

You Oughta Be in Pictures – Part 1

By **TheSpiralledEye**

A struggling actor during the Hollywood Golden Age makes a devils bargain to be turned into a woman and decides to use the casting couch to become a famous star.

Part 1

1937 – Hollywood, California

Benjamin knew breaking into the technician area at the studio was a risk, but he had to know, he had to see the screentest of the man who had beaten him out for the lead in yet another film. Ben had always known he was destined to work in showbusiness; his name rolled off the tongue and straight onto the silver screen, Benjamin Brennan. It was perfect. So many times growing up he had used his job as a theatre gopher to watch plays and later on, films; imagining the day his face would be the one projected up for the whole world to see. Never again would he be forced to sweep up garbage or be looked down upon by all those rich folk in their designer clothing. No, he would be the one walking the red carpet, with millions of fans pushing forward for his autograph.

He'd started auditioning as soon as he was old enough, sure his big break was right around the corner. Yet here he was, five years in, halfway to thirty and still he had nothing but a handful of uncredited extra roles behind him. His biggest role had been as a waiter serving drinks for Humphrey Bogart in a small picture; his one spoken line in film being "Here you are, sir.". It was certainly no legacy.

He slunk into the open technician bay, it was set up like a tiny theatre so that directors and producers could watch the short screen tests actors performed before they decided who to cast. He sat in the editing booth and sifting through the reels of screen tests and came across his own. It sat near the bottom, forgotten and he almost growled. He slipped the reel on the projector and watched as his face appeared and Ben beamed; his line reads were good, his expressions passionate, how on earth had he been passed up for this flick? With his strong jaw and dark hair, he was perfect leading man for a swashbuckling pirate adventure. He rifled through the reels again, finding the one labelled Harold Firming, the man who had somehow gotten the role he was destined for. He set up the film, ready to sneer at the director's obvious bad taste only to feel his jaw drop and his blood run cold. These were just simple tests, a few line reads, a couple of gestures, just to give the directors and producers a taste of what you were capable of and if you were right for the part. Yet Harold had blown him out of the water. He was strong, authoritative and for a few split seconds, Ben even forgot he was watching an audition tape.

Ben's hand curled into a fist in fury; he'd been working towards becoming a star ever since he was a child and here was Harold with all the talent! The injustice of it infuriated him. Curious, he rifled through more tapes, finding the one label Jenny Lake; he'd never heard of her before but somehow, she'd been chosen over much bigger, more bankable stars to make this film her debut. Watching her screentest he was baffled, she was...okay. Nowhere near as good as some of the more

experience actresses he knew auditioned. So why was she chosen while his comparable performance was once again shoved aside. He was so distracted he didn't even notice the door opening till a voice yelled out.

"What the hell are you doing back here?"

Ben spun in his chair, coming face to face with the worst possible person to have caught him; Frank Gordon; The very director he had been hoping to impress.

"I just wanted to watch my reel." Ben justified, "See how I could...improve! Yes, I wanted to see what I was doing wrong."

"What you were doing wrong was sneaking into a restricted area." Frank scowled, "Now get out of here before I call the police and if I find you've taken anything!"

"Really Frank I-"

"That's Mr. Gordon to you. I don't make a habit of going by my first name to strangers."

Ben's heart fell; he'd auditioned for Frank Gordon's films over a dozen times in the past two years alone and somehow, he still didn't recognise him. He searched the man's eyes for any sense of recognition, even if it was tinted with hate but to his dismay, all he saw was a man wanted him gone and would likely dismiss him out of hand the instant he left. Face erased from his memory just like every other meeting they'd had.

With slumped shoulders he walked out of the booth only to flinch as Frank yelled for security anyway. He bolted, disappearing down the alley between lots; if he got tossed out by security, they'd never let him audition again! Luckily, after almost five years of coming to Silver Studios daily, he knew the lots inside and out and easily ducked through the various outdoor sets without the guards spotting so much as his shoe. When the torches and voices faded, he sighed, clambering out from behind a large fake tree and kicking a loose stone in frustration; it wasn't his fault his talent was lacking! If they'd just give him a shot, he'd be paired up with one of those fancy acting coaches and within months he'd be the next Douglas Fairbanks. He'd already drained most of his savings attending the acting classes available to the masses and clearly, that had done jack squat.

He looked up at the large poster for the studio's latest blockbuster; a blonde bombshell smiling down at him with heavy lidded eyes. He laughed bitterly; he'd watched the flick; it was good but the main actress was average at best. That didn't stop people flocking to see her though, all dressed up in a fancy silk dress for half the run time. It occurred to him that Miss Lake had likely jumped on the casting couch to gain her position in the film with Harold, like almost all of them did.

"If I could just sleep with some suit and get a movie contract in return, I'd be a major star by now." He muttered to himself bitterly, walking along the set, "If God had made me a pretty blonde all my problems would be fixed."

"Is that so?"

The voice caught him off guard and he spun to find a man in a fine tailor suit standing just behind him in the middle of the set. He regarded Ben with a sly grin and as he tilted his head in the moonlight Ben realised there were two red horns pushing through his dark hair.

"Where the hell did you come from?"

"Hell indeed." The man chuckled, "You should know, you summoned me here."

"Summoned...?"

"The crossroad?" The man snickered glancing down at his feet.

Ben looked around, the set indeed was one of a crossroad, probably for some great southern gothic film but it only ran a few feet in each direction.

"All I need is the roads," The man added, "Never said they had to be real."

Ben actually laughed for a moment; whoever this guy was, he was a pretty good actor. He'd heard whispers of this new technique called 'method acting' where people embody their characters both on set and off, this guy was clearly taking that to the next level. But, the thought occurred, if this man was still here in full costume, perhaps a few producers were as well, this could be his shot to prove himself a flexible and talent actor!

"So, you're the Devil then?" Ben smiled, "Here to offer me a deal at the crossroads?"

"Now you're catching on." The Devil beamed, "Now, I hear you wished you could be a pretty blonde?"

“Oh yeah,” Ben nodded, “Bombshells are all the rage and then, I could easily sleep my way to the top like they all did.”

“Interesting idea...” The Devil mused, “You know, I think that could be fun.”

“In exchange for my immortal soul?” Ben added wryly, “Oh what to do...”

“I have more souls than I know what to do with.” The Devil sighed, “How about this, I make your wish come true, but if you’re not the number one starlet in the studio rankings one year from now, I change you back and the whole world will mysteriously find out you were a cross dresser the whole time and there will be nothing you can do to hide from the press hounding and humiliating you for the rest of your life.”

The grin on the man’s face seemed impossibly wide and to be honest, pretty intimidating. Idly, Ben wondered if when they were done with this little scene if the guy would break character and give him a few pointers. He pretended to think about the deal for a moment, trying his best to look conflicted before he gave the obvious answer.

“You have a deal, Devil.” He thrust out his hand and the other man snapped it up instantly, his nails were sharp against Ben’s skin and he couldn’t help but wince as they dug into the back of his hand slightly.

“A bargain is struck.” The Devil smiled, “See you in one year.”

Then, to Ben’s great shock, he vanished. No flash of light, no smoke, simply vanished into thin air. He blinked a few times; looking around hurriedly to find no sign that anybody had ever been there at all. Had he really just imagined the entire conversation? No, he couldn’t have because there in the dirt in front of him were two footprints. The soles most definitely not his own. Then Ben noticed something else strange, they were the only two footprints. There were no tracks in the dirt leading to or from them, even if the man had jumped to that position, he would have left some other sign nearby.

Could he really have been...? No, that was foolish, Ben shook such ideas from his head and made for the side exit before security could double back. It was the stress of yet another rejection getting to him, that was all. This would all seem like a funny story in the morning, he mentally reminded himself to tuck the memory away as a fun anecdote to tell during interviews one day. He pushed open the door and paused; he was heading for one of the side exits to the lot yet somehow, while caught up in his own thoughts he’d ended up in the costume department. Even stranger, with all the props and expensive outfits stored here, normally it was locked and guarded at all times. How

had he not only managed to open the door and get inside, but do it without being noticed without even trying? Ben turned around, he'd been in enough trouble tonight, but instead of walking out the door, he closed it. As if pulled by invisible strings he began walking the racks, fingers brushing across a dozen different fabrics like a fussy shopping at a department store. What was he doing? Why were his feet moving against his will? If he got caught here there is no way he would be able to convince them he wasn't trying to steal something.

"Turn. Around." He ordered through grit teeth; his feet did not listen.

He reached the back of the room in question; a number of vanities were set up rimmed with little lights; the make up department. He'd walked past stars getting their hair and costumes touched up here a dozen times and ached with jealousy. He turned sharply, enough to make him give a yelp of shock as his hands dove into the clothing rack; he felt like a puppet, being pulled on invisible strings. Was he having a stress induced mental break? Or...surely that man at the crossroad wasn't really the devil, surely? But what else could explain the fact that his limbs were moving of their own volition, picking up a backless ivory cocktail dress with a halter style bodice and slit skirt. There was a stiff breeze and he closed his eyes against the sting of wind only to blink them open and find he was naked!

"No way." He whispered, watching with horror and fascination as his limbs began to move, slipping the dress to the floor before stepping inside, pulling the soft reylon fabric up his body before clicking the hooks closed behind his back.

Ben's face burned with shame, if anybody walked in and saw him he was finished; nobody wants a leading man who was secretly a sissy. He didn't like wearing dresses, so why couldn't he stop himself! It didn't help that the dress was clearly built for a woman with a full figure, where he was straight and narrow. The chest sagged empty, his hips and torso stretching and bunching the material at the torso unflatteringly. That didn't stop whatever force was controlling him though, he walked through the racks, finding a pair of matching white pumps that were several sizes too small and forcing his feet into them.

Ben winced as he walked, the straps far too tight around his toes as he was puppeteered into one of the make up chairs. Before him sat tubes and powders of a variety of colours, he could see himself perfectly lit in the ring of lights surrounding the mirror.

"Oh no, please not that."

His hands reached for the powder, dusting himself with it before reaching for a tube of liberty red lipstick. He winced before his face smoothed against his will, lips pouted as he was forced to paint them. He'd never applied make up before, of course not, yet his hands seemed to know exactly what to do, brushing out his eyelashes and smoothing over his cheekbones. He looked ridiculous with this soft, feminine make up on his angular jaw. His facial hair itched as concealers was pressed into it.

When the make over was finally completed his hands came to sit in his lap and he desperately wished he could control his own body, run to the bathroom and watch all this off. Being caught running naked through the studio lot would be easier to recover from than anybody finding him fully cross dressed here.

“Almost done...”

The voice echoed from nowhere, seemingly in all directions at once. Ben didn't have time to question it before he felt his eyes widening, glued to the reflection in the mirror. Slowly but surely the person in that reflection was changing; their lips plumping to perfectly fit the red lips, eyes narrowing and lashes lengthening as the square jaw turned round and dark hair turned blonde. He wanted to scream, to jump back, but he was frozen; forced to watch as slowly his shoulders sloped and the cups of his dress steadily filled out. The only sign of panic were in his bright green eyes, still wide with horror as the man in the mirror became unrecognisable.

He could feel himself rise in the chair ever so slightly as his ass filled, the bodice becoming a perfect fit as his stomach smoothed over and, in his lap, he felt the slightly press of sharp nails pushing into his palms. Then, all at once, he was free. Stumbling back from the table gasping for breath, feeling his chest heave with the extra weight of two perky breasts. In a panic he twisted and turned, white dress flaring as he tried to look at himself. Blonde hair tickled at his back, somehow having grown halfway down there without his noticing.

“This can't be happening...” The voice that came from his mouth was breathy and high, he almost gagged in shock.

That deal...it had been real! Like cold water dread soaked through him to the core; not only was he now a woman but if that demon was to be believed, he had a year to become the number one starlet in Hollywood! Living as a woman wasn't ideal but it would be better than spending the rest of his life emasculated and hunted by the press.

Ben forced himself to stand stock still and close his eyes, breathing deeply; now was not the time to panic. Maybe, if he just calmed himself down, he'd open his eyes and this will all have been some strange dream. He'd wake up in his own bed to a phone call from the Silver Studios executives saying he got the lead in the pirate film and all would be well. He knew, even before he cracked open an eyelid that would not be the case. His curvaceous, ivory clad body greeted him and he bit his lip. What was he supposed to do?

“Hey, what are you doing in here?”

For the second time in a single hour, Ben whirled around to see Frank Gordon, only this time, he didn't look angry. Instead, he was peering at him with a curious look on his face, a slight smile tugging at his lips. Ben watched as the man's eyes danced up and down the length of his body and

he had to work very hard to keep a smirk off his face. Surely, he'd never been that transparent with a lady.

"Good luck." Came that echoing voice, though judging from Frank's lack of reaction Ben assumed only he could hear it. "See you in a year."

Ben put on his best flustered look, not difficult as he was still dazed from the sudden change, and batted his eyes at Frank.

"I'm so sorry." He sighed, "I just arrived in Hollywood tonight and...I couldn't resist coming to the studio to look around. I didn't mean to break in I just wanted to see where the magic happened."

The words were almost saccharine and to his delight, Frank seemed to be eating them up. He could almost feel the directors pride swelling when he added.

"Oh, my goodness, You're Frank Gordon! The director!" Ben took a step forward, "It's such an honour to meet you Mr. Gordon."

"Oh please, call me Frank. Everybody does."

The bastard. Ben bit his tongue to keep the spiteful comment from escaping. If Frank had caught him in here before this change he'd be out on his ass by now; but since he was now in possession of a pair of tits, it seemed he was in the clear.

"But, I'd better escort you off the premises miss, we can't have you wandering around alone."

"Why, thank you. I'd hate to cause you any trouble, Frank."

Ben took back what he thought about his acting skills earlier, he was superb. If nothing else, at least he might actually get to show the world what he was made of in this body. Still, as Frank offered his arm in a gentlemanly fashion, Ben couldn't help but feel awkward taking it. Walking arm in arm with another man felt so wrong. When he'd made that off the cuff wish, he'd not really thought through what it would mean to actually jump on the casting couch. Hopefully, he wouldn't have to. This body was enough to get him actually noticed and if Frank's demeanour was anything to go by, he was a much better actor than he'd ever realised.

“What’s your name miss?” Frank asked, tightening his hold on Ben’s arm just a tad.

Crap. He hadn’t had the chance to pick one out yet, and a star’s name was so important. Thinking quickly, he giggled.

“Oh, I don’t have one yet. Studios always rename their stars anyway; I discarded my old name in favour of the one yet to be assigned.”

The response was the perfect mix of confidence, wit and mysterious and Ben watched with glee as Frank’s eyebrows raised into his hairline, impressed. They reached the gate quickly taking the main roads and Ben slipped out from the directors’ grip, giving him a flirtatious smile and a wink, this was actually pretty fun, maybe that method acting schtick actually had some merit.

“I’m sure we’ll be seeing each other around, Frank.” He waved, turning and walking away, adding a little extra swing to his hips as he went and biting his lip to keep the laughter at bay.

He managed to get a full block before it finally burst you and he doubled over in a side street practically busting a gut. Fuelled by the pent up emotion and shock from the transformation, it took him almost a full minute to get himself back under control. That had been...so easy! In two minutes as a woman, he’d made a better impression on a director than five years of auditions. This was going to be easy from here on in. Hell, he wasn’t going to even need the casting couch. He’d grown up watching those sensual femme fatales on the big screen, he knew every play needed to keep those men wrapped around his finger. He’d go into the studio tomorrow, find the listing for the next lot of films ready to audition for and have the men fighting over which one of them got him. Fuck Harold Firming, Jenny Lake and their damn pirate film; nobody would even remember it when his screen debut happened the same year.

The only thing, he realised as he walked back to his little apartment, was a name. That line had worked on Frank but he couldn’t very well go auditioning without a name to go with his new pretty face. The great stars of the silent era flicked through his mind one by one, it would be easy to take one of their names, or a variation but that wasn’t right. He needed something that was all his own; when he hit it big, he didn’t want any accusations that he rode on the coattails of a famous name. The night breeze blew his long hair around his bare shoulders and he watched as the golden threads danced.

“Gold...” He whispered, the colour of victory, of class, of wealth...

A smile pulled at his lips as he turned and announced to the empty street:

“Just you wait world, Taylor Goldwyn is about to take the stage!”