

TONIGHT
CHARLIE
CHAPLIN
GILLIAN PLOWMAN



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gillian Plowman

Gillian won the Verity Bargate award in 1988 with *Me and My Friend*, a poignantly funny play about the release of four patients from a psychiatric hospital into the community. It was first produced at the Soho Poly Theatre in 1990 and at the Chichester Festival Theatre in 1992, directed by Ian Rickson.

The Purity Game formed part of the opening season of Chichester's Minerva Theatre Studio in 1989. *Storm* was produced in Hastings and London's Soho theatre by Freehand Theatre Company in 2000/01.

Radio plays for the BBC include *The Wooden Pear* in 1991 starring Anna Massey, *Philip and Rowena* in 1993 with Leslie Phillips and Renee Asherson, *A Sea Change* in 1995 with Jenny Funnell and *David's Birthday* in 2000 with Amanda Root and Clare Holman. A film script *Daisyworld* was commissioned by Paramount Pictures.

Boniface and Me, a radio version of *Yours Abundantly from Zimbabwe*, was broadcast in December 2007, the first in a trilogy of radio plays featuring Harriet Walter. *Gracey and Me* was broadcast in 2010 and *Loveness and Me* in 2012.

In 1996, Gillian's play *Padlocked* formed part of the Etcetera Theatre's One-Person Play Festival and *Imagine Imogen* was read at the London New Play Festival in 1997.

Full length plays include *Moments of Glory*, which received a rehearsed reading at the Nuffield Theatre in November 1998, *Another Fine Mess* was toured by the PostScript Theatre Company in 1998/99 and *Pits*, which was a runner up in the 2004 King's Cross Award for new writing.

Yours Abundantly from Zimbabwe,* directed by Annie Castledine, was produced at the Oval House Theatre, London, during Black History Month, October 2008, and *Crooked Wood* was produced at the Jermyn Street Theatre, London, in September 2008.

The End of the Journey, a full-length play, directed by Pamela Howard and linked to the start of World War One was produced in the Pavilion Theatre in Selsey in August 2014, a first production in the near-derelict building for over fifty years. *Tonight in the Pavilion – Charlie Chaplin* was produced there in 2015, and *Tonight in the Pavilion – Laurel and Hardy* in May 2016. These plays prompted the start of the building's renovation as a centre for the arts.

**Yours Abundantly from Zimbabwe* was featured in *Plays for Today by Women*, published by Aurora Metro Books in 2013 and *Crooked Wood* was published by Oberon Books.

Other plays by Gillian Plowman
published by Samuel French Ltd

Me and My Friend
Beata Beatrix
Cecily
Close to Croydon
David's Birthday
The Janna Years
A Kind of Vesuvius
Philip and Rowena
Two Summers
Umjana Land
There's None So Blind
Tippers
Two Fat Men
Touching Tomorrow
The Allotment
The Window Cleaner

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Charlie Chaplin was the very first icon of the silver screen, and is one of the most recognisable faces in Hollywood, even over a hundred years after the emergence of the Little Tramp. But what of the man behind the moustache? The director holding the camera as well as acting in front of it? The cockney boy beneath the make-up?

Born in London in 1889, his early life was defined by poverty and hardship and in the absence of his father, and with his mother being regularly confined to asylums, he and his brother Sydney spent their childhood in and out of orphanages and workhouses. The workhouse in Kennington is now the Cinema Museum and houses much Chaplin memorabilia.

Charlie survived by making himself invulnerable. 'Even in the orphanage, I thought of myself as the greatest actor in the world. I had to feel the exuberance that comes from utter confidence in myself, without it, you go down to defeat.' This exuberance later became part of his screen persona. The Little Tramp always picks himself up and walks jauntily into the distance.

Chaplin made over eighty films. In 1972 he was honoured with an Academy Award for his 'incalculable effect in making motion pictures the art form of the century'. In 1975 he received a knighthood.

In *Tonight... Charlie Chaplin* it is 1959. Charles Chaplin is seventy years old, talking across the years to the young Charlie Chaplin, the Little Tramp who was never allowed to speak in his films. Now he has a voice.

BIOGRAPHY OF CHARLES CHAPLIN

Early years

Charles Spencer Chaplin was born in London, England, on April 16th 1889. His father was a versatile vocalist and actor; and his mother, known under the stage name of Lily Harley, was an attractive actress and singer, who gained a reputation for her work in the light opera field. Charlie was thrown on his own resources before he reached the age of ten as the early death of his father and the subsequent illness of his mother made it necessary for Charlie and his brother, Sydney, to fend for themselves. Having inherited natural talents from their parents, the youngsters took to the stage as the best opportunity for a career. Charlie made his professional debut as a member of a juvenile group called "The Eight Lancashire Lads" and rapidly won popular favour as an outstanding tap dancer.

Beginning of his career

When he was about fourteen, he got his first chance to act in a legitimate stage show, and appeared as "Billy" the page boy, in support of William Gillette in "Sherlock Holmes". At the close of this engagement, Charlie started a career as a comedian in vaudeville, which eventually took him to the United States in 1910 as a featured player with the Fred Karno Repertoire Company. He scored an immediate hit with American audiences, particularly with his characterization in a sketch entitled "A Night in an English Music Hall". When the Fred Karno troupe returned to the United States in the fall of 1912 for a repeat tour, Chaplin was offered a motion picture contract. He finally agreed to appear before the cameras at the expiration of his vaudeville commitments in November 1913; and his entrance in the cinema world took place that month when he joined Mack Sennett and the Keystone Film Company. His initial salary was \$150 a week, but his overnight success on the screen spurred other producers to start negotiations for his services. At the completion of his Sennett contract, Chaplin moved on to the Essanay Company (1915) at a large increase. Sydney Chaplin had then arrived from England, and took his brother's place with Keystone as their leading comedian.

The following year Charlie was even more in demand and signed with the Mutual Film Corporation for a much larger sum to make 12 two-reel comedies. These include *The Floorwalker*, *The Fireman*, *The Vagabond*, *One A.M.* (a production in which he was the only character for the entire two reels with the exception of the entrance of a cab driver in the opening scene), *The Count*, *The Pawnshop*, *Behind the Screen*, *The Rink*, *Easy Street* (heralded as his greatest production up to that time), *The Cure*, *The Immigrant* and *The Adventurer*.

Gaining independence

When his contract with Mutual expired in 1917, Chaplin decided to become an independent producer in a desire for more freedom and greater leisure in making his movies. To that end, he busied himself with the construction of his own studios. This plant was situated in the heart of the residential section of Hollywood at La Brea Avenue. Early in 1918, Chaplin entered into an agreement with First National Exhibitors' Circuit, a new organization specially formed to exploit his pictures. His first film under this new deal was *A Dog's Life*. After this production, he turned his attention to a national tour on behalf of the war effort, following which he made a film the US government used to popularize the Liberty Loan drive: *The Bond*. His next commercial venture was the production of a comedy dealing with the war. *Shoulder Arms*, released in 1918 at a most opportune time, proved a veritable mirthquake at the box office and added enormously to Chaplin's popularity. This he followed with *Sunnyside* and *A Day's Pleasure*, both released in 1919.

In April of that year, Chaplin joined with Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks and D.W. Griffith to found the United Artists Corporation. B.B. Hampton, in his "History of the Movies" says: "The corporation was organized as a distributor, each of the artists retaining entire control of his or her respective producing activities, delivering to United Artists the completed pictures for distribution on the same general plan they would have followed with a distributing organization which they did not own. The stock of United Artists was divided equally among the founders. This arrangement introduced a new method into the industry. Heretofore, producers and distributors had been the employers, paying salaries and sometimes a share of the profits to the stars. Under the United Artists system, the stars became their own employers. They had to do their own financing, but they received the producer profits that had formerly gone to their employers and each received his share of the profits of the distributing organization."

The masterpiece features

However, before he could assume his responsibilities with United Artists, Chaplin had to complete his contract with First National. So early in 1921, he came out with a six-reel masterpiece, *The Kid*, in which he introduced to the screen one of the greatest child actors the world has ever known – Jackie Coogan. The next year, he produced "The Idle Class", in which he portrayed a dual character. Then, feeling the need of a complete rest from his motion picture activities, Chaplin sailed for Europe in September 1921. London, Paris, Berlin and other capitals on the continent gave him tumultuous receptions. After an extended vacation, Chaplin returned to Hollywood to resume his picture work and start his active association with United Artists.

Under his arrangement with U.A., Chaplin made eight pictures, each of feature length, in the following order: *A Woman of Paris* (1923) which he wrote, directed and produced, but in which he only appeared in a cameo role and gave the limelight to Edna Purviance and Adolphe Menjou; *The Gold Rush* (1925); *The Circus* (1928); *City Lights* (1931); *Modern Times* (1936); *The Great Dictator* (1940),

in which he played a dual role and talked on the screen for the first time; *Monsieur Verdoux* (1947) in which the public saw a new Chaplin, minus his traditional moustache, baggy trousers and wobbly cane; and *Limelight* (1952).

In 1957, he released his comedy *A King in New York* which Chaplin wrote, acted in and directed, as well as composing the music, and in 1966 he produced his last picture *A Countess from Hong Kong* for Universal Pictures, starring Sophia Loren and Marlon Brando.

Chaplin's versatility extended to writing, music and sports. He was the author of at least four books, *My Trip Abroad*, *A Comedian Sees the World*, *My Autobiography*, *My Life in Pictures* as well as all of his scripts. An accomplished musician, though self-taught, he played a variety of instruments with equal skill and facility (playing violin and cello left-handed). He was also a composer, having written and published many songs, among them: *Sing a Song*; *With You Dear in Bombay*; and *There's Always One You Can't Forget*, *Smile, Eternally*, *You are My Song*, as well as the soundtracks for all his films.

Charles Chaplin was one of the rare comedians who not only financed and produced all his films (with the exception of *A Countess from Hong Kong*), but was the author, actor, director and soundtrack composer of them as well.

He died on Christmas day 1977, survived by eight children from his last marriage with Oona O'Neill.

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First produced at the Pavilion Theatre, Selsey,
in August 2015 with the following cast:

CHARLIE CHAPLIN Ryan Moss
CHAPLIN AT 70 David Flint
HANNAH CHAPLIN Josette Coulston
SYDNEY CHAPLIN Daniel Bowring
MACK SENNETT. Daniel Bowring
MINNIE CHAPLIN Briony Laker
HETTY KELLY Briony Laker
MILDRED HARRIS Briony Laker
LITA GREY Briony Laker
JOHN WILLIE JACKSON David Flint
FRED KARNO David Flint
DIVORCE LAWYER. David Flint
DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS. Chris Nairne
HARRY WELDON Michael Gennings
MABEL NORMAND. Christine Beare
EDNA PURVIANCE. Christine Beare
MARY PICKFORD Hannah Skelton
PAULETTE GODDARD. Hannah Skelton
HENRY LEHRMAN Colin Martin
AL JOLSON Sam Townsend
BROADWAY BABE AND OPERA SINGER. Lisa Pow
CROWD AND CHORUS Members of the cast
PIANIST Sylvia Rota

DIRECTORS Pamela Howard, Gillian Plowman
SCENOGRAPHER. Pamela Howard
CHOREOGRAPHER Chris Butler
WARDROBE Emma Bentley, Georgina Keigher
ASSISTED BY Sue Graves
PRODUCTION MANAGER. Becki Townsend
ASSISTED BY Charles Townsend, Roland Robinson
BUSINESS MANAGER. Neil Kimber
LIGHTING Simon Townsend
SOUND Dan Townsend

PRODUCED BY ARTS DREAM SELSEY

Produced at the Cinema Museum, Kennington,
in September 2016 with the following cast:

CHARLIE CHAPLIN	Ryan Moss
CHAPLIN AT 70	David Flint
HANNAH CHAPLIN	Josette Coulston
THE YOUNG HANNAH	Lisa Pow
(Lilley Harley)	
SYDNEY CHAPLIN	Daniel Bowring
MACK SENNETT	Daniel Bowring
MINNIE CHAPLIN	Briony Laker
HETTY KELLY	Briony Laker
MILDRED HARRIS	Briony Laker
LITA GREY	Briony Laker
JOHN WILLIE JACKSON	David Flint
FRED KARNO	David Flint
DIVORCE LAWYER	David Flint
DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS	Chris Nairne
HARRY WELDON	Michael Gennings
ORPHANAGE MEN	Chris Nairne, Michael Gennings
MABEL NORMAND	Christine Beare
EDNA PURVIANCE	Christine Beare
MARY PICKFORD	Lisa Pow
PAULETTE GODDARD	Lisa Pow
MILDRED'S MOTHER	Lisa Pow
HENRY LEHRMAN	Colin Martin
TIMEKEEPER	Colin Martin
AL JOLSON	Sam Townsend
BROADWAY BABE	Lisa Pow
CROWD AND CHORUS	Members of the cast
PIANIST/OPERA SINGER	Sylvia Rota
DIRECTORS	Gillian Plowman, Pamela Howard
MOVEMENT CO-ORDINATOR	Chris Butler
PRODUCTION MANAGER	Richard Cooper
LIGHTING DESIGN	Jai Morjaria
ASSOCIATE LIGHTING DESIGNER	Ali Hunter
SOUND DESIGN	Chris Drohan
MUSEUM TECHNICIAN	David Locke
WARDROBE	Emma Bentley, Georgina Keigher

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Dedicated to Jeff Alan

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

CHARLIE CHAPLIN	The Little Tramp. Small, athletic, black curly hair. Plays five to thirty five years. London born.
CHAPLIN AT 70	Smart-suited, urbane. Same height as Charlie. London still in the man.
HANNAH CHAPLIN	Plays twenty to fifty. Beautiful music hall singer, crumbling to premature old age. London born but loves to speak well.
SYDNEY CHAPLIN	Four years older than Charlie. Taller. Plays nine to forty. London born.
MINNIE CHAPLIN	Supportive wife of Sydney, admirer of Charlie. London born and tower of strength. Twenties/thirties.
HETTY KELLY	English fifteen-year-old dancer. Shy. Charlie's first love.
MILDRED HARRIS	Pretty American sixteen-year-old. Charlie's first wife.
LITA GREY	Ambitious sixteen-year-old American actress. Charlie's next wife.
JOHN WILLIE JACKSON	Expansive theatrical entrepreneur, manager of The Eight Lancashire Lads.
FRED KARNO	Middle-aged, ebullient founder of Fred Karno's circus, originally from Devon, widely-travelled.
DIVORCE LAWYER	Middle-aged, American, slick.
DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS	Tall and handsome American film star.
HARRY WELDON	Big, blustery London music hall comedian.
MABEL NORMAND	Vivacious, bossy, young American film star, partner to Mack Sennett. Twenty/thirty.
EDNA PURVIANCE	Intelligent, beautiful American film actress. Twenties/thirties.
MARY PICKFORD	America's sweetheart. Young, pretty, sweet and caring. Curls. Partner of Douglas Fairbanks.
PAULETTE GODDARD	Beautiful, brunette American film star. Twenty two.
HENRY LEHRMAN	Bespectacled brusque American film director.
AL JOLSON	Glamorous and famous /American singer. Thirties.
MUSIC HALL ARTIST	Beautiful female singer of note.
MACK SENNETT	Good-looking successful film producer. Thirties

The original production was titled *Tonight in the Pavilion – Charlie Chaplin*

If you want to use this title, the word Pavilion may be replaced by the name of your own venue

Individual characters and chorus played by a cast of twelve.

CHARLIE CHAPLIN

CHAPLIN aged seventy in 1959

SYDNEY CHAPLIN, Charlie's brother, four years older

HANNAH CHAPLIN, their mother

WOMEN*

HETTY KELLY, aged fifteen, Charlie's first love in old London

MILDRED HARRIS, actress, aged sixteen, Charlie's first wife

LITA GREY, actress, aged sixteen, Charlie's second wife

MINNIE, Sydney's wife

EDNA PURVIANCE, Charlie's great love and leading lady for thirty eight films

MABEL NORMAND, film star

MARY PICKFORD, film star

PAULETTE GODDARD, last leading lady and possible third wife (not ever confirmed)

WOMAN AT PARTY

MILDRED'S MOTHER

BROADWAY BABE and **OPERA SINGER**

MEN*

JOHN WILLIE JACKSON, clog-dancing show Eight Lancashire Lads

FRED KARN, of circus fame, took Charlie to America

HARRY WELDON, worked for Fred Karno

MACK SENNETT, took Charlie on at Keystone films

DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS, film star

DIVORCE LAWYER, for Mildred Harris

AL JOLSON

MUSIC HALL MC

HENRY LEHRMAN

ORPHANAGE MAN 1

ORPHANAGE MAN 2

OFFICIAL

TIME KEEPER

PIANIST

The props and costume store of the Keystone Film Company, 1915.

There are hidden corners; half-built film sets, hanging sheets. A wardrobe assistant checks a list. A carpenter moves a ladder. From the gloom, and through the clothes rails, a figure emerges. He starts to pick through the rails, finding the trousers, the jacket, the hat, the shoes. He puts them on, practices the walk and, in front of our eyes, the Little Tramp is born.

*But we are in 1959. The 70-year-old **CHARLES CHAPLIN** is present. We shall call him **CHAPLIN**. We shall call the Little Tramp, **CHARLIE**.*

***CHAPLIN** calls out and catches the tramp's attention.*

Scene 1

CHAPLIN There was a time before that, you know...

CHARLIE What?

CHAPLIN Before the Little Tramp

CHARLIE I know

CHAPLIN Before America, the movies

CHARLIE does more little tramp moves with his cane and hat.

London, Charlie, where you were born. 16th April 1889.
Seventy years ago...

CHARLIE You're an old man now

CHAPLIN I am seventy, Charlie but I am not old.

CHAPLIN spins and turns and does the walk.

The time before – 1890s – the great age of the music halls...

Scene 2

The guys and gals throw on boas, hats etc and give a rousing old music hall song – “TA RA! RA! BOOM DE AY!”

CHARLIE “untramps”, is a child.

MC And now, Ladies and gentlemen, for your delectation, your delight, the purest songstress in town tonight – Miss Lilly Harley!

Lilly Harley was the stage name of HANNAH CHAPLIN, CHAPLIN’S MOTHER. She enters.

CHARLIE It’s our mother! Syd! Syd it’s our mother!

SYDNEY *joins him.*

But she’s Hannah Chaplin, Syd

SYDNEY That’s her stage name – Lilly Harley

CHARLIE I wouldn’t do that. I’d always be Charlie Chaplin

SYDNEY Shhh, Charlie, you’ll get us thrown out

The two brothers sit, as children.

HANNAH *hugs and kisses them as she goes up to the stage and sings the song.*

“YOU ARE MY HONEYSUCKLE, I AM THE BEE”.

To much audience appreciation and the boys’ delight.

Until she is afflicted by laryngitis and unable to continue.

The cast becomes the unforgiving audience members and hiss and boo, laughing at her.

HANNAH *is distraught, stumbles and is pulled off by the MC.*
CHARLIE *goes on and sings her song, as a five-year-old. He does well. The “audience” is delighted and coins are thrust into his hands.*

CHARLIE That was her last time on stage. And my first

CHAPLIN *moves to CHARLIE and they continue the conceit of being able to talk to each other.*

CHAPLIN You were just five years old. Syd, nine...

Scene 3

Their attic room.

SYDNEY What's the matter, Ma?

HANNAH I've got a terrible headache. We'll have to move...can't afford this place...we'll find a nice, cosy room, just the three of us... I've got my sewing machine...there's lots of costumes people need running up for the halls...

(She parodies)

Oh I need feathers from the tip of my head to tip of my...
(she wiggles her backside)

The boys laugh.

And buttons and bows and furbelows

She wiggles and they copy her, laughing.

CHAPLIN *moves.*

CHAPLIN She would sit for hours at a window looking down at the people in the street. It was through watching her that you learned how to study people, how to express emotion with your hands and face

CHARLIE *mimes and postures.*

HANNAH *(doing all the actions)* There comes Bill Smith. He's dragging his feet and his shoes are polished

She does the actions, polishing vigorously.

He looks mad. I'll wager he's had a fight with his wife and come off without his breakfast. Sure enough there he goes into the bakeshop for a bun and coffee!

The boys mime Bill Smith.

The boys laugh.

HANNAH *tries to sing. She can't.*

Their laughter fades.

I lost my voice

CHARLIE We'll find it Ma

They search.

(to **CHAPLIN**) Lost for all time

CHAPLIN I know. Things went from bad to worse. From three comfortable rooms you moved into two, then one...always hungry...

HANNAH *reels from the pain in her head, collapses and is taken away by two men.*

SYDNEY Where are you taking her?

MAN 1 Lambeth Infirmary, son. And you two are for the workhouse

SYDNEY It's okay Charlie we'll be together...

MAN 2 You – with the big boys. Little'un – with the infants...

They are taken opposite ways.

CHARLIE Sydney! Don't leave me all alone...

Scene 4

In the asylum.

CHAPLIN Poor Hannah. In and out of asylums, her mind faltering, then mending... She retrieved her boys, moving from one back room to another, like a game of draughts, the last move always back to the workhouse before starting again

One time, when she was particularly well, we...they...moved to a room at three Pownall Terrace in the Kennington Road

HANNAH *returns to the attic smiling with a big bag, and the boys run to greet her.*

HANNAH I hope you've remembered your manners and your good talking!

CHAPLIN Sheep were driven daily past Pownall Terrace on their way to a nearby slaughterhouse. One of them escaped running pell-mell among the crowds in the street

The boys are killing themselves laughing, watching the chaos.

SYDNEY They've caught it!

CHARLIE Caught it!

They cheer.

SYDNEY Off to the slaughterhouse

CHARLIE *(realising, weeping, running to HANNAH)* They're going to kill it! They're going to kill it...

She hugs him.

HANNAH You see how it is, Charlie. Laughter and sorrow go hand in hand

CHAPLIN The tragic and the comic. Those words of my mother's...
I hear them as clear now as I did all those years ago. All my films came from those words of my mother's

HANNAH Come on, boys...look what I've got

SYDNEY Where'd you get them?

HANNAH There they were, lying on the cobbles, waiting for cockney feet...oh la

She is a little strange and they look at each other.

She gets clogs out of her bag and they dance the clogs.

Enter **JOHN WILLIE JACKSON.**

JWJ Well now, well now you, young fella me lad, you heard of the Eight Lancashire Lads? The clog-dancing troupe. John Willie Jackson at your command...

HANNAH Eight Lancashire Lads?

JWJ Well I've only got seven as one of 'em's deserted, and all me posters say eight. Hundreds of posters I've got. Don't want to waste 'em so I need another lad

HANNAH They're cockney lads. Nicely spoken mind

JWJ Your lad here will be just fine – after intense rehearsing you understand. Music halls all round the country, full board and lodging and half a crown wages paid direct to you, ma'am

HANNAH What about Sydney?

SYDNEY I'm going to be an actor, Ma. Going round all the theatrical agencies. Going to follow in your footsteps, and father's

HANNAH He could sing a song on a stage all right, but he drank himself to death, Sydney. *(She raises her finger to both of them)* Lay off the booze, and watch how you talk. Doesn't matter where you come from...

The Lancashire Lads enter and clog dance to music. (Costume of blouse, knickerbockers, lace collar and red clogs.)

Scene 5

CHAPLIN Even to a ten-year-old in a troupe of clog dancers, the music halls of those times provided an incomparable schooling in method, technique and discipline. A music hall act had to seize and hold its audience, make its mark within a very limited time – five minutes...the audience was not indulgent and the competition was relentless – Sarah Bernhardt might find herself following Lockhart's elephants on the bill. You had to learn the secrets of attack and structure, the need to give the act a crescendo – a beginning, a middle, and a smashing exit – to grab the applause. You had to command every sort of audience from a lethargic Monday first house to the Saturday rowdies

Fred Karno of course was the king of music hall knockabout comedy

KARNO Custard pies and buckets of whitewash, trick cyclists and spinning plates, high wires and wooden stilts, spinning clubs and fire torches are always on the bill. Drunks

He points at them and they do drunks.

I've got twenty troupes touring all over England and America. I can spot a good 'un a mile off. How much am I paying you?

SYDNEY Four pounds a week

My brother Charlie has been on the halls since he was this high. I need a plumber's helper in my sketch – you know where he knocks the nail through a wall into a water pipe?

KARNO Where's the other one gone?

SYDNEY Gone

KARNO Gone! When anyone leaves this company, it's like taking a screw out of a very delicate piece of machinery. You do not be *gone!*

SYDNEY He's gone. See Charlie, Mr Karno

KARNO *sees* **CHARLIE.**

You look undernourished. How old are you?

CHARLIE Seventeen

KARNO Never

CHARLIE It's a question of make-up, Mr Karno

Circus scene with as many acts as possible ensues.

KARNO All right. I'm from humble beginnings meself. Give you a trial, on account of Syd here. I want comedy – that comes from–

SYDNEY Perfect timing

KARNO And the unexpected. Keep it wistful. When you knock a man down, kiss him on the head. If you hit someone hard, just look sorry for a few minutes. That makes the action funnier. You can come on with Harry Weldon in The Football Match. You enter as the villain to bribe Harry, the star goalkeeper, into throwing the game...

HARRY WELDON All those ruddy extra rehearsals cos of this new fella

KARNO The golf will have to wait, Harry

HARRY WELDON *shakes his head crossly.*

SYDNEY Touchy is Harry. Top of the bill and jealous of anybody new who might want to topple him

CHARLIE I don't want to topple him, just learn...

Sketch. The actors becoming audience.

CHARLIE *enters threateningly, his back to the audience. CHARLIE has reddened his nose and stuck a moustache on. He turns with great unction, his nose dominating. Gusts of laughter from the audience. He does a comedy routine. He loses a button and his pants fall down.*

Audience is ribald.

Looking for the button, he picks something up and throws it away with a grimace.

Confounded rabbits

Audience roars.

WELDON *waiting to come on can't understand the laughter.*
CHARLIE *is supposed to feed him, the principal comedian.*
He comes on to re-establish dominance and CHARLIE grabs him
ad-libbing.

Quick! I'm undone! A pin!

More laughter.

HARRY WELDON *and CHARLIE with KARNO.*

HARRY WELDON We didn't rehearse any of that. What the devil's going on?

KARNO He made them laugh

CHARLIE He's jealous

HARRY WELDON I have more talent in my arse than you have in your whole body!

CHARLIE That's where your talent lies!

Exit HARRY WELDON.

CHAPLIN You had a big mouth Charlie

CHARLIE And you never let me speak! The Little Tramp was silent all his life

CHAPLIN No, you spoke the truth. In the human heart, for some reason or other, there is love of truth. Even in slapstick comedy, it is the truth of the situation that makes people laugh. The whole world understands when they watch your face, look into your eyes, see your grin. They understand that in China and Ceylon. Everywhere in the world, they see the truth that words would destroy...

Scene 6

CHARLIE and SYDNEY *go to see HANNAH. She is in the asylum.*

SYDNEY Charlie and I are sharing a bill together

HANNAH Don't fall in the river, son

SYDNEY What?

HANNAH The river Jordan

CHARLIE Living together now in Brixton

HANNAH They won't let me out of here. The river's too deep. No!
No! Don't cross

They turn to leave.

If you'd made that cup of tea for me, Charlie, it would have all
been different

They leave her.

CHARLIE What cup of tea?

SYDNEY We couldn't look after her, Charlie...

CHARLIE But...

SYDNEY She's ill

CHAPLIN *(to us)* What cup of tea?

Scene 7

A girl is dancing. The melancholy CHARLIE has fallen for the fifteen-year-old HETTY KELLY.

CHARLIE Hetty Kelly, you are the most beautiful dancer in the whole of London

HETTY I'm... I'm training you know. I'm not a dancer yet

CHARLIE Can I walk you home? Can I meet you tomorrow? Will you meet me on Sunday?

HETTY I...yes

They walk. He makes her laugh with his mimed antics.

CHARLIE How much do you love me?

HETTY I'm too young for love

CHARLIE No you're not

HETTY Fifteen

CHARLIE I love you

HETTY My mother says...

CHARLIE Do you love me?

HETTY I...

CHARLIE Mothers can make you sad

HETTY She says that I ...that we...

CHARLIE You see

HETTY That you should stop...seeing me

CHARLIE I love you...you are my honeysuckle

HETTY I don't know if we're in love

CHARLIE I do

HETTY Please...

Suddenly.

CHARLIE We must part and never see each other again?

She doesn't know what else to say.

HETTY Yes

*She goes, touching **CHAPLIN** briefly on her way.*

CHAPLIN You loved and lost

CHARLIE (*whispers*) My first love. Sometimes I think I look for her
in every girl I meet

But I had my violin...

CHARLIE *always has his violin.*

Scene 8

The guys and gals embark for America, singing a riff:

All aboard the SS Cairnrona to cross the Atlantic. We're taking A Night in an English Music Hall all around America – Winnipeg and Chicago, Portland and San Francisco, Cleveland and Kansas City

CHAPLIN (to **CHARLIE**) 1910. You're twenty one now

KARNO Old enough and big enough and clever enough for anything!

CHAPLIN And from coast to coast, the Inebriated Swell had them laughing in the aisles of America

CHARLIE *dons the askew winged collar and red cheeks of the inebriate.*

CHARLIE (to **CHAPLIN**) I loved America. When the tour ended in 1912 and I came back to England, Syd had married and I had no home. After the United States, England seemed small and tight and dismal. I was happy when Karno sent me back for a second tour

CHAPLIN Top billing

CHARLIE Yes

He starts to perform the drunk.

CHAPLIN Unanimously praised by the press

CHARLIE Yes

Continues performing.

CHAPLIN And seen in New York by Mack Sennett. With the creation of the Keystone Cops in 1912 he might well be said to have created American comedy. And he wanted you...

CHARLIE From Karno to Keystone! My final performance on stage was at Kansas City on 28 November 1913