be so embarrassing, like when my best friend comes to visit me, you know?

STAR. Oh, sure. My friends come visit me all the time, too. So I'm glad to have a normal roommate, myself. (*To audience*). Yeah, like I was really going to tell her that I actually didn't have any friends outside of Heart House. It's hard to make friends when you don't go to school. So sue me. I lied. (*Re-enters scene.*)

COURTNEY. I'm so glad you're normal!

SHRILL WOMAN'S VOICE (*from hall*). Yoo-hoo, Courtney! Where's my baby?

COURTNEY. Oh, God, it's my mother.

STAR (*to audience*). I'll do you a big favor and skip over the part where her parental units showed up. Her mother was so suffocating, she actually sucked all the air out of the room. (*Re-enters scene.*)

SHRILL WOMAN'S VOICE (*from hall*). Bye, baby! I'll be back first thing in the morning. Do everything the doctor says!

COURTNEY (*waves bye-bye, then turns to STAR*). I hate my mother.