

SYNOPSIS

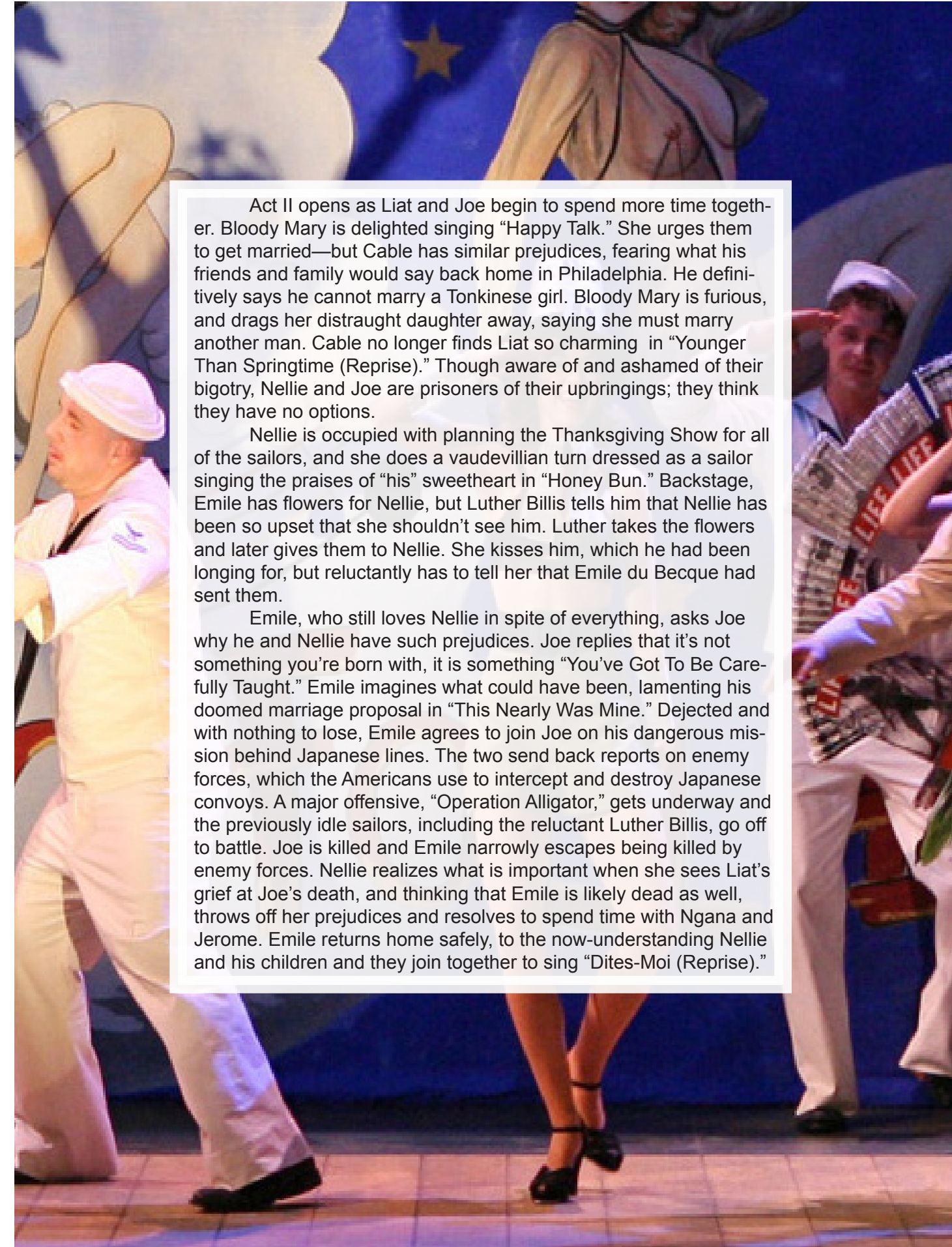


Act I opens on a South Pacific island during World War II, two Polynesian children, Ngana and Jerome, sing “Dites-Moi”, a charming French song. A naive U.S. Navy nurse from Arkansas, Ensign Nellie Forbush, falls in love with middle-aged French plantation owner Emile de Becque. Even though everyone else is worried about the outcome of the war, Nellie explains to Emile that she’s still “A Cockeyed Optimist.” She and Emile are in love, but each wonders if the other reciprocates their feelings in “Twin Soliloquies.” Emile recalls how they met at a dinner held at the officers’ club on “Some Enchanted Evening” and were immediately drawn to each other. Nellie returns to the hospital for work and Emile calls Ngana and Jerome to him, revealing to the audience that they are his children, unbeknownst to Nellie.

Meanwhile, the restless American sailors, led by entrepreneurial Seabee Luther Billis, lament the absence of women or combat to relieve their boredom. There is one non-naval woman on the island, a middle-aged Tonkinese grass skirt seller, nicknamed “Bloody Mary.” Billis wants to go to a nearby island, Bali Ha’i, off-limits to all but officers. The French plantation owners have hidden their women there, and riches may be had by trading for goods with the locals. Billis and the sailors lament the lack of female company singing “There is Nothin’ Like a Dame.” Lieutenant Joe Cable, of the U.S. Marine Corps, arrives on the island to take part in a dangerous spy mission that might help turn the tide of the war against Japan. Bloody Mary is immediately drawn to him and tries to persuade him to come to “Bali H’ai”, where she lives.

After thinking a bit more about Emile and the life they would have on the island, Nellie tells the other nurses that she intends to break up with him in “I’m Gonna Wash That Man Right Outta My Hair.” But she meets Emile unexpectedly and realizes that she loves him. He invites her to a party he has set up for the purpose of introducing her to all of his friends. Nellie eagerly accepts and after Emile leaves, she declares “I’m In Love With A Wonderful Guy.”

Meanwhile, Cable learns that his mission involves reconnaissance on a Japanese-held island. The only candidate to be his guide is Emile, who refuses due to his love for Nellie and feelings of alienation from others. Cable is sent on leave until an opportunity arises. Billis convinces Lt. Cable to take him to Bali Ha’i. There, Bloody Mary introduces Cable to a beautiful young Tonkinese girl, Liat, her daughter. Cable becomes infatuated and sleeps with Liat. Cable sings her the love song, “Younger Than Springtime.” But as he is leaving the island, Bloody Mary informs him that Liat is her daughter—the reason Bloody Mary so quickly showed interest in Cable is that she thought he would make a good husband for Liat. Her plan shows promise, as Cable and Liat have quickly fallen in love. The two couples, Nellie and Emile, along with Liat and Joe, deepen their affection. But Nellie breaks off the engagement when Emile reveals that the dark-skinned Ngana and Jerome are Emile’s children by a Polynesian woman—she has deep-seated racial prejudices and is particularly upset to think of Emile married to a dark-skinned woman.



Act II opens as Liat and Joe begin to spend more time together. Bloody Mary is delighted singing “Happy Talk.” She urges them to get married—but Cable has similar prejudices, fearing what his friends and family would say back home in Philadelphia. He definitively says he cannot marry a Tonkinese girl. Bloody Mary is furious, and drags her distraught daughter away, saying she must marry another man. Cable no longer finds Liat so charming in “Younger Than Springtime (Reprise).” Though aware of and ashamed of their bigotry, Nellie and Joe are prisoners of their upbringings; they think they have no options.

Nellie is occupied with planning the Thanksgiving Show for all of the sailors, and she does a vaudevillian turn dressed as a sailor singing the praises of “his” sweetheart in “Honey Bun.” Backstage, Emile has flowers for Nellie, but Luther Billis tells him that Nellie has been so upset that she shouldn’t see him. Luther takes the flowers and later gives them to Nellie. She kisses him, which he had been longing for, but reluctantly has to tell her that Emile du Becque had sent them.

Emile, who still loves Nellie in spite of everything, asks Joe why he and Nellie have such prejudices. Joe replies that it’s not something you’re born with, it is something “You’ve Got To Be Carefully Taught.” Emile imagines what could have been, lamenting his doomed marriage proposal in “This Nearly Was Mine.” Dejected and with nothing to lose, Emile agrees to join Joe on his dangerous mission behind Japanese lines. The two send back reports on enemy forces, which the Americans use to intercept and destroy Japanese convoys. A major offensive, “Operation Alligator,” gets underway and the previously idle sailors, including the reluctant Luther Billis, go off to battle. Joe is killed and Emile narrowly escapes being killed by enemy forces. Nellie realizes what is important when she sees Liat’s grief at Joe’s death, and thinking that Emile is likely dead as well, throws off her prejudices and resolves to spend time with Ngana and Jerome. Emile returns home safely, to the now-understanding Nellie and his children and they join together to sing “Dites-Moi (Reprise).”