

Revisions to lyrics of
“Until the Real Thing Comes Along” (1936)
Music and lyrics by multiple persons
Revisions by Bill Jackman, December 2025

Original lyrics by multiple persons

I'd work for you, I'd slave for you,
I'd be a beggar or a knave for you,
If that isn't love, it will have to do,
Until the real thing comes along.

I'd gladly move the earth for you
To prove my love, dear, and its worth for you,
If that isn't love, it'll have to do,
Until the real thing comes along.

With all the words, dear, at my command,
I just can't make you understand.
I'll always love you, darling, come what may,
My heart is yours, what more can I say?

I'd sigh for you, I'd cry for you,
I'd tear the stars down from the sky for you,
If that isn't love, it will have to do,
Until the real thing comes along

Revisions to lyrics of “Until the Real Thing Comes Along” (1936) By Bill Jackman, December 2025

I could not sing the original lyrics because I found several lines to be objectionable or ridiculous. So, I revised these lines.

Revision 1

The last eight bars of the tune begin with,

“I'd sigh for you, I'd cry for you,

“I'd tear the stars down from the sky for you,”

This is a vile and ridiculous thought. We're in the process of wrecking our planet, and now we want to wreck other parts of the universe by tearing the stars down. In the 1930s when this tune was written, caring for our planet and our universe was not a salient concern. However, it is today. Lyricists in the 21st century would not write “I'd tear the stars down from the sky for you.” Even people like President Trump who virtually always put economic goals (e.g., faster growth of GDP) ahead of environmental considerations would be opposed to **“tearing the stars down from the sky for you.”**

So, I have rewritten the two lines,

“I'd sigh for you, I'd cry for you,

“I'd tear the stars down from the sky for you,”

to be

“I'd sigh for you, I'd cry for you,

“I'd even tell a big fat lie for you,”

Revision 2

The first two lines of the song are,

I'd work for you, I'd slave for you,

I'd be a beggar or a **knave** for you,

What is a “knave” as intended in this song? “Knave” is an archaic word that meant a dishonest or unscrupulous man. The word is archaic today (2026) but also was archaic in 1936 when the song was written. That’s why Fats Waller, who had a big hit with this song, had to qualify the word. He added “**whatever that is.**”

Waller sang,

“I'd work for you, I'd even slave for you

I'd be a beggar or a knave for you (**whatever that is**)”

Why did the lyricists of “Until the Real Thing Comes Along” use the word “knave” that was archaic then? They used it because they wanted an internal rhyme (“slave” and “knave”) in addition to the end-of-sentence rhyme* (“for you”).

* The technique of repeating a word or phrase such as “for you” at the end of each line is called epistrophe/epiphora. It is used to create rhythm, emphasis, and emotional intensity.

My revisions:

I changed the original,

I'd work for you, I'd slave for you,

I'd be a beggar or a **knave** for you,

to

I'd work for you, I'd slave for you,

I'd be a beggar or a **thief** for you,

The word “**thief**” obviates the archaic word “knave.” The two lines still have a rhyme scheme with the epiphora of “for you.”

The combination of the words “**beggar**” and “**thief**” is common in literature. For example, “**Tinker Tailor**” is a counting game, nursery rhyme and fortune telling song traditionally played in England, that can be used to count cherry stones, buttons, daisy petals, and other items. It has a Roud Folk Song Index number of 802. It is commonly used by children in both Britain and America for “counting out,” e.g. for choosing who shall be “It” in a game of tag.

Lyrics: The most common modern version is:

Tinker, Tailor,

Soldier, Sailor,

Rich Man, Poor Man,

Beggar Man, Thief.

December 30, 2025, 7:06 pm

Lyrics to “Until the Real Thing Comes Along” with revisions by Bill Jackman, December 2025

World premiere on February 15, 2026 at the Piedmont Center for the Arts (PCA). Bill has donated these newly revised lyrics to “Until the Real Thing Comes Along” to the PCA and all performing rights accruing to them. These lyrics are now singable by a singer in the second quarter of the 21st century.

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Until the real thing comes along.

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