

# Force Ten Gayle

## Treatment for a musical by Neil Bastian – draft 4

**Period** Mid 1980s

**Locations** New Jersey and Monaco

**Cast (4)** **Jason Gates** – mid-20s, songwriter

**Suzanne (Suzi) Gates** – mid-50s supermarket assistant: Jason’s mother – and the world’s biggest Gayle Bailey fan

**Gayle Bailey** – mid-50s British superstar singer in the Shirley Bassey mould

**Willy** – late 40s – Gayle’s long-suffering personal assistant.

## Act One

### 1. Opening

Glamorous singer GAYLE BAILEY performs ‘**FORCE TEN GAYLE**’, a big, John Barry-style song that says:

- She’s a superstar singer in the Shirley Bassey mould
- She’s a force to be reckoned with.

When the song ends, she swirls off stage and is escorted into a fur coat by her personal assistant, WILLY, who hands her a pair of dark glasses as she...

### 2. Suzi the superfan

...sweeps out of the stage door, escorted by Willy, who shepherds her past her clamouring fans and straight into an (offstage) limousine.

The fans, represented by a single fan onstage: SUZI GATES, are left calling her name (audio) and waving autograph books, with only a brief wave from Gayle in acknowledgement.

When Gayle is gone, Suzi turns to face us, disappointed, her autograph book unsigned.

Song: ‘**A DISTANT STAR**’

It’s an ‘I want’ song that says:

- I work in a supermarket and I’m Gayle Bailey’s biggest fan
- Gayle’s records have punctuated all the most important points in my life

- I'd love to meet her one day and tell her how much she means to me

When the song is done, she looks at her watch – “Oh crap!” – and hurries off.

#### 4. Introduce Jason, failing songwriter

Jason Gates plays an acoustic guitar on a tiny stage in a deserted late-night bar and sings a humorous song:

Song: **‘SONGWRITER BLUES’**

It says:

- He's a songwriter
- He plays his songs in half-empty bars
- He can't get anyone to sing them

When he finishes, a single pair of hands clap and a woman whoops enthusiastically. The woman invades the tiny bar stage – it's Suzi, who showers Jason with kisses:

“Ooh, my liddle *genius*! I don't care if no-one gives a hoot about your songs – I care enough to make up for the whole wide *world*! Come here!” She kisses him, then sings:

**Brief song: ‘I DON'T CARE IF YOU'RE A NOBODY (YOU'RE EVERYTHING TO ME)'**

More kisses – Jason seems embarrassed at her gushing, but good-naturedly prides her away. “Thanks, Mom – how was Gayle Bailey?”

Suzi suddenly pouts, only half joking: “What do *you* care, Mr Cutting Edge?”

“Mom...!”

““Gayle Bailey's a dinosaur' you said. Hnff! A superfan doesn't forget these things...”

“Okay, I didn't mean – I just meant – she was great for her era.”

“She's great for *every* era – she's timeless. She was transcendent tonight.”

“Get you with your big words.”

“Still couldn't get near her though. Ever since what happened to John Lennon, she's –”

“Terrified of her – wooooo! – crazy fans.”

“I am *not* a crazy fan!”

Playful banter – song possibilities:

- **CRAZY FAN SONG** – comic song in which Jason teases Suzy about her obsessive fandom, **or**
- **PISS-TAKE GAYLE BAILEY-STYLE SONG** – Jason takes the Mickey out of Gayle Bailey's grandiose, old-fashioned style

When the song's over, Jason puts his guitar in its case – at which point, gruff bar owner Mickey enters (played by the actor who plays Willy).

"Here's your dough, kid. Listen – I hate to do this to you but – I'm afraid that's gonna have to be your last spot."

"Mickey – what –?"

"It's not you – it's this place: I could get Bruce Springsteen in here and we'd still only sell three Doctor Peppers and a coupla bottles of Bud."

"Hey, nobody sacks my boy!"

"Lady – I ain't sacking no-one – I just can't afford to run this joint no more. That's it for me as well as your son. Capisce? Now kindly help me drink this place dry."

(ENDING NEEDS WORK!)

## 5. Gayle: 'I want that boy!'

Gayle Bailey stands glaring at Willy, her personal assistant: "Well, have you found him?"

Willy says no and makes fumbling excuses.

Gayle's annoyed: '**I WANT THAT BOY!**', she sings, ordering Willy to track him down.

She storms off, leaving Willy looking to God for assistance, He exits, shaking his head.

## 6. Suzi and Jason in their tatty New Jersey rented flat

Suzi sits on a battered sofa – she's wearing her supermarket checkout girl outfit (as a fiftysomething) and flicking channels, exhausted after work. Behind her there's a framed, fading poster: "*Gayle Bailey Live at Radio City Music Hall*".

Jason bursts in: "Mom, you'll never believe this – I've just had a call."

"A record contract! At last they've come to their senses!"

"Ha ha – not quite, Momma – I wish. It's – it's *weirder* than that..."

He explains that the call was from someone representing none other than... he points at the poster behind her.

Suzi blinks: "Gayle Bailey?"

Jason nods. Suzi screams with delight.

"I know, Mom – she wants me to fly out to Monaco to write some songs for her."

Suzi squeals with even more delight – but Jason looks suddenly forlorn.

"Baby, this is great news... so why the long face?"

"She... wants me to fly out to tomorrow..."

"But – tomorrow's your daddy's –"

“I know, Momma – I’m sorry.”

“But can’t you postpone? We’ve never missed a birthday since he –”

“Mom – I already said yes – she’s booked me on a flight.”

“You *forgot* your father’s birthday?”

“No, I just –”

“You *didn’t* forget?! But you went ahead and said yes anyway? That’s even worse!”

“Mom, Dad would understand: he wouldn’t want me to screw up my big chance.”

“Your big chance! You don’t even like her music!”

“She wants to go in a new direction – the guy told me she wants to get a younger songwriter involved.”

### Jason’s song: ‘MY BIG BREAK’

Suzi has to concede that chances like this only come once in a lifetime. She gives Jason her blessing...

*(But somehow the audience has to know that she deeply fears being alone for the first time in decades, without her saying it in a clingy way to Jason).*

## 7. Welcome to Monaco

Starry-eyed Jason arrives with a suitcase amid the bustle of Monte Carlo.

Gayle, from a balcony, sings (not specifically to Jason) about the excitement of Monaco.

### Song: ‘WELCOME TO MONACO’ (or similar)

- Fun party song for the sake of it – not advancing the drama – just to give a flavour of Monaco
- To give Gayle an up-beat song

## 7. Jason meets Gayle

Nervous Jason waits in an ante-room with Willy:

“Sorry if I seem nervous – I’ve never met a superstar before.”

“Feeling nervous is the default position in all dealings with Miss Bailey.”

“Oh.”

“The condition doesn’t improve with the passage of time.”

“Oh. Okay.”

GAYLE emerges from deep within her suite of rooms. She looks Jason up and down, circles him – and seems very pleased with what she sees.

She gets to know Jason over the course of the scene, Willy acting as waiter throughout, coming and going, making wry asides and rolling his eyes at Gayle's whims.

The scene establishes that:

- Gayle doesn't want to talk about the new songs tonight
- She drinks rather a lot
- She's besotted by handsome Jason.

Jason gets his notepad out – “we can scribble down some song ideas” – but Gayle tosses it aside.

“We can start work tomorrow – we have plenty of time. Tell me about you.”

**Song – duet: 'TELL ME ABOUT YOU'**

Gayle appears to want to get close to him, while he's decidedly uncomfortable, unsure of her motives.

She eventually tries to kiss him on the cheek, but he successfully manages to kill the mood by raising a glass to his father, explaining that his dad died five years ago.

Gayle: “Oh – how sad – how very sad... Willy, more brandy...”

But before Willy can freshen her glass, Gayle suddenly falls asleep and starts snoring on the chaise lounge.

Willy asks Jason to leave the room while he deals dutifully and lovingly with Gayle, trying to protect her dignity.

## **8 Suzi alone in New Jersey on her dead husband's birthday**

Suzi has booked a restaurant – gingham tablecloth and candles – to celebrate her dead husband Bernie's birthday.

The cutlery and crockery is set for two, as though Bernie were still alive.

**Song: MY NEWS**

- The song suggests she often has these talks to dead Bernie
- She wishes him a happy birthday
- She shares the mundane news – a few aches and pains, doctor's appointment, “same-old-same-old” at the supermarket
- “...And Jason – Jason is thousands of miles away – and I miss him – and I miss you.”

She raises a glass to her dead husband; the waiter (Willy actor) interrupts:

“Are you Suzanne Gates? Call for you...”

He hands her the phone.

It’s Jason, calling from Monaco – he has his own private phone in Gayle’s apartments in Monaco.

He wants his mother to know he’s raising a glass to his father, too.

## 9. A perfect star (Monaco)

The next day, Jason is walking from Gayle’s swimming pool back to his room, carrying a towel, so she catches him bare-chested. She points at his shoulder:

“Oh – I like the tattoo.”

“Actually, it’s a birthmark.”

“Amazing – it’s in the shape of a perfect star... Bit like me. Hahahaha...”

Jason hastily puts on a t-shirt, embarrassed.

Gayle clicks her fingers: “Willy!”

Willy drags on a big wooden chest. Once he’s put it down, Gayle dismisses him with a flick of the wrist: he glowers at her, and skulks off.

Gayle throws opens the trunk – it’s full of photos, paperwork, scrapbooks etc. “If you’re going to help me write the musical story of my life, you’re going to need a few memories to base your research on...”

“Sorry – Miss Bailey – ‘the story of your life’?”

“Yes – from my humble beginnings in Reading – gerk! – right up to today...”

“Uh – you’re saying you want me to write a whole *album* for you?! When you said ‘come up with some songs’, I presumed you meant a couple of demos to see if you like my style–”

“I *already* like your style. I’m planning a double album. Twenty – maybe twenty-five songs...”

“Holy –!”

“I want you here for the whole summer, at the very least...”

## 8. Suzi discovers she’s terminally ill (New Jersey)

Alone back in New Jersey, Suzi is in Out Patients.

She has a scene with a **CONSULTANT** (played by the same actor who plays Willy)

“Do you have any family that can be with you today, Mrs Gates?”

“Well, my parents are both... and my husband too, he... and my only son is out of the country at the moment, so –”

“Okay, well – take a seat...”

The doctor delivers the bad news – she has a **TERMINAL ILLNESS**.

Song: it’s a back-and-forth duet in which Suzi wants answers from the consultant but he can’t commit to a definite forecast:

**Song: ‘HOW LONG DO I HAVE?’**

**“Nine days? Nine weeks? Nine months... like a baby...”**

Suzi leaves the hospital, reeling, with the results paper in her hand.

She gets home – calls Jason on his Monaco line – “Son, I’ve got to talk to you.”

“What is it, Momma?”

“It’s not something I can say over the phone.”

“Are you okay?”

“I’m fine – I – I –”

“You sure?”

“Yes. I just – miss you, that’s all. Come home.”

“Mom – I’ve only been out here three days.”

“I know, but I miss you and –”

“Mom, I miss you too but – fact is, she’s asked me to write a whole *double album*, and I can’t just –!”

“A double album – but how long will that take?”

“Hard to tell, but she wants me out here the whole summer at least.”

“Okay... well... can’t I come and stay with you?”

“Mom, I can’t blow this – a Gayle Bailey fan hanging around: it won’t look professional, and it might be best if I don’t have any distractions.”

“But baby –”

“Mom, I’ve lived with you my whole life – twenty-five years – and you’ve been amazing – but – can’t you just allow me time to just blossom and –”

Jason’s frustration comes out as a floodgate confession:

**Song: ‘YOU HAVE A TENDENCY TO CLING’**

- He wants to be free to live his life as an independent young man – not tied to her apron strings
- He can't blow this chance.

Suzi chokes back her pain: "Of course, Jason – I... certainly don't want to smother you..."

She hangs up, no choice but to hold back her feelings – her son is on a career roll, and her bad news musn't ruin his big chance.

Suzi song: 'SEEMS I GOTTA FACE THIS ALONE'

## Act One curtain

### Act Two

#### **11. Willy confronts Gayle**

Willy plucks up courage to ask Gayle if she's planning to shack up with this new toyboy of hers.

Gayle goads him – "My, my Willy – is that jealousy I detect? How unbecoming..."

Willy angry song: 'A YOUNGER MODEL'

- She has a history of going for younger men
- Willy's going to end up on the scrapheap

The scene ends with Gayle pitying him:

"Oh Willy – if only you *knew*..."

#### **12. Jason does research from the 'trunk fulla junk'**

Jason is alone with the 'trunk fulla junk', sifting through the documents and old photos – he sings a brief ditty called:

Song: 'FROZEN MOMENTS IN TIME'

- Lists some humorous and touching things inspired by the photos – "how beautiful she was" – "yet another husband" – etc. etc.

Then, his eye is drawn to a **RED ENVELOPE** – which he draws out from the general pile of paperwork like Excalibur from the stone.

He take something out of the envelope – it looks like a photograph.

He peers at it... Puts a hand to his mouth...

"Oh my God. Oh my *God*..."

He runs off, anguished, with the photo.

### **13. Gayle reveals the truth**

Jason, hard-faced, has his notepad on his lap, sitting with Gayle:

“So, Gayle – I hope I’m not being indelicate but, as this album’s gonna be the story of your life, I have to ask – did you decide not to have kids or did it just not happen for you?”

Gayle laughs – she can tell he knows.

His façade crumbles – he throws down the photo:

“You. Twenty-five years ago. Holding a tiny baby. With a star-shaped birthmark on his shoulder.”

Gayle stares at him. “I put it in the red envelope so you’d be drawn to open it.”

“What? Why couldn’t you just come out and tell me?”

“Felt you needed to find out on your own – have some time on your own to – absorb the truth.”

#### **GAYLE sings: ‘I’M YOUR MOTHER’**

(this might not be the title, but it’s the meaning of the song)

Jason is reeling – still can’t believe it...

Gayle explains that she gave him up for adoption when he was very small so that it wouldn’t interfere with her career. “There’s other, more boring, more *official* paperwork in that trunk that proves it even further...”

Jason asks if she actually ever wanted him to write the album at all.

“No – it was just an excuse to get to know you. And, lucky for you, I like what I see.”

“And if you *hadn’t* liked what you’d seen?”

“I guess I would’ve just... asked you to do a few sample songs, then found them regrettably lacking, then – let you go with a nice little payoff.”

Jason’s reality implodes – “I need to talk to my mother.”

“***I’m*** your mother, Jason.”

He runs off. Gayle is left to muse, then calls out “Willy!”

#### **Reprise: ‘I’M YOUR MOTHER (AND DON’T YOU FORGET IT)’**

## 14. Ignorance is bliss for Suzi

Jason is on the phone to Suzi, trying to bite back his anger and confusion – “Mom, I – I’m sorry I was so harsh on the phone yesterday: I need to see you, too – I’ll book the next flight home.”

Suzi looks hugely relieved at the other end of the phone, but feigns nonchalance: “Are you sure? I never intended to be too clingy, ya know?”

At the Monaco end of the call, Gayle slinks up to Jason and coolly takes the phone off him: “Mrs Gates? This is Gayle Bailey.”

Suzi is dumbstruck.

“My assistant has just booked you a flight to Monaco. Ring the supermarket – tell them you’re indisposed – come and see the sights and spend some time with your – with Jason. How does that sound?”

Suzi stammers, amazed, gushes over her idol a little – “to be asked to spend my last few days... of holiday leave this year – in Monaco – with my darling son – and my favourite singer..!” After more gushing, Suzi eventually asks to be handed back to her son.

Gayle gives the phone back to Jason, patting his hand and walking off...

“Oh my God,” says Suzi “I’m really going to meet –”

“Momma, sometimes they say ‘never meet your idols.’”

She says she can’t wait to see him – or Gayle Bailey.

Jason hangs up sadly, but Suzi is full of excitement: she says to herself (and us, the audience) that she’s not going to bring things down – she won’t mention her terminal illness at all. She’s happy: cos at last she’s going to meet her heroine:

### **Reprise: ‘A DISTANT STAR’**

- Painful dramatic irony because we know the truth of what’s in store when she gets there

## 15. Suzi arrives in Monaco

**(All the action from now on takes place in Monaco)**

Suzi bustles on with a suitcase, led by Jason.

“When are we going to meet her?”

“Soon, Momma. Momma... what was my birth like?”

“What?”

### **Duet Jason/Suzi: ‘THE DAY THAT I WAS BORN/THE DAY THAT HAD TO DAWN’**

The lyrics will replace this dialogue (which is all I have for now):

“I mean, was I a difficult labour?”

“No baby, you were smooth as cream.”

“And what was it like, carrying me around for nine months? That must’ve been weird.”

“No more weird than for any other mother – you’d kick sometimes, like a Vegas chorus-girl in there, but –”

“Did dad cut the umbilical chord?”

Suzi knows something’s up.

“You’re a liar, Mom.”

“What?”

“Or should I say – Suzi.”

The duet is both angry and sad:

- Jason is angry – why didn’t she tell him from the start?
- Suzi is heartbroken – she didn’t want him to be bullied at school like she was (**she too was adopted**).

“So Jason – how did you find out? Did your birth mother contact you?”

Silence.

“Jason? Did your real mother -?”

“Oh, she contacted me all right. Asked me to... write her next album.”

“What?”

“But it turns out there are a few... surprise songs.”

Suzi gets it – Gayle Bailey is Jason’s real mother.

She’s devastated. It’s hard to take in.

A stunned reprise of ‘**AT LAST I’LL MEET MY HEROINE**’ (with different lyrics, or lyrics that can be seen in a new light now that she knows the truth)

Then Suzi’s mood changes from devastated to incandescently furious: “Lemme at her! Lemme at her!”

## **16. Suzi confronts Gayle**

Willy lets Suzi in, followed by Jason. Gayle greets, but has barely had time to open her mouth when Suzi lets rip:

**Song (SUZI): ‘WHERE WERE YOU?’**

She expresses her rage that she and her husband scrimped and saved to bring up their adoptive son, while millionaire Gayle didn't contribute a penny to his upkeep.

"I bought all your singles, all your albums, shelled out every time you sang in New York – all the time I was paying *your* bills, while paying for your son's upbringing (not a single penny of which I regret, by the way) when *you* weren't contributing a single, sorry-assed cent!

Gayle fights back – it becomes **A GRAND DUET OF ANGER AND RECRIMINATION.**

## 17. Jason's choice

Part of the same scene as above but the mood changes as...

Gayle says she can't take back what happened in the past, but she can offer Jason a better future – he can live rent-free in sunny Monaco, writing songs all day every day if he wants.

### **Gayle sings: 'REAL LIVE MOTHER'**

It's an inappropriate seduction song in the 'Hey Big Spender' mould, appealing to him as his birth mother.

Suzi is furious – she fights back with another verse of **'WHERE WERE YOU?'**

**It becomes a counterpoint with all three of them singing**

**ending in Jason singing:**

**"Seems I was born...**

**To be torn between two mothe\_\_\_\_rs!"**

## 18. What's my real name?

Jason asks what his real name is – the name Gayle gave him at birth.

"Your real name is... Torquil..."

SUZIE goes apeshit – "What?! There's no way in heaven and earth my son is a 'Torquil' – my gay son is my **Jay-son!**"

Gayle: "Uh – excuse me – he's **not** your son."

There's a big kerfuffle – another singing battle, or perhaps even a physical fight.

## 19. Who's the daddy?

Jason stops the fight by suddenly asking – "Hang on a minute – who's my father?"

SUZIE: "Bernie's your father, baby: he brought you up, every penny he worked for was for you – God rest his poor soul..."

JASON: I know, Momma – and I love him for that but – my real, *biological* father...?"

**WILLY** enters with an empty tray.

All eyes turn to him.

He wonders why they're all looking at him.

GAYLE: "Willy, put the tray down."

"But I was just going to collect the empty – "

"Put it down."

Gayle asks if he remembers that boozy night long ago when they were both stuck in that ski-lodge in Switzerland: "We dipped chunks of bread into the fondue. That's not all you dipped that night, if you remember..."

Willy protests: "It wasn't my fault – you got me drunk – you were between husband one and husband two – it's not my bag, but you forced me into it – created the necessary friction to – bring the evening to a climax. And you fired me the day after."

- It turns out that Gayle fired Willy for daring to get intimate with her, even though it was she who'd instigated the whole thing.
- Gayle stopped touring for nine months – took a holiday from the industry. Knew she didn't want to keep the baby and gave it away.

Jason is agog at prissy Willy:

"...Dad?"

"...Son?"

They all look at each other – but the humorous moment dissolves as **SUZI collapses onto the chaise lounge.**

## 20. Ending

Jason swoops to her side: "Momma – I know – all this news is a bit overwhelming, to say the least...."

Suzi, dying, breathless: "Baby, I didn't want to tell you, but – I'm not a well woman. You make the best of this whole crazy game. I've launched you into the world – you've got to sail off and make your own way. Gayle – you look after my boy. Cos he's your boy too."

"Of course."

"And – Miss Bailey –?"

"Yes?"

"Do you do requests?"

"Yes – yes of course."

"Then sing it."

“Sing what?”

“Just – sing it.”

Gayle suddenly seems to realise what Suzi means: “Of course. It’d be my pleasure...”

She steps forward and sings her Very Greatest Hit:

**Gayle sings: ‘THE WOMAN I AM’**

At the end of the song, Suzi claps slowly – gives a weak “Wooo!” She turns to Jason: “She may be a total bitch, but I’ve always loved her music. And I’ve always loved you, my baby... always will... Now, Miss Bailey – could you grant one last request for a dying woman?”

“What’ll it be? ‘Sophisticated Lady’? ‘My Man from St Tropez’?”

“No, I – sing something my *son* wrote for you...”

“We only had discussions – never got so far as –”

Jason steps forward: “I – I’ve written something, Mom. Needed something to occupy myself every day while while Gayle was sleeping off her –”

Gayle closes her eyes in mortification.

Suzi: “Okay, son – I’d love to hear it.”

Jason picks up a guitar and sings a simple, short, sweet love song to his adoptive mother:

**Song: JASON’S MOTHER SONG**

It has to be:

- Moving without being sickly
- Maybe it says ‘My mother drives me crazy but I love her anyway’

When it’s finished, Suzi takes it in for a moment, then:

“Oh my boy. Thank you. Thank you. It’s too delicate for... Miss Bailey – she’d smash it to pieces – but you don’t need her... Keep going son – keep going, son – it’s only a matter of time before...”

She collapses and breathes her last.

Jason cries, cradling her in his arms.

Behind him, ever so slowly, Gayle reaches out a hand toward him...

Is his birth mother going to touch him on the shoulder?

**BLACKOUT**