

Following Our Fannie
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In this over-the-top melodrama, the actors are trying to assimilate the existence of Fannie Fakename, who has magically fallen through time by way of an especially effective disappearing act performed on stage at her hometown theater, circa 1920. Fannie, in search of a happy ending in life, has somehow been transported to the rehearsal of the Broadway play, "The Happy Ending," where she has immediately fallen into the clutches of the lecherous producer who, desperate to find a role for her in a play that has no role for her, summons the writer to create a role for her. The actors are having a particularly difficult time with the concept of a writer, having no real existence outside of the roles they believe themselves to be. Also, Fannie has run with the show's histrionic star, Bernadette. The disdain the cast feels for their leading is more than made up for by the adulation she feels for herself.

NOTE: Being myself of a uniquely calm and soothing disposition as a playwright working with actors, directors and artistic staff hell bent on slaughtering my words, it was particularly difficult for me to create the WRITER character herein depicted. But fortunately, one does not have to be a whale to write Moby Dick.

PRODUCER:

All right! I can see my back is up against the wall: you've pushed me as far as I can go. I don't want to have to resort to this, but you've left me no choice in the matter.

MALCOLM:

Oh no! You don't mean...

PRODUCER:

Yes -rewrites! Somebody get me the writer!

(Organ crash. The cast is frantic while the WRITER simply walks on stage, observing all of it, then goes over to the ASSISTANT to get a cigarette)

(Throughout this section, everyone who addresses WRITER does so while looking in the complete opposite direction, purposefully trying not to look at him)

ASSISTANT:

Hey, you, Beagle-face -are you the writer?

CAST:

(Reaction -fear; distaste -all turning away)

WRITER:

(Assuming persona -paroid)

Maybe. What's it to you? Maybe I'm the carpenter; Maybe I'm Santa Clause and his reindeer - who wants to know?

HUGH:

(Looking away)

We were merely trying to find the writer to adjust the script.

WRITER:

You!

HUGH:

That's "Hugh" with an "H".

WRITER:

It's "you" -with as much acting talent as a grapefruit! Do you have any idea what you've done to my words! I have given you beauty, drama, mirth, merriment, intrigue to name a few- and you have given me garbage! I can't even hold my food down. I'm punching strangers on the sidewalk! (HUGH keeps turning away when WRITER yells at him) Hey -what the hell do you think you're doing? Look at me when I'm talking to you! (Then turns to others who are doing the same) And you, too! Look at me.

ASSISTANT:

What are you -nuts?

WRITER:

Probably.

STAGE MANAGER:

They can't look at you.

WRITER:

What do you mean they can't look at me? I' the writer! (Shudder from the group) It's because of me that they exist.

ASSISTANT:

And that's why they can't admit that you exist.

STAGE MANAGER

It means their lines aren't their lines...

ASSISTANT

...they're somebody else's

STAGE MANAGER:

Unless that person doesn't exist

ASSISTANT:

Which is you.

STAGE MANAGER:

The writer.

WRITER:

Actors....If only I could have gotten elephants to speak!

(BARBERSHOP QUARTET has now formed and begins singing. This is the song about another manifestation of entering the land of illusion, how the actors can't stand to admit the existence of a writer. Like all of these songs -or really more of a musical moment or thought -they take a grain of truth in the actor/writer relationship, and extend it absurdly)

BARBERSHOP

We want your lines now please just -go away

Give us your words then please just -go away
Give us our lines then please just disappear.
They're our lines, they're not your lines -you don't exist
Ending tag: "When you enter the world of illusion..."

(As the song is sung, the WRITER tries to move through the group of people, and they suddenly turn from him, nobody letting themselves actually see him)

PRODUCER:

(Restraining WRITER)

Look here! I'm the producer and you're the writer, and I said what we need are rewrites!

(WRITER suddenly composes self entirely)

WRITER:

Re-writes?

PRODUCER:

Yes, "rewrites."

WRITER:

(Calmly)

Ah, but there's only one problem: I can't do any re-writes.

PRODUCER:

And why not?

(Suddenly WRITER lunges at the PRODUCER's throat)

WRITER:

Because it's perfect as it is, you morons! If it needed rewriting I would have rewritten it already!
You don't ask William Shakespeare to re-write Romeo and Juliet? Do you? Do you?

(They pull the WRITER off the PRODUCER)

BERNADETTE:

Somebody stick him back in the zoo!

MOTHER:

This is an abomination!

HUGH:

Why did you bring him here?

MALCOLM:

We don't want anyone knowing that 'our' words come from this brain.

BERNADETTE:

I don't care whose brain my words came out of! (Gasp from everyone) I just think he's a psycho and shouldn't be allowed to mingle with "civilized" people.

WRITER:

Now that you mention it, there is one flaw in the script.

BERNADETTE:

Oh, do tell, William, deary.

WRITER:

(Suddenly)

The female lead needs to die!

(Sudden change of attitude towards the WRITER)

PRODUCER:

Brilliant!

DIRECTOR:

(Reappearing, half-man, half woman)

It's just what we need -certainty!

WRITER:

What?

(Suddenly everyone else takes on WRITER's intensity and he is taken back)

PRODUCER:

The only question is, how do we kill her?

(Sudden barrage of ideas rapid fire:)

HUGH:

Burn her in oil!

MOTHER:

Feed her to the snakes!

STAGE MANAGER:

Drop her from a scaffolding, it'll be more realistic. I'll set the prop.

ASSISTANT:

Let her get hit by a train! On stage! I'll build the train! No, better yet, I'll buy the train -a real one! I'll pay for the whole thing -outta my own money!

HUGH:

Burn her at the stake!

WRITER:

Wait a minute and shut up! This is my job!

MOTHER:

Just shoot her in the head and be done with it!

WRITER:

Nobody's getting any of my royalties

BERNADETTE:

That is just about enough!

(This causes them to stop.)

(The following melodramatic soliloquies possess a disconnect between form and content. She says them as though she were saying something sympathetic, although her words are quite different.)

BERNADETTE:

(Melodramatic, martyr-like)

I can see that in my quest for art, for truth, for perfection, I might have rubbed hard against some of your intransigent quest for mediocrity. And I can see how my unambiguously correct talent and skills may have been intimidating -especially to those for whom talent is a four letter word.

STAGE MANAGER:

What do you think that means?

ASSISTANT:

Who cares? She'll be dead, soon.

BERNADETTE:

(Melodramatic, injured)

And yet I see that such malevolence and misanthropy against you have caused me to feel the slings and arrows of your misguided wrath towards my very being. Here, today, hurling insults, depriving me my rightful status as star, and mercilessly free-associating my demise with more vigor than I have ever witnessed on this set since I accidently dropped a dime in the direction of the stage hands.

STAGE MANAGER:

I remember that.

ASSISTANT:

Yeah, that was good.

BERNADETTE:

(Melodramatic, indignant)

Nea ye, I will not stand and be insulted! Nea ye, I will not stand to become anything less than I shall always be! Nea ye, I will not be boiled in oil, burned at the stake, or even shot in the head. And so, exit stage left I must. For it is far far better to have loved and lost, than to be run over by a real locomotive on stage.

(She exits dramatically, but inconsistently, as if waiting to be called back.)

PRODUCER:

Wait a second! You can't go!

BERNADETTE:

What's this? The west wind beckoning the coming of Spring? A mother calling back her errant youth? A confused and desperate producer made insane by the artistic power about to pass forever from his grasp?

PRODUCER:

(Pulling the wig off of her, and putting it on FANNIE)

Not bad, (Then suddenly pulling her wig off) for a "person!" But Fakename here's younger and better looking. The name of the lead role has changed to "Fannie."

FANNIE:

Oh dear...

Play continues