

SYNOPSIS *Mam'zelle Nitouche*, Hervé

Act One

Célestin is the organist of the convent of Les Hirondelles by day and a composer of operetta, under the pseudonym of Floridor, by night. He creeps back in from the rehearsals at the theatre of Pontarcy just in time to accompany his pupils in their hymn. The most gifted of his charges, Denise de Flavigny, has (unbeknown to her) been promised in marriage to Fernand de Champlâtreux. Although the girl has discovered Célestin's double identity and is enthralled by his music, she is unaware that the old inspector who has come to question her from behind a screen is actually Fernand. Denise is expected in Paris that very evening, but the Mother Superior has concealed from her that she is going there in order to be married. Under the impression that she is leaving to go to a new convent, Denise persuades Célestin, who has been designated to accompany her, to make a detour by way of the theatre of Pontarcy. She explains that he will be able to attend his premiere while she will stay in the hotel as good as gold – cross her heart and hope to die!

Act Two

It is the interval at Pontarcy. A jealous quarrel is afoot between Major de Château-Gibus and Corinne, the prima donna, who hotly denies that she is two-timing him with Floridor. Denise arrives backstage. She was hardly going to miss this unexpected opportunity to go to the theatre! She runs into Champlâtreux, who has a habit of frequenting theatrical dressing rooms (and actresses). She introduces herself as a pupil of Floridor. Corinne overhears the conversation. She thinks Floridor wants to offer this young girl a chance to make her debut in Paris. Treachery! Corinne refuses to sing in the second part of the performance and incites the Major to take revenge on his rival. The theatre manager is in despair. Who can save the show? Why, Denise, of course, who knows the score off by heart! Thrust onto the stage, she scores a triumph before the eyes of the bewildered Célestin. They tear themselves away from the bravos in order to catch the night train for Paris, thus escaping, in Denise's case, the ardent attentions of Champlâtreux, who has fallen madly in love with her, and, in Célestin's, the fury of the Major.

Act Three

First Tableau

Célestin and Denise (or Floridor and Mademoiselle Nitouche, since she too now has a stage name) have been arrested by a soldier as they fled the theatre through the window and taken in handcuffs to the barracks, where the officers immediately free them, on condition they drink champagne to the success of Nitouche. Célestin is stupefied – as is Champlâtreux, who was going to look for Denise at the station and is astonished to find her singing fanfares in the midst of his comrades. The Major arrives; Célestin and Denise don uniform to try to hide from him, but he is not fooled. Denise has no option but to slap his face and take advantage of the general confusion to decamp with Célestin.

Second Tableau

On their return to the convent, the fugitives find themselves face to face with the Mother Superior. Denise tells her that she begged Célestin to bring her back as soon as she realised she was to be married. She is prepared to take her vows as a nun. Enter the Major, beside

himself with rage. The Mother Superior tells him that Denise is no longer free. The Major retorts that Champlâtreux in his turn has withdrawn his consent; he has fallen in love with an actress! Hearing this, Denise asks to see the young man, convinced that she can bring him back to the straight and narrow. She unveils herself behind the screen, and Champlâtreux finds in her the woman he fell in love with when he saw her on stage. And we see how the theatre is capable of turning marriages of convenience into genuine love matches. All's well that ends well.