

THE FLICKERS

by

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FADE IN.

EXT. HOLLYWOOD, 1917 - NIGHT

A Model-T Ford pulls into the driveway of a large, Spanish-style house. Parked cars and the sound of laughter indicate a party is underway.

INT. PARTY - CONTINUOUS

The walls are covered with pictures of the owner and hostess, golden-haired starlet AIMEE ADOREE (early 20s). Aimee flits among her GUESTS, whose conversation we overhear --

GUEST 1

-- and Jimmie says to me, I decide who finances what on this lot --

GUEST 2

-- used to be a vaud-a-ville star, hasn't worked in ages, not in pictures anyway --

GUEST 3

-- we're looking for someone a bit more of a refined type --

GUEST 4

-- "Shoot it," I says, "if you have to use candles!"

Aimee alights on MABEL NORMAND (20s). Mabel is Gibson Girl pretty, with a mischievous grin.

AIMEE

Mabel, darling! How's the funny business?

MABEL

Oh Aimee, one of these days I'll break my head open with this slapstick stuff.

Mabel gestures to her friend FRANCES MARION (late 20s), a slightly plain woman, but with sparkling, intelligent eyes.

MABEL

You remember Frances Marion.

AIMEE

The writer, yes, oh how fascinating it must be to --

(MORE)

AIMEE (cont'd)
 (Spotting someone even
 more fascinating)
 Cecil! Darling! Excuse me, girls!

Aimee dashes over to a young man, and Mabel smiles wryly.

FRANCES
 Charming girl.

MABEL
 Come on, Fran. There's Sherman
 Pettibone, let's go raise his
 pulse.

Mabel steers Fran toward SHERMAN PETTIBONE (late 40s), a
 thin, long-faced man who is drinking alone.

MABEL
 (in undertones)
 You've heard about Sherman's
 troubles of course. These things
 always happen when you think you're
 the biggest toad in the puddle --
 (heartily, to Sherman)
 Hello, Boney!

Sherman smiles vaguely, half indulgent, half bored.

MABEL
 This is my friend Frances Marion,
 the --

SHERMAN PETTIBONE
 Oh yes, Marvin Lasker's pet
 scribbler.

MABEL
 Ought to give her a try one day,
 Boney, she can make 'em laugh, make
 'em cry --

SHERMAN PETTIBONE
 I write my own scenarios. Good luck
 miss ...

FRANCES
 Lincoln, Mary Todd.

SHERMAN PETTIBONE
 (absently)
 Miss Lincoln.

Sherman walks off.

MABEL

Aw, nuts to him, nobody goes to see
his pictures these days anyway.

MARIE DRESSLER (48) IRISH MURDOCH (50s) loom up behind them.
Marie is a large, raw-boned woman; Irish resembles Oscar
Wilde, and is rather drunk.

IRISH MURDOCH

And don't you believe he writes his
own pictures -- he's a bloody fraud
is what he is.

MARIE

(explaining to the girls)
He's still bitter over a little
incident --

IRISH MURDOCH

He stole my scenario. I told him
about it at West Lake last year and
now look at what he's producing
over at Lasker Studios --

MARIE

Irish Murdoch, haven't you figured
out what contracts are for?

MABEL

Contracts! They're for working you
to death six days a week -- and
makin' it so's you can't do a thing
about it!

MARIE

They're for making you play
characters half your age --

FRANCES

And replacing plot with pie!

MABEL

At five hundred dollars a week!

IRISH MURDOCH

(eyeing Sherman)
I'd still like to kick him right in
the fundamentals.

A tall, slim woman walks past, alone. It is MRS. MAGUIRE
(early 30's), beautiful but with a cold, standoffish air.

MARIE

Well there goes Mizz Maguire,
giving me the fish eye. Looking
marvelously youthful, considering
she's been twenty-seven for three
years.

MABEL

You cat! She heard you!

Movie cowboy TOM NETTLES (40s), dressed in full regalia,
drifts by and tips his hat to them.

MARIE

Hiya, Tom.

Following Tom, we pass by gossip columnist VIOLA HIATT (30s)
flirting heavily with leading man MARCUS MANGOLD (30s), who
becomes distracted as Aimee approaches.

AIMEE

Hello Marcus. I wanted to thank you
for the lovely flowers you sent.
You should come by my dressing room
sometime and see how they look.

(off Viola's glare)

Is Marcus letting you interview him
for your little gossip rag? How
sweet.

Aimee glides away.

VIOLA HIATT

You sent her flowers?

MARCUS MANGOLD

Honestly, Viola, you're worse than
my wife.

Over the boozy party noise, we begin to hear serious
shouting. Irish Murdoch is yelling drunkenly at Sherman
Pettibone.

IRISH MURDOCH

You just keep your corn-fed fingers
off my story!

SHERMAN PETTIBONE

You crazy loon! Ya drunken Mick!

IRISH MURDOCH

A race of kings!

SHERMAN PETTIBONE

-- You no account --

IRISH MURDOCH

Listen, you! You've stolen my property!

SHERMAN PETTIBONE

You're hysterical --

IRISH MURDOCH

I demand recompense!

SHERMAN PETTIBONE

You argue like a woman!

Sherman telegraphs a haymaker but Irish reacts swiftly --

He takes a swing at Sherman and they start to tangle.

IRISH MURDOCH

I'll kill you!

He punches Sherman hard and the director flails around, loses his footing and tumbles into the POOL with a splash.

Aimee rushes over frantically.

AIMEE

Sherman! Irish Murdoch, how could you!?!

Irish storms away muttering threats and Marie hauls Sherman out of the pool.

MARIE

Silly boys.

SHERMAN PETTIBONE

I'll catch my death of cold.

AIMEE

Let me get you into some dry clothes.

She leads him upstairs. Marcus follows Aimee with his eyes and, a few moments later, with his feet.

Viola watches him heading upstairs, daggers in her eyes.

INT. UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

AIMEE

Here it is. My cousin left this
when he came to visit last week.

SHERMAN PETTIBONE

(Eyeing the suit)

What an awfully strapping cousin
you have.

Aimee blushes and looks away.

SHERMAN PETTIBONE

I should think you were beyond
blushing at this point, my dear.

AIMEE

Sherman, you don't own me.

Marcus enters and eyes the suit.

SHERMAN PETTIBONE

I do hope we're the same size.

AIMEE

Sherman, please.

SHERMAN PETTIBONE

If it wasn't for me, you'd still be
selling hats at Altman's Department
Store. Remember that.

Sherman stalks off and slams the door.

INT. AIMEE'S HOUSE - LATER THAT NIGHT

The guests are beginning to leave, noisily and merrily.

Frances, Mabel and Marie stumble into the night. Irish is
raving drunk. Marie uses her bulk and hoists him up.

MARIE

I ought to knock your head in.

INT. AIMEE'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Aimee is walking from room to room turning off the lights.

EXT. IRISH MURDOCH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Marie carries the sleeping man as far as the porch, then dumps him.

MARIE

You can sleep here if you have to.

Irish opens one eye.

IRISH MURDOCH

What'd I do?

INT. AIMEE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Aimee walks into the study and sees gasps.

Draped over the large oak desk in the study is the lifeless body of Sherman Pettibone.

Sherman has been stabbed in the eye with a FOUNTAIN PEN.

The black ink and the red blood, mingled together, flow out of his eye and trickle in a stream down the desk.

EXT. LASKER STUDIOS - MORNING

The sun gently rises over an impressively large studio complex. It is early in the morning but already bustling with the activity of movie-making.

INT. FRAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Frances is seated at her desk, drinking coffee and writing intently.

Producer MARVIN LASKER (50s) enters the room. Lasker is a big, blustery man. He puts his hand on Fran's shoulder in a protective, avuncular way.

MARVIN LASKER

How's it coming along, Fran?

FRANCES

It's a breeze.

MARVIN LASKER

Ha! You agonize over every word of every title card.

He lights a cigarette and looks down at Fran's typewriter.

MARVIN LASKER
What is this, revisions?

FRANCES
I'm one step ahead of you, Marvin.
This is our next project.

MARVIN LASKER
Really? Have I approved it?

Fran suddenly looks very serious.

MARVIN LASKER
Oh dear. That face means only one
thing.

EXT. LASKER STUDIOS - CONTINUOUS

Marvin walks briskly toward the back lots and Fran keeps
pace, linking her arm around his.

FRANCES
Listen, how much money have I made
this studio? Plenty, right? Now, I
have this idea, see --

MARVIN LASKER
I pay you a good salary don't I?
You're well-known, respected among
your peers, aren't you? What more
could you possibly, possibly want?

FRANCES
I want to direct my next picture.

MARVIN LASKER
(to the heavens)
Now she wants to direct.

FRANCES
I'm a quick study, Marvin. Everyone
needs a first time.

MARVIN LASKER
You're killing me ...

FRANCES
I won't even ask for a higher
salary -- even though I'll be
working much harder --

MARVIN LASKER
What's the story?

FRANCES
It's about identical twin orphans.

MARVIN LASKER
Who plays the twins?

FRANCES
Mabel Normand!

MARVIN LASKER
Both of them?

FRANCES
Yes!

MARVIN LASKER
So it's a comedy?

FRANCES
Well, an adventure comedy -- a
romance adventure comedy.
She's twins, see, but she's
separated at birth, like the Prince
and the Pauper, only with a comic
twist! You know, lots of crazy mix-
em-ups!

MARVIN LASKER
A movie written and directed by a
lady, with a woman in the lead!

FRANCES
It's real modern!

MARVIN LASKER
The girls in the shirtwaist
factories will love it. Hope they
have two nickels for a picture
show.

FRANCES
Oh, Marvin, men like Mabel Normand
movies, too. You know that!

Marvin sighs deeply and rubs his temples, thoroughly
overwhelmed by the force of Fran's nagging.

MARVIN LASKER

And you won't ask for an increase
in salary?

FRANCES

No. Just a small percentage of the
gross.

MARVIN LASKER

How 'bout the net?

FRANCES

Marvin!

MARVIN LASKER

You're lucky you're a gold mine for
this studio.

Fran hugs him and kisses him on the cheek.

FRANCES

Oh, thank you Marvin!

MARVIN LASKER

Let's see if it does any business.

EXT. A STUDIO BACK LOT - CONTINUOUS

Mabel is sitting in a folding chair reading the newspaper as
a make-up artist dishevels her hair and stuffs hay in it.

Stagehands and propmasters set up haystacks and other props
to make the lot look like a farmyard.

ROSCOE ARBUCKLE (30s) is directing, setting up the scene.

ROSCOE

You get over there with that bucket
of whitewash and dump it on my
head. Are you listening?

MABEL

I can't believe it, look at this
awful photograph they published.

She holds up the newspaper, showing a nasty photograph of
Sherman's body.

ROSCOE

Aw, that's revoltin'.

MABEL
 Poor Sherman!

ROSCOE
 I need more hay over here!

A STAGEHAND (19) appears and stuffs hay into Roscoe's pants.

ROSCOE
 Hell of a way to go. They say it
 pierced his brain.

MABEL
 Cryin' shame.

Roscoe and Mabel scurry over to a big haystack.

ROSCOE
 Rolling!

Roscoe tiptoes up behind Mabel as she paints a fence. He steals a kiss and she jumps, accidentally overturning the bucket of whitewash on his head. TEDDY THE WONDER DOG (40 in dog years) chases Roscoe until he dives headfirst into a haystack. Mabel gleefully spans Roscoe's ample rump as Teddy looks on, barking.

EXT. STUDIO BACK LOT - CONTINUOUS

Frances and Marvin appear over the crest of a hill overlooking the set.

FRANCES
 Oh, it's going to be wonderful. I
 have this idea for an action scene
 on a boat --

Marvin notices Roscoe and Mabel.

MARVIN LASKER
 What's Arbuckle doing here? This is
 the set for Mary Sunshine Goes
 West. I told him to stay out of my
 haystacks, damn it!
 (shouting)
 Arbuckle, you union bum, get out of
 my farmyard!

ROSCOE
 Let's scam!

The cast and crew start to grab equipment and hightail it out of there. Mabel waves as she hikes her skirts and runs.

MABEL

Hiya Fran!

Marvin turns to his right-hand woman.

MARVIN LASKER

This is the woman you're writing a picture for? She's completely wild.

FRANCES

(gleeful)

I know.

Teddy the Wonder Dog growls and nips at Marvin's heels. The dog barks at him and darts off.