

FUN FACTORY

by Kimberly Locke

A new play based on the true story of Mabel Normand

First ten pages

ACT 1

SCENE 1: The Bottom of the Ocean

It is dark. The whir of an old movie projector fills the room. Light shines on a round screen center stage. Joe Rinaudo's piano tune from Huell Howser's "California Gold" (2006) starts playing, as if you are watching a silent film.

The credits roll on the screen, and the title card appears.

The projection starts to malfunction, as pops and flashes take over the screen. The music blends into a cacophony of CLICKS and POPS.

MABEL, 20, spirited, naive, adventurous, dressed in a sparkling blue kimono covered in stars, enters.

MABEL

I swam with the stream as it pulled me to California. I matched its pulse with my strokes, pushing and pulling to the rhythm of my destiny. Come to Hollywoodland. Make comedies. Conquer the world! Or at least that's what I thought when Mack and I created Keystone Studios over in Los Angeles.

Two journalists enter. ADELA, 24, clever, sophisticated, a journalist with flourish, and HERBERT, 25, crass, a fabricator. They circle MABEL like sharks taking pictures and hurling headlines.

ADELA

Mabel Normand is loved.

HERBERT

Mabel is a trainwreck.

ADELA

Mabel is a darling!

HERBERT

She's nothing but a self destructive party girl.

ADELA

She needed help.

HERBERT

She did it to herself.

ADELA

She's gonna jump!

HERBERT

Let her!

All we see is flashes and hear camera shutter sounds. MABEL recreates her role in "The Diving Girl" (1911). She removes the kimono and stands on an apple box upstage center. She takes a deep breath and smiles widely. She prepares to dive.

MABEL dives into the water. The lights go out as soon as there is a SPLASH. Through the darkness, blues start to permeate the stage. On the screen, MABEL sinks down, down, down through the water as ADELA speaks.

MABEL

All I can do is hold myself under the water. Drown the noise and the fallout and the fame. The journos want a story I can't give them. They want another angel for their City of Angels. For Hollywoodland. They promise us a destiny, to be like the stars in heaven. They don't tell you that the price you pay is slaughter. So... I hold myself underwater, as long as I can. I survive under here. I am still Mabel. But once I die and float to the surface you will get your angel.

The light shifts again, the little GLOOMS retreat as if the sun is rising out of the water. We go back in time to the beginning of the story.

SCENE 2: Production Meeting Behind Keystone Studios

MACK, 26, stubborn, brash, workaholic, briefs ROSCOE "FATTY", 26, brazen, hungover, on the picture. MACK acts as the cast, going through each of the motions. MABEL and ADA, 20, leisurely, privileged, but astute, work on the camera together.

MACK

Brace yourself, Roscoe, for this impending spectacle. We have Mabel as our damsel in distress. Her and her sister are tied to the train tracks and robbed of all their belongings by some desperadoes. Luckily we see our hero strolling nearby. He thinks it's hoax! He laughs while motioning for them to stand up. But the train! The train is in sight, barreling towards the two girls! Our hero slaps himself in the face, runs to them, trying to untie the rope. The girls get flung every which way as he works his magic, and with no time to spare, they escape the train!

ROSCOE

That's great, Mack! ...but I don't know if it's funny enough just yet. How about – hear me out – while the hero still believes the girls are toying with him, he too lies down on the tracks. He'll pretend to scream as frantically as they are. That's when he sees the train and saves the day.

MABEL breezes over to the boys and plants a kiss on MACK's cheek quickly.

MABEL

Funny ideas, boys. But no one would believe I'd need saving. I will save myself! I'll cut my sister and me from the tracks with my handy pocket knife I keep in my boot. Then, I'll jump on the back of the train as it rips past and wave at the hero as he laments his shortcomings.

ROSCOE and MACK look at each other.

MACK

The hero needs to save you, Mabel. Helpless women are funny.

MABEL

That damsel in distress is so cliché.

MACK

Please, Mabel. This movie will make us money. It's the California gold rush and we are tappin' it!

MABEL

You think I don't know that?

MACK

You gotta trust me.

MABEL

We need something more relatable than desperadoes and train murders. How about we do something sweeter, maybe a *romantic* comedy? Oh! A big wedding!!! That's it! Mack, it would be perfect with our wedding approaching. It could be like our dress rehearsal for the real thing!

MACK

Train tracks trump a wedding, my girl. The people want action. *I* want action! Weddings are for boring people with boring lives.

This hits MABEL hard.

MABEL

There is nothing boring about love, Mack. If you're having me risk my life for you on those tracks then risk this for me.

MACK

So you'll do it?

MABEL

I'll do it if you give my idea some thought. Besides, this is our Fun Factory, dear. It would not be a typical wedding. There would be cold feet and pratfalls and food fights! And it would be the most wrecked but beautiful wedding the world has ever seen.

MACK

I suppose it could work... We can do both, but *only* if Bauman and Kessel agree to put it in our budget.

ADA

Already done! Daddy has a soft spot for romance. As do I.

MABEL and ADA giggle.

MACK

As long as I'm here, the tracks will be the safest place in the world. I love you, *baby*.

MABEL

You know how much I hate it when you call me that.

MACK

Then which do you prefer? My water bug? My little clown? The rose to my thorn? My queen?

MABEL

Just call me Your Girl. And I will call you my flat-footed store detective. My spatting Irishman. My Mickall *Snot*. My Napoleon Bonaparte! My Nappy.

MACK

You are very cute... but not cute enough to lose that pretty dollar floating down to the sea as we speak. Let's get moving!

ROSCOE starts to fit MABEL for the ropes. He wraps MABEL up throughout the dialogue.

ROSCOE

Finally, a good idea!

MABEL

Oh, Roscoe, dear, loosen up.

ROSCOE

Of course, Milady.

Pulling tightly.

MABEL

Okay, let's see... I could be a bride who's great love has returned to spoil—

MACK

Right now you are a babe tied to train tracks alongside your sister. I have to give some thought to this wedding.

MABEL

You conjured your picture five minutes ago, we have time to give this five minutes too!

MACK

Can we focus on what we are doing right now?

Beat. MABEL takes a deep breath and forces a smile on her face.

MABEL

Then I am a widow. My husband was killed by a train because of these desperadoes last year and my sister and I have come to avenge his death. Unfortunately, we have gotten ourselves into a pickle and now we have been tied up too! This characterization requires painted toe nails. Can someone get me that?

ADA runs and snatches the rope from around MABEL.

ADA

We can 100% fit that in the budget, my lovely girl!

ADA starts hitting ROSCOE with the rope like a whip.

ADA

FATTY. GET MABEL SOME RUBY RED. DADDY'S PAYING!

The lights fade as ADA chases ROSCOE offstage.

SCENE 3: Mabel's Dressing Room

It's after the production meeting. MACK is waiting for MABEL and rummaging around the room casually. He sits at the vanity. MABEL's wedding dress is hanging plainly on the wall beside him and the sight makes him antsy. He finds the stool is not very stable and starts trying to fix it with different scripts and book pages he finds around. MABEL enters wrapped in a fluffy towel to her neck. Her hair is wet and sticking up in the back.

MACK

What a cute little duck you are.

MABEL

I'm no duck.

MACK

How about a pigeon?

MABEL

I'm no pigeon either.

MACK

Oh! You're a swan. I love swans.

MABEL

Do you? Do you love me?

MACK

I love you, Mabel. You know that.

MABEL

But do you want to marry me? In front of the cameras and the real thing? You seemed to be getting cold feet today.

MACK

covering

The picture makes me nervous, yes, but it's nothing I won't risk for you.

Mack playfully tries to flatten her hair again.

MABEL

Hm, well then, I'm no bird at all. I'm a flea, and if you don't stop petting me I'll crawl into your hair and pinch you to death.

She starts pinching him hard.

MACK

Fleas don't get married.

MABEL

This flea does!

Mack goes too far with his affection.

MABEL

Hey, the wedding is only 3 days away, Mister. Hold your horses.

MACK

I give you a piece of twine as a ring and then try to get at ya. What a man I am.

MABEL pulls out the ring from around her neck, slides it off the cord and examines it in her hands.

MABEL

The ring's my favorite part.

Beat.

You know, today really got me thinking. I think we could do something really extraordinary if you let me work with you more closely... A real partnership! Look at what Griffith is doing. We could make an impact like that.

MACK

He's making pretentious boloney. We are making people laugh.

MABEL

It's not pretentious or baloney. We could be at the top, Mack, make something no one's seen before. Something funny, exciting, *and* intimate.

MACK

Funny is all that matters.

MABEL

I want to be more than just funny.

MACK

Listen, to conquer this business, we gotta make money. When we get rich, we will be king and queen and we can make whatever we want. For now, you just need to make people laugh.

MABEL

What a distinguished artist you are, Mack.

MACK

There were no dukes on the Mayflower, Mabel.

MABEL

I'm no duke either. How about you let me direct this time?

MACK

The director needs to be behind the camera, not in front of it, and you're our star. In front of the camera is where you need to stay.

MABEL

Why're you hiding my ideas?

MACK

People need to see us as a unified force, my girl. You are more special on the silver screen than off. Believe me. No one wants to watch me get tied to the tracks, they wanna watch you.

MABEL winces. They sit in silence for a moment. It's awkward, so MACK puts his hand on her leg but she pushes it off.

MACK

Alright, fine. We can direct *together*. But only for that wedding picture.

MABEL

Oh thank you, Nappy!

MABEL shrieks and hugs him. MACK kisses her.