

UNCLE TIMBO

A Play in One Act

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Characters

GUSSIE	Early 30's; nervous and shy; her Southern accent pops up when she plays herself at 11
DR. KELLMAN	Early 40's; psychiatrist; attractive; reads the voice of GUSSIE'S MOM
UNCLE TIMBO	GUSSIE's eccentric uncle from the South

- The 'Richard Dreyfuss' is a reference to an actor from the past that DR. KELLMAN might resemble. Feel free to change it.

ACT ONE

Setting: DR. KELLMAN's office
Comfy chair, coffee table

At Rise: GUSSIE is seated in the comfy chair.
DR. KELLMAN is facing her with a notepad and a compassionate expression.
UNCLE TIMBO is standing in the shadows and GUSSIE sees him, but DR. KELLMAN does not.

DR. KELLMAN

Gussie...Do you want me to repeat the question?

(UNCLE TIMBO makes fun of DR. KELLMAN.)

GUSSIE

No, Dr. Kellman, I'm sorry. I was distracted. What were we talking about?

(UNCLE TIMBO is tormenting DR. KELLMAN silently and laughing.)

DR. KELLMAN

I see you've been having the same recurring dream. You are stuck in band practice and the conductor makes you play the trumpet over and over, but you've never played the trumpet before. And as soon as you reach for the trumpet, it disappears and you wake up. Is that right?

GUSSIE

I guess. What does that mean?

DR. KELLMAN

Well, what does the trumpet represent to you?

GUSSIE

Uh—I don't know. It's kind of loud and harsh and—
(imitating)
Blaat! Blaaf!

DR. KELLMAN

Well, that doesn't seem to be it. Perhaps, the conductor is important. Who's the conductor?

(UNCLE TIMBO is waving his arms like a conductor before he exits.)

Gussie—

GUSSIE

The conductor looks like my uncle.

DR. KELLMAN

Your uncle? Well, that's surprising. Tell me about him.

GUSSIE

He was my mother's only brother. My Uncle Timbo.

/DR. KELLMAN

Timbo?

GUSSIE

It's a Southern thing—like my name is Gussie Jo. We all get two names right away. I grew up down South and things are so different for girls and boys—

DR. KELLMAN

(pointedly)

Really?

GUSSIE

Oh, but Uncle Timbo was just...great...Really? He carried me piggy-back and he liked my drawings and my stories and he always made me feel special. Like I mattered.

DR. KELLMAN

You do matter.

GUSSIE

I do matter.

DR. KELLMAN

Tell me more about Uncle Timbo.

GUSSIE

There's nothing to say.

(UNCLE TIMBO appears from somewhere to stare at her.)

I mean—that was a long time ago.

DR. KELLMAN

Gussie, we can't make this work unless you're honest with me.

(UNCLE TIMBO wags his finger at her before blowing a kiss and disappearing.)
You're getting very emotional thinking about him.

GUSSIE

Today would have been his birthday.

DR. KELLMAN

You shared a birthday.

GUSSIE

I did. How did you know that?

DR. KELLMAN

You told me that our last session would be on your birthday. Are you planning on doing something fun?

(GUSSIE shakes her head.)
I'm sorry you're leaving my practice. I've enjoyed getting to know you.

GUSSIE

Yes, Doctor.

DR. KELLMAN

I think you can call me Matthew now. And I hope we stay friends.

GUSSIE

(in love)
Uh-huh...

DR. KELLMAN

How old would your Uncle Tim have been?

GUSSIE

(a la UNCLE TIMBO)
A lady never tells her age. And his name was Timbo. Not Tim.

DR. KELLMAN

Timbo. Tell me what you remember about him.

GUSSIE

Well, he was smart and funny and was always dressed so nicely. He would wear a tie when no one else did or whenever they did, he wouldn't. My grandmother Nonnie Lou would always yell at him and say 'That Son of a Devil will be the death of me', but I

GUSSIE (Cont.)

think he made her laugh. He was so different than anyone in that small town. He always looked like he was in a magazine. Cool and collected. Even when it was blazing summer. He wanted to be an actor—

DR. KELLMAN

He was an actor.

GUSSIE

No, he just wanted to be a famous actor so he could go to great parties and drink and people would take pictures of him. There was always laughter when he was around. Even my Great-Aunts Ola May and Vita Jane thought he was funny—and they didn't like anybody. He has a great smile and fancy hair and he called me Lady Bracknell.

DR. KELLMAN

What on earth for?

GUSSIE

He said she was a famous lady and her name was Augusta just like me. She's from a funny play where everyone has the same name.

DR. KELLMAN

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST.

GUSSIE

That's it! How did you know that?

DR. KELLMAN

I know everything. What else would you like to tell me?

GUSSIE

He died too soon.

DR. KELLMAN

I'm sorry. He seems like a great guy.

UNCLE TIMBO

(entering suddenly)

He was... Cue the dramatic lighting change...

(lights change)

Very nice.

GUSSIE

It was a hot summer day.

UNCLE TIMBO

One of the hottest summer days on record. As decadently steamy as a Tennessee Williams play as performed by William Faulkner. The only cool breeze is on the porch. My mother's front porch. Nonnie Lou's front porch.

GUSSIE

I was eleven years old. I was so young.

(GUSSIE sits on the floor and becomes eleven. The lights fade on DR.

KELLMAN who keeps taking notes. The sound of a crowd is heard off-stage. The Southern accent that GUSSIE has struggled to lose is revealed.)

There were too many people there. The neighbors and Reverend Whitlow and my mother and my Nonnie Lou and my great aunts. Too many people and it was so hot. So damned hot.

(GUSSIE has been crying as she takes off her good shoes.)

I hate these shoes.

(UNCLE TIMBO appears in a doorway. GUSSIE doesn't turn to him.)

UNCLE TIMBO

Oh, my dear, a lady doesn't remove her shoes unless a gentleman is presenting her with a much more expensive pair.

GUSSIE

Yes, Uncle Timbo. I remember.

UNCLE TIMBO

What else do you remember?

GUSSIE

I remember laughing with you. And singing. And movies. So many movies.

UNCLE TIMBO

Only from the forties, my dear. The golden age. Davis and Crawford and Astaire and Rogers. The elegance of the dance. Ah, my lady, there is nothing like it. Come dance with me.

GUSSIE

There's no music.

UNCLE TIMBO

Of course, there is.

(UNCLE TIMBO makes the crowd noise disappear and classic dance music plays. He offers his hand.)

May I?

GUSSIE

This can't be happening.

UNCLE TIMBO

Of course, it's happening. It's the dance break between the feisty heroine and her eccentric bachelor uncle.

(GUSSIE and UNCLE TIMBO execute a sweet routine.)

Ah, you remember everything I taught you.

(GUSSIE becomes frightened and steps away from UNCLE TIMBO.)

GUSSIE

This was twenty years ago. Not today. I'm living in New York. I'm a grown up and I'm at Dr. Kellman's office. Dr. Kellman? Dr. Kellman?

DR. KELLMAN

(suddenly)

Fascinating. Tell me more.

GUSSIE

(sitting on the floor again)

My feet hurt from those shoes and I just had to get away from everybody. There's a lot of people out there.

UNCLE TIMBO

Standing room only. I'm a hit.

GUSSIE

You're a hit.

UNCLE TIMBO

(taking a grand bow)

Thank you very much.

GUSSIE

Nonnie Lou is crying and Ola Jane and Vita May are a wreck, but my Mama just fusses with the food. She won't admit that she's sad. Why do people do that?

UNCLE TIMBO

It's a Southern thing. My dear sister is always the perfect hostess.

(GUSSIE turns away.)

You seem sad, dear Lady Bracknell. Why are you sad?

GUSSIE

I'm sad because you're not here anymore. It's not right. It's not fair.

UNCLE TIMBO

Life ain't fair, darlin'. We're here one minute and then we're gone. Don't want to overstay my welcome. Always leave them wanting more. No encore. No second curtain call.

GUSSIE

But I won't see you again.

UNCLE TIMBO

Of course you will. Think of me as a classic movie that is always there when you need a laugh or good cry. You hear a word or a song and I'm back again. In glorious Technicolor or perhaps black and white. Yes, that's it. Much more elegant.

GUSSIE

But you're dead. No one even says that word anymore. People say 'passed away' or 'gone to heaven'. Why is that?

UNCLE TIMBO

I don't know. People are very strange. And I hope I'm not in heaven. It sounds like a dreadful bore. I was thinking of a different party location. A real 'hot time'....

GUSSIE

Stop...

UNCLE TIMBO

I checked off a lot of those seven deadly sins in my time. Gluttony, Sloth, Greed, Apathy, Sarcastm....

GUSSIE

I don't think that's right.

UNCLE TTIMBO

And Lust...Never forget Lust...

GUSSIE

I'm only eleven. Aunt Ola May would say you're being vulgar.

UNCLE TIMBO

I love vulgarity. I'm sorry. Do you still have that doll I gave you? What was her name again?

GUSSIE

Her name was Tallulah—

UNCLE TIMBO

(a la 'Bankhead')
Tallulah, darling...

GUSSIE

Don't you remember? She had the greatest hair and a little cigarette holder and a tiny little trumpet. Why did she have a trumpet?

UNCLE TIMBO

Don't you remember? I came to your Christmas concert where you played the trumpet, but you were so excited to see me that you didn't play anything at all. You just stood there like a statue. My goodness, your mother had a fit after that night. I wanted to make you smile, so I found a little trumpet and put it in Tallulah's hand. I just wanted to make you smile.

GUSSIE

You did good. I put her next to you when you were lying...on that pillow...

UNCLE TIMBO

That was sweet of you, but your mother took it out.
(feeling a little dizzy)
Where is your mother?

DR. KELLMAN

(as GUSSIE'S MOTHER)
Augusta? Where are you, honey sweet? Reverend Whitlow is leaving and wants to see you before he goes.

UNCLE TIMBO

(amazed at DR. KELLMAN)
There she is. Maribelle insists on such good manners, doesn't she?
(to DR. KELLMAN)
Good job, doctor.

DR. KELLMAN

Gussie, your memories are so vivid. Keep going.

GUSSIE

Yes, Doctor.
(to UNCLE TIMBO)
Where am I? What day is this?

UNCLE TIMBO

It's your birthday. It's my birthday.

GUSSIE

Of course. I get the card today. The last card. You left me so much money.

UNCLE TIMBO

It was nothing. I wanted to remember you.

(GUSSIE takes a moment to look at UNCLE TIMBO. She is saying goodbye.)

GUSSIE

You said you would dance at my wedding.

UNCLE TIMBO

I did—but what if you never get married?

GUSSIE

That's a horrible thing to say.

UNCLE TIMBO

No, it's not. You don't have to get married. I never did. And it's okay. But I never had a child and do you know why? It's a secret.

GUSSIE

Uncle Timbo...I know why.

UNCLE TIMBO

Well, then tell me, smartiepants.

GUSSIE

It's because you liked boys more than girls.

UNCLE TIMBO

Oh, my stars, that was no secret. Your Nonnie Lou said she always knew. I never really gravitated toward the harshness. I always wanted to think about light and loveliness. Dear Aunt Vita Jane was always a bit confused by me, but that was her thing. The secret is that I never had a child because I could never have had a child as perfect and beautiful and as smart and funny as you. You were my best birthday present ever!

GUSSIE

I know...

UNCLE TIMBO

So, your movie doesn't have to end with you getting married to Cary Grant or...a psychiatrist who is sort of a young Richard Dreyfuss* , don't you think?

GUSSIE

Who?

UNCLE TIMBO

Never mind. Just promise me that you will make your own movie.

GUSSIE

Make my own movie.

UNCLE TIMBO

With glamour and romance and handsome leading men. And dancing. Lots of dancing.

GUSSIE

(smiling)

Okay...

UNCLE TIMBO

And I'll be there, darling. I want a big credit.

DR. KELLMAN

(standing up as GUSSIE'S MOTHER)

Augusta ! You must come down now. Everyone's asking for you. Please.

GUSSIE

I will! I promise.

(to UNCLE TIMBO)

Will you be here when I get back?

UNCLE TIMBO

There's no getting back, Augusta. Just go forward. You can do it. And no more dreams, okay? A trumpet is for Miss Tallulah. You need to be a big bass drum. Go out and beat that drum!

GUSSIE

I understand.

DR. KELLMAN

Gussie...

UNCLE TIMBO

And that doctor seems to be pretty good at what he does.

DR. KELLMAN

Gussie...

UNCLE TIMBO

He's good looking, too.

GUSSIE

Like Richard Dreyfuss...or maybe...

DR KELLMAN

We're almost done here.

GUSSIE

Yes, Doctor.

UNCLE TIMBO

But wherever you go, whatever you do, I'll be standing over you making horrible jokes
Goodbye, my lady. Happy Birthday! Now, take that money and have some fun.

(UNCLE TIMBO fades away.)

GUSSIE

Well...

DR. KELLMAN

Those were some intense memories.

GUSSIE

He died a long time ago, but he left me money every year on my birthday. Today is the
last one—and it's quite a lot of money. More than I could have imagined.

DR. KELLMAN

Congratulations!

GUSSIE

Part of me wants to put it in the bank, but the other part of me wants to celebrate Uncle
Timbo with champagne and formal wear and lots of dancing. Lots of dancing.

DR. KELLMAN

(shyly)
I like dancing.

GUSSIE

Oh.

(pause)

Matthew...There's a reason I'm leaving here.

DR. KELLMAN

Okay.

GUSSIE

I don't think it's right for doctors to date their patients.

DR. KELLMAN

I agree. It's not right. Especially...you and me...

(standing to offer his hand)

Thank you, Gussie.

GUSSIE

Thank you.

(UNCLE TIMBO appears to make a classic tune play. GUSSIE and DR. KELLMAN dance together and then end their dance as if it never happened.)

DR. KELLMAN

Good afternoon, Gussie.

GUSSIE

Good afternoon, Matthew.

(As GUSSIE starts to exit, she high fives UNCLE TIMBO and the lights fade to the dance music as DR. KELLMAN is suddenly aware of the 'magic'.)

END OF PLAY

