

## **BESSIE'S WINGS**

**Libretto**  
**Tim Yealland © 2017**

### **Prologue 1: The airfield**

#### **St Mark's**

*The crowd comes to the front of the stage*

*James points over 4*

*Everyone points over 4*

*We follow a loop the loop with our heads over 8 (x2)*

*Duck and turn back (as the plane comes over our heads)*

*Clap and turn back as Bessie walks through*

Mikina **She's amazing!**

Kashine **She's incredible!**

Marianne **She's brilliant!**

Migle **Extraordinary!**

Hensi **Impeccable!**

All **Wo!**

*Photographers. JASON, AMANUWIT, DEBRA*  
*Flash!! (everyone freezes)*

*She has to break away – she has an appointment.*

### **Prologue 2: R.E. Newman's office.**

#### **Ashmole**

*Newman is looking at some black and white film stills*

*There's a model of a movie camera*

*The secretary is typing.*

Bessie        *Spoken*  
**Excuse me?**

Secretary    **Shhh!**

Bessie        **But I have an appointment.**

*The secretary looks Bessie up and down...*

Secretary    **Name?**

Bessie        **Coleman.**

*The secretary looks suspiciously at the diary*

Bessie        **Bessie Coleman.**

Secretary    **Who?**

Member of the crowd  
**Bessie Coleman!**

All shout     **The aviator!**

Secretary    **Alright, alright! Mr Newman will see you now. Wipe your feet on the way in.**

*The secretary sends her in*

Newman      **Miss Coleman, thank you for coming. Was your journey ok?**

Bessie        **Yes, fine thank you.....**

Newman      **You need coffee?**

Bessie        **Well....**

Newman      **Coffee!**

Secretary    **Milk and sugar?**

Bessie        **Yes please!**

Secretary    **I thought so!**

Newman           **The story of your life is interesting – it might – I said it *might* - make a good film. The question is this: is there really an audience for a film called ‘Bessie’s Wings’?**

Bessie           *spoken*  
**I think there is!**

Newman           **And you think people will come to see a film about a woman born the wrong side of the tracks?**

Bessie           **Why not? It’s a good story!**

*sings*  
**If you listen to the story,  
If you listen to my history,  
How I fought against repression  
How I found my true expression  
In the cockpit of a plane  
And the crowds I entertain...**

Chorus *echoes* **If you listen to her story,  
If you listen to her history,  
How she fought against repression  
How she found her true expression  
In the cockpit of a plane  
And the crowds she entertains...**

Newman           *spoken*  
**Alright. Tell me everything. I hope there’s a good ending!**

Bessie           **You’ll have to wait to find out about that!**  
*Secretary brings coffee*  
**This is how it all began!**

### Scene 1: Bessie’s Arrival

St Mark’s           *The titles for the film:*

Jeremy

**Newman Productions  
presents  
BESSIE’S WINGS**

Andre

**Starring  
BESSIE COLEMAN**

Joyce	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Also starring</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>ASHMOLE SCHOOL</b></p>
Serena	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ST MARK'S SCHOOL</b></p>
Yasmine	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>VAUXHALL SCHOOL</b></p>
Hensi	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Music by</b> <b>THE COMPOSER</b> <b>And</b> <b>THE BAND</b></p>

Bessie      **Imagine this, Mr Newman. The 26<sup>th</sup> January 1892. Only 30 years after slavery was abolished. A small town in Texas. Susan Coleman, an African American, gives birth to her tenth child. Her parents call her Bessie. She was born firmly on the wrong side of the track!**

All      **When Bessie landed on earth  
Began her whirlwind tour  
Slavery was in the minds  
Of all the folk who'd gone before**

**Black and white  
White and black  
Divided by a railroad track**

**Black and white  
White and black  
Divided by a railroad track  
Railroad track  
Divided by a railroad track  
Railroad track  
Railroad track  
Divided by a railroad track**

**In the days Bessie grew up**

**People didn't mix  
Find yourself in the wrong shop  
You'd be beaten with a stick**

**Black and white  
White and black  
Divided by a railroad track**

*6 from Ashmole come to the front in pairs during the instrumental solos*

**Black and white  
White and black  
Divided by a railroad track  
Railroad track  
Divided by a railroad track  
Railroad track  
Railroad track  
Divided by a railroad track**

### **Scene 2: Bessie growing up**

Life in the American South (the wrong side of the track)

2 signs at the front (white and coloured)

#### **Vauxhall**

Bessie	<b>Have you heard of the Jim Crow laws Mr Newman?</b>
Newman Secretary	<b>I might have... I have!</b>
Bessie	<b>Schools, libraries, restrooms, buses, restaurants, even drinking fountains are all segregated, and not in our favour! Does that strike you as being a bit unfair?</b>
Newman	<b>Well...</b>
Bessie	<b>Well?!...</b>
All	<b>Have you heard of Jim Crow? Don't you know of Jim Crow? Not a bird that you'd know That scoundrel Jim Crow.</b>
Bessie	<b>Even if you had money you couldn't eat in the fancy restaurants!...</b>

#### **Restaurant**

- Samad **I'm hungry!**
- Samad, Mervyn, Younes, Abraham come forward with menus and read.*
- Mervyn **Chicken and chips! Nice!**
- Younes **Excuse me! Chicken and chips please.** *Zharick, Larhi join on either side ready to take orders with notebooks and pencils*
- Abraham **And a big glass of cola.**
- Zharick **Nope!**
- Samad **What do you mean 'Nope!'?**
- Larhi **This restaurant's not for folk like you.**
- Zharick **See that shack over there! That's for you!**
- Mervyn **But chicken and chips?!**
- Larhi **Beans, bean and more beans. And that's it!**
- Younes **But that's really, really....**
- Z/L **Scram!**
- Have you heard of Jim Crow?  
Don't you know of Jim Crow?  
Not a bird that you'd know  
That scoundrel Jim Crow.**
- Bus**
- Mariah, Carmine, Chloe with tickets*
- Bessie **Then the buses! Even if they let you on they'd make you sit at the back.**
- Carmine **Buses to Texas and Tennessee!**
- Samirah *running*  
**Got to get to Tennessee. Fast! Mister, a ticket to Tennessee!**
- Mariah **This bus isn't for folk like you! See that bus over there? That's for you!**
- Ashfaq, Samira **But that's a slow one!**
- Ashfaq **And there are only metal seats!**

Carmine **Slow or not, that's it! Now scram.**

Chloe **Get out of here!**

**Have you heard of Jim Crow?  
Don't you know of Jim Crow?  
Not a bird that you'd know  
That scoundrel Jim Crow.**

### **Shop**

*Mumtaz with a pair of shoes at the front*

Bessie **You'd see white folk dressed in their finest. There was one shop for them,  
another for us.**

Princess **I need a nice pair of new shoes! I'll have those ones.**

Mumtaz **They're taken! A nice young lady bought them. She wasn't like... you!**

Giada **What about those? They're nice!**

Mumtaz **Taken!**

Jharnae **And those? I need new shoes!**

Mumtaz **Taken!**

Mariana **And... these ones? They're blue!**

Princess **She likes blue shoes!**

*Everyone pulls a face*

Mumtaz **Taken. T. A. K. E. N. Taken!!!**

All **But why?**

Mumtaz **You're the wrong people in the wrong shop! Get out of here!**

**Have you heard of Jim Crow?  
Don't you know of Jim Crow?  
Not a bird that you'd know  
That scoundrel Jim Crow.**

### **Park**

Bessie **You couldn't play in the nice parks.**

Monica/All **Let's go to the park! That looks fun!**

Nawal **Let's play on the slides!**

David **Let's play on the swings!**

Monica **Let's play on the see-saw!**

*They all play, running around for 4 seconds*

*Siham, Abdulrahman enter from behind. The others freeze*

Siham **What do you think you're doing?**

David **Just playing in the sun!**

Siham **Well you can't! You see that sandpit over there.... All look**

Nawal **The dirty one full of dog mess?**

Abdulrahman **That's the one. You can play in that. Now scam!**

*Broom – step back x3*

**Have you heard of Jim Crow?**

**Don't you know of Jim Crow?**

**Not a bird that you'd know**

**That scoundrel Jim Crow.**

**Café**

*Rachel and Geyana drying cups at the front*

Bessie **And the trouble you had just to get a cup of coffee!**

AL **I'm thirsty. Let's go to the café!**

All **Let's go to the café!**

*They come to the front and look up at the menu*

MA **A cappuccino please!**

CS **I'll have a latte!**

AL **Cup of tea!**

All **With 2 sugars!**

MO **Make mine a hot chocolate!**

Rachel/Geyana **I expect you want cream on top?**

All **Yes please!**

Rachel/Geyana **And you want a table too do you?**

Moma **That one over there looks nice!**

*They run to the table on the right and pretend to sit down and drink*

Rachel/Geyana **Right, get out of here, I don't want any trouble. I'll call the cops!**

*Siren. All complain*

**Have you heard of Jim Crow?  
Don't you know of Jim Crow?  
Not a bird that you'd know  
That scoundrel Jim Crow**

### Scene 3 : Wright Brothers

#### St Mark's

*Newspaper stand*

Bessie **Imagine a world without planes Mr Newman! Imagine an 11 year-old hearing that someone had - for very first time - made a machine that could do what the birds can do!**

*Child rushes in with a newspaper....*

Saied **A plane! The Wright brothers have flown an aeroplane!**

Gazim **The plane flew 20 feet above the beach.**

Serena **The first flight lasted 12 seconds.**

Mariette **Listen to this! There was another flight! 850 feet... in a minute!**

(Old) Bessie *sings*

**I was aged only eleven,  
I turned my eyes to the heavens,  
If they could fly so could I!**

I'd fly further, I'd fly higher  
 In the cockpit of a plane  
 Think of the crowds I'd entertain...

*Spoken*

**There was just one problem.**

Newman **What was that? Race?**

Bessie **No not race!**

Newman **The fact you were..**

Andre **...a girl?**

Bessie **So what? Who cares about that?**

Newman **Ah! I get it! You were poor!**

Secretary **Dirt poor!**

Bessie **Yes! The problem was money! So I was going to have to work. It was July and the cotton was ripe and there was money in cotton.**

#### Scene 4: Work

**All**

Work song. Ropes are pulled out into the audience.

**Take this hammer, and carry to the captain  
 Take this hammer, and carry to the captain  
 Take this hammer, and carry to the captain  
 Tell him I'm gone  
 You tell him I'm gone**

**If he asks you was I runnin'  
 If he asks you was I runnin'  
 If he asks you was I runnin'  
 Tell him I was flyin'  
 Tell him I was flyin'**

**If he asks you was I laughin'  
 If he asks you was I laughin'  
 If he asks you was I laughin'  
 Tell him I was cryin'  
 Tell him I was cryin'**

I don't want no cornbread and molasses  
 I don't want no cornbread and molasses  
 I don't want no cornbread and molasses  
 It hurts my pride  
 It hurts my pride

Take this hammer, and carry to the captain  
 Take this hammer, and carry to the captain  
 Take this hammer, and carry to the captain  
 Tell him I'm gone  
 You tell him I'm gone

**SAPHIRE**

*Interrupted by the sight of birds.*

*Crowd parts to reveal 3 birds on rods – adults*

**Scene 5: School**

*Blackboard*

**Ashmole**

Bessie **The schoolhouse was 4 miles away from home. That was a 4 mile walk there and 4 miles back. Every day!**

*Everyone's asleep. Bell sounds and Matthew gets up*

Matthew **Wake up!**

*Everyone sits up. Groans. Lies down again.*

Matthew **Wake up! It's time for school!**

*Everyone sits up again. Groans. Lies down again.*

Nathaniel **Five more minutes please!** *Everyone looks expectant....*

Matthew **This happens every single morning!**

Harry **But it's four miles...** *comes to the front*

Alissa **Four miles there and four miles back!** *comes to the front*

Rufus **And we went there yesterday!** *comes to the front*

Thaniya **And the day before!** *comes to the front*

Ayesha **And the day before that!** *comes to the front*

Henock **Quit complaining and get walking!**

*Music starts for the walk.  
Everyone walks. Rhythmic text*

Sarah **One mile!**

Sophie **Three miles to go!**

All **One mile! Three miles to go!**

Andre **Two miles!**

Yaqoob **Two miles to go!**

All **Two miles! Two miles to go!**

Ainoha **Three miles!**

Sabir **One mile to go!**

All **Three miles! One mile to go!**

Umor **Four miles!**

Fantasy **No miles to go!**

All **Four miles! No miles to go!**

Megan **We're here!**

All **Finally!**

*They make 4 lines for the class*

Adeleke **Late again!** *With a ruler in his hand*

- Fingers to temples
- Wiggle both hands on head
- Crazy gesture
- Thumb on nose

*Teacher... suspecting something... turns*

- Thumbs up

- Pistols
- Cute hands under chin
- Smile

*Teacher walks around the class.*

- Adeleke      **A word that describes a noun? Bessie?**
- Saphire      **A flyjective?**
- Adeleke      **What kind of a word is that? Anyone? Umor?**
- Umor          **An adjective!**
- Adeleke      **Good boy! Name the three parts of the atom. Bessie?**
- Saphire      **The breeze.**
- All            **The breeze.**
- Saphire      **The wind.**
- All            **The wind.**
- Saphire      **The sun.**
- All            **The sun.**
- Adeleke      **For heaven's sake Bessie. Get your head out of the clouds!  
Anyone else? All hands go up. Elaisha?**
- Elaisha      **Neutrons**
- Adeleke      **Poppy?**
- Poppy        **Protons**
- Adeleke      **Innes?**
- Innes         **Electrons**
- Adeleke      **Correct! And now name 3 planets.**
- Anisa         **Jupiter**
- Eve           **Venus**
- Saphire      **Fluto?**

- Adeleke **Fluto? Fluto?? What kind of panet's that? Anyone?**
- Lucas **Pluto!!**
- Adeleke **Talking of the planets and the sun.... Who knows the story of Icarus?**  
*Hands go up...*
- Megan **He was the boy who escaped the minotaur!**
- Nathaniel **His wings were made of feathers and wax.**
- Lucas **He flew too close to the sun!**
- Umor **He was like Bessie! *All laugh***

**Can you see him?  
Can you feel him?  
Can you see him?  
Can you be him?**

**A boy like a bird  
A bird like a boy  
A boy like a bird  
A bird like a boy**

**Feel the quiver in your wings  
Touch the current of the wind  
Not so high and not so low  
That you touch the sun  
Or fall to the ocean.**

**Breathe like an eagle and fly!  
Breathe like an eagle and fly!  
Breathe like an eagle and fly!  
Breathe like an eagle and fly!**

**Can you see him?  
Can you feel him?  
Can you see him?  
Can you be him?**

**A boy like a bird  
A bird like a boy  
A boy like a bird  
A bird like a boy**

**The sun is closer than you thought  
 And the wax begins to melt  
 Up so high and now so low  
 The weight of the water  
 Will drag you down  
 Breathe like an eagle and fly!  
 Breathe like an eagle and fly!  
 Breathe like an eagle and fly!  
 Breathe like an eagle and fly!**

4 groups with the 4 flyers

**The sun is closer than you thought  
 And the wax begins to melt  
 Up so high and now so low  
 The weight of the water  
 Will drag you down  
 Breathe like an eagle and fly!  
 Breathe like an eagle and fly!  
 Breathe like an eagle and fly!  
 Breathe like an eagle and fly!**

### Scene 6: Bessie's Wings

St Mark's

Bessie	<b>Mr Newman, there was something about me that people should never know.</b>
Newman	<b>And what was that?</b>
Bessie	<b>When I was a teenager I seemed to be growing wings.</b>
	<i>Secretary laughs hysterically until Newman stops him</i>
Newman	<b>Don't be ridiculous!</b>
Bessie	<b>It's perfectly true. One day they were just there. It was like the idea of flying had taken over my life. And you know people say that your shoulder blades are remnants of wings. Except in my case they really were wings.</b>
Newman	<b>Wait a minute, true or not, this is a brilliant idea! It would make one of the best scenes in the film! Bessie's Wings!</b>
Newman/	

Secretary **Bessie's Wings!**

Secretary **I don't get it!**

Newman **Imagine the doctor examining her back! Imagine him snipping them off one by one!**  
*Snip snip gesture with piano*  
**Tell me was it painful?**

Bessie **Oh yes!**

Pierreice **What? What's that? What's that on your back?**

Kishine **What? What's that? What's that on your back?**

Serena **There's something soft springing on your back.**

James **There's something odd stinging on your back.**

Mikina. **Maybe it's that you've been bitten.**

Andre **Maybe it's that you've been stung.**

**What? What's that?**  
**What's that on my back?**

**What? What's that?**  
**What's that on my back?**

**There's something soft springing on my back**  
**There's something odd stinging on my back**

**Maybe it's that I've been bitten**  
**Maybe it's that I've been stung**

**There's something soft springing on my back**  
**There's something odd stinging on my back**

**Maybe it's that I've been bitten**  
**Maybe it's that I've been stung**

**Maybe I'm asleep**  
**Will you wake me from this dream?**

**Maybe I'm asleep**

**Will you wake me from this dream?**

**I feel faint**

**Lighter than a feather**

**I feel odd**

**Am I turning into an eagle, an eagle?**

**Am I turning into an,**

**Am I turning into an eagle?**

**What?**

**What's that?**

**What's that on my back?**

**There's something soft springing on my back**

**There's something odd stinging on my back**

**Maybe it's that I'm not a human**

**Maybe it's that I've become a bird**

**There's something soft springing on my back**

**There's something odd stinging on my back**

**Maybe it's that I'm not a human**

**Maybe it's that I've become a bird**

**Maybe I'm asleep**

**Will you wake me from this dream?**

**Maybe I'm asleep**

**Will you wake me from this dream?**

**I feel faint**

**Lighter than a feather**

**I feel odd**

**Am I turning into an eagle, an eagle?**

**Am I turning into an,**

**Am I turning into an eagle?**

*The doctor comes and looks with magnifying glass*

Senay

**It's Bessie isn't it? Well, Bessie, we are just going to have a look at your back.**

*They look*

Tomiwa **Very peculiar! In my experience unique!**

*Looks in the book*

**This will require a simple operation.**

Alicia **Just relax. You won't feel a thing. The screen please.**

*Shadow screen*

- *Bessie*
- *Bird*
- *Injection*
- *Bottle*
- *Scissors Wing 1*
- *Scissors Wing 2*
- *Feathers fly*

Senay **All done!**

*The child Bessie is now grown-up Bessie*

### Scene 7: Chicago

Vauxhall

*White Sox Barber Shop*

Bessie **When I was 23 I moved to Chicago, where I got a job in a barbers as a manicurist. This was 1916 and first world war pilots used to come into the shop. It was their stories that really got me interested in flying.**

Mohamed Adam

**Welcome to White Sox  
The barber shop  
Put your feet up  
Have your hair cut!**

Sihan **Manicures, haircuts and shaves!**

Mervyn **Pedicures reasonably priced:**

Nawal **Think of the money you'll save,**

- Starlin **Two for one's the offer tonight.**
- Ah oo ah oo oo oo oo oo**  
**Ah oo ah oo oo**
- Boys **You're the smartest girl in town**  
**Going to bring the house down**
- Ah oo ah oo oo oo oo oo**  
**Ah oo ah oo oo**
- Bessie **Just put your hand out** *First 2 pairs*  
**Going to polish those nails!**  
**First give them a clean**  
**Those nails tell tales!**
- Girls **Just put your hand out**  
**Going to polish those nails!**  
**First give them a clean**  
**Those nails tell tales!**
- Boys **You're the smartest girl in town**  
**Going to bring the house down**
- Ah oo ah oo oo oo oo oo**  
**Ah oo ah oo oo**
- Bessie **You want your hair cut?** *Second 2 pairs*  
**In the cutest style?**  
**First give it a wash**  
**Seems it's been a while!**
- Girls **You want your hair cut?**  
**In the cutest style?**  
**First give it a wash**  
**Seems it's been a while!**
- Girls **You're the smartest girl in town**  
**Going to bring the house down**
- Ah oo ah oo oo oo oo oo**  
**Ah oo ah oo oo**
- Bessie **Gents need a shave?** *Third 2 pairs*

**How close do you want?  
 Cut your throat if I slip!  
 Just kidding around!**

Boys

**Gents need a shave?  
 How close do you want?  
 Cut your throat if I slip!  
 Just kidding around!**

**Ah oo ah oo oo oo oo oo oo  
 Ah oo ah oo oo**

Gilrs

**You're the smartest boy in town  
 Going to bring the house down**

**Ah oo ah oo oo oo oo oo oo  
 Ah oo ah oo oo**

Boys

**You're the smartest girl in town  
 Going to bring the house down**

**Ah oo ah oo oo oo oo oo oo  
 Ah oo ah oo oo**

Younes

*Returns outraged – his face covered in blood*  
**You call this a barbers' shop? It's more like a butchers!  
 Look at my face! I want my money back!**

Bessie

**Our sincerest apologies!**  
*She looks at another barber– who lends her a \$5 note*  
**Will this help?**  
*Younes shakes his head.*  
**How about this?**  
*She looks at the other barber – who lends her another \$5 note*  
*Younes shakes his head again*  
**Isn't that enough?**  
*Younes shakes his head again*  
**Oh for heaven's sake!**

Barber

**Get out of here!**

**Scene 8: Eugene Williams**

**Ashmole**

Bessie            **About this time in Chicago a young black man called Eugene Williams took a raft onto the lake – and crossed a line on the shore the divided white from black.**

Newman        **I've heard of the story, Bessie, but I'm really not sure if our audiences are ready for this kind of thing? I mean the boy died didn't he?**

Secretary      **He did not!**

Newman        **He did!**

Bessie            **He drowned. On the lake.**

All                *Quietly*  
**Black and white**  
**White and black**  
**Divided by a railroad track**  
**Railroad track**

**Black and white**  
**White and black**  
**Divided by a railroad track**  
**Railroad track**  
**Railroad track**  
**Railroad track**

Enoch            *Offstage*  
**Help!**

*One child stands up, hearing a cry*

Adam            **What's that noise?**

Elaisha         **I didn't hear anything...**

Sophie          **I think it's someone crying for help!**

Poppy           **Don't be stupid.**

Eve               **It's just someone messing about!**

Enoch            *Offstage*  
**Help!**

Nathaniel      **Has anyone seen Eugene?**

*All come forward*

Alissa **There's something on the lake!**

Harry **We should help him.**

*All look right, then forward, then right again*

Matthew **Why are they throwing rocks?**

Anisa **Stop it!**

All **Stop it!!**

Henock **Jump in the water and help him!**

Ines **Grab a rope....**

Enoch **I can't swim!**

Sarah **It's too late!**

**Crystal water perfect day,  
Ripples sparkling in the sun:  
Reflection of a boy on the lake,  
Eugene Williams, someone's son.  
And so he had to die  
And so he had to die**

**Deadly fish beneath the water  
More dangerous than a crocodile  
Young men watching from the reeds:  
Eugene hadn't read the sign  
And so he had to die  
And so he had to die**

**Trees that dance and leaves that snap  
A stone is thrown from the bank.  
The lake is now a Venus fly trap;  
He's lost his paddle, can't go back.  
And so he had to die  
And so he had to die**

**Rocks come thick and rocks come fast,  
A sound like whistling wind  
Eugene falls and pulls himself up**

**And meets a stone bigger than sin.  
And so he had to die  
And so he had to die**

*Band only*

Lucas and everyone

- Right shoulder back
- Left shoulder with right hand on it
- Left hand on forehead
- Tummy - turn
- Back
- Look over left shoulder at audience.... and sing

**And so he had to die  
Eugene Williams someone's son x4**

### Scene 9: Aviation schools

#### St Mark's

Newman **It's time we moved back to your own story Bessie. How did you learn to fly? Was it very hard?**

Bessie **At first it seemed impossible. None of the American schools would take me...**

Secretary **I'm not surprised!**

Bessie **Hello?**

*The pilots are on the floor practising manoeuvres with their joysticks*

Saieed **Can I help you?**

Bessie **I'm Bessie Coleman.**

Hensi **Ah, the new cleaner!**

Romona **The toilets are round the back.**

Bessie **No. I want to fly!**

Garsim **Excuse me? You want to apply?? No problem. You can start As as cleaner right away.**

*Hands her a broom. Bessie is nonplussed.*

Nakai **Chop chop! Get on with it!**

Bessie **No, no. I want to fly!**

Migele **You? You – want – to – fly?!**

Bessie **Yes! I want to learn.**

Bessie *Sings – same tune as before*  
**You see I want to be a pilot,  
 Will you let me be an aviator,  
 And I have this great ambition  
 To find my true expression  
 In the cockpit of a plane  
 And the crowds I'll entertain...**

*Chorus echoes*

**So you want to be a pilot,  
 So you want to be an aviator,  
 And you have this great ambition  
 To find your true expression  
 In the cockpit of a plane  
 And the crowds you'll entertain...**  
*They all laugh*

Dominic **You know women can't fly?**

Bessie **Why?**

Jason **Because you always crash!**

Lydia **Anyway, poor people can't fly!**

Yasmine **You're not nearly rich enough!**

Bessie **But I've got money. Look!**

Shreine **Well, you're clearly not clever.**

Ceshawn **And look at you. You're not tall enough!**

Kachine **Old enough!**

James **Manly enough!**

Deborah        **White enough!**

*All gasp*

Jeremy        **You're not enough of anything!**

Mariette       **Women like you are scruffy!**

Amanawit      **And look in the mirror. You've got spots all over your face!**

All              **Get out of here!**

*Saieed takes her out*

**Have you heard of Jim Crow?  
Don't you know of Jim Crow?  
Not a bird that you'd know  
That scoundrel Jim Crow.**

Bessie        **Good day!**

Newman       **And then you moved to France. Is that what happened next?**

Bessie        **That's right!**

Nemman      **And you could speak French?**

Bessie        **Bien sur!**

Secretary     **Bien sur!**

Bessie        **You see the French didn't care about my sex. Or my colour!**

### Scene 10: Flying school in France

#### Vauxhall

Geyana        **Maintenant élèves, une leçon de vol.**

*Kids learn how to fly and how to do stunts.*

*Mohammed-Adam  
Samira  
Younes  
Mohammed Ahmed*

*Siham*  
*Abdurahman*  
*Annie + Zhireck*  
*Abdulahi*

*Bessie enters*

Younes      **Bonjour! Name?**

Bessie      **Bessie Coleman. From America!**

Adam      **Bien alors. You want to be a pilot?**

Bessie      **I do.**

Mumtaz      **Vous avez francs?**

Bessie      **Better than that, I have dollars!**

Carmine      **Well there are rules Madame Coleman!**

Princess      **Learning to fly when you're young  
 Is not just a question of fun**

Mumtaz      **It's all about staying up high  
 Not hurtling to death from the skies**

Adam      **Don't try to fly if you can't fly**

Hana      **That seat belt can keep you alive**

Carmine      **Remember your parachute's  
 Worth more than a pilot's suit**

Sihan      **If you're flying at night follow the street lights!**

David      **Get to know the lie of the land as if it's the back of you hand.**

Younes      **Don't ever think that you'll live through a crash!**

Jharna      **One last thing Miss Coleman. Always check there's enough fuel in the tank.  
 Got it?**

- *Up on tiptoe with butterfly hands*
- *Goggles to eyes*
- *Fold arms with attitude*
- *Hand to chin wondering if Bessie will make a pilot*

Learning to fly when you're young  
 Is not just a question of fun  
 It's all about staying up high  
 Not hurtling to death from the skies

Don't try to fly if you can't fly  
 That seat belt can keep you alive  
 Remember your parachute's  
 Worth more than a pilot's suit

*Flying*

Check that there's fuel in the tank  
 Without it you're walking the plank  
 If the propeller's on fire  
 You'll hear the angelic choir

Don't try to fly if you can't fly  
 That seat belt can keep you alive  
 Remember your parachute's  
 Worth more than a pilot's suit

*Flying*

Don't ever ever ever ever ever ever  
 No never think that you'll live through a crash  
 Don't ever ever ever ever ever ever  
 No never think that you'll live through a crash

At least you'll go out with a splash

*Bessie flies the yellow plane*

Bessie            **Well?**

Secretary        **Well?**

Newman            **This scene will be incredible. The little plane hurtles from the blue sky and  
 it's touch and go whether Bessie will survive.**

### Scene 11: Hospital

**Ashmole**

*Crash of 1923 and months in hospital.*

*The children are all bandaged along. Bessie has a broken leg and a broken arm*

Bessie **I became a star! Huge crowds came out to watch me. They called me....**

All **Queen Bess!!**

Bessie **Queen of the Skies! But in those days none of us could rely on the planes....  
Pilots would crash the whole time!**

*The group is in line with their backs to the audience.*

*They turn around one by one to reveal their bandages, or eye patch etc.*

*The group rips off their slings and bandages and eye patches, and throws them away....*

Bessie **Queen Bess was going to fly again!**

### **Scene 12: Jazz, Chicago in the twenties**

***Breaks into a big dance number...***

**TAPDANCE**

### **Scene 13: Bessie entertains**

*Bessie flies in her model yellow plane.*

Bessie **In my very own plane with the sun on the wings  
Into clouds at 5,000 feet  
It's hard to explain if you've not flown a plane:  
The sensation's completely unique**

**From the ground to the air with the wind in your face  
And the countryside rushing by  
Your heart beats in your chest and your skin is on fire  
And the morning light dazzles your eyes**

**Then you loop the first loop then fly upside down  
So the crowds are under your head  
Till you buzz them at speed and pull up in time  
Give them the thrill of thinking you're dead**

**Scene 14: The End**

**St Mark's**

Newman           **How does it end, Bessie? The film needs a good ending!**

Bessie             **Why don't you come to my next airshow in Florida Mr Newman? You could bring some cameras and film a few of my stunts!**

Secretary         **Can I come too?**

Newman           **NO!**

Secretary         **Please!**

Bessie             **He can make the coffee!** *Newman resists....*

Newman           **Well alright then.**

*She and mechanic William Wills go through the check list and take to the sky.*

William (James) **Looks like there'll be big crowd today Bessie!**

Bessie             **Let's put on a show! Have you checked the engine?**

William           **Sure, all's fine!**

Bessie             **I love this little plane. My brand new Curtis Jenny!  
Ok, let's go up and have a look at the terrain. You can take the controls!**

William           **Are you sure Bessie?**

Bessie             **I'm sure. You fly.**

William           **What about your seat belt?**

X                   **Don't forget your seat belt!**

Bessie             **Not today William. I want to lean out and look at the view!**

All                 **So Bessie took off once more  
Began her final flight  
Nothing further from her mind**

**Than falling from a great height**

**Engine smoke  
Engine's broke  
Jenny engine's fatal croak**

**Engine smoke  
Engine's broke  
Jenny engine's fatal croak  
Fatal croak  
Jenny engine's fatal croak  
Fatal croak  
Fatal croak  
Jenny engine's fatal croak**

**Weather fine when Bessie flew up  
On that final day  
But she'd run out of all her luck  
A spanner sent her on her way**

**Engine smoke  
Engine's broke  
Jenny engine's fatal croak**

**Engine smoke  
Engine's broke  
Jenny engine's fatal croak  
Fatal croak  
Jenny engine's fatal croak  
Fatal croak  
Fatal croak  
Jenny engine's fatal croak**

*Newman and the Secretary are at the front*

Look up – slowly down over 20.  
Step back.

**Epilogue: Flashback**

**St Mark's**

*Return to the small child Bessie, and the moment her wings are clipped.  
The adult Bessie stops the doctor.  
The two Bessies – child and adult – fly*