

QUEEN MARIE

by
Shirley Barrie

Original Music by Justin Hiscox

Commissioned by 4th Line Theatre

Shirley Barrie
© 2013
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Liberties have been taken with history in *Queen Marie*. Some characters are composites, events are not always in the exact order in which they occurred and imagination has been used to connect some of the dots. I've taken my cue from Marie herself who said: "I've always regarded life as a whole, you know. Taken it in a big sweep. Remember the effect things had, what you learned from them, how you felt. But don't be fussy about the details." The dates in the script are a rough guideline for the passage of time rather than an exact chronology.

Queen Marie calls for a versatile cast and fluid staging. The play can be done with 8 performers (5 women and 3 men) and a child. Cross gender casting can be used.

The actress playing Marie goes from 14 - 66 years old. All the other actors play multiple roles.

Actors can be on stage all, or most, of the time - even when they're not in a scene.

Quick costume changes are a must. Some can be done off stage, but others can be done in full view of the audience or be achieved with "magical" speed from behind a screen.

CHARACTERS

Marie Dressler - actress extraordinaire
Young Marie - (5)
Nella Webb - actress/astrologer, her lifelong friend
Mamie Steele - her black maid and confidante
Frances Marion - cub reporter, later Hollywood screenwriter
Claire DuBrey - bit part actress and lover
James (Jim) Dalton - Marie's manager/"husband"
Mother
Father
Nevada - 3rd rate touring producer
Abe Erlanger } Broadway producers
Lee Shubert }
Louis B. Mayer, owner of MGM
Irving Thalberg, MGM boy wonder producer
Mack Sennett of Keystone Films
Edgar Smith - playwright
Dan Daley, English star

Also:

Jenny, leading actress
Richard Ganthony, playwright/actor
Train conductor
Major Tolliver
Chef
Clarence Brown - director
Adolph Schnitz

Soldiers
Peanut Seller
Chorus Girls
Charlie Chaplin
Mabel Normand
Wallace Beery
Lionel Barrymore
Norma Shearer
Nurse
Doctor
Various Emcees, Stage hands, Stage Managers, Reporters, Audience members, Newsboys, Studio Hands, Camera Assistants

The first production of the play was at 4th Line Theatre, July 3 - August 4, 2012.

Director	Kim Blackwell
Dramaturge	Maja Ardal
Set & Costume Design	Julia Tribe
Musical Direction	Justin Hiscox
Choreography	Monica Dottor *
Stage Manager	Fiona Jones *

Marie Dressler:	Shelley Simester *
Jim Dalton, Father, Charlie Chaplin, & Lionel Barrymore:	Robert Winslow *
Frances Marion, Mother, Mabel Normand: Mack Sennett, Irving Thalberg, & Major Tolliver:	Alison J. Palmer *
Mamie Cox, Governor Rolf:	Mark Hiscox
Louis B. Mayer, Dan Daley, & Richard Ganthony:	Sedina Fiati *
Claire DuBrey, Jenny, Adolph Schnitz:	Jeff Schissler *
Nella Webb, Norma Shearer:	Allie Dunbar
Abe Erlanger:	Heather Maitland
Nevada, Lee Shubert, Wallace Beery:	Justin Hiscox
Little Marie:	Rebekah Fallaise
	Maude Rose Craig
	Abby Hatherly
Clarence Brown:	Jess Whiston
Edgar Smith:	Sahara Haylestrom
Peanut Seller:	Madison Sheward
Other parts played by:	Kaitlyn Buckborough
	Robyn Bull
	Nafshiya Haylestrom
	Anna Kennedy
	Stephanie Koomen
	Sabina Litherland
	Victoria Salem
	Anika Spasov

* with the permission of Canadian Actors' Equity Association

Music by Justin Hiscox

Lyrics by Shirley Barrie

With the exception of:

A Great Big Girl Like Me

Marie sang this in her early days in vaudeville, and also in her early Broadway shows.

It was incorporated into *Higgledy Piggledy* credited to: Music by Maurice Levi, Lyrics by Edgar Smith. 1904

Heaven Will Protect the Working Girl

This was a wildly popular number in *Tillie's Nightmare*

Music by A. Baldwin Sloane, Lyrics by Edgar Smith. 1909

Sister Susie's Sewing in the Kitchen on a Singer

Music by Hermann E. Darewski, Lyrics by R.P. Weston. 1914

I'm the Queen

Marie sang this in *The Hollywood Review of 1929*

Uncredited: Music by Martin Broones, Lyrics by Andy Rice

SCENE ONE - HOLLYWOOD. 1933. THE COMPANY ARE CHATTING ATTENDEES AT A FORMAL OCCASION. LOUIS B. MAYER POMPOUSLY ADDRESSES THE AUDIENCE FROM A MICROPHONE.

MAYER

Ladies and gentlemen. Ladies and gentlemen.

The 'audience' gradually grows silent.

MAYER (cont'd)

For those of you who don't know me -

Laughter

MAYER (cont'd)

I am Louis B. Mayer, your host for this evening. And now that you've enjoyed the hors d'oeuvres -

COMPANY 1

Hear, hear!

MAYER

And made free with the libations.

Laughter

MAYER (cont'd)

May I turn your attention to the purpose of tonight's celebration: the 63rd birthday of the best loved movie actress in America.

Cheers and whistles.

MAYER (cont'd)

It gives me great pleasure to present - The Governor of the State of California -

(a few oh's at the honour Mayer has managed to pull)

and Miss Marie Dressler!

Marie enters on the arm of Governor James Rolf Jr. She's wearing a sleeveless black dress with a spray of white orchids on her left shoulder. Her face is etched with exhaustion but she's putting on a brave front.

COMPANY

(sings)

*Marie, Marie
You're the best
Marie, Marie
Happy birthday, Marie*

The Governor kisses her hand and passes her off to Mayer. Mayer presents her to the audience.

COMPANY (cont'd)

*Marie, Marie
We love you
Marie, Marie
Happy birthday, Marie*

Marie accepts the accolades with a mixture of vulnerability, pleasure and surprise. Mayer quiets the crowd.

MAYER

Now, Marie. It isn't just people in the movie business who are celebrating with you this evening. Tonight's events are being broadcast to your fans over an international radio hook up!

MARIE

My goodness.

MAYER

And that includes a very special radio line I had put in to Cobourg, Ontario.

(Marie looks somewhat
nonplussed)

Where you were born.

MARIE

Why yes. I believe I was. I've lived in so many places that

-

MAYER

Do you have anything to say to the good people of Cobourg?

MARIE

Thank you for coming to my party. I confess I don't remember many of you, since I was about three, I think it was, when my family moved up the road to Lindsay.

(Mayer forces a smile and tries
to take back the microphone
but Marie barrels on)

And it was there at the age of five that I made my theatrical debut in a tableau organized by my dear mother. There was always too much of me, even as a child.

The audience laughs. A pudgy Little Marie at 5 runs on wearing a pink leotard.

LITTLE MARIE

(sings)

*I've only just turned five years old
And my skirts don't reach my knee
Folks say 'tis a shame to put half mast clothes
On a great big girl like me.*

Marie's Mother, a pretty but worn woman, enters carrying a pair of wings.

MOTHER

Come here, Marie.

Mother fastens the wings on Marie.

LITTLE MARIE

Why do I have to wear this silly costume, Mama?

MOTHER

You're Cupid. You inspire love.
(She gestures to a couple of stage hands who lift Little Marie up and into position on a pedestal.)

Thank you.

(She hands Little Marie a bow and arrow)

Now remember, when Cupid shoots his arrow whoever he hits will fall in love with the next person he sees.

LITTLE MARIE

But who am I to shoot?

MOTHER

You're not going to shoot anyone. It's a tableau, my dear. You're going to stand very still.

(Little Marie nods)

You're not going to move a muscle.

(Little Marie stands still)

Lovely

(Little Marie giggles)

Shhh. Shhh.

(Whisper to stagehand)

Curtain.

Marie's Father, at the piano, begins to play.

MARIE

And I didn't move. I was Love.

There is gentle laughter and "ah's" at the young Cupid.

MARIE (cont'd)

Everybody admired *me!* I didn't move a muscle. I didn't move an eyelash. I can't say the same for the pedestal. It wobbled.

(it does)

And I fell -

(Little Marie tumbles - perhaps with the help of the stage hands)

- right into the lap of the most notorious ladies man in Lindsay.

LADIES MAN

Ooof!

LITTLE MARIE

Ohhhh.

The man pushes her off his knee. Little Marie is stricken - on the verge of tears. There is mocking laughter.

MARIE

I was devastated. Love had become a laughingstock.

The ladies man looks down, sees the arrow stuck in his shirt front. Laughs. Presents the arrow to the audience. Indicates Marie, the arrow. Laughs. The audience laughter builds. Little Marie's face changes from misery to delight as the man takes her hand, kisses it, presents her to the audience. There's more laughter and applause.

LITTLE MARIE

He loves me. They all love me.

She runs back to the pedestal and tries to scramble up.

FATHER

What's the little idiot, doing?

MOTHER

(to Marie)

Marie!

LITTLE MARIE

I want to do it again.

Mother gestures to the stagehands and they carry Little Marie off stage.

LITTLE MARIE (cont'd)

But, I can do it better.

MARIE

I've been perfecting the fine art of -

She executes one of her classic trips. There are gasps. And exchanged looks of concern. She recovers, and gives a smile to the audience.

MARIE (cont'd)

-falling, ever since.

There's laughter and applause.

MARIE (cont'd)

Now I believe I was promised dinner, Mr. Mayer.

The band strikes up as Mayer leads Marie out.

SCENE TWO - AT HOME WITH THE KOERBERS

1883. Mother is folding wash. A child plays badly on a piano. Father hovers over him. Mother puts her finger through a hole in a towel, shakes her head and puts it to one side.

FATHER

No, no. Start again....

(The boy does. Makes the same mistake. Father reaches over and pounds a key)

F Sharp. Sharp. Can't you hear it? (etc.)

The lesson carries on under the scene. Marie (14) enters carrying a parcel. Mother takes it.

MOTHER

This doesn't feel like a pound and a half.

MARIE

I had to entertain him royally to get a pound, Mother. He says we haven't made a payment for...

MOTHER

Oh dear. And this new lodger has such a big appetite.

There's a sudden crash of the piano lid and a childish shriek.

The Young Boy enters in tears, holding his injured hand. Mother moves as if to help him but father is after him.

FATHER

Get out of my house!

The boy starts to run. Father chases him around Mother and off.

FATHER (cont'd)

Go!! I can't teach music to a tone deaf brat like you.

MARIE

How many students does that leave him?

MOTHER

Two.

MARIE

Are we going to have to move again?

Father re-enters rubbing his aching head.

MOTHER

Shhh.

Marie picks up a costume and begins to sew. Father grabs it from her as he passes.

FATHER

What's this?

MARIE

It's a costume I'm making for one of the lads -

He shakes it at Mother.

FATHER

This is all your fault, Annie. With your silly theatrical presentations and tableaux!

MOTHER

Now you enjoy them Alexander.

FATHER

I do not. I do it because you say I have to, to ingratiate myself with these backward small town - I could have been a great concert pianist if I hadn't moved to this godforsaken country. And now my daughter takes up amateur theatrics with a bunch of street ruffians.

MARIE

They're not ruffians.

FATHER

They are if I say they are, girl. And I won't have it, I tell you.

MARIE

Would you prefer if I went over to Boardwell's Opera House and danced on a barrel?

MOTHER

(gasps)

Marie!

FATHER

Only fourteen and so insolent. I tell you, she'll bring the name of Koerber into disrepute.

MARIE

I'll change it. You say I've got an Aunt named Dressler you never liked. I'll take that.

Father raises his hand to strike her.

FATHER

You'll do no such thing!

MARIE

And don't you raise your hand to me. Not any more.

He goes after her.

FATHER

You're my daughter and -

Marie jumps out of his way.

MARIE

I'm not going to be a slave to any man like mother's been to you.

MOTHER

Marie!

FATHER

How dare you!

He charges for her again. Mother intervenes.

MOTHER

Alexander. Alexander Koerber. Stop! Sit down, my dear. Sit. That's it. Into the kitchen, Marie.

(MORE)

MOTHER (cont'd)
 (Marie seems about to respond)

Now!

(She thrusts the package of
 meat at Marie)

FATHER
 I've got such a headache, Annie.

MOTHER
 I know my dear.

Mother massages father's head. Marie
 exits in tears.

SCENE THREE - TRAINING GROUND

1883. The Company enters carrying suitcases.

COMPANY
 (sings)
*Nevada's company
 Aims to entertain
 When our days with you are done*

CONDUCTOR
 All aboard!

COMPANY
 (sings)
We hop aboard the train

They do. The suitcases becoming train
 seats.

CONDUCTOR
 (intersperses in next couple of
 sung lines)
 Saginaw! Grosse Pointe! Windsor!

COMPANY
 (sings)
*And we're
 Living out of a suitcase
 No bed to call our own -*

CONDUCTOR
 Sarnia! Sarnia, ladies and gentlemen.

The Company exits the train, looks
 around in dismay. Nevada, manager of
 the Nevada Stock Company, chomps on a
 cigar as he chivvies people along.

NEVADA

Hurry up! Hurry up, everyone!!
 (crosses with JENNY, the lead
 actress)
 Get the lead out of that cute little tush.

He slaps her bottom. She yelps.

NEVADA (cont'd)

(to stage hand)
 Other way up, Ned. Heaven save me from idiots.

JENNY

(looking around)
 You expect us to perform here?

NEVADA

It's a nice open space.

JENNY

It's a barnyard.

NEVADA

The Nevada Stock Company has no room for divas, Jenny.

Nella Webb(late teens)comes out from
 the barn.

NELLA

There's some stalls we can clean out for dressing rooms.

Richard Ganthony, a handsome young
 English actor/playwright, pokes his
 head out of the loft.

RICHARD

There's hay up here!

NELLA

(calling up)
 Be a sweetie, Richard, and save a corner for me.

JENNY

You wouldn't dare!

NELLA

Can't be worse than these small town flea bag hotels. I'm
 being eaten alive by bedbugs!

Marie enters with a big overflowing
 suitcase. She looks around in
 fascination and terror.

NEVADA

Rehearsal in ten ladies and gentlemen.

COMPANY 2

Yes, Mr. Nevada.

Marie registers the name and comes towards him, hand out.

NEVADA

(ignores the hand)

What d'you want?

MARIE

I'm Marie Dressler.

(he looks vacant)

I wrote to you. You wrote back. Said to come.

NEVADA

(taking her in)

But - you're just a kid. A - large kid.

MARIE

(crossing her fingers behind her back)

I'm 18.

NEVADA

I don't think so.

MARIE

I've had several years of touring experience. I've performed Lady Macbeth. In a little town outside of -

NEVADA

There's not much call for Lady Macbeth here. I need people who can dance and sing.

(Eyes her crestfallen face.

Sighs)

Show me what you can do.

Marie stands frozen like a deer in the headlights.

Nevada snaps his fingers at Nella and Jenny. They come forward and prepare to dance. The band starts to play a ragtime tune. Nella and Jenny dance.

NEVADA (cont'd)

(to Marie)

Well, follow along. You have to be able to pick things up quick or you're no good to me.

Marie watches intently, then joins in.

Marie gets smoother and more confident.
Her energy and enthusiasm build.

RICHARD

For her size, she can move.

NEVADA

She's ugly as a troll.

As the dance reaches it's finale Marie starts to take over and her final pose is bigger, and more flamboyant than anyone else's. Richard laughs.

NEVADA (cont'd)

But she's got energy.

(to Marie)

You'll start in the chorus. Six dollars a week. And beer money after the performance.

MARIE

But I don't drink.

NEVADA

No need for beer money then.

He starts off.

MARIE

But that's not (fair) -

Nella grabs Marie and yanks her aside.

D'you want a job or not?

MARIE

A job.

(beat)

And six dollars a week is a fortune! I can send half of it home to my Mom.

NELLA

Don't count on it. You have to pay for food, accommodation, costumes. I'm Nella Webb by the way. You can bunk with me up in the barn if you want.

Marie nods and follows after Nella.

There's a train whistle. The company hurries to the train.

COMPANY

(sings)
*In theatre or barn
 We aim to entertain
 When our days with you are done
 We go and hop the train*

CONDUCTOR

All aboard!

Richard sits behind Marie and Nella.
 Marie is obviously smitten.

MARIE

Hi Richard.

RICHARD

And how's our young clown this morning.

MARIE

(giggles)
 Fine.

CONDUCTOR

Ithaca. Ithaca!!

COMPANY

(sings)
*Up and down the coast
 Then heading to the West
 In big town or in small
 No place to make a nest.*

*'Cause we're
 Living out of a suitcase
 No bed to call our own
 Learning the skills of the trade
 With nowhere to put up our feet and say I'm home.*

The Company mills about. Nevada enters
 with some papers in hand.

NEVADA

All right, everybody. Gather round. Our new production is
 an adaptation that Richard's thrown together.

Richard winces. Murmurs of surprise and
 congratulation.

NEVADA (cont'd)

Speaking roles.

He begins to hand out papers.

Marie.

NEVADA (cont'd)

She looks up in surprise. He gives her a sheet.

MARIE
(to Nella)

Richard's written me a part!

NELLA

Shhh.

NEVADA

Now we've only got a couple of days to rehearse this one so, we'll start right in with -

Marie looks at the pages and her delight turns to dismay.

MARIE

Mr. Nevada. Sir.

NEVADA

What!

MARIE

You've given me pages for the king.

NEVADA

Well you're big enough to play a royal personage.

There's laughter and snickers.

NEVADA (cont'd)

But if you don't want a speaking role -

Marie struggles to overcome the hurt and embarrassment.

MARIE

Of course I want it. And I'd like beer money now, Mr. Nevada.

NEVADA

You barely earn what I'm paying you, girl.

He walks away from her.

MARIE

And half the time you don't do that, you cheapskate.

NEVADA
 (whipping back)
 What did you say?

Nella jumps in.

NELLA
 Nothing, Mr. Nevada, Sir. She was just asking me about the costume. How cheaply she could get the material.

With a crown and a cape and maybe a knee stocking with garter, Marie does a turn as a doddering King flanked by two courtiers. It's the worst kind of ham acting.

MARIE
 I say... What I mean is... I decree. I decree.

NEVADA
 (shaking his head)
 Gawd help us.

MARIE
 I de -

Marie accidentally trips and is rescued in mid-fall by two courtiers who place her upright. There's laughter. She registers the laugh and so falls over in the other direction. The audience laughs louder. She does it again, the courtiers racing madly to keep the king from hitting the ground. Nevada too is chuckling.

NEVADA
 She's got possibilities.

CHORUS
 (sings)
*We're still
 Living out of a suitcase
 No bed to call our own
 Learning the skills of the trade
 With nowhere to put up our feet and say we're home.*

During the singing, Marie loses the crown and cape. She practices tripping or leaning over backwards. Richard comes by.

RICHARD

I'm off home to England, Sport. Keep up the good work.

He chucks her under the chin. Marie looks after him regretfully. Nella approaches with a suitcase.

NELLA

(sings)

*I'm going to try New York
Why don't you come with me?*

MARIE

(tempted but can't)

*What if I can't get work there
To support my family.*

Nella hugs her and exits

COMPANY

(sings)

*And I'm
Living out of a suitcase
No bed to call my own
Learning the skills of the trade
With nowhere to put up my feet and say I'm home.*

NEVADA

This next show has a great part for you, Marie.

He hands her a couple of pages.

MARIE

The dowager.

NEVADA

You've got the chest for it.

MARIE

MR. Nevada!!

NEVADA

I can always put you back in the chorus, girl. But you won't be getting any \$15 a week!

Marie fumes as she's "costumed" for the Dowager.

MARIE

*Kings, dowagers, servants, hags, kings, maids....
(she sighs)
Just make 'em laugh, Marie.*

Jenny as a weeping heartbroken young thing sweeps on and sinks to the floor. Marie sweeps on and sails towards Jenny. She slowly pulls a huge hanky out of her bosom.

MARIE (cont'd)
Oh my dear. My dear. Don't cry, my dear.

Jenny reaches out for the expected hanky. It doesn't come. Jenny wails louder. Marie puts her fingers in her ears and makes a face as if her ear drums are being broken.

MARIE (cont'd)
Please! Don't cry.
(She waves the handkerchief around always just out of Jenny's reach as she continues)
If there's one thing I've learned in my long, (to audience)
loooong life - it's that we have to turn drawbacks into drawing cards.

Jenny is furious. Marie drops the hanky on the ground.

MARIE (cont'd)
Dear me.

Slowly and languorously she leans over backwards and picks it up. (Alternatively other hanky business can be used) The "audience" goes wild. Marie holds the hanky out to Jenny who glares at Marie.

MARIE (cont'd)
Dry your eyes and we'll plot our revenge.

Jenny grabs the hanky and flounces off. Marie shrugs her shoulders.

MARIE (cont'd)
The young.

She follows Jenny off and is met by Nevada.

NEVADA
What was *that* all about?

MARIE

I was entertaining the audience.

NEVADA

You were upstaging my star! I won't have it.

MARIE

Then you won't have me.

NEVADA

What?

MARIE

(sings)

*For I am New York bound
The Great White Way's the key
It's time to take a chance
And do something for me.*

*No more
Living out of a suitcase
With no bed to call my own
I've learned the skills of the trade
But I've nowhere to put up my feet and say I'm home.*

She exits.

SCENE FOUR. 1895. KOSTER AND BIAL'S VAUDEVILLE HOUSE, NEW YORK. IT'S A DIVE. A BOUNCER PATROLS - ENSURING THAT THE BEHAVIOUR OF THE PATRONS IS KEPT IN CHECK. SIGNS SAY NO CIGARS, NO WHISTLING, NO STOMPING OF FEET, NO SPITTING. A WELL-DRESSED, POMPOUS BULL OF A MAN, ABE ERLANGER, WOULD BE OUT OF PLACE IN THE AUDIENCE EXCEPT FOR THE WOMAN OF QUESTIONABLE VIRTUE HE HAS ON HIS ARM.

EMCEE

And now, ladies and gentlemen -

Marie is to one side looking green with nausea, having just been sick in a bucket.

EMCEE (cont'd)

Koster And Bial's Vaudeville House in New York City is proud to present a woman large in both talent and - scale.

Marie wipes her face with a towel and prepares to go on.

EMCEE (cont'd)

Miss Marie Dressler.

Marie sweeps on stage to a musical flourish.

MARIE

Good evening. Thank you. Such a fine evening.

AUDIENCE 1

Was till you came on, dearie.

There's laughter.

MARIE

And how are the rest of my pals on this fine summer's evening?

Not much response from the audience. They're more interested in the bouncer who's making his way toward the heckler.

MARIE (cont'd)

There must be something wrong with my hearing. I said how are all my pals tonight?

There's a bit of response.

MARIE (cont'd)

Well a few of you are alive. I can see you're doing fine, madam. Yes, you, way back there - in the white hat. That's right, you. Glad to see you out on this summer's evening. And your handsome friend. Hello there, Sir.

She does a suggestive little hip swirl at him.

AUDIENCE 2

Swirl those big hips at me baby.

There's hoots from the audience, and a few shushes. The bouncer heads over.

MARIE

I must say I'm very happy to be here at such a *high class* New York establishment.

There's some laughter. Erlanger begins to pay attention to the performance.

MARIE (cont'd)

I've spent the last twelve years on the road - performing on many a Main St. and Broad St. or sometimes Broad Ave. I liked those places. They were usually broad enough to contain me.

There's more laughter. She laughs along with the audience.

MARIE (cont'd)

So - what I'm going to do this evening - I hope you'll forgive me - is sing you a little song about myself. It's called *A Great Big Girl Like Me*.

She presents herself to the audience.
They laugh. (See Note 1)

MARIE (cont'd)

(sings)

*I was always a great big lunk of a girl,
And remember now with rage,
The street car conductor's sad sweet smile
When mamma told him my age.*

Oh -

*A great big girl like very truly yours
Has very little cause for glee,
They always make a pet of some stingy faced soubrette.
Not a great big girl like me.*

*At sweet sixteen I tried to catch
My hooks on a Romeo,
But I found that each of the village batch
Had some other girl in tow.*

*A wee, small brother of very truly yours
Explained it to a nicety,
He said most any chap took a chance to break his lap
With a great big girl like me.*

*Oh - A great big girl like very truly yours
Has very little cause for glee
They always make a pet
Of some stingy-faced soubrette,
Not a great big girl like me.*

Marie takes the applause, the Bouncer warns a man about the foot stomping and Marie makes a large, but very graceful curtsey and moves off stage. Erlanger indicates that the woman should wait and he goes towards Marie who's wiping her face and her neck with a handkerchief.

ERLANGER

Miss Dressler? I'm Abe Erlanger.

MARIE

The theatrical producer?

ERLANGER

And I'm looking for a woman to play a very particular role.

MARIE

I'd be happy to audition.

ERLANGER

You already have.

(Marie looks at him in
surprise)

I'm going to be mounting an American adaptation of a play that's done very well in England: *The Lady Slavey*. I'm bringing over Dan Daley who starred in the English production.

MARIE

Dapper Dan Daley??!!

ERLANGER

You'll play Flo Honeydew. It's a small part, but in the right hands -

MARIE

How much?

ERLANGER

\$100/week.

MARIE

(disappointed)

Oh.

ERLANGER

Is there a problem?

MARIE

I have a family who count on me for support, Mr. Erlanger. What about a hundred and -

(he glares at her)

I make more than \$100 at the - (moment)

ERLANGER

(shakes his head)

People who make that kind of money do not perform in a place like this, Miss Dressler. Now if you'll excuse me, there are other actresses who would be only too happy to -

MARIE

Alright. \$100. *If* I get to dance with Dan Daley.

ERLANGER

(gives a cold laugh. Looks at
her assessingly)

I suppose I can be - flexible about things that don't cost me money.

He holds out his hand. They shake. He walks off, picking up the woman on the way.

MARIE

Yes!

Marie does a skip of delight.

SCENE FIVE. A REHEARSAL HALL. ACTORS MILL ABOUT.

STAGE MANAGER

All right, ladies and gentlemen. Can I have your attention please. Mr. Daley. Miss Dressler. Take your positions for the end of Act 1 number.

Marie eagerly steps forward.

DALEY

What?

STAGE MANAGER

You and Miss Dressler have a dance at....

DALEY

No we don't!

Marie looks up with surprise. The rest of the company are all ears. Erlanger starts forward.

ERLANGER

Dan -

DALEY

There is no way on God's earth, that I'm dancing with that elephant of a Dressler.

(gasp of shock from an actor)

Her jowls shake!

(titter of laughter from another actor)

MARIE

An elephant I may be, Mr. Daley, but one that's remarkably light on her feet. And as for my jowls, I'm working on having them waggle more!

There's laughter.

DALEY

(gapes at her. To Erlanger)

You see. Impossible. She's impossible. I refuse...

He starts off. Marie struggles to cover her hurt and embarrassment.

ERLANGER

Dan!

Starts after him.

STAGE MANAGER

Take ten, ladies and gentlemen. Ten minutes. Can I get you a coffee, Miss Dressler?

MARIE

(indicates no)

Thank you.

She exits as do the actors.

Erlanger catches up with Daley, puts an arm around his shoulder.

ERLANGER

Humour me, Dan.

DALEY

Don't you Dan me, Erlanger.

ERLANGER

Mr. Daley. Listen. You know as well as I do, that there's many a number that gets cut during rehearsal.

DALEY

Well let that be the first one. I'm your star and I won't dance with that -

SCENE SIX. OPENING NIGHT. 1896. MARIE IS BEING SICK IN A BUCKET. A BORED STAGE HAND LEANS HOLDING MARIE'S HUGE HAT.

MARIE

Stage fright.

(Stage Hand grunts)

You'd think I'd be used to it by now. But, no, every opening night it's worse.

(Stage Hand grunts)

Dan Daley comes running off stage, grabs a towel from the Stage Hand, wipes his face.

DALEY

We're dying out there. Dying! The grand old man can't remember his lines and he's too deaf to hear the cues.

MARIE

That's all I need. A flop. I've told Mother she and Father can come and live with me. I've rented a house! She's packing up!

(Stage Hand grunts)

I can't be in a flop!

DALEY

That's your cue, you daft daisy.

MARIE

Oh!

Marie is frozen with fear. The Stage Hand gives her the hat.

MARIE (cont'd)

Thank you.

She crams on the hat and races out onto the stage to meet Major Tolliver, knocking into him in her rush. An audience watches. They titter.

MARIE (cont'd)

Why, Major Tolliver.

She makes a huge gesture and in her nervousness, hits her hat which spins around on her head. The crowd laughs. Marie does a double take. Looks up.

MARIE (cont'd)

Why Major-

She spins the hat again. A bigger response. She begins to look pleased with herself. Indicates that the audience should wait a moment. Thinks. Spins the hat in the opposite direction. Daley and the Stage Hand watch from the sidelines. The Stage Hand is laughing.

DALEY

She's bringing them round. She's actually bringing them round.

Marie takes the hand of Major Tolliver, hitting him in the head with her hat. More laughter.

MARIE

It's so very nice to meet you. And of course you know Sheriff William Endymion Sykes.

Daley enters and bows, setting up for his song and dance. (See Note 2) Marie cheekily joins in, chasing him around the stage, dashing in to hold onto him and do a dance turn. It becomes an acrobatic delight with Marie chasing after Daley, whirling him about, lifting him up. He crashes down. In attempting to get away he walks over a chair and is forced into a somersault etc.

DALEY

(interjects as appropriate)

What're you doing?
We didn't rehearse this!
Isn't this nice.

Dan realizes the audience is loving it and starts playing along. The dance reaches it's climax. The audience cheers. Marie and Daley bow.

MARIE

Jump on my hip and I'll carry you off.

DALEY

What?

MARIE

Just do it.

Daley jumps on and they make their stage exit. The crowd goes even wilder. In the wings, both of them are panting and out of breath.

DALEY

I suppose we'll be repeating that tomorrow, Marie.

MARIE

With a few improvements, Dan. I thought that I could -

She takes his arm and leads him off.

SCENE SEVEN. MAMIE, A YOUNG BLACK WOMAN MAKES HER WAY THROUGH THE BUSY BACKSTAGE AREA AFTER A PERFORMANCE, ASKING FOR DIRECTIONS. SHE COMES TO MARIE'S MESSY DRESSING ROOM. MARIE IS SPRAWLED EXHAUSTED IN A CHAIR.

MAMIE
Miss Dressler?

MARIE
Huh?

MAMIE
My name is Mamie Steele.

MARIE
And?

MAMIE
(pulls out a newspaper)
You advertized for a lady's maid.

MARIE
Yes I did, but -

MAMIE
(looking around at the chaos)
I can see you need one.

MARIE
I believe that ad says I'm interviewing tomorrow.

MAMIE
That's why I'm here today.

MARIE
And why are you so eager to work for me, Mamie?

MAMIE
You're a very good actress.

MARIE
Thank you. But that's -

MAMIE
You don't just play to the society matrons down in the stalls, you play to people like me at the back of the balcony.

MARIE
And this is enough to make you leave Washington? You must have ties here.

MAMIE

There is a young man. He offers a decent life. Hardworking but decent.

MARIE

Well I don't think your young man would be too happy if you packed up and -

MAMIE

It isn't up him, Miss Dressler. I want more than decency. I want more than Washington. I want to see the world.

MARIE

And you think you'll see it with me.

MAMIE

I do.

MARIE

Well I'm flattered. Very flattered. But I'm looking to hire an excellent lady's maid, not an adventurer.

The Stage Doorman sticks his head in.

DOORMAN

I'm sorry, Miss Dressler, but there's a young man here who says he has an appointment.

MARIE

Oh yes. Yes. I'd agreed to see a...

She searches around on her messy table for a letter.

MARIE (cont'd)

Some young man.

A young and eager Mack Sennett bursts in.

SENNETT

I'm Mack Sennett, Miss Dressler and I'm so.... I'm just so... well overwhelmed and honoured, yes honoured to meet you.

Sennett is full of nervous energy and can't keep still. He pumps her hand energetically.

MARIE

You sound like you're from Canada, Mr. Sennett.

SENNETT

I was born up there Miss Dressler. Just like you. But my family moved down here a couple of years ago.

Mamie makes a decision and as they talk she proceeds to quietly and unobtrusively neatening the room, and find the things Marie needs.

MARIE

And what do you do - down here?

SENNETT

I'm a riveter. I drive rivets.

MARIE

And just what IS a rivet?

SENNETT

Oh, it's a mechanical fastener. Very strong. You drive the head through a pre-drilled hole... But you don't care about that. Heck, I don't care about it. Believe me, it isn't riveting at all.

(he laughs at his own joke.)

Marie acknowledges the unexpected witticism)

I want to be an actor.

MARIE

(looking for the letter)

Yes, that's what your letter of introduction from, Mr. Uh -

SENNETT

Coolidge.

Mamie hands Marie the letter.

MARIE

Thank you - what Mr. Calvin Coolidge said in his very short letter. I'll be honest, Mr. Sennett. Becoming an actor is a very bad idea.

SENNETT

But it's my dream.

MARIE

Sit down, young man. Sit down.

(he does)

Dreams of theatre are not the reality of theatre. You may think this all looks very fine and easy but believe me, it's not. I've been hungry more times than I care to remember. When you do work, it's at night. Touring. That's the worst. Look at me, sitting here in Washington while my nice house in New York... You never have time for a home, a - family.

(MORE)

MARIE (cont'd)
 (she's suddenly regretful, but
 recovers)
 It's gruelling work.

SENNETT
 You should try driving hot rivets all day long!
 (jumps up)
 If you could just tell me how to get into show business -

MARIE
 Well, Rivets. If you're that eager, I'll write you an
 introduction to a New York producer I'm acquainted with. If
 I can find a pen.

She looks on the table. Sennett feels
 his pockets. Mamie hands Marie a pen.

MARIE (cont'd)
 Ah yes.
 (she writes. Holds out the
 note.)
 There you go.

SENNETT
 Thank you, Miss Dressler. Thank you.

She signals that he should leave. He
 does. Darts back in.

SENNETT (cont'd)
 Thank you.

He leaves.

MARIE
 (shaking her head)
 God help him.
 (registers the room)
 Well.
 (looks around)
 Well.
 (sees Mamie confidently
 standing there)
 When can you start?

SCENE EIGHT. BACKSTAGE AT A THEATRE, DAN DALEY AND THE CAST
 GATHERS AROUND A NOTICE.

ACTORS

I don't believe it.
 The nerve!
 What a skinflint
 Does he really mean no pay?

Marie enters

MARIE (O.S.)

What's the problem, pals.

Dan hands her the paper. She reads and burns.

MARIE (cont'd)

We'll see about this!

She marches towards Erlanger.

MARIE (cont'd)

Mr. Erlanger, you can *not* make us do Sunday performances.

ERLANGER

You're right. I can't.

Marie is taken aback for a moment, but she quickly recovers and shakes the paper at him

MARIE

Then what's all this?

ERLANGER

If you'd actually *read* the notice, you'd see that I have scheduled Sunday *concerts*.

DALEY

But you still expect us to perform the play.

ERLANGER

You are obliged to comply.

MARIE

No, no, no! I need my Sundays off.

DALEY

And it says here there's no extra pay.

ERLANGER

That's correct.

MARIE

You can't do that.

ERLANGER

I'm reliably informed by my lawyers that I can - as long as the performances are billed as concerts. Check your contracts.

The actors grumble unhappily. But Marie grabs a stage brace and brandishes it.

MARIE

You - nasty penny-pinching swine.

Erlanger starts to run. Marie chases him around the other actors.

MARIE (cont'd)

You - slime covered, reprobate. You slave driver. You Simon Legree. Get out.

She chases him off the stage. The company is delighted.

COMPANY 1

Good on you, Marie.

COMPANY 2

Finally got what's coming to him.
(MORE)

COMPANY 2 (cont'd)

*

Note 1. Marie's performance of *A Great Big Girl Like Me* (Act I Sc. 4) has been described as "an operatic chant varied by elephantine gambols. Her hips pounded the performers around her like rubber balls battered with a sledgehammer." It's also been described as a Spanish Fandango.

Note 2: Marie's dance with Dan Daley (Act 1 Sc. 6) was dubbed *The Human Fly*. A description is: Their performance in many parts resembles a catch-as-catch-can wrestling match. He circles around her watching for a chance to rush in; then, quick as a flash, he has her, and both begin to fly about the stage. Up she shoots into the air, and down comes 240 pounds with a crash that shakes the theatre. Then she flies up again, and it is the comedian's turn, with the assistance of Miss Dressler, to lead the onlookers to believe that he is about to force his way through the boards of the floor. But he doesn't seem to mind it a bit, for no sooner has he struck than he is up again and over tables, chairs, and sofas, knocking over everything inside the mad pair are whirling. And more wonderful than all this, they are in perfect time with the liveliest kind of lively music.

Note 3: Marie's physical relationship with her father in *Higgledy Piggledy* (Act I Sc. 10) has been described like this: she picked up her parent by the nape, tucked him under her arm, threw him over her shoulder and laid him over her lap for a spanking. She also swung her hips at other performers sending them flying as if they'd been hit by a sledgehammer.