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## **Cast of Characters**

MARC

CLARICE

VIRG

PETER

SANDY

MAXWELL

ADO

SHARP

ANNOUNCER I

ANNOUNCER II

# THE DESK

by Jeffrey Adams

## ACT I

### Scene 1

*(Four battered, much-abused desks have been pushed together to form a square at the center of the stage. Each desk is equipped with a computer, telephone, and chair, none of which is in very good condition. The rest of the space on top of the desk is jammed with a kind of uniform covering made up of fifty-percent information [media guides, print outs, old newspapers, reporter's notebooks] and fifty percent junk [fast food wrappers, dirty dinner plates, old magazines, etc.]. The walls around these desks are covered with sports memorabilia of all types, with no rhyme or reason as to their arrangement. Two other objects are of note: a large salmon is mounted on an oval board and hung centrally on the upstage wall, and a television set hangs from the flies downstage so that the screen faces the desks.)*

*At rise: CLARICE sits at one terminal, chewing on an unlit cigar. In her mid-sixties, CLARICE is the staff columnist, a job she inherited from her husband when he died two years earlier. She's tough and very protective of the staff around her. A kind of cross between a mother hen and Groucho Marx. In front of the desk, we discover VIRG, pacing. An attractive woman in her mid-twenties, VIRG is at that difficult transition in life when youthful idealism is dying fast, while aged perspective has yet to hit. Behind VIRG, sitting at another terminal, is PETER. In his early twenties, PETER is still in college. Always impeccably dressed, his grooming is frighteningly good. We forgive him this fault because he's almost always nervous or frightened about something. And when PETER is in this state, he has the endearing quality of a puppy who's sorry for missing the paper.)*

**PETER.** Clarice?

**CLARICE.** Fifty-seven minutes, Peter.

**PETER.** Is that all? It feels like it ought to be longer.

**CLARICE.** Kid, if I could tell you the number of times I've heard that.

**VIRG.** No jokes, please.

**CLARICE.** Virginia honey, relax.

**VIRG.** And stop telling me to relax. I'm fine. Tense, a little upset, wondering if there are any guns in the building, but other than that, I'm fine.

**CLARICE.** You're throwing off enough heat to be an alternative energy source.

**PETER.** Clarice is right, Virg. You're more tense than you were last time.

**VIRG.** Sorry. It's just that I have the feeling I'm going to get run over and I didn't wear clean underwear.

**PETER.** Oh yeah. I've had that nightmare lots of times.

**VIRG.** And besides, I've been laid off before. You guys haven't.

**CLARICE.** So you keep telling us.

**PETER.** What was it like, anyway? On the Times, I mean?

**VIRG.** What was it like? They made us pack up our things in boxes from the liquor store and leave under security escort. There I am, walking out of the building with what looks like a case of cheap Scotch and a rent-a-cop on my arm. I figure half the people knew I had been laid off, and the other half thought it was my birthday.

**PETER.** They put a guard on you?

**VIRG.** Yes. Apparently, a guy had gone crazy on them a year earlier so they weren't taking any chances.

**PETER.** What'd he do? The guy, I mean.

**VIRG.** Got a gun out of his car and started shooting computers. He's doing a year in jail now.

**CLARICE.** We could use a self starter like that around here.

**PETER.** Do you...do you think anything like that could happen now?

**CLARICE.** Of course not, Peter. We'd use baseball bats.

**PETER.** I can't stand this. Clarice...

**CLARICE.** Sixty one minutes. And relax. Marc is in there fighting for us and he's the guy you want in this situation, believe me. Besides, we won those awards last year, remember? They'd be crazy to break us up.

**VIRG.** Easy for you to say. You've been on this paper since they chiseled it on stone tablets.

**CLARICE.** One more crack like that, young lady, and I'll brain you with my mastodon club.

**VIRG.** How come you can joke about your age but I can't?

**CLARICE.** Let me get that club and I'll show you.

**VIRG.** When is he going to get back? It's taking too long.

**CLARICE.** I know it runs contrary to your nature, honey, but you can't keep tearing yourself apart like this. Things might not work out horribly.

**VIRG.** I wish I had your optimism.

**CLARICE.** I'll trade you my optimism for your legs.

**VIRG.** I'll trade you my whole body for your pension plan.

**CLARICE.** Honey, I'm desperate but not stupid.

*(MARC enters, dragging his heels and trailing a string of printouts. MARC is in his mid-thirties, and is the head sports editor. Always intense in everything but personal hygiene, MARC lives for the thrill of deadline. At the moment, he looks lucky just to be alive.)*

**VIRG.** Well, look what the cat dragged in.

**CLARICE.** And dragged out, and dragged back in again.

*(MARC drags himself to the nearest chair, and flops. The printouts splatter at his feet.)*

**MARC.** How many days was I gone?

**CLARICE.** Seven. We sent out a search party, but all they came back with was your sock.

**MARC.** Didn't they find the message I scratched in the ice cave?

**CLARICE.** What did it say?

**MARC.** "Kill All Lawyers."

**CLARICE.** That was you? We figured it was the President.

**VIRG.** Marc, you would be really proud of me if you knew how patient I've been.

**MARC.** *(To CLARICE:)* Was she?

**CLARICE.** Oh yes. There're three men in the building that'll walk like Groucho for the rest of their lives, but other than that, she's been fine.

**MARC.** I'll bet you guys want the news, huh?

**VIRG.** Please.

**PETER.** *[Squeak.]*

**MARC.** For you and squeaky back there?

**VIRG.** If it's not too much trouble.

**MARC.** Well, as of right now, we are still a staff of four.

*(PETER exhales for the first time since MARC entered.)*

**MARC.** But.

**PETER.** But?

**VIRG.** There's always a but.

**MARC.** This is a big one.

**CLARICE.** That's the only kind we have around here since they put pudding in the vending machines.

**VIRG.** Clarice!

**CLARICE.** All right, I'm sorry.

**MARC.** Well, they wanted to lay off someone in sports. This is the second round and we hadn't been hit last time, so the guys in press-room and news thought it only fair.

**VIRG.** Which guys, Marc. I want names.

**MARC.** Retract claws Virg. They're right, it is only fair.

**PETER.** So how'd you get us out of it?

**MARC.** I adopted a strategy of whining like a baby until the news came down that there were no layoffs today. Neat, huh?

**CLARICE.** You're a master strategist.

**VIRG.** Nobody?

**MARC.** Nobody.

**PETER.** But they said they were going to! They've been telling us that all week!

**MARC.** That's right, and we were in the process of wrestling out details of layoffs when our beloved manager left to take a phone call.

**CLARICE.** Maxwell left in the middle of a meeting?

**MARC.** Uh-huh.

**VIRG.** Mr. Maxwell? The guy who made us change toilet paper because our brand was a centimeter too wide?

**MARC.** Got up and left, right in the middle.

**CLARICE.** That's some phone call.

**VIRG.** Why would he leave in the middle of a meeting?

**MARC.** This is just an unsubstantiated rumor.

**CLARICE.** We're listening.

**MARC.** I talked to Gladys at the front desk? She said the call was from L.A. Home office is annoyed with him. They're sending out some corporate headhunter type to take over.

**PETER.** That's great!

**MARC.** How is it great?

**PETER.** We're getting rid of Maxwell.

**MARC.** Peter, have you ever heard the word “headhunter” associated with a nice person?

**PETER.** Well, not recently.

*(Everyone stares at him.)*

**PETER.** I...used to do role playing games. Dungeon and Dragons?

**MARC.** And you had good headhunters?

**PETER.** Felicity of Overnon, Hunter of Heads and Keeper of the Sacred Scepter. We went to the prom together.

*(All nod. MAXWELL enters, flustered and sweating, and carrying a large sheet of paper. MAXWELL is in his mid-forties, and is beginning to question his hold on middle management. He is a corporate animal, and as such, extremely aware of any change in pecking order. At the moment, he's feeling quite besieged.)*

**CLARICE.** God's Wounds! Thy sweaty manager comes hither.

**MAXWELL.** Marc, a word?

**MARC.** Yes Curtis?

**MAXWELL.** I just came from the backshop. What is the meaning of this picture?

**MARC.** What?

**MAXWELL.** The section front. The four column picture?

**MARC.** What's wrong with it?

**MAXWELL.** It's of a baseball game in Philadelphia.

**MARC.** It's of a no-hitter in Philadelphia. The guy threw it this afternoon.

**MAXWELL.** I keep telling you, Bauer, this is Seattle. Local news. That's what we should be focusing on.

**MARC.** And I keep telling you, Curtis, this isn't Seattle. Seattle is twenty miles that way. And why the sudden interest in my section?

**MAXWELL.** What?

**MARC.** Why the sudden interest in my section? If it's for the staff's benefit, forget it. They know empty posturing when they see it, Curtis. They work for me.

**MAXWELL.** I don't know what you're talking about.

**MARC.** Curtis, they all know about the meeting.

**MAXWELL.** That meeting was confidential! People in the news-room shouldn't know anything.

**MARC.** That's the way it is, most days. Ask our readers.

**CLARICE.** Marc didn't discuss it with us.

**VIRG.** He didn't really.

**PETER.** No.

**CLARICE.** We know you took a phone call from home office because the phone desk blabbed it all over the paper.

*(Pause.)*

**MAXWELL.** I see. Marc, you'll excuse me?

**MARC.** Sure.

**MAXWELL.** And you'll fix this picture?

**MARC.** No.

**MAXWELL.** Well...just remember that I...yes. And don't forget it!

*(MAXWELL starts to head off, stops, and turns back to the staff.)*

Um...phone desk is?

*(All four of the sports staffers point. MAXWELL nods and runs off.)*

**VIRG.** Poor guy.

**PETER.** Do you really feel sorry for him?

**VIRG.** Oh hell, no.

*(Everyone sits at a terminal and sets to work on that morning's paper, except MARC who picks up his printouts and studies them again. SANDY enters. She is in her mid-thirties, a very smart, passionate writer with an eye on making a difference in the world.)*

**MARC.** Hey!

**SANDY.** Hello. I heard.

**MARC.** Do you believe it?

**SANDY.** Yes. I've been telling you for months, Marc. These people are ruthless.

**MARC.** Let's not jump to conclusions.

**SANDY.** What are you saying? Do you think this Sharp woman is going to be better than Maxwell?

**MARC.** Is that her name?

**SANDY.** Dori Sharp, yes.

**MARC.** There's no way someone named Sharp is as bad as we think she is.

**SANDY.** She's going to be worse. Maxwell was just middle management. This person axes people for a living.

**MARC.** Do we have to have this discussion now?

**SANDY.** How many times have I heard that? When, Marc?

**MARC.** We haven't had dinner together in a while. Clarice?

**CLARICE.** Uh...three baseball, two softball and a track. And most of the Major League Baseball is already in.

**MARC.** Dodgers on the East Coast?

**CLARICE.** Cincy.

**MARC.** See? Easiest of all possible nights. I'll sneak out for two hours. We can go to Alahombro's...

**SANDY.** You are not wining me out of this conversation. You and I need to talk.

**MARC.** I never wine you. Dine you, yes. But can I help it if you've got a weakness for fettuccini?

**SANDY.** I've got a weakness for all noodles, including you.

**MARC.** It's mutual, my little marinara.

**VIRG.** Is anyone else getting sick?

**PETER.** No, but I'm getting hungry.

**VIRG.** That's sick.

**SANDY.** Marc...

**MARC.** We'll talk. I promise.

**SANDY.** You always say that and then we don't. I'm afraid you're going to be stuck here until it's too late.

**MARC.** This paper's not dead yet. I have to stay here through the end, that's all.

**SANDY.** I understand. You're the last Bauer here, I realize that. But your family doesn't own the Sentinel anymore. Those bloodsuckers upstairs do. Would you listen to me for a second?

**MARC.** Fine.

**SANDY.** I think I have a real shot for an interview in San Francisco...

**MARC.** This again.

**SANDY.** I know how you feel, but please, consider it. There are a dozen dailies down there, Marc. I have friends from Eugene that work at two or three of them. If we moved together, you'd find work in no time.

**MARC.** *(With pre-established contempt:)* Sandy, California.

**SANDY.** Consider it.

**MARC.** Sandy...

*(SANDY moves in close.)*

**SANDY.** We can talk about it over dinner. At my place.

**MARC.** You cooking?

**SANDY.** You like that idea?

**MARC.** Yeah.

*(VIRG pops up between them.)*

**VIRG.** Well I don't!

**MARC.** Anderson, do you need something to do?

**VIRG.** The last time you had dinner at her place, we didn't get you back until 10:30.

**MARC.** That's a lie. It was...yeah, 10:15 at the latest.

**VIRG.** He'll meet you at Alahombro's at eight.

*(VIRG starts to push SANDY off.)*

**SANDY.** Virg, has anyone ever told you you have a really sweet side.

**VIRG.** No.

**SANDY.** I wonder why. I'm going, I'm going.

**VIRG.** Thank you.

**SANDY.** Marc?

**MARC.** I'll fit her with a leash tomorrow, I promise.

**SANDY.** I have to warn you. You may think you're going to convince me to stay, but I have a secret weapon.

**MARC.** Does it come out of one of those catalogs you keep getting?

**SANDY.** No. It comes from Florida.

*(SANDY turns and marches off.)*

**MARC.** Florida? Florida... *(Yelling after her:)* Oranges? Spring training tickets? Jimmy Buffett?

**CLARICE.** Now we'll never know.

**VIRG.** To work, lover boy. You have a page to lay out before dinner.

**MARC.** Yes, Mom. *(He looks out after SANDY, then speaks to himself:)* Florida? She wouldn't...no. Not even Sandy is THAT crazy.

*(MARC turns to his work as the stage goes quickly to black.)*

**ACT I****Scene 2**

*(The desk of the sports department, more or less as before. It is about 4:30 in the afternoon of the next day. At rise, CLARICE sits in her usual chair, hammering away on the keyboard. VIRG and PETER similarly sit in front of terminals. PETER reads a book while VIRG files her nails down to the nub with an emery board. MARC and MAXWELL enter, in the midst of an argument.)*

**MAXWELL.** That is no excuse. You've been assigned a parking spot, so use it!

**MARC.** Curtis, YOU assigned those parking spaces a month ago and no one pays any attention.

**MAXWELL.** Nevertheless, you're in violation.

**MARC.** For using the wrong parking space?

**MAXWELL.** Violations are violations. This is a tight ship, Bauer.

**MARC.** *(Pirate voice:)* Aye Cap'n. Shiver me timbers and give me an Arrrrrg!

**CLARICE, VIRG, and PETER.** Arrrrrg!

**MARC.** *(Pirate voice:)* Ready for pillaging duty, Cap'n.

**MAXWELL.** You have no idea who you're playing with.

**MARC.** Have a sense of humor, Curtis. You might as well enjoy yourself until help arrives. When's she due, anyway?

**MAXWELL.** I'm sure I don't pay attention to such things. When she gets here, she gets here.

**MARC.** Yeah, that's the nice thing about those shuttle flights. She could be here virtually any time. This half hour, or the next half hour, or the next...

**MAXWELL** *(Feeling the pressure:)* Yes well, I appreciate all you've done, Marc. Excuse me.

**MARC.** You appreciate me parking in the wrong spot?

**MAXWELL.** What? No. Yes, I mean...excuse me.

(MAXWELL *exits looking like he's ready to throw up or faint, or both.*)

**VIRG.** Poor guy.

**MARC.** I am beginning to feel sorry for him.

**PETER.** Do you want me to go tell him that you switched the signs on the bathrooms?

**MARC.** Naw. Curtis is a fashionable guy. That stuff's all the rage.

(SANDY *enters.*)

**SANDY.** What's wrong with Maxwell? He looks sick and he just went into the women's room.

**MARC.** Must be that time of the month.

**SANDY.** Can you be more sexist?

**MARC.** Is that a request?

**SANDY.** Never mind. Has Madam Fu Manchu shown up yet?

**MARC.** Not that I know of. Clarice?

**CLARICE.** She's on the 3:30 plane out of Burbank.

**PETER.** How do you know stuff like that?

**CLARICE.** I could tell you, sweetheart. But then I'd have to kill you.

**SANDY.** A lady's prerogative, Peter. Don't question it.

**CLARICE.** Ladies prerogative, hell. I have good sources, and I protect them. Marc's grandfather taught me that when he was managing editor.

**SANDY.** Ah, a nice segue.

**MARC.** Nice segue to what?

**SANDY.** Do you remember what we were talking about yesterday? Just before dinner?

**MARC.** It was either flirtatious banter, or the designated hitter.

**SANDY.** You're funny.

**MARC.** (To VIRG.) You see? I told you somebody thought I was funny.

**VIRG.** Yeah, but you had to sleep with her to get that opinion.

**MARC.** A small price.

**SANDY.** It was about the paper.

**MARC.** Oh. This is THAT discussion, again.

**SANDY.** That's right.

**MARC.** Sandy, I love you. And I hope to everything holy that you get a new job. And I hope to everything holy that you don't move to San Francisco. That's the kind of guy I am, complicated. But would you please just accept one simple thing?

**SANDY.** What?

**MARC.** This is my family's newspaper.

**SANDY.** Your family sold it a year ago.

**MARC.** Which was a mistake.

**SANDY.** So what's your plan? Save your pennies and buy it back?

**MARC.** Don't be ridiculous.

**SANDY.** Oh, so it's the lottery then.

(MARC grows sheepish at being "found out.")

**SANDY.** You really thought you'd...

**MARC.** Shut up.

**SANDY.** Marc, you can't plan on the lottery.

**VIRG.** Why not? That's my plan for buying a new car, getting a condo, retirement, burial plot...

**SANDY.** Okay, Marc? I want you to think of something.

**MARC.** What?

**SANDY.** Before you hang around here any longer and waste the best years of your career, think about what your family would have wanted.

**MARC.** My family? What about my family?

**SANDY.** I made some phone calls last week.

**MARC.** Did you prank Maxwell? That goes perfect with the flaming dog poop I left on his porch.

**SANDY.** No, I did not. I called your uncle.

*(Pause.)*

**MARC.** You...you mean...Ado?

**SANDY.** How many uncles do you have?

**MARC.** Just one. He's enough. We've been thinking of dividing him and keeping the pieces on separate continents. Sandy, you didn't.

**SANDY.** Your uncle managed to let go of The Sentinel. And that's a skill I'd like my future husband to acquire.

**MARC.** Sandy, what have you done, exactly?

**SANDY.** Just called him up, let him know what's going on up here.

**MARC.** You actually called him?

**SANDY.** I invited him to come up and see for himself!

**MARC.** You invited him up here? Sandy, you don't invite Ado anywhere. He'll come!

**SANDY.** And he was happy to be invited, too. Apparently, his nephew never writes.

**MARC.** When's he going to be here?

**SANDY.** I don't know exactly. He said he'd have to take care of a few things then drive right up.

**MARC.** And that was how many days ago?

**SANDY.** Uh, Thursday so...five?

**MARC.** Oh good Lord. Clarice, are you hearing this?

**CLARICE.** *(Hanging up a phone:)* Hearing what?

**MARC.** Clarice, are you sitting down?

**CLARICE.** I think so Marc, let me check.

*(She checks.)*

Yes, I do appear to be seated.

**MARC.** Clarice?

**CLARICE.** Yes, Marc?

**MARC.** Ado.

*(Pause. CLARICE stands.)*

**CLARICE.** When?

**MARC.** I don't know. Sandy called him last week and he was going to drive north right away.

**SANDY.** What's going on?

**MARC.** You wouldn't understand.

**SANDY.** Try me.

**CLARICE.** No honey, you wouldn't understand. No one understands Ado. He's a freak of nature, like a tornado or a water spout.

**SANDY.** That's ridiculous. He's a nice old man.

**CLARICE.** You never worked with him.

**MARC.** Clarice, you want a vacation?

**CLARICE.** There is no place far enough.

**MARC.** There's got to be. Where would he have trouble finding me?

**CLARICE.** How many planets are there?

**SANDY.** This is silly. You two are overreacting.

**MARC.** Sandy, you don't know Ado.

**SANDY.** All right, tell me about him. What's so terrible?

**MARC.** Nothing. Everything. I don't know. I'm all mixed up now. I thought all I'd have to deal with would be headhunters and the possibility that Virg might buy a handgun. But now...Ado.

**SANDY.** Marc, you're not making sense.

**MARC.** Wait, he got a cellphone for Christmas last year. I can call him up and send him back to Florida.

**CLARICE.** How?

**MARC.** I'll make something up. I'll say they want him to fill a Senate seat or something.

**CLARICE.** Do you have the number?

**MARC.** I think Candace has it upstairs. I'll be right back.

**SANDY.** Marc, wait a minute!

*(MARC rushes off with SANDY in hot pursuit.)*

**PETER.** Clarice, are you all right?

**CLARICE.** No, Peter. I'm not.

**VIRG.** What's wrong? You look pale.

**CLARICE.** I think all the blood's drained from my face. It's trying to escape. My blood's making a break for the parking lot and I have several vital organs on an outbound bus.

**VIRG.** What's all that stuff about Marc's uncle?

**CLARICE.** It's hard to explain, honey.

**VIRG.** Did you and this uncle not get along?

**CLARICE.** Something like that. The easiest way to think of Ado is Santa Clause if all he did was break chimneys instead of slide down them.

*(ADO enters. In his early seventies, ADO is a right charming old elf with a mind for mischief. In truth, he finds retirement desperately boring and spends a good amount of his time running away from that boredom. He is dressed for warm weather and carries a duffel*

*bag. He sets the bag down, looks around once, sighs, and takes a pocket tape recorder out of his breast pocket.)*

**ADO.** *(Into recorder:)* Note to myself. Strongly recommend repainting newsroom in a tropical motif. I could finally paint that pirate ship montage I always wanted on the outside wall. Oh, and remember to check with that nice man I sent money to back in Lauderdale. If email addresses have arrived, I start my new career as a used golf ball broker tomorrow! Also, remember to send a thank you note to that diner in Tulsa. Capital tongue sandwich, simply capital. One last note, make sure to find a freezer for that half-cow I bought in Mississippi. Fifth wheel's developing an aroma.

*(ADO turns and faces the staff, a big smile on his face.)*

Well ahoy, maties!

*(Beat.)*

**PETER.** Virg? I'm scared.

**VIRG.** Let's go.

**PETER.** Where?

**VIRG.** This way. And don't look him in the eyes.

*(VIRG and PETER both exit rapidly.)*

**ADO.** Sweet kids. *(He sees CLARICE, and goes dramatic:)* Well there's a vision that will keep a man going through four thousand miles of open road.

**CLARICE.** Hello, Ado.

**ADO.** Hello, Clarice.

**CLARICE.** Could I ask, please, what you are doing here?

**ADO.** It's the old ball and chain. What's wrong with a visit now and again?

**CLARICE.** You said you'd never come back. We said you'd never come back. Everyone was happy.

**ADO.** The truth? I couldn't stand not seeing you again. How long did we have, Clarice? Two weeks? A month?

**CLARICE.** We had nothing. You're thinking of the Paris flashback in Casablanca.

**ADO.** Ah yes. An excellent film.

**CLARICE.** Do I smell beef?

**ADO.** Don't say anything. Just let me look at you. You know Clarice, I've made a decision since going into retirement.

**CLARICE.** Oh?

**ADO.** A man's got to keep busy.

**CLARICE.** Busy?

**ADO.** You've got to have interests. A lot of my friends down at the R.V. park in Lauderdale, they play golf, or bingo, or sit around complaining about the government.

**CLARICE.** And you're moving into used balls, right?

**ADO.** No. Clarice, that'll just be my day job. For my avocation, I have a higher call.

**CLARICE.** Higher?

**ADO.** I might be rushing things having just seen you, but I've had a chance to do a lot of thinking down there, Clarice. And I've come to a decision.

**CLARICE.** Ado, before you say anything, there's something I have to tell you. Marc and Sandy and the rest, they don't want you.

**ADO.** What?

**CLARICE.** So if you think you can come riding in here on a white horse and save the paper, you can just forget it. They would just as soon you hop back in your R.V. and head home.

**ADO.** Oh, I didn't drive all this way to save the paper, Clarice.

**CLARICE.** You didn't?

**ADO.** Heavens no! Marc can handle that lot of fools running the place now. No Clarice, I'm here for you.

**CLARICE.** (*Growing frightened:*) Handle fools on the what now?

**ADO.** You've always known how I feel about you, and it's time I started acting on those feelings.

**CLARICE.** Ado, we went all over this. Before you left, you admitted it was just a schoolboy crush. You've been having those off and on for sixty years.

**ADO.** I know I said that, but inside my heart was breaking. Oh please, Clarice. Please let me be part of your life.

**CLARICE.** Ado, I said no once...

**ADO.** Oh, I understand your feelings for me will never burn as hot as mine for you, and I've accepted it. My plan does not include a romantic entanglement.

**CLARICE.** (*Afraid to ask:*) What did you have in mind, then?

*(ADO takes her by the hand, perhaps on a bowed knee.)*

**ADO.** Clarice, I want to be your butler.

**CLARICE.** You what?

*(ADO stands and takes a butler-y pose.)*

**ADO.** I would ask to be in your employ, if madam doesn't object. I'm sure you'll find my rates most reasonable.

**CLARICE.** Ado!

**ADO.** I have to be near you, don't you see? It will be tragically romantic. Just like Gloria Swanson and Erich von Stroheim in *Sunset Boulevard*.

**CLARICE.** That's the one where Swanson goes crazy at the end, isn't it?

**ADO.** Just give me a chance. I'll make a great butler, you'll see. I can do laundry, a little gardening. And I do this grill cheese and celery soup thing that you wouldn't believe.

**CLARICE.** Ado, I have a confession to make.

**ADO.** That's all right. I didn't expect you to wait for me.

**CLARICE.** Ado, I lied.

**ADO.** I forgive you.

**CLARICE.** Ado, I lied about the paper. Marc puts up a good front but the truth is, things look bad.

**ADO.** I'm sure he can handle it.

**CLARICE.** They laid off two dozen people the month you left, and they're going to do more.

**ADO.** I'm sure that...two dozen?

**CLARICE.** And that's just the beginning. Ado, I'm not sure I should tell you this.

**ADO.** Don't be afraid. Go ahead.

**CLARICE.** I think they're going to sink the paper.

**ADO.** What?

**CLARICE.** There's nothing definite yet. Just rumors, really...

**ADO.** Does Gladys in reception say it's true?

**CLARICE.** *(Lying through her teeth:)* Yes.

**ADO.** I don't believe it! I refuse to believe it! I signed contracts with those people! Less than a year later and everything we worked for. My grandfather started this...No! I won't stand for it! I CAN'T stand for it! Clarice, I'm sorry but our life together is going to have to wait.

**CLARICE.** *(Caught up in his fervor:)* Hallelujah!

**ADO.** There is a battle to be fought here, and I'm just the guy to fight it. Where is this Maxwell!

*(ADO turns suddenly and marches off.)*

**CLARICE.** Well, Clarice, here you go. Out of the frying pan, into the volcano.

(CLARICE exits after ADO. Almost immediately, SANDY and MARC enter on the side opposite where CLARICE and ADO exited.)

**MARC.** We can't lock the doors I suppose.

**SANDY.** Marc, would you slow down and listen.

**MARC.** Maybe I could call in sick. We could re-route the calls and Clarice and I will do the page from my apartment.

**SANDY.** Marc...

**MARC.** For a week or two.

**SANDY.** Marc! You're yammering.

**MARC.** I am not. I'm planning for all contingencies.

**SANDY.** I want you to stop a second and explain to me what it is about this man. He seemed harmless enough when I met him.

**MARC.** It's hard to explain. Ado just seems to...I don't know. Bring out the best in people.

**SANDY.** And this is a bad thing?

**MARC.** It is if the people in question don't have any good in them.

**SANDY.** I need to sit down.

**MARC.** I know, I know. That's what he does to me. That's what he does to everyone.

(MAXWELL enters. He is in a huff as usual.)

**MAXWELL.** Marc, there you are. Would you mind explaining to me why you haven't moved your car yet?

**MARC.** Curtis, for pity's sake would you just shut up about the parking spaces.

**MAXWELL.** That is insubordination, and I'll write you up for it if you're not careful.

**MARC.** Nobody cares, Curtis. We all have bigger problems now.

**MAXWELL.** I am managing director of this paper, and if I say we worry about parking spaces, we worry about parking spaces.

**MARC.** Stand on a desk and beat your naked chest, why don't you. Maybe that will impress her.

**MAXWELL.** Impress who?

**MARC.** Don't be a dink, Curtis. We know what this is all about. Quit trying to get tough. It's too late.

**MAXWELL.** I have always been this way. I've always been tough. Tough but fair. And sensitive. Tough, fair and sensitive, that's my style.

**MARC.** Sort of a combination John Wayne / Charlie Brown type.

**MAXWELL.** Are you going to move your car or not?

**MARC.** My space isn't open.

**MAXWELL.** What?

**MARC.** When I got here today, my assigned space was taken.

**MAXWELL.** Then you should have reported it. Let me know whose car was in your space and I'll impound it. Do you remember?

**MARC.** Yes. Yours.

*(Beat.)*

Black Stanza, right? California plates? Yup, that's who it was, all right. You know, if you REALLY wanted to impress the new management, I'd go ahead and impound the car. In fact, I'd crush it into a cube and leave it in my space as a monument to assigned parking. I'll even spring for a plaque! Now if you'll excuse me, I've got to find someone.

*(MARC hustles off.)*

**SANDY.** I'm sure it's not as bad as it seems, Curtis.

**MAXWELL.** You don't think so?

**SANDY.** Well...it...I...need to follow Marc, now.

*(SANDY hustles off to catch up with MARC. MAXWELL sighs and leans on a desk. ADO enters, and comes up behind MAXWELL. After having his moment, MAXWELL turns to exit and runs straight into ADO.)*

**MAXWELL.** Oh, can I help you?

**ADO.** I think so. You're Maxwell, aren't you?

**MAXWELL.** That's right. Do you work here?

**ADO.** I do now. We need to have words, you and I.

**MAXWELL.** I can't talk. I need to move my car.

**ADO.** The car can wait. Layoffs.

**MAXWELL.** What?

**ADO.** Layoffs, I want to talk about the layoffs, pard.

**MAXWELL.** Look, if you're worried about your job, I can assure you that those decisions have been delayed.

**ADO.** I know, delayed for me.

**MAXWELL.** What?

**ADO.** Those decisions were delayed so that you would have to deal with me. I'm here now, and nobody gets laid off without my say-so.

**MAXWELL.** There's been some mistake. I understood...

**ADO.** Whatever you understood, forget it. I'm here now, and I'm the law.

**MAXWELL.** What happened to Dori Sharp?

**ADO.** You're on your own now, Maxwell. Understand?

**MAXWELL.** Uh, I think I should call the home office...

**ADO.** Understand?!

**MAXWELL.** Yes sir!

**ADO.** Good. Now if you do exactly as I say, you and I will get along just fine, okay?

**MAXWELL.** Okay.

**ADO.** You ready for your orders?

**MAXWELL.** I uh, orders?

**ADO.** I can't hear you!

**MAXWELL.** Sir, yes sir!

**ADO.** I want you to go up to the personnel office, dig up the files on those two dozen people you laid off last year, and call each and every one of them.

**MAXWELL.** All of them?

**ADO.** All of them.

**MAXWELL.** Oh no. There's a class action suit, isn't there?

**ADO.** No. You're going to give them their jobs back.

**MAXWELL.** I'm going to what?!

**ADO.** They all get their jobs back, every one of them.

*(He gazes out at the room.)*

Then, I want you to call the hardware store and order some paint.

**MAXWELL.** This paper has been running in the red for as long as we've owned it and you want me to hire people back?

**ADO.** That's right.

**MAXWELL.** What possibly for?

**ADO.** They were good people. They don't deserve that kind of treatment.

**MAXWELL.** Who are you?

**ADO.** I told you. I'm boss here now, Curtis.

**MAXWELL.** Yes. Yes, I can see that. You'll excuse me, but I think I have to make a phone call.

**ADO.** Good. That's what I call a self-starter.

(MAXWELL exits rapidly, taking a suspicious glance or two over his shoulder at ADO. MARC enters.)

**MARC.** Ado!

**ADO.** Hello, my boy. So good to see you.

(Despite all his consternation, MARC's mood softens at the sight of his uncle.)

**MARC.** Ado, what are you doing here?

**ADO.** Oh, didn't you know? Let me tell you everything. Sandy...you know...of course you know Sandy. Funny, you not knowing your own fiancée. *(Laughs.)* Anyway, Sandy called, and I'm glad she did, too. Did you know that two dozen...wait, you work here, of course you knew that. So that means we're up to date. How's things with you?

**MARC.** *(Feeling familiar confusion:)* F-fine?

**ADO.** Oh, by the way, I just got all those people's jobs back.

**MARC.** All whose people?

**ADO.** The layoffs, last year. I just talked to that Maxwell character and he's popping upstairs to take care of it.

**MARC.** Take care of what?

**ADO.** Call up those people and reinstate them. Are you all right, Marc? You look like you've been deep sea fishing.

**MARC.** It's just...good to see you again.

**ADO.** Oh, good seeing you, son.

*(ADO takes MARC's arm and starts to guide him off.)*

**ADO.** Come on. I'll buy you a cup of coffee.

**MARC.** Ado? Are you going to stay long?

**ADO.** Just as long as I need to. Shouldn't take much the way things have gone thus far. Maxwell is really quite agreeable.

**MARC.** Maxwell? Agreeable?

**ADO.** Sure. Once you know how to handle him right.

**MARC.** God help us all.

**ADO.** It's nice to see you still trust in the Lord, Marc.

**MARC.** Some days, He's all I have.

*(They exit, followed by a quick blackout.)*

## ACT I

### Scene 3

*(The sports desk about 6 P.M., the next day. The desk looks more or less the same as before. At rise, VIRG, CLARICE, and PETER are all at their terminals working hard. The three of them should jump on and off of phones throughout the scene. MARC is seated at the downstage-left corner of the desk going through some papers, apparently looking for something. There is a general air of stress among the staff.)*

**MARC.** Virg? Did you ever find those Masters stats?

**VIRG.** *(On the phone:)* Yeah, we need your three best hitters. Can you hold a minute? *(To MARC:)* I am on the phone here, boss.

**MARC.** Look I need that stuff now if we're going to have a box on page one.

**VIRG.** I put it on your desk an hour ago.

**MARC.** Well then where is it?

**CLARICE.** Have you had dinner yet?

**MARC.** Yes.

**CLARICE.** Then check under the teriyaki container.

*(VIRG returns to her phone call, while MARC starts digging through the piles of paper again until he comes to a square, styrofoam food container. He lifts it up and discovers the piece of paper he's been looking for. It has several prominent and distinct brown stains on it.)*

**CLARICE.** That them?

**MARC.** Yeah.

**CLARICE.** How are they?

**MARC.** They smell delicious.

**CLARICE.** You want me to see if I can find those online?

**MARC.** No, not tonight. We have an extra page and I'm going to need everyone on phones. How are we doing, by the way?

**CLARICE.** The good news is we have fifteen baseball, five softball and three track meets already in the can.

**MARC.** Is there bad news?

**CLARICE.** Twelve baseball, fifteen softball, and a dozen more track coaches we haven't heard from yet.

**MARC.** Has everyone eaten?

*(PETER, who has been taking a phone call, hangs up. He has heard nothing of the conversation up to this point.)*

**CLARICE.** I think so.

**MARC.** Okay. Nobody gets up until we get on top of things then.

**PETER.** What about bathroom breaks?

**MARC.** That's why we all ordered drinks, Peter. Use the cups.

**PETER.** *(To CLARICE:)* He's kidding, right? Right?

**MARC.** *(With the teriyaki-paper:)* Oh Peter, type in these stats, will you? And be careful, somebody's already used the paper.

*(PETER takes the paper very gingerly.)*

**PETER.** Used?

*(MAXWELL enters.)*

**MAXWELL.** Marc, I need to talk to you.

**MARC.** I'm a little busy right now, Curtis.

**MAXWELL.** Have you had any luck finding that man yet? We can't have lunatics loose in the building.

**MARC.** It's not my job to find the lunatics, Curtis. That's personnel's job. Why are you asking me, anyway?

**MAXWELL.** No one's listening to me. I tried to call the security guard for half an hour yesterday and he never returned my calls.

**MARC.** Is Bob on the bubble?

**MAXWELL.** We have talked about taking him from full to part time. Why do you ask?

**MARC.** Oh, no reason. Why are you so upset about this, anyway?

**MAXWELL.** This man pretended to be from home office, he tried to get me to call back all the laid-off workers.

**MARC.** *(Now interested:)* Oh?

**MAXWELL.** Yes. I called home office and they said nothing of the kind. I'm to wait on all future decisions for Ms. Sharp, but past layoffs certainly remain in effect.

**MARC.** Was this an old man? Kind of large?

**MAXWELL.** Yes, that's what worries me. He's someone I'd remember if he worked here. I swear, Marc, if one of your people hired some rube to come in for a practical joke...

**MARC.** My people? Why would you think my family—people, would be involved?

**MAXWELL.** Because of your charming sense of humor, that's why. I'm going to go down to that security desk. If you want to do anything right...

**MARC.** That's what I always say. Take things in hand, Curtis. We'll all keep our eyes open here.

**MAXWELL.** Yes, do that.

*(MAXWELL exits. MARC waits until he's gone, then accosts CLARICE.)*

**MARC.** Clarice? Where is he?

**CLARICE.** Where's who?

**MARC.** You know who. Ado!

**CLARICE.** How should I know? He took off after Maxwell last night and lost me in the press room.

**MARC.** Lost you? How could anyone lose you in this building?

**CLARICE.** So sue me, I didn't look very hard. I had to go home and put new locks on the doors.

**MARC.** Well, do you know where he is now?

**CLARICE.** I imagine he needed to find a place to park that fifth-wheel of his. Did you try the trailer parks?

**MARC.** I didn't try anything. It was such a peaceful night after work, I didn't want to mess it up.

**CLARICE.** Then you know how I feel. Maybe we're jumping the gun. Maybe he won't do anything for a couple of days.

**MARC.** He's already done something. And besides, Ado's a very unstable explosive, Clarice. It's never a question of if he goes off. It's a question of when.

*(SANDY practically skips on, goes right up to MARC and gives him a kiss on the cheek. MARC barely responds.)*

**SANDY.** Marc?

**MARC.** Hmm?

**SANDY.** Anybody home?

**MARC.** No, we're all at work.

**SANDY.** You know, if I weren't in such a good mood, I'd worry about you. But guess what?

**MARC.** You found Ado!

**SANDY.** No, I don't know where he is.

**MARC.** We've got to find him. Innocent lives are at stake.

**SANDY.** Marc, he's your uncle. Stop thinking about him like he's a rabid raccoon.

**MARC.** I only wish it was that way. Rabid raccoons you can shoot.

**CLARICE.** There're always tranquilizer darts.

**MARC.** Hey yeah!

**SANDY.** Marc, listen to me a minute. I've got the best of all possible news.

**MARC.** You mean the best of all possible news that doesn't involve finding Ado.

**SANDY.** I got the interview in San Francisco! I'm going down tomorrow.

*(Pause.)*

**MARC.** You got a what?

**SANDY.** I told you I was applying for that job.

**MARC.** Sandy, we talked about this. You agreed I should stay on here a while longer.

**SANDY.** That's right, I did agree. But you agreed that we had some tough choices ahead and this wasn't going to be easy. None of that actually keeps me from applying for the job.

**MARC.** Sandy...

**SANDY.** Don't look at me like that. This job is important.

**MARC.** And mine here isn't?

**SANDY.** I'm not going to be stuck on unemployment after this rag closes. I am getting on that plane tomorrow.

**MARC.** And under different circumstances, I'd follow you. I'd clean your apartment and cook your meals for you. I'd stay home with the kids...

**SANDY.** Kids?

**MARC.** Yes kids.

**SANDY.** I never said anything about kids.

**MARC.** But that's what we're talking about, isn't it? Sandy, we'll go. But I'm not done here yet. We have this new woman and Ado's loose and Virg is on the second day of her five-day waiting period.

**VIRG.** Third day.

**MARC.** You see? I can't go now.

**SANDY.** I know you can't. I can.

*(Pause.)*

**MARC.** So it's definite then? You're going?

**SANDY.** I have to go.

**MARC.** No you don't. Just call them and postpone. Call them, and tell them anything.

**SANDY.** That's been your solution to everything, hasn't it? Sandy don't go. Stay here. Wait for the roof to fall in.

**MARC.** Sandy...

**SANDY.** Wait for me to flog this dead horse another year or three and then we'll go somewhere where I can actually write. Marc, I'm covering giant vegetables and pet weddings here. I've had enough.

*(SANDY turns and exits. She never looks back at MARC on her way out.)*

**MARC.** *(Weakly:)* Sandy?

*(ADO enters. He is dressed in what he considers his "old work clothes." This consists of two pieces of a three piece suit [the coat is missing], complete with pocket watch. The suit is very well maintained, and he looks like a million dollars. He's also wearing a green eyeshade or visor, the symbol of newspaper men from days gone by.)*

**ADO.** Hello all!

**MARC.** Ado? What are you doing?

**ADO.** I'm ready to go to work. What do you have for me? Anyone run the section front yet?

**MARC.** To work?

**ADO.** Of course! You don't think I'd abandon my boy in his hour of need, do you? This is serious business, Marc. We have to work together.

**MARC.** Ado...

**ADO.** 'Scuse me a minute. Hey Clarice! Check out the threads, huh?

**MARC.** Ado, thanks, really. But you don't need to do this.

**ADO.** Oh, it's my pleasure. Besides, we can...

**MARC.** You REALLY don't need to do this.

**ADO.** I know. You probably think the old bird hasn't got any fight left in him.

**MARC.** No. I do not think that.

**ADO.** But when I showed up here last night, and I found out what you've been going through these last few months, I had to help.

**MARC.** Ado, I've got help. Clarice is here and I think you met Virg.

**ADO.** Of course. That's her there, right?

**MARC.** No, that's Peter.

**PETER.** *(Looking up from a task:)* What?

**VIRG.** Just keep your head down.

**MARC.** You see? There's no reason for you to be here. Go relax.

**ADO.** Thanks for the concern Marc. But a little bird told me different.

**MARC.** What bird?

*(CLARICE gets up and begins a tactical retreat.)*

**CLARICE.** Excuse me, I need to go get some coffee.

**ADO.** Just think, Clarice. Next week at this time, you won't have to get your own coffee.

*(CLARICE exits running.)*

**ADO.** Now, what do you have for me?

**MARC.** Ado...

**ADO.** Nothing big, you understand. Just give me a day to get my chops back.

**MARC.** Ado, please. I don't have the money to hire someone else.

**ADO.** Pension took care of that, my boy. I'm just looking to help out any way I can.

**MARC.** It's a slow night. We don't need you.

**ADO.** *(Picking up a sheet of paper:)* Is this the prep schedule.

**MARC.** No.

**ADO.** Rather full, isn't it?

**MARC.** That's yesterday's.

**ADO.** It has today's date.

**MARC.** That's the issue date. It's the system we use.

**ADO.** It wasn't the system Nells Olson taught you. And I taught Nells Olson.

**MARC.** Well...I've made the job my own. Ado, really. You're retired. Go relax. Take in a ball game. I'll give you a press pass, you can go sit in the box. Bet it's been a while since you've been to a ball game. No ball games down in Florida, are there?

**ADO.** Marc, we have two major league teams plus spring training in Florida.

**MARC.** *(Embarrassed at his gaffe:)* I knew that.

**ADO.** My boy, what's wrong? You have that look again. The fishing look.

**MARC.** It's just...Oh! Ado, can I speak plainly?

**ADO.** *(Sincere:)* I don't know, I think so. Try it and find out.

**MARC.** I don't want you here. You've always driven me crazy. You've always driven everyone crazy. I understand that you want

to help, but I'd really appreciate it if you'd just go back to the trailer, and relax. You were editor here for thirty years. It's my turn now.

**ADO.** You don't need to say these things.

**MARC.** No, no I think I do.

**ADO.** I understand what's going on. You want to handle it yourself. Like the prodigal son taking his inheritance.

**MARC.** The prodigal son? Who's prodigal?

**ADO.** You are.

**MARC.** I am?

**ADO.** Yes. And now I'm back.

**MARC.** Huh?

**ADO.** Back to kill the fatted calf and get rid of this big corporation.

*(Beat.)*

**MARC.** *(To himself:)* You know, I could go to San Francisco.

**ADO.** That's what you want, isn't it? To get rid of these characters? Listen, Marc, I don't know if you'd noticed it, but this Maxwell fellow really isn't all that hard to deal with.

**MARC.** Ado, try and understand. I don't like the corporation much myself, but what's the alternative? We were nearly bankrupt when they took over.

**ADO.** So we'll just take it back.

**MARC.** We can't afford it, Ado.

**ADO.** Oh, sure we can. I know some real money people down in Florida. They'd love to own a newspaper.

**MARC.** Real money people.

**ADO.** That's right.

**MARC.** That live in an R.V. park?

**ADO.** Well, they like to keep a low profile. Some of them owe the mob.

**MARC.** Ado, try and understand. I don't want to get rid of the corporation. I just want to try and survive under it.

**ADO.** You gotta aim higher, my boy. You gotta think big. One paper won't be big enough for this company we'll found.

**MARC.** Oh, the pain.

**ADO.** We'll start a chain all over the country. Next thing you know, Maxwell and company will be working for us.

**MARC.** A chain?

**ADO.** Why not?

**PETER.** *(Caught up in the pitch:)* Why not!

*(Beat.)*

Sorry.

**ADO.** You see? You see the kind of youthful enthusiasm you have here?

**PETER.** That's not enthusiasm, that's stupidity. Everyone says so.

**ADO.** You've got potential here, Marc. You're like a bug in his cocoon, ready to break out and sprout wings.

**MARC.** But...

**ADO.** You can't think so small.

**MARC.** Yeah, I...

**ADO.** And you've got to be more forceful with those people. Show 'em who's boss, and they'll fold right up. You'll see.

**MARC.** Yeah I'm...but...how do you do that?

**ADO.** Do what?

**MARC.** Suck all the common sense out of the room like that? I'd kill to be able to do that sometimes.

*(MAXWELL enters. He glances up, takes a moment to make sure ADO is the same man, then acts.)*

**ADO.** Oh, don't you worry about anything, Marc. Everything's going to be just fine. I have a plan.

**MAXWELL.** There he is! Call security!

**ADO.** Hello, Maxwell.

**MAXWELL.** Marc arrest this man!

**ADO.** Sports editors can't do that, Maxwell. Just take it easy.

**MAXWELL.** I will not. You're going to be arrested for impersonating an executive.

**ADO.** Now Curtis, I'd watch what you say if I were you.

**MAXWELL.** I don't know who you are, mister. But you are in for a full measure of trouble.

**MARC.** Curtis, this is my Uncle Ado. You probably read about him in the run-down before you took this job.

**MAXWELL.** Ado Bauer? Yes, I remember. You were the last publisher before us.

**ADO.** Right-o.

**MAXWELL.** You kept wanting everyone in negotiations to participate in group hugs. At one point, you delayed things a week because of the World Series. One of the negotiating team said it was the most difficult assignment she'd ever had. Like trying to get a salmon away from a grizzly bear that kept trying to sit in your lap.

**ADO.** I like that. Think I'll paint it on the side of the fifth wheel.

**MAXWELL.** That poor woman is in an institution now.

**ADO.** Good for her! I always wanted to go into teaching myself.

**MAXWELL.** Marc, are you responsible for this person being here?

**MARC.** No.

**MAXWELL.** Who is?

**MARC.** Sa...He drove himself up.

**MAXWELL.** This might very well represent a breach of contract, you know.

**ADO.** What?

**MAXWELL.** Technically, you have no right to be on this property and I can have you removed.

**ADO.** Don't be silly. I'm here working for my nephew.

**MAXWELL.** You've already lied to me, tried to impersonate a member of my company and who knows what else. You're a menace, Mr. Bauer. And I'm going to have you removed.

**MARC.** Wait a minute, just a second. Let's not get excited, rush into things, okay?

**MAXWELL.** This man should be removed.

**MARC.** Curtis, calm down. Security is not returning your calls, remember? Ado, I think it would be better for everyone if you go back to the camper and just relax. Maybe Sandy and I will take some time off, come down and visit awhile. There's no reason for everyone to get bent out of shape about this, is there?

**ADO.** No reason at all.

**MARC.** Curtis, my uncle can be a little old-fashioned. He cares deeply about this newspaper, and he did some things without thinking yesterday. Now can you please just let him leave with a little dignity?

**MAXWELL.** Of course. So long as he goes.

**MARC.** See? We can all work together. Come on, Ado. Let's go.

**ADO.** Right fine speech, Marc.

**MARC.** Thank you. Let's go.

**ADO.** Except for one small detail.

**MARC.** See the thing is, it's like my head's in a vice that keeps squeezing and squeezing...

**ADO.** Maxwell, you're expecting a representative from home office, is that right?

**MAXWELL.** Yes.

**ADO.** A Ms. Sharp? Well-known as a tough egg with no problem axing people if the situation calls for it?

**MAXWELL.** That's correct. She's coming to assist me here.

**ADO.** Wrong on two counts, Maxwell. One, she was not coming to assist you, she was coming to replace you.

**MAXWELL.** Well, that uh...remained to be seen. I guess. How do you know so much about this?

**ADO.** Because, Mr. Maxwell, you were also wrong about one other thing. She's not coming.

**MAXWELL.** I don't understand.

**ADO.** Sharp was called away at the last minute. I was sent in her place.

**MAXWELL.** You?

**MARC.** You!

**ADO.** That's right. I'm the headhunter you deal with now, Maxwell. And I have the CEO's signature to prove it.

*(ADO takes an envelope from his vest and thumps it against a stunned MAXWELL's chest. MAXWELL takes and opens it.)*

**MAXWELL.** I...don't know what to say.

**ADO.** Say hello to the new boss. And get ready for some changes around here.

*(Fade to black.)*

## ACT II

### Scene 1

*(The sports desk, as before. The time is a heartbeat after the end of Act I. At rise, MARC, ADO, PETER, VIRG, and MAXWELL are all in the same positions they held at the end of Act I.)*

**MAXWELL.** This is all wrong. Home office would have called me.

**ADO.** It's irregular, I admit. But not unheard of. We did the same thing in Omaha last year.

**MAXWELL.** *(Disturbed by what he's reading:)* Maybe...perhaps so. Sir. But I...I really think I need to call the home office.

**ADO.** Go ahead. Make a bad situation worse. I don't know if you're aware of it, Maxwell, but your future with this company is not exactly assured. What's happened up here does not speak well for you.

**MAXWELL.** I understand.

*(MAXWELL hands the letter back to ADO.)*

**MAXWELL.** What are your instructions?

**ADO.** For starters, callbacks. I want everyone who got a pink slip to have a job offer in the next twenty-four hours.

**MAXWELL.** But we're in the red right now.

**ADO.** Maxwell, what you don't know about this situation would fill an ocean. You did your best and that will be taken into account on your behalf. Why don't you run along home now before things get worse.

**MAXWELL.** Am I being recalled to L.A.?

**ADO.** That remains to be seen.

*(MAXWELL starts off. ADO remains unmoved. MAXWELL looks back rather pathetically. He honestly wants to know what he did wrong, but nobody's telling. MAXWELL exits. ADO takes a beat or two to make sure Maxwell's really gone.)*

**ADO.** We did it!

**MARC.** We?

**ADO.** Got rid of him. How about that!

**MARC.** Let me see that.

*(MARC takes the letter.)*

**VIRG.** Mr. Bauer?

**ADO.** Yes, Virginia?

**VIRG.** Just Virg. Do you really...you know?

**ADO.** Work for them? Oh, heavens no. I rummaged around upstairs in Maxwell's office until I found some company letterhead, then typed that letter myself. Didn't know it would fly until just now.

**MARC.** You did what?

**ADO.** I typed the letter. I figure what we do now, is re-hire as many people as possible in the next few days. By the time they figure out what's really happened, it will be too late.

**MARC.** To late for what?

**ADO.** Too late to do anything about it. Once we're back to full staff here Marc, they won't be able to resist it. There's no force in the world like a newspaper firing on all cylinders.

*(Pause.)*

What's wrong?

**MARC.** Virg?

**VIRG.** Yeah Marc?

**MARC.** You know where the fax machines are down next to composing?

**VIRG.** Sure.

**MARC.** In the back corner of that room there's a shredder. Take this letter down there and get rid of it.

**VIRG.** Now?

**MARC.** Yes now. I know we're behind, but we'll catch up. This is important.

**VIRG.** Okay.

**MARC.** And take Peter with you.

**PETER.** What?

*(Beat. MARC looks at PETER and VIRG and silently sends the message that he'd rather they not be in the room for the next few minutes. They both understand, get up and exit.)*

**MARC.** Ado...

**ADO.** Marc, you're upset. You don't want to get in trouble. I understand.

**MARC.** No, no you don't.

**ADO.** Well then let's get to work. We got things to do.

**MARC.** No!

**ADO.** Marc? Are you all right?

**MARC.** What was that letter all about?

**ADO.** Oh, just a little trick. Harmless.

**MARC.** Harmless? It was probably illegal.

**ADO.** What are they gonna do? Put me in jail?

**MARC.** Yes, for starters.

**ADO.** I'm sure it won't come to that.

**MARC.** What do you know about it! That letter, that ridiculous letter...is that all you ever try to do? Fool people?

**ADO.** It got us what we wanted, didn't it?

**MARC.** No, Ado, it did not. What we want is some confidence that our jobs are going to be here next year. That letter didn't do anything. Look, I know you're trying hard, but this isn't going to work. And besides, Maxwell deserves better than being roped in with a lame prank.

**ADO.** Well, if you like Maxwell that much...

**MARC.** I don't like him, but...dammit Ado. The guy's on his way home now thinking his career is over.

**ADO.** He'll be fine.

**MARC.** (*Yelling:*) We don't know that! (*Quieter:*) We don't know anything about Maxwell. Nothing real, anyway. He could take that letter seriously. The guy is alone up here, on a job. What if his job is all he has? People shoot themselves over stuff like this.

**ADO.** Well if you're so worried about it, why don't you check on him.

**MARC.** I will. I practically have to now, don't I.

*(MARC gets his coat.)*

**ADO.** What are you doing?

**MARC.** I'm going to find Maxwell.

**ADO.** Are you crazy? You've got a page to put out.

**MARC.** It's early.

**ADO.** But your work is here!

**MARC.** I'll be back. And when I get back, be someplace else, okay? We've got a lot of work tonight and I don't want people getting distracted. And Ado, I'm serious this time.

*(MARC exits, leaving ADO alone. CLARICE enters.)*

**ADO.** Clarice, there you are. You won't believe what just happened.

**CLARICE.** Where's Marc?

**ADO.** That's what I'm talking about. He left.

**CLARICE.** Left?

**ADO.** To go check on that Maxwell character. I can't believe Nells and I brought him up in this business, leaving his post like that.

**CLARICE.** I think he's a pretty sharp guy, myself.

**ADO.** What's wrong?

**CLARICE.** Oh, nothing. I just ran into Peter and Virg. I saw the letter, Ado.

**ADO.** Oh, that. Look, if I'd known Maxwell was a suicidal paranoid, I wouldn't have done anything.

**CLARICE.** You wouldn't have done anything.

**ADO.** Of course not.

**CLARICE.** Sure. You would have done something, Ado. Ever since you got here, you've been itching to be somebody's white knight.

**ADO.** *(He hadn't been listening:)* What?

**CLARICE.** Ado, what were you planning to do when the corporation found out?

**ADO.** All they need is time. I'll convince 'em. They need to see all those people back at work, and how this paper can function when it's fully staffed.

**CLARICE.** What if they didn't see it that way?

**ADO.** Then we would have thought of something else. You just gotta keep plugging, that's all.

**CLARICE.** No matter what happens, right?

**ADO.** No matter what.

**CLARICE.** You believe that, don't you?

**ADO.** Worth a shot, isn't it?

*(Pause.)*

**CLARICE.** Take uh...take care of yourself, all right Ado?

**ADO.** What?

**CLARICE.** Just take care of yourself. I'm gonna go get Peter and Virg and when I come back we'll be pretty stacked up so...so take care of yourself.

**ADO.** Clarice, what do you mean?

**CLARICE.** I mean, I don't want to see you anymore. Your style wears thin after a while. You run roughshod over people and break every rule in the book and generally have a great time. But your pranks have this nasty habit of leaving you home and dry and other people in the tank. You'll excuse me if I ask you to leave. Goodbye.

**ADO.** Clarice, don't be like this. Remember what I said. I want to be there for you always.

*(ADO reaches out and grasps CLARICE's arm. CLARICE glances at the grip, then up at ADO. ADO releases her. What's passed between them in those few actions is significant, and even ADO now feels it.)*

**CLARICE.** Mr. Bauer, the staff and I would appreciate it if you leave. Now.

**ADO.** Oh, Clarice, I don't want to go home yet. Clarice?

*(CLARICE exits. ADO is left alone with his thoughts for a moment. Presently, SANDY enters.)*

**SANDY.** Ado?

**ADO.** Hello, Sandy.

**SANDY.** Did you know Marc is looking for you? He's worried sick.

**ADO.** Oh, he is? I guess...I understand.

**SANDY.** Where is everyone?

**ADO.** Just down getting some supplies. What are you doing here? I thought you were on days.

**SANDY.** I am. I just came back to talk to Marc. Is he here?

**ADO.** He's uh...on an errand, I think.

**SANDY.** Oh I never really had a chance to thank you for coming up here.

**ADO.** Anything I can do to help. You know me.

**SANDY.** Well, I'm beginning to.

**ADO.** Sandy?

**SANDY.** Hmm?

**ADO.** Could I ask...well, I was just wondering.

**SANDY.** Go ahead.

**ADO.** Why did you call me?

**SANDY.** *(Laughs.)* I should apologize for that. Playing a trick on Marc, actually. I was hoping you'd come up here and talk some sense into him about the Sentinel.

**ADO.** Yeah, you said that on the phone. Could I ask, just because I'm wondering, what exactly did you think I would do?

**SANDY.** Well, it's like this: I'm hoping Marc and I can move on, together. I have an interview in the Bay Area tomorrow. If things go well for me, we could move down there together and Marc could look for work. He'll find it without a problem, I'm sure of that.

**ADO.** How do you know?

**SANDY.** He's good at his job. Solid skill base, good résumé. His layout portfolio alone should get him a few interviews. Besides, I think he'd like being editor of the Sporting Green some day.

**ADO.** What about the future here?

**SANDY.** Ado, this might hurt to hear, but the corporation you sold to never had much of an interest in keeping the place. Maybe it was a tax write-off, I don't know. The point is, Marc is good at what he does. He could work anywhere if he'd just give himself a chance.

**ADO.** Is that why you called me? You were hoping I'd come up and talk him into leaving?

**SANDY.** Like you did, right. I mean it's been a fairly sweet life in Florida, right?

*(Beat.)*

**ADO.** Time of my life.

**SANDY.** I'm going to go look in the backshop. If you see Marc first, tell him I'm looking for him.

**ADO.** All right.

**SANDY.** And Ado? Thanks again for coming up on short notice. I know how busy you must be.

**ADO.** No...problem.

*(SANDY exits. ADO sits for a minute, trying to digest this newest bit of information. He reaches into a pocket and produces his portable recorder. He turns it on, then has to think for a pause before coming up with anything to say.)*

**ADO.** *(Into recorder:)* Thursday, April 15 in the p.m. *(Pause.)* No notes. Just like hearing myself talk.

*(ADO presses the stop button on the recorder. Blackout.)*

## ACT II

### Scene 2

*(The sports desk about 24 hours later. Things are unchanged. It is early in the shift. At rise, VIRG sits at a computer, typing. CLARICE is in her usual spot chomping on her usual cigar.)*

**VIRG.** There it is. Résumé, version seven.

**CLARICE.** I'm trying to decide if I should let you teach me how to do one of those things.

**VIRG.** It couldn't hurt, you know. Unless you're ready to retire.

**CLARICE.** I was ready to do that when I was thirty. The problem was, prince charming never showed.

**VIRG.** Don't tell me you believed in that.

**CLARICE.** We all did, honey. We didn't come by cynicism as early as your generation.

**VIRG.** Finally, something to be thankful for.

*(MARC enters. He's a little frantic.)*

**MARC.** Clarice? Have you seen Ado?

**CLARICE.** Not since last night. Why?

**MARC.** He left this note in my box.

*(CLARICE takes note from MARC. She reads it rapidly as all newspaper people can read.)*

**CLARICE.** It's probably nothing.

**VIRG.** What is it?

**MARC.** Didn't you hear the woman? Probably nothing.

**CLARICE.** Take it easy, Marc. Virg, have you seen Ado?

**VIRG.** No. What's wrong?

**CLARICE.** Ado says he's sorry he was such a nuisance to everyone.

**MARC.** That's so unlike him.

**CLARICE.** And that he's, I'm quoting here, "going to cash in this time. There isn't much else to do around here, so I'll simply get out of everyone's hair."

**VIRG.** You don't think he's going to kill himself?

**MARC.** I don't know what to think. I've never known him to give up before. On anything.

**CLARICE.** *(Looking at note:)* I wish he hadn't used "cash in."

**MARC.** Ado never really was much of a writer. Do you know which trailer park he hooked up in?

**CLARICE.** No, don't you?

**MARC.** Where's the phone book? There can't be that many of them around.

*(Over the following, VIRG finds the phone book and gives it to MARC.)*

**CLARICE.** He used to like KOAs, I know that.

**MARC.** It's good for a start.

*(As MARC begins thumbing through the phone book, SANDY enters. She is carrying a suitcase, and is dressed to travel. SANDY stares at MARC. MARC is too intent on his task to notice her.)*

**SANDY.** Marc?

**MARC.** Just a second.

**SANDY.** Marc I...my flight leaves at nine. I wanted to say goodbye.

**MARC.** Okay. Have a good trip.

**SANDY.** Marc?

**MARC.** Sandy, would you please?

*(Beat.)*

**SANDY.** I understand. You're a busy man.

**MARC.** What? Oh, yeah. Have you seen Ado, recently?

**SANDY.** I talked to him last night.

**MARC.** Did he say anything about anything?

**SANDY.** I don't know what you mean.

**MARC.** It's all right. I'll just look in the R.V. parks. See you later, okay?

*(MARC selects an entry from the phone book and starts to make a call. SANDY feels intensely ignored.)*

**SANDY.** Goodbye, Marc.

*(She turns on her heels and walks out. As soon as SANDY is gone, MAXWELL enters. He looks like he hasn't slept all night. He is clinging to a briefcase. As he enters, MARC hangs up the phone.)*

**VIRG.** No one home?

**MARC.** It was a machine.

**MAXWELL.** Marc?

**MARC.** Oh, hello Curtis.

**MAXWELL.** Am I pathetic?

**MARC.** What?

**MAXWELL.** Tell me honestly, I can take it.

**MARC.** Curtis, I need to look for Ado.

**MAXWELL.** Why would anyone need to look for Ado. Just say his name three times and he'll appear over your shoulder with a machete.

**MARC.** I explained this to you last night. He does not work for the company.

**MAXWELL.** Oh, it doesn't matter. He may have forged that letter but the things he said, they're exactly what Sharp will say when she gets here.

**MARC.** Curtis...

**MAXWELL.** I'm doomed, Marc. I've got no future.

**MARC.** Curtis, please. My uncle doesn't know what he's talking about. He was just trying to get rid of you.

**MAXWELL.** And I fell for it. Another black mark. I can see my evaluation now: falls for zany schemes. I'm like a half-wit villain.

**MARC.** Curtis...

**MAXWELL.** Next time, I want to be one of those super villains with the floating city and the henchmen in matching jumpsuits.

**MARC.** Curtis, have you seen Ado recently?

**MAXWELL.** I've been hiding in my office, avoiding him.

**MARC.** Well he's disappeared, and I'm afraid he's done something to himself.

**MAXWELL.** Great. The guy's a suicidal mental defective and he fooled me. This will look wonderful.

**MARC.** No one's seen him since last night.

**MAXWELL.** Oh I saw him this afternoon.

**MARC.** You what?

**MAXWELL.** Yeah, didn't I explain that? Oh, I must have forgot. Memory is slipping on top of everything else.

**MARC.** Curtis, when did you see him?

**MAXWELL.** In my office about two. He came in and asked how I was doing. He asked me about Los Angeles, if I liked it or not. What a stupid question. No one likes Los Angeles. Liking it is completely beside the point.

**MARC.** What else did he say?

**MAXWELL.** He told me about the paper when he used to work here. Almost got misty-eyed a couple of times.

**MARC.** Did he seem despondent at all?

**MAXWELL.** How does a sports editor know words like despondent?

**MARC.** Never mind, just tell me.

**MAXWELL.** I didn't notice.

**MARC.** How could you not notice? The man was suicidal, and you didn't notice?

**CLARICE.** Marc?

**MARC.** What?

**CLARICE.** Take it easy.

**MARC.** Oh. Right.

**MAXWELL.** No, it's okay. That's the way it is with me. Yell at me, give me the grunt work, send me up to Washington. Whatever you got no one wants, give it to Maxwell, that's the solution. That's always been the solution. I can see that now. I don't even like pine trees.

**MARC.** Maxwell?

**MAXWELL.** I mean, that's my life, right? That's the program I signed up for. Funny, I don't remember signing up.

**MARC.** Maxwell?

**MAXWELL.** Maybe they don't let you sign up. Maybe it's just assigned to you no matter what you want. That would be consistent. Come to think of it, I hate pine trees.

**MARC.** Curtis, please.

**MAXWELL.** Oh, I don't blame you for feeling that way, Marc.

**MARC.** What way?

**MAXWELL.** Abusive toward me. Everyone else does, after all.

**MARC.** Curtis, I'm really sorry about how you're feeling and everything but I have to ask you some more questions about Ado. He's missing.

**MAXWELL.** No he's not.

**MARC.** Do you know where he is?

**MAXWELL.** I don't need to know. I can feel him. Like gas.

**MARC.** Where did he go after he left your office?

**MAXWELL.** He didn't say. He just left.

**MARC.** Well, did he mention anything? Any kind of clue at all?

**MAXWELL.** He just said he was going to trundle along. I like that word, don't you? Trundle.

**MARC.** Curtis...

**MAXWELL.** Can't talk now, Marc. I have to trundle. Wait, trundle along. Damn, I can't even trundle right.

**MARC.** Curtis, please. I am really worried about my uncle and you're the last one to see him. Now I know you're in a tough spot right now and I promise, I'll do everything I can to help you. But I'm really worried that Ado's gone off and hurt himself or something and I need to know where he is. Can you help me?

**MAXWELL.** Groveling.

**MARC.** What?

**MAXWELL.** When Sharp finally does get here, I think I'm going to try groveling. I'm really quite good at it.

**MARC.** This is hopeless. Virg? Would you get this guy out of here, please?

**VIRG.** Sure.

*(MAXWELL throws himself at MARC's feet and wraps himself around MARC's legs.)*

**MAXWELL.** Oh, please!

**MARC.** Maxwell!

**MAXWELL.** Please! Please! Don't make me go!

**MARC.** What the hell are you doing?!

**MAXWELL.** Relax, I'm just practicing. This is really for Sharp.

**MARC.** Get off me.

**MAXWELL.** Please! Don't make me go!

**VIRG.** Do you still want help, Marc?

**MARC.** Yes!

**VIRG.** I was just checking.

**MAXWELL.** I'll work hard, I promise.

**MARC.** Curtis...let me talk to you a second.

**MAXWELL.** I'd like to Marc, really I would. But this is important.

**MARC.** Curtis, I think you're feeling a little under the weather. Why don't you let go of me, stand up, and we'll all go see a doctor together.

**MAXWELL.** Oh, I don't need a doctor. I need another drink.

**MARC.** That would be fine too. Another?

**MAXWELL.** Sure. Haven't you figured it out by now?

**MARC.** Your breath doesn't smell.

**MAXWELL.** I know. I sneak Vodka from a thermos. Plaid thermos. My secretary thinks it's soup.

**CLARICE.** No she doesn't.

**MARC.** You mean you're drunk right now?

**MAXWELL.** Three sheets, as they say. Do you think Sharp would like me better drunk or sober?

*(With VIRG's help, they finally manage to get MAXWELL to his feet over the following.)*

**MARC.** Tough call, Curtis.

**MAXWELL.** 'Cause I'm thinking a little tipsy. She was probably a party girl at some point in her life.

**MARC.** Keep thinking that, Curtis. Why don't you sit down now?

**MAXWELL.** I would like that. Can I have your chair?

**MARC.** Sure. Just sit.

**MAXWELL.** You're a pal, MarcBauer.

*(MAXWELL collapses in Marc's chair.)*

**MARC.** Clarice?

**CLARICE.** I called all the R.V. parks in the area, Marc. Most of them just had machines on but the two I did talk to hadn't seen him.

**MARC.** I've got a bad feeling about this. Where could he be?

*(SANDY marches in. She is furious.)*

**SANDY.** All right, joke's over.

**MARC.** What's wrong?

**SANDY.** Funny, Marc. Very funny. No wonder you were Mr. Standoffish when I tried to say goodbye.

**MARC.** Uhhhhh...

**SANDY.** Where are they, Marc? Just tell me now, and nobody gets hurt.

**MARC.** Sandy, please. I'm trying to find Ado and Maxwell has gone crazy.

**MAXWELL.** Crazy like an ostrich, if you know what I mean.

**SANDY.** I don't want to discuss it. I just want my cables back.

**MARC.** What cables?

**SANDY.** Of course, that's what you'd say. What cables. Marc, this is childish.

**MARC.** I don't know, what cables.

**SANDY.** My spark plug cables. Somebody took them all. Makes it hard for the car to work, you know?

**MARC.** And you think I did it?

**SANDY.** I'm driving to the airport, remember? The interview in San Francisco, remember?

**MARC.** Sandy, I did not take your spark plug cables. I didn't even know where you parked this morning.

**MAXWELL.** Assigned parking spaces people. That would have solved this problem.

**SANDY.** Just hand them over.

**MARC.** Sandy, I have not stolen any auto parts since I was sixteen.

**SANDY.** Well who else would? One of the merry pranksters around here?

**MARC.** I don't know. I got problems of my own, all right?

**SANDY.** *(She looks at her watch:)* If you make me late...

**MARC.** Look, I do not appreciate all this accusation. Ado is missing, Sandy. And I'm afraid he might have done something stupid.

**SANDY.** Oh would you quit fixating on that man! He's all you've thought about since he's been here.

**MARC.** Which is why I made sure he went to Florida after he retired, Ms. Bring him north for his business sense.

**SANDY.** You're saying this is all my fault?

**MARC.** He'd be flirting with a waitress in Tampa right now if it wasn't for your stupid phone call.

**SANDY.** I wouldn't have needed to make that stupid phone call if you'd be reasonable.

**MARC.** I am not running away from this newspaper! This is important.

**SANDY.** You don't need to tell me!

**MARC.** Why don't you just take off then?

**SANDY.** I can't! My plug cables are gone!

*(PETER enters.)*

**MARC.** Oh, always with that excuse.

**PETER.** Hey, did somebody order an Airporter van? There's one out front.

**SANDY.** Perfect!

**MARC.** Yeah, perfect! Your getaway car is here.

**SANDY.** I am coming back, Marc.

**MARC.** What's the point? You'll just run away again. If it's not San Francisco, it will be some other place.

*(SHARP enters carrying a suitcase. She is a very capable-looking woman in her late forties with the razor-eyed look of someone who can pass accurate judgment on people in a New York second.)*

**SANDY.** I am not running away.

**MARC.** Are to.

**SANDY.** Am not!

**MARC.** Are to! You're just a runner, that's all! Run run runaround. Run!

**SANDY.** What?

**MARC.** I'm not thinking good, all right? Go catch your plane!

**SANDY.** I'll do that.

**MARC.** Yeah?

**SANDY.** Yeah!

**MARC.** Fine! *(Sees SHARP. He yells:)* Can I help you!

**SHARP.** Unfortunately, I'm afraid you can. Marc Bauer?

**MARC.** So what!

**SHARP.** I'm looking for Curtis Maxwell.

**MARC.** (*Pointing:*) There! Now would you mind leaving us alone? We have work to do.

**SHARP.** I can see that.

**MAXWELL.** Did somebody want me? Anybody?

**SHARP.** Maxwell? Dori Sharp. It's good to meet you.

*(SHARP extends her hand. MAXWELL stares at it for a beat, then throws himself onto her legs as he did with MARC.)*

**MAXWELL.** Oh please! Please!

**SHARP.** What?!

**MAXWELL.** I'm so sorry!

**SHARP.** What is wrong with this man?

**CLARICE.** He's worried you won't like him.

**SHARP.** Would you please get...stop that!

**MAXWELL.** I didn't mean to have it happen! I need a good evaluation! Pleeeeease!

**SHARP.** I have pepper spray! Get off me this second!

*(The phone rings. PETER answers.)*

**SANDY.** Should we do something?

**CLARICE.** No. Maxwell's been planning this for hours.

**PETER.** Marc!

**MARC.** What is it?

**PETER.** It's Ado.

**MARC.** On the phone? What line?

**PETER.** He's not on anymore. He hung up.

**MARC.** What did he say? Is he all right?

**PETER.** He told us to watch channel 11.

**MARC.** He said what?

**PETER.** Channel 11. He said tune it in.

*(CLARICE picks up the remote and tunes the television to the channel over the following.)*

**MARC.** Peter, if he calls back, under no circumstances are you to let him off the phone until he tells you where he is.

**VIRG.** How are we supposed to do that?

**MARC.** I don't know. I can't think of everything.

**SHARP.** Mr. Bauer, I'm afraid I'm going to need your help here.

**MARC.** Maxwell, get off her!

*(CLARICE begins to slowly rise from her seat, eyes glued on the television.)*

**MAXWELL.** Marc, stay out of this. It's a corporate thing.

**CLARICE.** Marc?

**MARC.** What? What is it?

**CLARICE.** Listen!

*(CLARICE uses the remote to raise the volume on the TV until everyone can hear it. Naturally, ANNOUNCER I and ANNOUNCER II are off-stage, heard on the sound system, but not seen.)*

**ANNOUNCER I.** Strike three called! What a pitch. Was that a fork-ball, Bob?

**ANNOUNCER II.** It must be, Rick, but the way he's throwin' it, it ain't even fair. I have never seen a fork ball break like that. It's zip-ping right up to the plate like old number one, then bam! Falls off the table like Aunt Velma's pancakes. What a performance.

**ANNOUNCER I.** That is it for the Indian seventh so hold your breath, folks. Rafael Martinez, a journeyman pitcher who's been

with Seattle for only three months, has faced the minimum. 21 batters up, 21 down, and nobody has had anything remotely resembling a hit. Martinez is only minutes away, from immortality. With the Mariners leading 3-0, we'll be right back.

**MARC.** Mute, Clarice.

*(CLARICE hits a button on the remote and the sound disappears. She immediately turns to her computer and starts typing frantically.)*

**MARC.** Okay, gotta think, gotta think.

**SHARP.** Mr. Bauer?

**MARC.** Just a second, please. Virg, didn't you go visit a friend in Cleveland last fall?

*(SHARP extracts herself from MAXWELL over the following. MAXWELL stands. Both he and SHARP grow interested in what is going on.)*

**VIRG.** Sure, Gloria. We were roommates. She works at the Plain Dealer.

**MARC.** She work nights?

**VIRG.** I don't think so.

**MARC.** Do you think she'd be up for some stringing?

**VIRG.** I know she would. That's how we bought beer in school.

**MARC.** Get her on the phone and get her down to The Jake A.S.A.P. Then call the field and reserve a press pass for her. The number should be in the media guide.

**VIRG.** On it.

**MARC.** I want half a dozen quotes. Forget about Martinez, he'll be buried in people. Catcher, coaches, people like that.

**VIRG.** Okay.

**MARC.** Wires, Clarice?

**CLARICE.** *(At her computer:)* Just a warning from A.P. so far.

**MARC.** Okay, the team faxed us a bio on Martinez when they traded for him. Find it.

**PETER.** I got it here, Marc.

**MARC.** Okay. Can you get ten inches out of it?

**PETER.** I guess, I don't...

**MARC.** (*Warning:*) Peter.

**PETER.** Yes. Yes I can.

**MARC.** Okay. That's yours.

**SANDY.** Marc, what is going on?

**MARC.** Sandy, I need you.

**SANDY.** What, now?

**MARC.** Yes. I need someone to do a story on Mariner no-hitters.

**SANDY.** Marc, I don't know very much about baseball.

**MARC.** You'll do fine. It's just standard news writing with a few corny clichés thrown in.

**SANDY.** But...

**MARC.** Oh, your flight, that's right. Uhhhh...

*(MARC cannot find the words to ask what he must ask. He asks with face and gesture. SANDY understands that something almost magical is happening, and he needs her help.)*

**SANDY.** There are always shuttles.

**MARC.** Thank you, very much. Okay, who? Curtis?

**MAXWELL.** Hmm?

**MARC.** Can you answer phones for us?

**MAXWELL.** I don't, I'm not...

**MARC.** Just take scores, that's all.

**MAXWELL.** Would you mind very much telling me what's going on?

**MARC.** A Mariner pitcher could throw a perfect game tonight. If he does, it belongs on the front page and we better have a package worthy of it.

**MAXWELL.** What are you going to do?

**MARC.** Re-design the section front and help you on phones. I'm really in a spot here, Curtis. I could use your help.

**MAXWELL.** What if he gives up a hit?

**CLARICE, VIRG, and PETER.** (*Fiercely:*) Sssssshhhh!!

**MARC.** Two rules of a no-hitter, Curtis. Number one, never write your lead before the last out and number two, never mention the "H" word.

**MAXWELL.** What, you mean hit?

**CLARICE, VIRG, and PETER.** (*More fiercely:*) Sssssshhhh!!

**MARC.** That's the one, yes.

**MAXWELL.** But if the Indians get a...I mean if Martinez shouldn't do it, all this work will be for nothing.

**MARC.** That's right.

**MAXWELL.** And it could fall apart at the last minute, the last batter.

**MARC.** And did you think I took this job to write about high schools every night?

**MAXWELL.** It's not worth the risk. Too tenuous. Poor use of resources.

**MARC.** If it works, It'll mean about a twenty-five percent increase in walk-up sales tomorrow morning.

**MAXWELL.** Twenty five?

**MARC.** If it's a perfect game, we might get requests for copies from all over the country. You might even get away with upping the advertising rates.

(*Beat.*)

**MAXWELL.** Phones it is! Clarice, how about turning the sound on the TV. Just keep it low.

*(CLARICE does this. All on the desk settle into various tasks. SHARP, who has been watching MARC work with interest, moves toward him.)*

**SHARP.** Mr. Bauer?

**MARC.** Just a second...yes?

**SHARP.** Do you have anything that needs typing?

**MARC.** Here, take my terminal. I need to go down to the backshop anyway. This fax?

**SHARP.** Yes?

**MARC.** Just put it into the file I've opened. Thanks.

**SHARP.** No problem.

*(MARC exits. CLARICE turns up the volume for a moment.)*

**ANNOUNCER I.** And that's it for the Mariner eighth. No runs on no hits, nobody left. Well hold onto your seats, folks because stalking out to the mound right now is the man of the hour, Rafael Martinez, six outs away from a perfect game. We'll return with the bottom half of the eighth, right after this.

*(CLARICE mutes the TV again. Everyone returns to their tasks.)*

**SHARP.** Remarkable.

*(Lights do a quick fade.)*

**ACT II****Scene 3**

*(The sports desk as before. About four hours later. At rise, an empty stage. Presently, we hear joking and laughing from a group of people offstage. Suddenly, PETER runs on. A football flies in from offstage, and PETER makes the catch.)*

**PETER.** Oh come on, put a little zip in it!

*(He throws it back to VIRG, who has just entered. She catches the ball and throws it back. VIRG is followed on by MARC, SANDY, MAXWELL, and CLARICE. MARC is going over the early edition. SHARP straggles on after a few moments. She is still closely observing the staff.)*

**MAXWELL.** I didn't think he'd do it, I really didn't. That last ball was only foul by two feet!

**MARC.** It's a fun story to cover, all right.

**MAXWELL.** Man! It's been a long time since I actually worked on a paper.

**SANDY.** Did you used to write?

**MAXWELL.** College and then right out of college. There's no money in your job, Sandy.

**SANDY.** I'm aware of that, Curtis.

**MARC.** Great job, everyone!

**CLARICE.** Yeah, I don't know.

**MARC.** What? This is perfect?

**CLARICE.** The Indians aren't hitting the ball much this year anyway. Why couldn't he no-hit the Yankees?

**SANDY.** So Marc? What do you think of the package?

**MARC.** Pretty good. I'd still like to change that picture for the final, but other than that, it's all right. Especially preps, you guys. Thanks for filling in.

**SANDY.** Glad to do it.

**MAXWELL.** Let's celebrate. Marc, you have to know a place open after your shift.

**MARC.** That is a world class idea.

**MAXWELL.** I'm going to get my coat. Don't leave without me.

*(MAXWELL rushes off. As he passes SHARP, it doesn't really register who she is. Everyone else happens to look after MAXWELL and in doing so, sees SHARP.)*

**MARC.** I didn't get a chance to thank you.

**SHARP.** You're very welcome. Like Mr. Maxwell, I too worked on the news desk once. This was fun tonight.

**MARC.** You were invaluable.

**SHARP.** I doubt that, but it's nice for you to say so.

**MARC.** Listen I don't mean to spoil everyone's mood, but...why exactly are you here?

**SHARP.** Why? I'm here to examine this paper's fitness and take appropriate action.

**MARC.** Lay-offs.

**SANDY.** Marc.

**SHARP.** I haven't decided that yet.

**MARC.** Don't kid us. We've been through too much together, this group. Everyone knows the Sentinel is dragging and everyone knows what people like you are for: Thinning the herd. Before you do anything, I just want you to listen to me.

**SHARP.** I'm listening.

**MARC.** Good. We don't do the most important job in the world and maybe we don't always take it so seriously, and Lord knows the money is nothing to even think about. But we deserve what we've built here. If you ask me, I think you people would rather we didn't build anything. You'd rather we look out for ourselves, and be ready to move on at the drop of a hat and be loyal to no one. But I can't pretend to be that way anymore. This staff is all I think about

these days. I worry about them, like a family. You people, you'd rather I just look out for myself, take a severance check and get out. Well that's not what I'm going to do. You've got a job to do here, Ms. Sharp, and I suppose you have your reasons so I respect that. But I'm taking it upon myself to fight you at every turn. Not one person loses a job without a fight. As the last Bauer on the Sentinel. I owe them that.

**SHARP.** Well. That's the way it has to be?

**MARC.** Yup.

**SHARP.** I see.

*(Pause.)*

Give.

**MARC.** Beg pardon?

**SHARP.** Give. I give up. You're all keeping your jobs. In fact, I want to take a look at the salary steps around here, bring them into line with market value.

*(Pause.)*

**MARC.** That...that would be okay.

**SHARP.** Don't look so shocked, Marc. May I call you Marc?

**MARC.** That would be okay too. Would you mind telling me what just happened?

**SHARP.** Marc, I was sent here to evaluate this newspaper. That included circulation, staff, revenue, everything. Home office has noticed that you seem to have below average financial standing but an above average product. You won some regional awards, I understand.

**SANDY.** News has won something eight years in a row.

**SHARP.** Exactly. You've got a good little paper here. We want to use it.

**MARC.** To do what?

**SHARP.** Whip Rupert Murdoch's sorry butt.

**MARC.** I'm sorry. I still don't understand.

**SHARP.** Do you know who runs this corporation?

**MARC.** Guy named Sherman, right?

**SHARP.** Richard Sherman, yes. He's a very competitive individual, and Mr. Murdock is the bane of his existence. They compete for awards all the time. Mr. Sherman sent me to decide if The Sentinel might be his go-to paper in this circulation size. And after what I saw tonight I have no doubts. You have an excellent staff and they know how to put together a newspaper.

**MARC.** I don't know about this.

**CLARICE.** Marc, shut up.

**MARC.** No, really. You want us to cover the news just so some old guy in California can be a big shot at the club? That's not why I went into journalism.

**SHARP.** There will be new equipment to go with the deal. Computers, pagination machines, a phone system that works.

**MARC.** We have a phone system that works. Her name is Gladys.

**SHARP.** Then she'll get a raise. A healthy one.

**MARC.** What about the ad budget and circulation sales? We pretty much live to beat the Seattle Times around here. Without that...

**SHARP.** Mr. Sherman understands competition. I'll fly back on Monday morning and recommend he develop a plan to push the Times right out of the county. Considering the job you've done tonight, I'm sure he'll go along with it.

**SANDY.** What about Maxwell?

**SHARP.** That's none of your concern.

**MARC.** What if I told you Maxwell is a vital part of this newspaper.

**SHARP.** I wouldn't believe you. But I saw how he worked tonight, so I understand why you would say so.

**MARC.** He deserves better than what he's gotten.

**SHARP.** There are better managers in the company.

**MARC.** He deserves better. I want him to stay.

**SHARP.** Well...I suppose your rather fierce loyalty is part of the chemistry here, and I shouldn't break up the team. But a word of friendly advice?

**MARC.** Yes?

**SHARP.** See if you can get the guy to loosen up.

**MARC.** You're saying he stays?

**SHARP.** I'll recommend it, yes.

**MARC.** Okay then.

*(There's a tense moment on the desk while MARC finally allows himself to believe this is all happening. He turns to SANDY, and they embrace.)*

**MARC.** Wow.

**SANDY.** Wow.

**MARC.** I don't believe this.

**SANDY.** Ms. Sharp, I don't know what your plans are for the evening, but could we drive you to your hotel?

**MARC.** Or more specifically, the hotel's bar?

**SHARP.** I think a little celebration is in order, yes. Is the page to bed?

**MARC.** I just have to work out the final. Sandy, drive her down and I'll meet you there.

**SHARP.** It's the Hilton.

**MARC.** I know the bartender there. He'll stay open late for us.

**SHARP.** We'll need it. We have a lot to discuss.

**MARC.** Okay then.

(SANDY and MARC start to separate, stop, share one last kiss then go on their way. MARC exits to work on the paper, SANDY and SHARP exit the building.)

**VIRG.** Did you understand any of that?

**PETER.** It's good right?

**CLARICE.** It's very good, Peter.

**VIRG.** Then why do you look so down?

**CLARICE.** No reason. Hey, we're done here.

**VIRG.** I don't feel like heading home. I feel like celebrating.

**PETER.** Wanna crash the party at the Hilton?

**VIRG.** I guess. I don't know, kind of sounds boring to me.

**PETER.** Planning the future of the newspaper? No, that will be thrilling! It'll be like being in on the ground floor of a great new company, or a shopping mall!

**VIRG.** You know, Peter, I really never realized how truly weird you are.

**PETER.** Weird? Me? I've never been called weird. Thank you.

**VIRG.** You're welcome.

(MAXWELL enters, coat on arm.)

**MAXWELL.** Hey, where'd they go?

**VIRG.** Where'd who go?

**MAXWELL.** Marc and Sandy. I thought we'd go celebrate.

**VIRG.** Oh they had to take off.

**MAXWELL.** That's odd.

(VIRG gives PETER a "play along with this" glance.)

**VIRG.** But uh, Mr. Maxwell?

**MAXWELL.** They said they'd wait for me.

**VIRG.** Mr. Maxwell, you're going to have to come with us.

**MAXWELL.** What?

**VIRG.** Ms. Sharp asked us to bring you to her hotel this evening.

**PETER.** *(Catching on:)* Yes. This evening.

**VIRG.** She has some things she wants to...discuss with you.

**MAXWELL.** I completely forgot about her. Was she angry?

**PETER.** It's really not for us to say. Come along, please.

**MAXWELL.** What, now?

**VIRG.** I'm afraid so.

**MAXWELL.** How is it you two are doing this?

**VIRG.** It's a little business we're opening on the side. Insurance against the uncertain economy.

**PETER.** Thugs 'R' Us.

**VIRG.** We have a brochure!

*(PETER and VIRG lead a confused MAXWELL off.)*

**CLARICE.** I like those kids more than I thought.

*(Pause. CLARICE seems to think things over a second, then she grows interested in the room around her. She glances at one corner, then another. She gets up and moves to an area that's roughly in the center.)*

**CLARICE.** *(Yelling:)* All right, Ado! You can come out now!

*(After a beat, ADO enters looking a little sheepish.)*

**ADO.** How?

**CLARICE.** I knew you'd be around here somewhere. There's no way Ado Bauer was going to be completely absent on the evening of his big triumph.

**ADO.** You know me too well, Clarice.

**CLARICE.** I guess I do at that. Well, you gonna tell me what happened?

**ADO.** Oh, you don't want to hear that.

## **THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**

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