The Plot to Kill Charlie Chaplin

a vaudeville based on a true story

book and lyrics by Scott Guy
music by Kevin Mathie

excerpt

CAST

Marion Davies
William Randolph Hearst
Charlie Chaplin
Thomas Ince
Carson Goodman
Abigail Kinsolving

Rosamund
Olive
Darlene

TIME
1918-1924

PLACE
various theatres, movie studios, charm schools,
rooms in Hearst Castle,
and onboard a Hearst yacht

Musical Numbers

			script
1.	Who Shot Charlie Chaplin?	Instrumental	1
2.	Digga Doo	Chorines, Marion	3
3.	A Girl Could Get Distracted	Marion	9
4.	I Danced the Dance	Rosamund	12
5.	Who Gets to Say No	Hearst	14
6.	You Owe Me	Marion, Abigail	17
7.	The Hat and Cane Bit	Instrumental	20
8.	Do What's Gotta Be Done	Ince, Goodman	22
9.	The Charm Song	Abigail, Marion, Olive, Darlene	25
10.	I Danced the Dance - Reprise	Olive	29
11.	Smitten	Hearst	33
12.	Digga Doo Reprise	Darlene	34
13.	Hearst Castle	Chorines	41
14.	What I Do with my Money	Ince, Goodman	49
15.	Gradually You	Marion	53
16.	A Girl Could Get Distracted - Reprise	Marion, Olive	55
17.	The Last Word	Chaplin	61
18.	The Silent Conversation	Instrumental	71
19.	The Charm Song - Reprise	Abigail, Chorines	67
20.	The Pie Fight	Instrumental	77
21.	Gradually You - Reprise	Hearst, Marion	79
22.	Threnody for Charlie	Chorines	83
23.	Hearst Castle - Reprise	Chorines	94
24.	Gradually You - Reprise	Hearst, Marion, Chorines, Abigail, Ince	106

ACT ONE

Scene 1.

An aging vaudeville theatre stage, on which is CHARLIE CHAPLIN in his classic tramp outfit, walking away from us. We see him through a rectangular opening, resembling a silent movie frame. Suddenly there's a gunshot. Chaplin's hat flies off; HE clutches at his back. HE tips at an improbable angle and freezes. Three CHORINES rush in, alarmed. **1. Who Shot Charlie Chaplin?**

DARLENE
Someone shooting Charlie Chaplin!?

ROSAMUND
Say it ain't so!

OLIVE
Actually true, actually happened.
(takes in the audience)
The story we're telling you tonight is based on a true story.

ROSAMUND
The question is....

ALL THREE
Which true story?

OLIVE
Was it --

ROSAMUND
Was it --

DARLENE
Ooo!

OLIVE
The Newspaper Mogul who shot Charlie Chaplin?

(In a second silent movie frame on the other side of stage, a title displays: "The Newspaper Mogul" and then it gives way to a tableau of

(WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST holding a threatening Indian hunting rifle, pointing a *j'accuse* finger at Charlie Chaplin. Caption reads: "Charlie! You tried to steal my girl and destroy my motion picture studio. Tonight you die!" CHAPLIN remains frozen in his tableau.)

ROSAMUND
Or was it the Movie Star Mistress Marion Davies?

(A third silent movie frame. MARION DAVIES in a frozen lunge, reaching for Hearst's rifle. Caption: "Wait, darling, that's not Charlie!" In the first frame, Charlie spins around, shot; hurt. We see it's not, after all, Chaplin, but a pale accountant-looking man. Marion's caption changes to read: "Oh no, it's the head of the Ince Motion Picture Company." MARION and HEARST turn and look at each other, alarmed.)

DARLENE
The Rape Victim! Abigail Kinsolving.

(A fourth silent movie frame in which ABIGAIL KINSOLVING appears, weakened, imbalanced, uncertain. SHE rails at Ince. Caption: "You rapist! You ruined my life. Tonight you die!")

OLIVE
The Head of a Rival Studio!

(A final silent movie frame in which CARSON GOODMAN appears, furrow-browed and very concerned. Caption: "That gun was never loaded. Ince died of a heart attack. That's my story and I'm sticking to it." The tableaux hold a moment, each still blaring their captions. Then:)

ROSAMUND
So which of 'em hated Charlie Chaplin enough to shoot him the night of November 15, 1924?

OLIVE
Well, it all began six years earlier, the night William Randolph Hearst met Marion Davies.

(A final theatrical pose from each of the tableaux, as the lights shift and MARION DAVIES comes down center. The three CHORINES join her.)

OLIVE
She was dancin' with us at the time.

(Title: "A New York burlesque theater." MARION's elegant gown is whisked away by some unseen force, and she is dressed like the other three chorines. The CHORINES fit Marion with a headdress. Some fragments of scenery fly in, identifying the burlesque as "The Gold Diggers of 1918." **2. Digga Doo**.)

OLIVE, DARLENE and MARION
A-DIGGA DOO! A-DIGGA DEE!
A DIGGA GOLD FOR YOU AND ME.
A-DIGGA DOO. A-DIGGA DEE.
A DIGGA GOLD FOR YOU
BUT MAINLY ME.
NOT GONNA FOLD. GONNA BE BOLD
BEFORE THE WINTERTIME GETS COLD.
LO AND BEHOLD, BEFORE I'M OLD
I GOTTA GET A MAN WITH GOLD.

ROSAMUND
I LIKE IT IF IT GLITTERS.
WANT A LIFE A SPARKLE AND SHINE.
HUMDINGER ON MY FINGER,
THAT'D SUIT ME FINE!
FIND A MATE: THAT'S MY FATE,
SO MY DICE OF ROLLED.
THOUGH HE'S OLD, I'M CONSOLED
IF HE'S A MAN WITH GOLD.

THIS HONEY LIKES HER MONEY.
RATHER BE A HAVE THAN HAVE NOT.
THE CHORUS, IT AIN'T FOR US.
GET ME MORE'N I GOT.
DON'T GIVE A FIZZ WHO HE IS
LONG AS HE'S BANKROLLED.
THOUGH HE'S OLD, I'M CONSOLED
IF HE'S A MAN WITH GOLD.

MARION
Al-though...I see things different.

OLIVE
(to audience)
Oh, you knew this was coming, didn't you. She's the leading lady in this show, so....

(TITLE: "Marion Davies, not your ordinary Gold Digger." MARION in a spotlight.)

MARION

MY PERSPECTIVE IS A LITTLE DIFF'RENT.
I'LL WED A GEEZER: A NEWYORKESER;
BUT I'M GONNA DO YOU ALL GOOD.
I'M GONNA HELP YOU GIRLS WHO AIN'T GOTTEN
NO BREAK BECAUSE THE WORLD IS SO ROTTEN.
GIVE ALL HIS MONEY TO A POOR NEIGHBORHOOD.
Like Brooklyn.
DON'T CARE HE'S EGOTISTICALLY BLINDED.
I'LL MAKE HIM ALTRUISTICALLY MINDED.
DIGGIN' FOR GOLD, FOR GOLD, BUT FOR DOIN' GOOD.
FOR GOOD.

OLIVE

You done?

MARION

Just gettin' started. Marion Davies is just gettin' started.

(The girls dance; MARION is deliriously happy with delusions of the future. The other girls exude happiness professionally...it's their job.)

DARLENE and OLIVE

A-DIGGA DOO! A-DIGGA DEE!
A DIGGA GOLD FOR YOU AND ME.
A-DIGGA DOO. A-DIGGA DEE.
A DIGGA GOLD FOR YOU
BUT MAINLY ME.
NOT GONNA FOLD. GONNA BE BOLD
BEFORE THE WINTERTIME GETS COLD.
LO AND BEHOLD, BEFORE I'M OLD
I GOTTA GET A MAN WITH GOLD.

MARION

I'M GOING TO HELP,
I'M GOING TO GIVE.
GOING TO LIVE A LIFE
I'M PROUD TO LIVE.

ROSAMUND

I LIKE IT IF IT GLITTERS.
WANT A LIFE A SPARKLE AND SHINE.
HUMDINGER ON MY FINGER,
THAT'D SUIT ME FINE!
FIND A MATE: THAT'S MY FATE,
SO MY DICE OF ROLLED.
THOUGH HE'S OLD, I'M CONSOLED
IF HE'S A MAN WITH GOLD.

THIS HONEY LIKES HER MONEY.
RATHER BE A HAVE THAN HAVE NOT.
THE CHORUS, IT AIN'T FOR US.
GET ME MORE'N I GOT.
DON'T GIVE A FIZZ WHO HE IS
LONG AS HE'S BANKROLLED.
THOUGH HE'S OLD, I'M CONSOLED
IF HE'S A MAN WITH GOLD.

(And....WILLIAM RANDOLPH HEARST shouts to Marion from the back of the theatre.)

HEARST

I want <u>you</u>. Yes, you. You're the one for me.

(HEARST appears near the stage, his eyes fixed on MARION. Trailing nearby is GOODMAN, and THOMAS INCE, movie studio executives.)

HEARST
(seeing only Marion)
This man here is Carson Goodman, Head of Production at my newsreel studio, and he'll see to it that you're dressed like a million bucks and on my arm on Friday night at Delmonico's where you might be seen by the likes of Mary Pickford or Charlie Chaplin. Any questions, you ask Mr. Goodman.
(turning to Ince; Marion a foregone conclusion)
Thomas Ince! Come with me. What's it going to take to get my newsreels into your circuit?

(HEARST is already on his way out of the theatre, his business here concluded.)

INCE
Well, make me a better offer than Pathé newsreels --

HEARST
(never taking no for an answer)
This is William Randolph Hearst you're talking to. Follow me, Ince.

(HEARST and INCE are gone, leaving GOODMAN and the chorines a bit floundered.)

GOODMAN
(with a sigh; this is not the first time)
What's your name, sweetheart?

MARION
Used to be Marion Douras, but I changed it to Davies on accounta to be classier than my Greek/Brooklyn family, which I don't need no more if William Randorable Hearst is gonna marry me now! Plus, did he say Charlie Chaplin? Can he introduce me to Charlie Chaplin?
(snort!)

GOODMAN
(brief recoiling; handing her a card)
Call me tomorrow morning at this number. Word of advice: enroll yourself in a charm school if you want to last more'n a night. Just saying.

(GOODMAN scurries after Hearst, worried.)

GOODMAN
Uh, Mr. Hearst? We have a problem....

(Lighting change; a spotlight on Marion. DARLENE, OLIVE, and ROSAMUND become backup chorines. **3. A Girl Could Get Distracted**.)

MARION

William Randorable Hearst!
OF ALL THE GEEZERS
UP WITH WHICH TO HOOK
HEARST AIN'T THE WORST
A GIRL COULD'VE UNDERTOOK.
THERE'S ROBBER BARONS
IRON, COAL, OR RAIL,
WHERE, I DON'T CARE,
S'LONG AS HE AIN'T IN JAIL.
But this geezer, my geezer, turns out to make movies!

A GIRL COULD GET DISTRACTED
FROM HER PATH OF DOING GOOD
WITH ALL THE LIGHTS
WITH ALL THE CAMERAS
AND THE ACTION. YES, SHE COULD.
ALL THE FAME MAKES HER LASCIVIOUS:
LUSTY ROLES IN WHICH SHE'S ACTED.
BUT THANK GOD I'M SO OBLIVIOUS.
CUZ A GIRL COULD GET DISTRACTED.

STAY TO MY PATH.
REMEMBER MY VOW.
BE TRUE TO MYSELF.
KEEP TELLING ME HOW
ALL THE GLORIOUS GLORY'S
TOO NUMBING TO ME.
THAT IS WHY, MY FRIEND,
I KNOW IN THE END
I WILL TAKE, YES I'LL TAKE
ONLY WHAT'S COMING TO ME.

A GIRL COULD GET DISTRACTED
IF SHE MEETS A MOVIE STAR.
LET'S SAY CHARLIE CHAPLIN.

(CHARLIE CHAPLIN appears in an unreal silent-movie light, noticing and then ogling Marion.)

MARION

I ADORE HIM FROM AFAR!
WHAT IF HEARST WOULD INTRODUCE ME?
SILENT ROMANCE THEN ENACTED.
WHAT IF CHAPLIN WOULD SEDUCE ME?
OOOH, A GIRL COULD GET DISTRA--.
No, I'm not!

MARION and THE CHORINES

STAY TO MY PATH.
REMEMBER MY VOW.

(CHAPLIN's light fades.)

MARION and THE CHORINES

BE TRUE TO MYSELF.
KEEP TELLING ME HOW
ALL THE GLORIOUS GLORY'S
TOO NUMBING TO ME.
THAT IS WHY, MY FRIEND,
I KNOW IN THE END
I WILL TAKE, YES I'LL TAKE
ONLY WHAT'S COMING TO ME.

A-DIGGA-DOO!

(MARION, OLIVE and DARLENE leave. ROSAMUND lingers, as one of the movie stillframes appears around her. A title appears: "Rosamund Kills Herself." ROSAMUND pulls out a gun.)

ROSAMUND

Now, hold on, don't be gettin' scared. It ain't a real gun. It's a prop gun. A real suicide, but a prop gun. See, the thing is, I turn twenty-five at midnight tonight. It's all over for me. By my twenty-fifth birthday I said was to be my last shot. But he picked Marion. The one with the snort! I came in second to a snorter!? Yeah, no thanks. I can't go on no more.

(SHE shoots herself. Title: "Bang!" **4. I Danced the Dance**.)

ROSAMUND

And now I'm dead and the pain is over.
THE SPOTLIGHT! THE DRA-A-MA!
THE ROLE YOU'RE CAST TO PLAY.
BUT HARD AS HARD I'VE DIGGED AND HOPED,
I WASTED IT AWAY.
TOO LATE FOR ME. BUT NO REGRETS.
I GAVE IT ALL MY ALL.
I SANG THE SONG, I DANCED THE DANCE,
AND NOW THE CURTAINS FALL.

I SANG THE SONG, I DANCED THE DANCE,
AND NOW THE CURTAINS FALL.
(again to us)
Anyway-besides, I wouldn't trade it for what Marion's about to face. She's got the right idea: look to do some good, forget the money. But as she says, a girl can get distracted. Keep watching, you'll see. Remember where we're headed....

(Tableau appears: Charlie Chaplin being shot in the back, with his hat flying off. Title: “Bang!”)

ROSAMUND
Awful lot of guns in this show....

(ROSAMUND exits. Lights shift to:)

Scene 2.

(Outside the theatre. GOODMAN has caught up with HEARST and INCE. INCE is trying to hail a cab.)

HEARST
I don't want to hear we have a problem, Mr. Goodman.

GOODMAN
I think you do. The chorus girl you picked.

HEARST
(I get what I want)
I want her.

INCE
(ducking the conflict to come)
Where are any cabs!? I'm going to go find a hotel doorman.

(INCE goes off.)

GOODMAN
I did some research on all four of the ponies beforehand, just in case.

HEARST
I don't want to hear.

GOODMAN
The one you picked is trouble. Her brother drowned when he was fifteen and this girl was accused.

HEARST
Was she convicted?

GOODMAN
Nothing stuck.

HEARST
Get her to Delmonico's on Friday night.

GOODMAN
Let me do a little digging first, boss, right?

(HEARST whirls on Goodman. **5. Who Gets to Say No?**)

HEARST

Some words of advice, Carson Goodman, and by advice, I mean:
DROP THIS CONVERSATION
OR DROP YOUR EMPLOYMENT.
THE GIRL MIGHT BE TROUBLE
BUT THE GIRL IS MINE.
I DON'T WANT TO HEAR
WHAT I DON'T WANT TO HEAR.
SO I'LL DO THE TALKING
AND YOU'LL LIKE IT JUST FINE.

GOODMAN

It's just....

HEARST

No, Goodman, it isn't just at all. So long as you:
DROP THE INVESTIGATION.
I WANT MY ENJOYMENT.
THE GIRL SHE IS PERFECT
BECAUSE SHE IS MINE.
I DON'T WANT TO SEE
WHAT I DON'T WANT TO SEE.
THE TRUTH'S WHAT I MAKE IT.
THE WORLD'S MY DESIGN.

WHO BUILT AN EMPIRE?
I'm thinking
NOT YOU.
ON THE MASTHEAD,
Whose name? It's
NOT YOURS.
NO, YOU'RE NOT THE ONE
WHO GETS TO SAY NO
UNTIL IT'S YOUR NAME ON THE DOORS.

THE DAY IT'S YOUR NAME THAT'S OVER THE GATE
WHEN WE DRIVE ON THE LOT THAT YOU BUILT,
THE DAY YOU SPEND MILLIONS IN SHIPPING AND FREIGHT
ERECTING A CASTLE THAT'S MARBLED AND GILT,
WHEN YOU OWN
THIRTY-ONE PAPERS AND SIX MAGAZINES
AND SEVENTEEN CARS IN A ROW,
WHEN YOU'VE PURCHASED EACH FRIEND
AND BOUGHT EVERY FOE,
ONLY THEN IS THE DAY
THAT YOU GET TO SAY NO.

(Lights change to:)