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Family Plays

DON'T PRINT THAT!

OR, TEN NIGHTS IN A NEWSROOM

Melodrama by

Eddie Cope



DON'T PRINT THAT!

OR, TEN NIGHTS IN A NEWSROOM

"America's first newspaper comedy melodrama." (The *Southwest Star*, Houston, Texas.)

"Fast-moving and fun-filled ... A real romp-and-stomp boo-and-hisser—with plenty of big yuks." (Media comments when *Don't Print That! Or, Ten Nights in a Newsroom* opened at Theatre Southwest in Houston, Texas.)

"A fine entertainment ... enthusiastic audience ... a marvelous hissable villain." (Sue Dauphin, KUHF Radio)

"The fun appeal for audiences lingers on ... an ever-thickening plot." (Houston Post)

Melodrama. By **Eddie Cope**. Cast: 4m., 6w., extras. Publisher Lew Grantstedder tries to keep his town honest and respectable. Mayor Pizor is a crook. On Lew's side are his beautiful daughter, Loria, and his printer, who is in love with Loria. Helping the mayor in his attempt to ruin the newspaper are Hannah and her uninhibited demonstrators who go so far as to toss Lew in a blanket. With strong, currently topical melodramatic action, the play is rampant with fun and suspense for cast, crew and audience. For all groups and ages. Designed especially for theatre groups that like to fill their bank vaults with the income from an annual melodrama, *Don't Print That! Or, Ten Nights in a Newsroom* is inexpensive to produce, easy to rehearse and stage, and loaded with fun for the cast and audience. Set: *small-town newspaper office*. Time: *today*. Approximate running time: 60 to 75 minutes. Code: DE2.

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www.FamilyPlays.com

ISBN-10 0-88680-042-0
ISBN-13 978-0-88680-042-0



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Don't Print That!

Or, Ten Nights in a Newsroom

DON'T PRINT THAT!

Or, Ten Nights in a Newsroom

A Three-Act Melodrama

By

Eddie Cope

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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(DON'T PRINT THAT!)

ISBN: 978-0-88680-042-0

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All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author(s) of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author(s) *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author(s), if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

Dedicated
to the Memory of
RICHARD CRANE
an actor we will
all miss very much

DON'T PRINT THAT!

This script is based on a production by Theatre Southwest in Houston, Texas, in the summer of 1982, under the direction of Bonnie McFerren, with the following cast:

Lew Grantstedder	Joe Fosco
Hannah Crockett	Betty Wilson
Mrs. Grantstedder	Laura Koerper
Loria Grantstedder	Marri Lewis
Joe "Clean Copy" Stoneman	Bret Custer
Cornelius Buttress	Richard Crane
Peyton P. Pyzor	Ronald W. Kirshy
Mrs. Pyzor	Ellen Swenson
Zella Pyzor.	Nancy Ford
Trixie La Rue.	Salle Ellis
Demonstrators*	John Mellor, Toby Blunt, Mary Blunt, Stephanie Howard

★

A slightly different version of the play was presented at Gilruth Center Dinner Theatre at NASA, Houston, Texas, in the summer of 1982 by Nipper's Number One Plays & Players, under the direction of Bennie Nipper, with the following cast:

Lew Grantstedder	John McVeigh
Hank Crockett	Oscar Nipper
Mrs. Grantstedder	Sharon Maaz
Loria Grantstedder	Fayette Polk
Joe "Clean Copy" Stoneman	Bill Carlton
Cornelius Buttress	Russel Polk
Peyton P. Pyzor	Paul Maaz
Zella Pyzor.	Nancy Thrailkill
Mrs. Pyzor	Debbie Carlton
Trixie La Rue.	Dorothy Morgan
Demonstrators*	Rick Wiseman, Danny Fiddick, Clint Cole, Margie Bennett

*Demonstrators may be male or female

★

Place: A small-town newspaper office

Time: 1890

Synopsis

ACT I: Morning

ACT II: A moment later

ACT III: Two hours later

ABOUT THE PLAY

“America’s first newspaper comedy melodrama” is what the *Southwest Star* called *Don’t Print That!* That makes it a melodrama with a difference.

In the true spirit of the Gay Nineties melodrama, there is a pure and beautiful heroine, a handsome, strong, true-blue hero, and a deliciously ugly and dastardly villain. What’s new about *this* melodrama is its setting, the “truth-at-all-costs” tradition of the strong-hearted, dedicated newspaper man, the “cru-el Blanket Torture,” and many more features which you will discover as you read the play.

Playwright Eddie Cope, author of *Agatha Christie Made Me Do It* and other popular plays, designed this one especially for groups that like to fill their bank vaults with the income from an annual melodrama. *Don’t Print That!* is inexpensive to produce, easy to rehearse and stage, and so much fun for the cast and audience.

Here are some comments from the media:

“Fast-moving and fun-filled”—*Southwest Advertiser*

“A real romp-and-stomp boo-and-hisser . . . with plenty of big yuks”
—*Montrose Voice*

“The fun appeal for audiences lingers on . . . an ever-thickening plot”
—*Houston Post*

“Cope pits an evil mayor against a crusading editor”—*Houston City Magazine*

“A fine entertainment . . . enthusiastic audience . . . a marvelously hissable villain”—*Sue Dauphin, KUHF Radio*

PRODUCTION NOTES

Properties

ACT I

Preset on Editor's desk: writing paper and quill pen; much clutter
 Preset on Loria's desk: writing paper and lavender quill pen; otherwise neat
 Signs—carried by Demonstrators (see text)
 Whistle on neck chain—Hannah
 Brick—foam rubber or styrofoam (available at theatre supply houses or fun shops)
 Note—attached to brick with rubber band
 Legal document—Banker
 Small abacus—Banker
 Copy of newspaper—Mayor
 Coffee can—Loria
 Pocket watch—Joe
 Lorgnette—Mrs. Pyzor
 Ink-stained towel—Zella

ACT II

Shoe heel—Mrs. Pyzor
 Real brick (same size and color as brick used in Act I)—Mrs. Pyzor
 Icebag—Editor
 Unlit torches—Demonstrators
 Printing press belt—Loria (belt is 4" to 5" wide and 12' long, made of several layers of stiff cloth; e.g., ducking)
 Blanket—Hannah
 Red fire extinguisher—Joe
 Handgun—Mayor

ACT III

Preset near door Left: old-fashioned suitcases, handbags, cardboard boxes
 Straw suitcase—Joe
 Covered dish—Trixie
 Covered dish—Banker
 Rolling pin—Mrs. Pyzor
 Police whistle—Mayor
 Guns—Demonstrators
 Coil of rope—Hannah

Costumes and Characterization

MAYOR PYZOR, MRS. PYZOR, and ZELLA all wear black (they're the villains), including black gloves. Mrs. Pyzor carries a large purse. Mrs. Pyzor is very snobbish, Zella has an unpleasant giggle, and the Mayor sneers a lot.

The EDITOR wears green eyeshade and a neat light-colored suit.

JOE wears ink-stained pants, shirt, apron; square cap made of folded newspaper; hands and face ink smudged. He will later change to a neat suit, stiff straw hat, and clean hands and face. He is a true-blue hero, with noble gestures.

MRS. GRANTSTEDDER wears a long, unfashionable dress. Later, she will put on a "funny" hat. She is the editor's loyal wife.

LORIA, the Grantstедders' beautiful daughter, wears a beautiful dress of lavender hue with a pastel-colored sash. Later, she will put on an attractive bonnet and shawl.

The **BANKER** wears a gray cutaway coat, gray-and-white striped pants, and fashionable gray "bowler" hat. He is honest but weak.

TRIXIE, the sympathetic owner of a lowly dancehall, is dressed like a Gold Rush saloon entertainer. Although in her forties, she is still attractive in face and figure.

HANNAH wears mannish clothing with boots. She is loud, aggressive, and fearless.

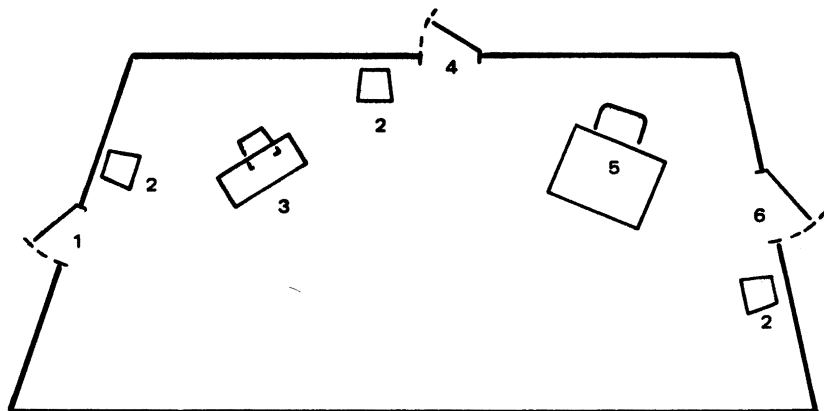
The **DEMONSTRATORS**, who may be male or female, wear nondescript old-fashioned clothing.

Sound and Special Effects

When the foam rubber brick hits the Editor and then the floor in Act I, a sound is desirable, but it does not have to be authentic. A rim-shot, woodblock, or bass drum are some of the possibilities.

Whenever the printing press is operating, a low rumbling sound can be heard offstage—perhaps a thump, thump, thump.

The Set



Scale: 1/8" = 1'

1—Door Right to living quarters (may have a "Private" sign above it)

2—Odd chairs or benches, ad lib

3—Dainty lavender desk

4—Door to press room (may have a "Press Room" sign above it)

5—Ramshackle, cluttered editor's desk

6—Door Left, to street

Wastebaskets (overflowing), "old-timey" pictures and a framed front page of an 1890's newspaper, and other trim props may be added as desired.

Advertising and Programs

Designing posters and programs for an old-fashioned melodrama can be as much fun as staging the play. Be sure to use melodramatic slogans like "SEE! Honest Reporters at Work"; "SEE! Mayhem in the Print Shop"; "SEE! Trickery in the News Room"; "SEE! A Poor Mother's Anguish"; "Newspaper Exposes Mayor"; "Mayor Attacks Newspaper"; "Angry Mob on the Loose"; "Cru-el Blanket Torture"; "Every Moment . . . A Thrill . . . A Laugh . . . A Tear"

DON'T PRINT THAT!

By Eddie Cope

ACT I

[The scene is a small-town newspaper office. The editor's battered, cluttered desk is at Up Left and the society editor's dainty, brightly painted desk is at Up Right. A door Up Center leads to the press room. A door at Stage Right opens into the publisher's living quarters. The street door is at Left. Odd chairs and perhaps a bench are against the walls.]

The curtain opens on LEW GRANTSTEDDER sitting at his desk Up Left, writing with pen and ink. He is a frail, elderly man with quiet dignity. He writes a few lines, then reads aloud thoughtfully]

LEW. “. . . and this the Banner-Gazette's third in a series of editorials in which we repeat without fear of successful contradiction, that political corruption at City Hall must be . . .” *[His reading is interrupted when an angry group of townspeople bursts into the office through door Left. They are carrying signs: “Down With the Gazette,” “Bounce the Editor,” “We Hate Newspapers,” “Down With the Editor,” etc.]*

TOWNSPEOPLE. *[Chanting as they march around the office]* Two, Four, Six, Eight; Banner-Gazette Is What We Hate. Two, Four, Six . . . *[HANNAH CROCKETT, the solidly built leader of the demonstrators, blows her whistle which immediately cuts off the chanting. She does not carry a sign]*

HANNAH. Quiet!

LEW. What is the meaning of this intrusion?

HANNAH. You'll get worse than this if you don't shape up.

LEW. Get to the point. I'm very busy this morning.

HANNAH. Do you know who I am?

LEW. Everyone knows you, Hannah Crockett, for the trouble you create.

TOWNSPEOPLE. Yeah!

HANNAH. *[To Lew]* Hear me good, Mr. Editor.

LEW. I hear you *and* your garlic breath. *[He fans himself]*

TOWNSPEOPLE. Yeah!

LEW. Mrs. Crockett, state your business, if any, then take your hoodlums out of my office.

HANNAH. We demand that you cease attacking City Hall in your editorials . . .

LEW. *[Interrupting]* This is my newspaper and I'll continue to exercise freedom of the press as long as there is a breath of life in me. *[Assumes heroic pose]*

HANNAH. Is that your last word?

LEW. Absolutely!

HANNAH. Then all I can say to you, that may be your last word.

LEW. Are you threatening me?

HANNAH. Have you ever heard of the blanket torture?

LEW. *[Terrified]* Oh, no. Please not that. It would prove fatal to me. *[To audience]* I have a strong character, but a weak heart.

TOWNSPEOPLE. Tar and feathers. Tar and feathers. Tar and . . .

HANNAH. *[Blows whistle; shouting ceases]* Hold it! Hold it! Now that the old man knows we mean business, maybe he will change his ways.

TOWNSPEOPLE. Yeah!

HANNAH. Let's get out of this quagmire of dirty journalism. Follow me. *[She exits arrogantly out door Left]*

TOWNSPEOPLE. *[Chanting as they exit]* Two, Four, Six, Eight; Give the Ed-it-tor the Gate. Two, Four . . .

LEW. *[Sits at his desk and resumes writing; he talks as he writes]* "Angry threats of paid demonstrators will not deter the Banner-Gaz . . ."

JOE. *[Enters from Up Center. He is a handsome young man dressed in ink-stained clothes and printer's apron; hands and face are also ink-smudged. On his head is a square cap made from a folded sheet of newspaper]* Pardon me, Mr. Grantstedder.

LEW. Come in, Joe. Did you hear all the excitement?

JOE. When the printing press is running, I can't hear a thing.

LEW. You've done wonders in the print shop.

JOE. Thank you, sir. I owe it all to my graphics course at the orphanage.

LEW. True, true. Now, if you will excuse me, I must get back to my editorial for next week's paper.

JOE. One question, please. Since this is my second day on the job, I would like to know whether it is time for me to put on my reporter's clothes and make my news-gathering rounds.

LEW. By all means, Joe.

JOE. And may I say, sir, that I very much admire your fearless crusade against malfeasance at City Hall?

LEW. You may.

JOE. I very much admire your fearless crusade against malfeasance at City Hall.

LEW. Ah, yes, you are quite literal-minded. You take your work seriously and it is a pleasure to have you on the job, er, jobs.

JOE. Thank you, sir. I look forward to the day when I will earn my reporter's hat and press card.

LEW. *[Strolling around office as he talks]* Always remember, young cub, our free press remains free because a free press seeks out the truth. And, in the final analysis . . . *[When his back is to the open door Left, a brick is thrown in, hitting him in the head, knocking him to the floor. See Production Notes on page 32]*

JOE. Mr. Grantstedder! Are you all right?

LEW. *[Groaning]* Ohhhhhhhh.

JOE. *[Picks up brick]* Wait! There's a note attached.

LEW. Ohhhhhh. Help me. I'm dying.

JOE. *[Runs to door Right and shouts into the Grantstedder apartment]* Mrs. Grantstedder! Miss Grantstedder! He's dying.

[The two ladies hasten into the office. MRS. GRANTSTEDDER is middle-aged, prim, proper and tight-lipped. LORIA is pretty and dainty, about nineteen or twenty years old and is a very dedicated news-person]

MRS. GRANTSTEDDER. Who's dying?

JOE. Some person or persons unknown hit Mr. Grantstedder in the head with a brick.

LORIA. Did it hurt Daddy?

JOE. You'll have to ask him.

LORIA. Oh.

JOE. There was a note attached.

MRS. GRANTSTEDDER. *[Helps Lew to his feet]* Come in the apartment and lie down, Lew.

JOE. Don't you want to hear what the note says?

[MRS. GRANTSTEDDER ignores the question. She exits Right with LEW leaning on her]

LORIA. I do.

JOE. What about your mother?

LORIA. She will be busy nursing father.

JOE. I hope he suffers no adverse affects.

LORIA. *[To audience]* Correction: adverse *effects*. *[To Joe]* What does the note say?

JOE. Oh, yes. *[Reads]* "First warning. Cease the editorial series or you and your newspaper will be destroyed."

LORIA. Who signed it?

JOE. *[Looks at both sides of sheet]* No one.

LORIA. It is proper form to sign all types of so-see-al communication.

JOE. How do you know that?

LORIA. Because I am society editor of the Banner-Gazette. My desk is painted lavender so that I am inspired to write purple prose. *[She gracefully indicates her desk Up Right with a ballet-like sweep of her hand]*

JOE. *[To audience]* I must learn these social graces, otherwise she will think me an ignorant oaf. *[To Loria]* I certainly admire your vast store of so-see-al knowledge.

LORIA. And I admire your hard-working determination to rise to the top of the world of journalism.

JOE. Thank you, Miss Grantstedder, but I am but an orphan . . . a foundling, in fact . . . who is trying to make good in a new job, er, jobs. A lowly cog in the machinery of newsdom. *[Pose]*

LORIA. I do not think of you as "lowly." Because I, too, am an adopted person, and I find, moreover, that I am drawn strangely to you.

JOE. *[To audience]* Little does she suspect that I am secretly in love with her. *[To Loria]* Thank you for saying so, Miss Grantstedder, but I must devote all my attention to my job, er, jobs.

LORIA. Do I understand that you are spurning my unmaidenly forwardness?

JOE. I am honored by your honesty, but my vocation must be served. Please try to understand my situation. *[He exits Up Center trying to hide his true feelings by emotionally biting knuckles]*

LORIA. *[Genuinely touched]* Poor, mixed-up young man. But, I, too must go to work. *[She sits at lavender desk and immediately starts writing with pen and ink speedily]*

[A few moments later, BANKER CORNELIUS BUTTESS enters from Left. He is a middle-aged man, weak but honest; likeable]

BANKER. Good morning, Miss Grantstedder.

LORIA. Good morning, Banker Buttress.

BANKER. Is your father in?

LORIA. Yes, but he is not feeling well.

BANKER. Then may I please speak to your mother?

LORIA. She is nursing my father.

BANKER. Nursing? *[He reacts, as though to shut out a painful old memory]* What is the nature of your father's malaise?

LORIA. His head hurts.

BANKER. *[Innocently]* I suppose when a man is so dedicated to cleaning up the political corruption of a town, he lays himself wide open to the brickbats of the guilty.

LORIA. How did you know?

BANKER. How did I know what?

LORIA. About the brickbat. *[Pause. BANKER looks blank]* Did you bash Daddy's bean with that brutal brick, Banker Buttress? *[LORIA wipes her chin with her hand, because the long alliterative sentence has caused her to drool]*

BANKER. You mean your father was attacked?

LORIA. By a person or persons unknown. *[Shudders]* Forgive me, sir. I am afraid that I am too sensitive to certain words.

BANKER. You are a very intelligent and beautiful young lady ... and a credit to Mr. and Mrs. Grantstedder.

LORIA. Thank you, sir. Is there anything I can do for you?

BANKER. One thing, if you don't mind. *[He takes a legal document out of his inside coat pocket]* You might tell your father that I came to collect the final installment on his printing press loan. It falls due today.

LORIA. How much is the final installment?

BANKER. *[Gets small abacus, then walks around room as he slides the wooden beads and talks]* H'm ... yes. Including interest ... carrying charge ... insurance ... closing costs ... tax ... title ... and license ... H'm ... A nice round figure of \$1,151 and 17 cents.

LORIA. \$1,151 and 17 cents. That does not sound very nice and round to me.

BANKER. *[Apologetically]* I was using bank-talk.

LORIA. I'll see if father can write you a check. *[She starts out Right]*

BANKER. I prefer cash, please. One of the rules of finance.

LORIA. More bank-talk? If you'll excuse me, I'll relay your message. *[She exits Right]*

BANKER. *[To audience]* What a splendid, dutiful daughter. She makes me regret my sordid past even more. Perhaps, I, too, should look in on my friend Grantstedder. *[Exits Right]*

[MAYOR PEYTON P. PYZOR storms into the office from Left, angrily shaking a copy of the Banner-Gazette. He is a mustached, evil-looking man, a hot-tempered bounder, and a complete villain. He wears a black suit, a black cape, a black plug hat, and black gloves which he never removes]

MAYOR. *[To audience]* Curses on this miserable scandal sheet! It is trying to reveal all my clever deals to increase my wife's fortune. I hate this chicken-livered turkey who calls himself editor-publisher of the Banner-Gazette. I must rid myself of him—whatever it takes. If Hannah Crockett and her gang of ruffians fail with their dirty tricks, then I'll have to resort to more drastic means. Grrrrrrrrr!

BANKER. *[Entering from Right, talking over his shoulder]* Of course I won't mind waiting in the news room. *[Sees Mayor]* Good day, Mayor Pyzor.

MAYOR. Don't "good day" me, you sanctimonious old money-bags.

BANKER. Come, come, Your Honor. That is no way to talk to a fellow pillar of society.

MAYOR. You dare call yourself a "pillar." Why . . . you should be pilloried!

BANKER. That does not sound very neighborly.

MAYOR. Who can be neighborly when this paper is filled with slanderous editorials? I could kill the author of such filth.

BANKER. Are you referring to my friend Grantstedder?

MAYOR. I am referring to anyone who writes a tissue *[pronouncing it "tiss-you"]* of lies. *[He shakes newspaper angrily]*

BANKER. Pray do not be angry with one who is just trying to do his job as he sees it.

MAYOR. You defend him only because he owes you money.

BANKER. How dare you impugn my character . . . and his, too. Mr. Grantstedder is the best credit risk in town. Why, just one more payment and his newspaper will be entirely paid for. *[Holds up document]* Here—this mortgage—is proof positive.

MAYOR. Let me see that. *[He snatches paper out of Banker's hand]*

BANKER. Don't grab things from me. *[He snatches paper from Mayor]*

MAYOR. Oh, no, you don't. *[He snatches paper from Banker]*

BANKER. Oh, yes, I do. *[He snatches paper from Mayor. BANKER puts document in his inside coat pocket]* If you touch me again, I'll have you charged with simple assault, you simpleton.

MAYOR. Are you forgetting that I control the Police Department?

BANKER. I have nothing to say.

MAYOR. [*Oily insinuation*] Really? What about your youthful indiscretion . . . when you were a medical student . . . if you know what I mean . . . [*MAYOR rubs hands together*] . . . and I rather think you do . . .

BANKER. [*To audience—frightened and dismayed*] Is it possible this scoundrel knows about the one incident in my life that must never be divulged? [*To Mayor—calm and composed*] I don't know what you're talking about.

MAYOR. I am talking about . . . [*whispers in Banker's ear*] . . . whisper, whisper, whisper . . .

BANKER. [*Crushed*] Then you know. [*MAYOR laughs sneeringly just as LORIA enters from Right, carrying a large coffee can*]

MAYOR. [*Pleasantly*] Why, hello, Miss Grantstedder.

LORIA. Good morning, Mr. Mayor. [*To Banker*] Here is the final payment on the printing press. Now if you will give me the signed papers . . .

MAYOR. [*Interrupting*] Shouldn't this business be transacted at the bank, rather than in this shabby den of yellow journalism? [*He jabs his elbow into Banker's back*]

BANKER. [*Grunts in pain*] Ugh! [*Takes a deep breath and then speaks normally*] Quite right. Let us repair to the bank.

LORIA. If you say so, sir. Here, hold this. [*She gives him the coffee can*] I'll get my bonnet and shawl. [*Exits Right*]

MAYOR. [*Thumping the coffee can*] Is that the final payment?

BANKER. [*Weighing the can in his hand*] H'm, feels like it's four cents short. But I'll count it when I get to my office.

MAYOR. I don't want you to accept it.

BANKER. What!?

MAYOR. You heard right. I don't want you to accept it.

BANKER. Who ever heard of a banker turning down money?

MAYOR. You will do it.

BANKER. I will not do it.

MAYOR. You will do it.

BANKER. I will not do it.

MAYOR. Then I shall divulge your secret.

BANKER. I will do it.

MAYOR. Also!

BANKER. [*Almost afraid to ask*] Also . . . ?

MAYOR. Also, you will make him default on his last payment, so that your bank can foreclose on the Gazette. *[Rubs his hands together as he leers]* Then I shall buy this sorry rag from the bank. Heh-heh-heh . . .

BANKER. But . . . but . . . Mr. Grantstedder is my friend. I cannot treat him that way.

MAYOR. You can and you shall.

BANKER. And if I should refuse to be a party to your disgraceful scheme?

MAYOR. I will ruin you for all time by divulging your . . . heh-heh-heh . . . ignominious secret.

BANKER. You wouldn't dare. It would be your word against mine.

MAYOR. Try me. I might have a witness.

LORIA. *[Entering from Right, wearing bonnet and shawl]* Excuse me for taking so long, gentlemen. Father has had a relapse.

MAYOR. Then perhaps you had better stay with him.

LORIA. Mother's doing very well. Besides, I'm anxious to go to the bank for the completion of the final papers. As soon as father hears that he has paid off everything, he will improve.

MAYOR. There has been a hitch in the negotiations.

LORIA. Will it take long to correct?

BANKER. Er . . . well . . . uh . . .

MAYOR. *[Loudly]* Hours and hours.

BANKER. *[Softly]* Hours and hours.

LORIA. *[Takes coffee can from Banker]* Then let me hold the money until the papers are ready.

BANKER. *[MAYOR jabs Banker in the back. BANKER grunts in pain]* Ugh!

LORIA. Are you all right, sir?

BANKER. Yes. Just a small pain in my backside. *[Breathes deeply]* I must return to my office to do some soul-searching.

MAYOR. And some loan-revising.

BANKER. *[Buries his face in his hands]* And some pencil-sharpening. *[He exits Left, tragically. MAYOR leers evilly at Loria]*

MAYOR. Has anyone ever told you how attractive you are?

LORIA. Not lately. *[Starts for door Right]*

MAYOR. Don't run off angry in the heat of the day, Miss Grantstedder.

LORIA. I am not angry, sir, I must look in on my father, if you will excuse me. *[LORIA exits Right]*

MAYOR. *[To audience, gloating and rubbing hands together]* At last, everything is going as planned. I shall destroy Grantstedder and his sniveling wife . . . I shall have my way with Loria Grantstedder. *[Pause]* And, to cap the climax, I shall take over the management of the Gazette-Banner, and thus assure my permanency in public office! Heh-heh-heh. Peyton P. Pyzor, Publisher and Politician . . . a perfect paragon from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania! *[He pauses to wipe the drooling off his chin, then chuckles hatefully. He sits in editor's chair, swelling with pride]* H'mmmm . . . the editorial seat and me . . . just where I belong . . .

JOE. *[Enters from Up Center. He is cleaned up and neatly dressed in his cub reporter's clothes. He is talking to himself, unaware that anyone is in the office]* Now is the time for my news-gathering rounds. *[Then he notices Mayor]* Oh, I am not alone. Good morning, sir.

MAYOR. Who are you?

JOE. I am new in town, but you look very much like the Mayor.

MAYOR. That's because I *am* Mayor, stupid.

JOE. Pleased to meet you, Mayor Stupid. *[Pause]* I am surprised to see you here.

MAYOR. *[Said with wide-eyed insincerity]* I can't imagine why.

JOE. What I mean is, after Mr. Grantstedder's series of stinging editorials . . .

MAYOR. *[To audience]* Stinking editorials, I call them.

JOE. . . . about . . . well . . . the situation at City Hall.

MAYOR. *[Shrugs unconcernedly]* That's politics. I always say, if you're too thin-skinned, then stay out of public life. What do you always say?

JOE. "Now is the time for my news-gathering rounds."

MAYOR. *[To audience]* How can he go on his rounds when he's such a square? *[To Joe]* Sorry to see you leave. Mrs. Mayor and my daughter Zella should be coming along soon to leave a so-see-al item with you.

JOE. Not with me, sir. Miss Loria Grantstedder is the society editor.

MAYOR. But I want *you* to handle the story. The Grantstedders don't like me. So any item I give them would be purposely messed up.

JOE. Begging your pardon, sir, but the Grantstedders are too ethical to indulge in such shoddy practice.

MAYOR. Be that as it might, I want *you* to write the story. You're a bright young man on the way up . . . despite your obvious humble beginning.

JOE. *[Depressed]* I didn't know it showed.

MAYOR. Anyhow, I would like to see you and my Zella become friends. *[To audience]* Let's face it, there's a shortage of eligible young men in the county, so even this idiot would be preferable to no one.

JOE. *[Glances at his pocket watch]* Duty calls, sir. I do not have time to meet your daughter.

MAYOR. Are you defying me?

JOE. Not purposely. But I am a true-blue, dedicated member of the honorable profession of journalism, and there is where my devotion lies. *[Offstage sound of a maniacal giggle]*

MAYOR. Here comes Zella now.

[MRS. PYZOR and ZELLA PYZOR enter from Left. Both are grossly overdressed. The mother is a haughty snob; carries a lorgnette. The daughter isn't too bright and she has an obnoxious giggle]

MAYOR. Hello, my dears.

MRS. PYZOR. *[Disdainfully looking around]* What a dumpy place! Eeeyuk.

ZELLA. Hello, Pater. *[Giggles]*

MAYOR. I want you to make the acquaintance of . . . of . . . this new young man in town.

JOE. Joseph "Clean Copy" Stoneman.

MAYOR. My wife and my daughter Zella.

JOE. How do you do, Mrs. Stupid and Miss Stupid.

MAYOR. *[Annoyed]* Pyzor is the name, you dingaling.

JOE. *[Unaware of everything, he babbles on]* "Clean Copy" is my middle name. That's because I write such . . . er . . . naturally . . . clean, uh, copy.

ZELLA. Pater forgot to give me a middle name. *[Giggles]*

MRS. PYZOR. It was not an oversight, dear. Middle names are so . . . well, middle class.

JOE. As a printer's apprentice and cub reporter, I am proud of my central appellation. *[To audience]* I may work cheap, but my press printing is without smudge and my news stories are accurate to the nth degree. *[He goes into a proud stance]*

MRS. PYZOR. Young man, whatever your name is, are you trying to be impertinent?

MAYOR. Lay off the kid. He's all right, even if he does work for a fink.

MRS. PYZOR. If that's what you fink . . . er . . . think.