

Nights at the  
**Algonquin**  
Round Table

A Play in Two Acts  
by  
Steven Vlasak

DRAFT FOR PRODUCTION CONSIDERATION

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"Nights at the Algonquin Round Table"

CHARACTERS w/actual ages in 1926

JACK BECK	An earnest farm boy, 24
SALLY ARDATH	No-nonsense waitress, 23
DOROTHY PARKER	Dark hair, with a darker wit, 32
ROBERT BENCHLEY	A human teddy bear, 36
ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT	A rude and rotund man with glasses, 39
FRANKLIN P. ADAMS	The elder statesman of the group, 44
GEORGE S. KAUFMAN	Ironic and droll, 35
PIANO MAN	A soft-spoken musicologist (Optional)

SETTING: The entire play takes place over several weeks in the Algonquin Hotel Rose Room Restaurant, New York City.

TIME: Spring, 1926, the height of Prohibition and the Roaring Twenties.

## INTRODUCTION (THE BENCHLEY PROLOGUE - OPTIONAL AS APPROPRIATE)

ROBERT BENCHLEY, a mid-30's teddy bear, nonchalantly ambles out through the "lobby" doors. He addresses the audience directly.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Good evening, and welcome. My name is Robert Benchley. Don't worry, I'll be right up here soon enough appearing in this night's entertainment as, um, Robert Benchley, but in advance of all that nonsense, this establishment's slumlords have asked me to step out here with a few brief comments. So now that you've all found your way out of this brisk Manhattan nocturne and in off of 5th Avenue, I wish only to inform you that this evenings fleeting diversion will include an intermission, Prohibition to the contrary, and that the sanitary facilities, as they are so charmingly never called, are located exactly back from whence you first made your stunning debut.

And finally -- and high time too, I hear you thinking -- before we begin, or have we already, let me ask you all to kindly silence or just toss away any potentially disruptive devices you've toddled in with that haven't yet been invented here in 1926. I leave it to your own good judgement regarding the use of said devices to take photographs, or text or post -- I have no idea what I'm going on about, I believe I may have just suffered a mild stroke -- or to immortalize any tableau with the potential to end up in some future location or "social media site" as proof that time travel does exist -- and to which I say, and why not? Thank you.

BENCHLEY wanders back from whence he came, stopping first at a bar or counter to refill his flask from a prominent bottle of Haig & Haig whiskey. The bottle will remain visible on the counter throughout the play.

## SCENE 1

## THE ALGONQUIN HOTEL ROSE ROOM - LATE MORNING

A large round table with (at least) six chairs dominates center stage, already set for lunch with napkins, silverware, glasses, and menus. On the bar sits a small pie case or rack, a stack of newspapers, and a single bottle of Haig & Haig whiskey. MUSIC drifts in from somewhere, from a radio or perhaps from a piano player in the "lobby" or a corner of the restaurant.

JACK, disheveled, a wide-eyed homespun hick toting a beat up suitcase, pads in through doors or an archway from the (we assume) hotel lobby. He wanders the room in awe. SALLY, a year or two younger than Jack, wearing a waitress uniform, appears from the only other required entrance portal, from the restaurant's "kitchen" door.

SALLY

(Brooklyn accent)

Now who in blazes let you in here?

JACK

Is that it? Is that the table?

SALLY

Don't tell me you're one of them.

JACK walks right to it.

JACK

That's it, isn't it?

SALLY

Twit.

JACK

What?

SALLY

Twit. It's British for...

JACK (cont'd)

Yeah, I speak English.

SALLY

Then you'll understand me when I say that you must leave now.

JACK  
 Sure, sure. I mean, I didn't expect, I just... This is it,  
 isn't it!

SALLY  
 Do you want to get me canned?

JACK  
 Certainly not.

SALLY  
 Well, then, would you like to leave?

JACK  
 No.

SALLY  
 No?

JACK  
 I wouldn't LIKE to leave. I will leave, but I don't WANT to.

JACK sets down his suitcase and checks  
 his pocket watch.

JACK (cont'd)  
 When's lunch anyway, in like ten minutes?

SALLY  
 Yes! Which is why you must go now. Whether you WANT to or  
 not.

JACK  
 And then come back. In ten minutes, for lunch.

SALLY  
 (glaring)  
 Not dressed like that.

JACK picks up his suitcase.

SALLY (cont'd)  
 (assuming:)  
 You're checking in. I'll take you to reception.

JACK  
 No.

SALLY  
 No again. So you WILL check in, but you don't WANT to check  
 in?

JACK  
 I'm not staying here.

SALLY

Finally! We agree on something. But then what's with the valise? Did you just toddle in off the street?

JACK

I drove here. Three thousand miles.

SALLY

YOU have an automobile?

JACK

I have a truck. The family legacy. Mine now... But they'll be here, right?

JACK sets down his suitcase by the round table. He looks at it reverently.

JACK (cont'd)

The Algonquin... Round... Table.

SALLY

Like clockwork. But again, if you're not checking in, then why isn't your trunk...

JACK

Still in my truck? Well, that's easy. I just wasn't too sure about this neighborhood.

SALLY

You weren't sure about midtown Manhattan? You're right. By now Legs Diamond's mob has probably walked off with your legacy. You should go check.

SALLY pushes JACK towards the lobby.

JACK

Okay, I get it.

Suddenly, from the lobby, or perhaps a private entrance, in fly ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT, 40-ish, a large man wearing owlsh glasses, dressed extravagantly in a cape and fedora, or perhaps a loud scarf and jacket, or other outrageous attire, along with GEORGE KAUFMAN, thin, mid-30's, also glasses, but dressed perfectly sedately in a business suit and tie.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

(to Kaufman)

I told you, it was purple.

SALLY  
Oh, sweet criminy!

Before being discovered by WOOLLCOTT and KAUFMAN, SALLY quickly shoves Jack's suitcase under the front of the table, then drags JACK off towards the wings to hide. WOOLLCOTT surveys the seemingly empty room.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT  
There's no one here. Finally, a room full of my peers.

GEORGE KAUFMAN  
(to Woollcott)  
Then I suppose we should... drop anchor.

WOOLLCOTT moves to hang his scarf/jacket/cape and hat on a nearby rack as SALLY crouches with JACK in the shadows, or behind a drape or a column or a potted fern. WOOLLCOTT and KAUFMAN take their usual seats at the round table, check their menus, and mime small talk, pointing to each others menus, etc. JACK and SALLY, hidden, whisper to each other.

JACK  
That's Alexander Woollcott, right?

SALLY  
He's hard to miss.

JACK  
Who's the specs?

SALLY  
Well, Mr. Algonquin Round Table, that's George S. Kaufman. He writes plays for Broadway.

JACK  
I'll say. Darn funny ones, from what I've heard: "Cocoanuts", for the Marx Brothers, "To the Ladies" starring Helen Hayes... He's thinner than I thought.

SALLY  
And now we're going to calmly ooze our way to the back door. Think invisible.

JACK  
Alright, I'm a pane of glass.

I'll say.

SALLY

She slowly scooches towards the exit, but JACK doesn't budge. SALLY tries to discretely pull him out, but JACK's planted firm.

C'mon!

SALLY (cont'd)

JACK

Why? I'm transparent. And that's Alexander Woollcott.

SALLY

Any second now my boss will walk in here and I will be fired. This is a good job.

JACK

So go, already.

In walks ROBERT BENCHLEY from the same place the fellows did.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Greetings, gents. I see you've managed somehow to survive the weekend.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Don't be so sure.

ROBERT greets the others and takes his seat to chat quietly.

JACK

I know who that is.

SALLY

Everyone knows Robert Benchley.

Suddenly, FRANKLIN ADAMS, mid-40's, holding a cigar, enters.

JACK

Don't tell me.

SALLY

Don't worry.

JACK

Franklin P. Adams. He's the reason I'm here.

SALLY

Not Dorothy Parker? And why am I still talking to you?



JACK

I know. We should be listening to them.

SALLY

You're right. What am I afraid of? If you won't go, I'll just TELL my boss.

SALLY strides off. JACK grabs her arm and pulls her back.

JACK

Alright. I'm sorry.

They creep towards their exit. Almost out. DOROTHY PARKER, petite, early 30's, dark hair, flies in, almost right past them, and up to the table. The gents half stand in greeting.

WOOLLCOTT

Dorothy...

BENCHLEY

Mrs. Parker...

She beats her chest in mock contrition, then holds up her hands.

DOROTHY PARKER

I'm tardy, mea culpa. But after all, I do have a reputation to live... down... to.

JACK eyes the group with admiration, riveted. Can he really be here?

SALLY

And we were so close. Look, what's the big deal? We finish oozing. You get cleaned and pressed, and I'll make sure you're seated within earshot. You can eavesdrop to your heart's content for the rest of the afternoon, which is how long they'll be here.

JACK

But that's not why I'm here.

SALLY

Now what do you mean?

JACK

I didn't motor clear across this grand country just to soak up the wit of Robert Benchley and Dorothy Parker.

SALLY

You didn't?

JACK

I'm not here to SEE them. I'm here to BE them.

And with that, JACK exits, or...

BLACKOUT.

The MUSIC swells, as all exit in  
darkness.

LIGHT BACK UP ON:

## SCENE 2

INT. ALGONQUIN HOTEL ROSE ROOM - THAT NIGHT

SALLY reemerges from the kitchen, begins adjusting the settings (for the next day), adding a few items from a tray. She shakes her head, thinking of Jack. Stops. Remembers the suitcase and drags it from under the table. She hoists it towards the lobby exit, right into JACK, bouncing in, still dressed as before.

SALLY

Criminy!

JACK takes the case.

JACK

Thanks. New York City sure is tall.

SALLY

I should hang a bell on you.

JACK

Sorry about this afternoon. My name is Jack.

JACK sets down the case and offers his hand. SALLY just eyes it.

JACK (cont'd)

Your name is Sally. They told me at the front desk.

SALLY

Yeah, well, that I knew.

JACK

I have spent the entire day driving around this terrifying town.

SALLY

And yet apparently all roads lead right back here.

JACK

At least you're not fired. You won't get in dutch now, will you?

SALLY

You mean blabbing with you?

JACK

That's exactly what I meant.

SALLY  
Not if you help.

JACK  
You bet.

SALLY extends her hand.

SALLY  
Sally Ardath. Charmed, I'm sure.

They shake hands. She drags him back to the round table.

SALLY (cont'd)  
Just make it look something like that.

They tidy the rest of the table as the scene continues. JACK struggles with folding the napkins right, and checks his placements against Sally's.

SALLY (cont'd)  
So, Jack? New York City. Terrifying, and tall?

JACK  
Tall, yes! Skyscrapers, wow. And that Brooklyn Bridge. I drove over that thing twice. The second time by accident, but still... And Central Park. I thought I was lost, out in the country somewhere, when suddenly, pow, I'm right back in the city. I didn't know there could be so many automobiles in one place. And then, as the evening sky darkened, I caught sight of the long avenue of cars on the bridge, their white headlamps and red running lights streaming hither and yon across that great span like white and crimson corpuscles coursing through the very heart of this vibrant nation.

SALLY freezes. Absentmindedly, in a moment of realization, she drops her tray of silverware noisily to the table.

SALLY  
My God, you're a writer.

JACK gestures at his arrangements.

JACK  
(non-sequitur)  
Is this right?

SALLY retrieves the utensils and walks over.

SALLY

Pretty much. The knife faces in, but otherwise I think you've got it.

JACK returns to each of his settings to fix them. SALLY retrieves the tray.

JACK

Where I come from, we usually just use our teeth and claws.

SALLY

Or your pen.

JACK

Yes. I'm a writer. I write.

SALLY

So what did you mean? You drove three thousand miles... Are you some sort of poet?

JACK

That would be a good place to start. Most of these knaves were first knighted in verse.

SALLY

You lost me, Lance. A lot.

JACK

Everyone knows that most of the Round Table, Parker, Kaufman, even Benchley, were first championed by Franklin P. Adams. He gave them all their first big break by publishing their silly poems in his column.

SALLY

You're right there.

JACK

If FPA says you're the bee's knees, the nation hears about it, and by next morning you're in clover. And why not? He's King Solomon. How many journalists are more famous than the people they cover? Above all, it's Franklin Pierce Adam's name that will be remembered forever.

(Ironic pause for the audience's sake.)

SALLY

Or at least his initials.

JACK

Exactly. FPA HRH.

SALLY

You're not the first kid voted "class clown" in their high school yearbook to imagine that that bunch might be their meal ticket. But instead of putting three thousand miles of dust on your family's truck, couldn't you have just purchased a postage stamp?

JACK

I did. 27 stamps. USA PO to FPA.

SALLY gestures.

SALLY

Okay. And..?

JACK

I'm sure the letters bearing my one score and seven sonnets simply got waylaid in his office somewhere. So I figured once FPA meets me...

SALLY

Oh, dear.

JACK raises an eyebrow.

SALLY (cont'd)

Did you notice that velvet rope just outside the door? My boss, as much as he craves their business, forbids any of our trade to so much as speak to these geniuses.

JACK

They'd appreciate me.

SALLY

Jack, the Round Table doesn't care the hole in a donut for how witty you are. They're already too clever by half.

JACK

But that's why they've assembled every weekday for the past five years, to amuse and entertain one another with their sparkling wit.

SALLY

They're a bunch of drunks spraining their own arms to pat themselves on the back. Who cares what they think anyway?

JACK

The whole country does, and you know it.

SALLY

Then I must need glasses, because I really can't see it.

JACK

What I need to figure now is how to get them to see me. Do you need any waiters?

Another glance from SALLY.

JACK (cont'd)

No, I guess not. They have to hear me speak, see how I think. What if I just march into "The Daily World" and ask to see Mr. Adams?

SALLY

I think "The World" has a moat.

JACK

An introduction! What I need is an introduction.

SALLY

Did you give any thought to this before you gassed up in Kansas?

JACK

I thought once I got here I'd know what to do. And it was sunny Cal-i-for-ni-ae.

SALLY

THAT'S your plan?

JACK

Think about it. If I want to impress them with my wit, then I should be clever enough to conjure something.

SALLY

That sounds half-witted to me.

JACK

I know. What I need is an introduction. But now how am I gonna swing that?

SALLY

Oh, you'll "conjure" something.

JACK picks up his suitcase.

JACK

Look, before I go, is there somewhere to clean up? My sister's got a floor waiting for me.

SALLY

An entire floor? Sure.

(gesturing towards the lobby)

Back through there. Turn right. It's labeled "Men."

Suddenly, in walks DOROTHY PARKER, dressed the same as previously, now a tad drunk. JACK immediately sees the potential. His eyes go wide as DOROTHY advances.

JACK

What's Dorothy Parker doing here?

SALLY

She lives here. The Algonquin Hotel? And you do smell kinda ripe.

SALLY picks up her tray and walks out past Dorothy and into the kitchen.

SALLY (cont'd)  
(to Dorothy)

Good evening.

DOROTHY spots Jack.

DOROTHY PARKER

We'll see.

SALLY exits as DOROTHY sizes JACK up and continues over. JACK lowers the valise.

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

Are you here to fix something?

JACK

I'm just a little lost, ma'am.

DOROTHY circles JACK.

DOROTHY PARKER

Aren't we all? I thought I heard voices, but I realize now they must have been my own. Let me ask you this, how do you look when I'm sober?

JACK

Sorry, I'm new in town.

DOROTHY PARKER

Well, benvenuto from your bon voyage. What's your name, handyman?

JACK

Jack.



DOROTHY PARKER

So, Lawrence, is there a clean suit of clothes in that very attractive tool box of yours?

JACK

Yes, ma'am, there is.

DOROTHY PARKER

Well, if you can manage to get into them and out of the habit of calling me ma'am, perhaps we can find something or somewhere to repair together. My name is Dorothy. I live, if you can call it that, in room 209.

And with that, DOROTHY walks back out (to quickly change her outfit.) JACK picks up his case. SALLY reappears from the kitchen with some fresh cutlery.

SALLY

Did you impress her?

JACK

I suppose. We're going out. Now. That was almost too easy.

SALLY

Someone is. Best of luck with your whole "introduction" scheme.

JACK

You sound... what?

SALLY

Proud. This is a big day for you. It's not every rugged young man who can rack up a date with Dorothy-tramp-Parker. You do know she's married, right?

JACK

Not... exactly.

SALLY

Well, that's what she is, not-exactly-married. Relax, no one's seen Mr. Parker in years. Plus you've already confessed that your intentions are entirely self-serving. This should be an interesting first night in town for you.

JACK

Are all New Yorkers as outspoken as you?

SALLY

Hardly. Around here, I'm what they call shy.

JACK walks out with his suitcase to the lobby.

SALLY returns to setting the tables (as Jack changes clothes offstage.) She straightens some of Jack's arrangements. Looks over at the lobby doors.

LIGHTS FADE, AS MUSIC PLAYS, THEN  
BACK UP ON:

## SCENE 3

ALGONQUIN HOTEL ROSE ROOM - MINUTES LATER

SALLY finishes the table. JACK walks in from the lobby wearing a suit jacket and tie, hair combed.

JACK

She's not there. Room 209. No answer.

SALLY.

Aw, you got stood up. Maybe she's already sleeping it off.

DOROTHY strides in. She's changed into evening wear and looks great.

DOROTHY PARKER

There's no one in the whole Gam Dodd place. Hello, Lawrence. I rang room service to get us some sandwiches, but they've obviously just unionized and gone out on strike.

SALLY

I'll be glad to make those.

DOROTHY PARKER

Sweet girl.

SALLY exits to the kitchen.

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

Sorry to keep you waiting, Larry, but from the looks of us, it was worth it.

JACK

You do look pretty sharp, ma'am... um, Dorothy... Mrs. Parker.

DOROTHY PARKER

(Busting Jack)

Mrs. Parker, eh? I see my reputation has receded me. Who snitched...

(Gesturing towards the kitchen)

The girl of sandwich?

JACK

Truth be told, I deliberately targeted the Algonquin in hopes of meeting you and your witty companions.

DOROTHY PARKER

Now why on earth would anyone wish to do that?

JACK

You're being modest, of course.

DOROTHY PARKER

Modesty is certainly not one of the virtues we're known for, if any.

DOROTHY pulls a flask from her purse.

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

Thirsty?

JACK

Thank you.

He takes a tentative sip. From his expression it appears JACK doesn't have much experience. He returns the flask.

DOROTHY PARKER

"Be Prepared." That's my motto. And if it's good enough for the Boy Scouts of America, then it would seem downright unpatriotic of me to disagree. What's taking those sandwiches being prepared, I wonder?

She takes his hand and leads JACK back towards the "lobby" doors.

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

We can dine upstairs, Larry. But I should warn you that my suite is rather small, with just room enough to lay my hat and a few friends. But it does offer a breathtaking view of an opposing wall. And in the moonlight you may be surprised to discover just how romantic these, uh, those old bricks can look.

JACK

I guess I should eat something.

DOROTHY PARKER

Splendid.

JACK

And tomorrow, will you introduce me to your exclusive group?

DOROTHY PARKER

Sure, Jack.

(re: getting his name right)

See, I know. But I'd hardly call us exclusive. Our vicious circle admits almost anyone: semi-literates, Semites, even... Alexander Woollcott. But why do you care, really?

JACK

Because I too am a writer. I've driven all this distance fueled only by the hope of getting someone in New York to publish something of mine.

DOROTHY PARKER

Really? You own a car?

JACK

A truck.

DOROTHY PARKER

We have a tough enough time getting our own stuff in print, accurately, at any rate. But I would like to help you, I sincerely would.

JACK

Back home I had quite a name.

DOROTHY PARKER

Was it Big Fish?

JACK just stares at his feet. DOROTHY almost seems sorry.

JACK

No. But your friend FPA is always looking to hook new writers for his column, isn't he?

DOROTHY PARKER

You won't see any money from the "Conning Tower" page.

JACK

Oh, I know. But he gave you your start, didn't he? With one of your short verses?

DOROTHY PARKER

It's true, the man raised me from a couplet.

SALLY arrives with a platter of sandwiches (crusts trimmed off.)

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

Why, thank you. We weren't even close to gnawing off our own hands, were we, Jack?

SALLY lingers, then leaves back to the kitchen. DOROTHY retrieves the flask again. She nods towards the exit.

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

One for the road?

JACK

Why not?

JACK has a sip. DOROTHY heads for the doors. JACK stays put.

JACK (cont'd)  
 (drunk, tired)  
 I'd already submitted a few dozen of my best poems from home.

DOROTHY PARKER  
 All at once?

JACK  
 No. One by one. But so far, not a peep.

DOROTHY PARKER  
 Under what name did you mail them?

JACK  
 Well, their titles, of course.

DOROTHY PARKER  
 No, I mean how were they signed?

JACK  
 My family name is Gross-Tin-Beck.

DOROTHY PARKER  
 That may explain the silent treatment right there. For the Conning Tower you're supposed to use a nom-de-pun like Flaccus or Amnesia.

JACK yawns.

JACK  
 But then how will I get known?

DOROTHY PARKER  
 Well, not by going as "gro-cery clerk." Did you even notice that each of Frank's epistles is signed with a fake name? The word gets out. You should at least shorten yours to... Beck.

JACK  
 To Beck. Can you do that? Go by only one name? Could you really get famous as just Beck?

DOROTHY PARKER  
 Jack Beck, Jack, Jack Beck: Ring Lardner, Zane Grey, Jack Beck. It sounds as sinuous as I'm sure you are under that Sears Roebuck ensemble. And you've already changed for me once this evening, so why not see how rosy life might look through a new moniker?

JACK  
 Jack Beck. It's still my name, just not quite all of it.

DOROTHY PARKER

It's easier than what I had to endure. I committed matrimony to change mine. At least looking back, that's the only excuse for it now I can think.

JACK reaches for a sandwich, stalling.  
DOROTHY saunters over and picks up the plate.

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

Let's tackle these tidbits in my room, Jack.

He stands. SALLY walks in with another plate and sets it down.

SALLY

I brought desserts. On the house.

DOROTHY PARKER

Thank you. That's exactly where we're headed.

SALLY makes a face at Jack and walks back out.

SALLY

Good night.

JACK

Mrs. Parker, I know there's more to you, your short stories and poems, than just laughs. Your words have real heart...

DOROTHY PARKER

Usually broken.

JACK

(slurring, clearly drunk/tired)

And that's my goal, to tell human fables, chronicles of the common man. I've worked on farms and in fields, I've listened to how people speak. And that's what I want to capture on paper, that simple eloquence.

DOROTHY PARKER

Well, that's all fine, if you've got an ear for corn.

JACK

I can be funny first, if that's what it takes.

DOROTHY, obviously, just wants to get upstairs. JACK again yawns.

DOROTHY PARKER

You don't have to convince me, Jack. You're clearly a rhinestone in the rough.

JACK

I know your group appreciates a man who's quick on his feet.

DOROTHY PARKER

This evening I'd prefer one at his level best.

JACK

(tired and drunk)

I can be clever. One summer I worked on a ranch with this annoying fellow who was such a wiener, I told him he should just go on and pull a condom over his head.

DOROTHY laughs in spite of herself.

DOROTHY PARKER

Ha!

JACK proudly polishes his fingernails on his chest.

JACK

That one got passed around, I'll tell you.

DOROTHY PARKER

See, that's precisely the sort of thing they don't let us print. But I'm encouraged by the apparent shift south in your current state of mind.

JACK

But FPA would be impressed at least, wouldn't he, if over lunch I said something like that?

DOROTHY PARKER

I told you, I'm already on your side. Why aren't you?

DOROTHY hands the two plates to JACK to carry and nudges him towards the door. They get a few steps. JACK, exhausted, abruptly takes a seat at the bar or elsewhere, or slides down the wall.

JACK

I'm sorry. It's been a bumpy week.

DOROTHY shakes him. Between the booze and fatigue, JACK is out cold. He snores loudly.

DOROTHY PARKER

Jack? Jack? Mr. Beck? Oh, for Christ's sake!

LIGHTS FADE.



DOROTHY throws up her hands, then exits in darkness to change backstage. JACK emits a loud SNORE.

## SCENE 4

## ALGONQUIN HOTEL ROSE ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

The LIGHTS FADE UP. JACK is still asleep in place. SALLY enters.

SALLY

Jack?

She pokes him cautiously. Repeatedly. He eventually stands and looks around.

JACK

Oh, great!

SALLY

Jack, what happened?

JACK

Well... nothing! I nodded out right here in my tracks. What time is it? What day is it?

SALLY looks pleased. JACK paces.

JACK (cont'd)

There's goes my big introduction! And it fell right into my lap. She was eager to help, too.

SALLY

I'm sure she was.

JACK

Now what?

SALLY

You don't need them, Jack.

DOROTHY flies in, dressed down with a different cloche hat and scarf.

DOROTHY PARKER

Larry? There you are! What are you waiting for? They'll be arriving any minute. Come on, let's splash some water on that lovely face.

DOROTHY grabs JACK and hustles him out to the lobby. SALLY shrugs, and begins tidying the table. She collects last night's sandwich and pie plates, and exits to the kitchen.

LIGHTS FADE, THEN BACK UP AS:

## SCENE 5

ALGONQUIN HOTEL ROSE ROOM - MINUTES LATER

WOOLLCOTT, in another colorful outfit, and BENCHLEY and KAUFMAN, with at least their ties changed, walk in to sit at the round table, conversing as they go.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Should we wait for Dorothy?

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Friends over food, this is news. Why do you care?

They take their seats. WOOLLCOTT looks over at the lobby door. The following is played briskly:

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

She owes me an article.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Animal, vegetable or mineral?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

I have a deadline.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Well, anything can happen, although it usually doesn't.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

She'll be here. But all her inspiration will go into explaining why she wasn't inspired enough to write your damn article.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

No doubt. Although I know she's capable of doing volumes of work.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Of course she is, as long as it isn't the work she's supposed to be doing.

DOROTHY walks in from the lobby with JACK, who still appears groggy. Everyone rises slightly.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Hello, straggler. What's this, a new puppy?

DOROTHY PARKER

Not quite. But he is a wag with a tale. Everyone, this is...  
 (as though just remembering)  
 ...Jack Beck.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Welcome, Jack, to the court of King Aleck, the pen dragon.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Smart Aleck.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Indeed. Before you stand my fair knights.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

And mediocre afternoons.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Saint George of Kaufman, and here, in the flesh, Prince Robert of Scarsdale, or as he is oft called by us, Sweet Old Bob, although usually just by his initials.

JACK looks confused. Bob explains.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

(aside)

S.O.B.

WOOLLCOTT extends a hand, ROBERT bows. KAUFMAN does his one forefinger in the air greeting.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

And the damsel with whom your are no doubt already intimately acquainted, we refer to as our own Lady Macbeth.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

We prefer to refer to...

DOROTHY PARKER

Not Guinevere, my lesion?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Alas not, as you -- are not -- a lass.

WOOLLCOTT pauses to allow the others to nod their general approval. DOROTHY takes out her handkerchief and throws it to the table.

DOROTHY PARKER

Will no one defend my honor?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Impossible, since Lady Guinevere was renowned and true,  
whilst you, Dame Dottie, are infamous and duplicitous.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

As are all of us.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

And that's not the half of it.

DOROTHY gestures regally.

DOROTHY PARKER

Thank you, Fred, at least. You ARE a prince.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Also, you have no honor to defend.

DOROTHY PARKER

Freddie!

The Round Table sit, as JACK and  
DOROTHY remain standing.

JACK

(aside to Dorothy)

Wow. Where's FPA?

DOROTHY PARKER

Oh, didn't I mention? He almost never takes lunch. Frank's  
more of a Saturday night poker face. But don't worry, if you  
impress the shire, then so goes "The World."

JACK

Oh gosh, that makes me even more tense.

DOROTHY retrieves her flask and offers  
it to JACK.

DOROTHY PARKER

Hair of the dog?

JACK takes a surreptitious sip. The  
others glance around knowingly (they  
think.) SALLY enters to fill water  
glasses. DOROTHY notices ALECK's stare.

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

Don't think I don't know what you're thinking, Aleck.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Someone should tell Aleck.

DOROTHY PARKER

You can stop glaring at me in that tone of voice. You'll be pleased to know I finished up my piece for your impoverished publication.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

I don't believe it.

DOROTHY PARKER

All I have to do is write it down.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

You're convinced now, aren't you?

DOROTHY PARKER

I stopped by your so-called office this morning, but someone was using the pencil.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

She has you there.

DOROTHY notices JACK gulping down coffee, trying to rally his wits.

DOROTHY PARKER

But enough about you, Alexander.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Such a nerve!

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Never speaks up.

DOROTHY PARKER

Our guest, Jack here, has just joined us from the western territories. Where precisely was that, Jack?

JACK

Califor...

DOROTHY PARKER

Oh, I remember, Hawaii.

JACK

What? No.

DOROTHY PARKER

Johnnie's family, who are all Norwegian, obviously, look at him...

JACK

I'm not...

DOROTHY PARKER

Hush. They run a huge ranch in the Hawaiian Islands with several thousand head of pineapple roaming free. In fact, that's why Jack has paddled his outrigger all this way to our fair shores, to drum up business for the poor neglected pineapple. He feels, and please do correct me if I'm wrong, ..

JACK

Well...

DOROTHY PARKER

...that there's no reason the humble pineapples shouldn't be at least as popular as the regular old red apple, and that Hawaii could and should give Washington State a run for its cider. In fact, I do believe Jack has been granted an exclusive audience with President Coolidge to plead his case. That's fairly accurate, right, Jack?

JACK

(head spinning)

Pretty much. You got my name right.

SALLY glances at Jack and exits.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

And the President's.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

So your mission, Jack, as I understand it, and I don't, is to establish the pineapple as the new apple of the nation's eye, is that true?

Sly smirks all around. They know Jack's being joshed.

JACK

Well, my mission, no, but...

GEORGE KAUFMAN

That would be mission figs.

JACK

But...

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Before pineapples, was your family in road apples?

ROBERT BENCHLEY

They were just horsing around.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Were they Rhodes apple scholars?

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Fellows, cut the horse crap. Can't you see our guest is trying to speak?

BENCHLEY neighs and paws the table with his "hoof." DOROTHY laughs.

GEORGE KAUFMAN (cont'd)

The neighs have it.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Don't worry, Jack. We'll subside. Are you suitably inoculated?

BENCHLEY offers his flask. JACK takes it, and the opportunity to get a word in.

JACK

I see, despite all I've read to the contrary, that prohibition in Manhattan is apparently merely an ugly rumor.

The guys look a bit impressed. But you can see it's a competition.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

An ugly roomer?

KAUFMAN shakes his head.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Too easy.

WOOLLCOTT takes the flask from JACK.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Thanks to the Volstead Act, I find liquor may now just be the perfect vice: Illegal, immoral AND fattening.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Not to mention fattening.

DOROTHY PARKER

Jack is also an author. He grows pineapples AND he writes things.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

What do you write, Jack?

DOROTHY PARKER

He writes ON pineapples. Poems mostly, of a tropical nature.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

I wrote "Cocoanuts."



Everyone seems to think that's hilarious, with possible spit takes and items dropped.

DOROTHY PARKER

Aleck, what's your favorite fruit? I mean aside from Noel Coward.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Why, you, Dorothy, of course. I can't get enough of you when you're in season.

DOROTHY PARKER

Hunting season.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

She can be a tad acidic.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

She can be a little tart.

DOROTHY PARKER

That's it, Fredrick. I take back everything nice I've ever considered saying about you.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Is that your considered opinion?

JACK's wide-eyed with disbelief, his head spinning. Suddenly, the table goes quiet. Everyone just looks at JACK.

DOROTHY PARKER

Jack has an amusing story. Or rather an amusing sentence, but still, not something the class has heard before. Jack, tell us about your belligerent friend. You know, Dick.

JACK stands, tipsy. He squints across the room. In steps FRANKLIN ADAMS.

JACK

Is that FPA?

FRANKLIN ADAMS

Hello. It was such a splendid day I thought I'd ruin it.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

You said that last week.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

Last week was nice, too.

DOROTHY PARKER

Frank, this is Jack Beck, from Hawaii. He was just about to enthrall us all with an amusing anecdote.

FRANK extends his hand, then withdraws it.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

Pleasure.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

It's an anecdote for your ruined day.

FRANKLIN ADAMS (cont'd)

Then should I walk in again?

GEORGE KAUFMAN

You should walk out again.

FRANK sits.

DOROTHY PARKER

Anyway, Jack worked with this fellow, right, Jack, on the pineapple plantation?

JACK stands for his story, drunkenly weaving just a little, steadying himself on the table, nervously clutching the tablecloth.

JACK

It was actually in the sugar beet fields.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

I thought they had sugar cane in Hawaii.

JACK

They do. This was California.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Do you parents own two plantations?

JACK

For this story, sure.

JACK looks over at FPA to make sure he's listening. FRANK takes out a big cigar, slowly unwraps it, and settles in. The table hangs on JACK's every word. SALLY walks in from the kitchen just as:

JACK (cont'd)

(drunk and nervous)

Well, you see, one summer, I was working with this annoying fellow who was such a...

Suddenly, JACK retches - is he going to puke all over them? EVERYONE leaps up evasively as JACK puts his hands to his mouth. JACK stands, facing one, then another. WOOLLCOTT, the delicate flower, looks as though he himself may be ill. A few begin to inch their way towards the exits. But instead of hurling, JACK teeters, and still holding the tablecloth, faints, falling backwards to the floor, out cold in a clattering vortex of glasses and silverware as everyone flees.

Lights FADE.

During the blackout, SALLY tries unsuccessfully to rouse JACK, looking at him affectionately. She collects the silverware back into the tray and exits to the kitchen as the PIANO plays...

LIGHTS FADE UP

## SCENE 6

ALGONQUIN HOTEL ROSE ROOM - LATER THAT AFTERNOON

SALLY reappears, sets the table, discovers JACK. She pokes him, clears her throat to wake him. JACK stirs awake from his dream.

JACK

There's a dog in the beat field! ...What happened?

SALLY

Is this a habit with you? If so, then it's probably better you don't remember.

He looks around.

JACK

I passed out.

JACK stands, gets light-headed, and sits back down. His eyes go wide as he slowly realizes:

JACK (cont'd)

I practically puked all over the people I came here to impress. That's just fantastic. At the foot of Mount Olympus, I nearly erupted. And then I fainted.

SALLY

For a moment there it looked like Mr. Woollcott was about to follow suit.

JACK

Talk about burning your bridges.

SALLY

For once, their meeting adjourned early. They'll definitely remember you.

JACK

I have to apologize. I'll eat crow. Anything.

SALLY

That might not help.

JACK

Ohhh... What else happened?

SALLY

The so-called wittiest people in America were at no loss for words in describing how much they never want to see you again.

JACK

Ohhh.. Maybe you're right. It's not like they will -- help me -- now -- that's for sure.

SALLY

Finally!

JACK

I wanted to be like them, but I see now that in order for that, I'm going to have to be more like them.

SALLY walks around him, staring at his head from every angle.

JACK (cont'd)

What?

SALLY

I'm looking for blood. Clearly, you've hit your head.

JACK

What I've hit on -- what I've had knocked into me -- is the insight I needed all along.

SALLY

Insight? From that gang?

JACK

What I wanted to believe is that my poems had somehow just been lost in the shuffle. What I see now is that FPA must have deliberately tossed each and every one of them out.

SALLY

You don't know that.

The two pull the table cloth back in place.

JACK

Well, now that I've heard them in action, it's a pretty safe bet. The only way he'll ever publish me is if I write like they talk.

SALLY

You just burned that bridge, remember?

JACK

I'll build another.

SALLY

You're one of those "glass half full" types, aren't you?

JACK

I learned something useful today.

SALLY

Don't drink on an empty stomach?

JACK

It's a good thing I did send those poems in under my surname, because FPA has no inkling that's me. If I submit my new "sophisticated" writing -- once I write it -- anonymously, under a new... fake... name, and if my words ring true in the cadence that they all speak, then he'll have to like my writing. Right?

SALLY

What's the point, if you end up sounding just like them?

JACK

To get in the door -- my plan all along. Once I'm known, I'll write what I want.

JACK looks over at the Round Table, as SALLY grabs the stack of newspapers from the bar.

JACK (cont'd)

What's this?

SALLY

There's plenty of newspapers in this town.

JACK takes them.

JACK

I see that.

SALLY

I mean newspapers that may need someone who knows how to work a pen, ones where those scribblers aren't employed.

JACK smiles at Sally's vote of confidence. He stands to lay them out on the table. Picks up:

JACK

"The World"! Of course, "The World". FPA, page one.

JACK crumples it up. JACK leafs through the others. SALLY gazes at him fondly. JACK catches her affectionate glance. SALLY looks away embarrassed. JACK picks up the others and stands.

JACK (cont'd)

But you're absolutely right, Sally. There's The New York Times, The Post, The American, The Daily News, The Daily Mirror, The Telegram, The Herald-Tribune, The Evening Graphic, The Evening Journal, and The Evening Sun.

SALLY

And if you don't find work there, you can always do a memory act.

JACK

Oh, I'll get a job.

SALLY looks like she wants to hug him as he walks out with the papers through the lobby doors.

LIGHTS FADE, PIANO MUSIC, THEN  
BACK UP ON:

## SCENE 7

## ALGONQUIN HOTEL ROSE ROOM - THAT EVENING

SALLY sets the table. JACK reenters from the lobby holding his jacket over his shoulder, looking a mess.

JACK

There she is!

SALLY

(noticing)

Criminy, look at you! I admire your determination. It's tough out there, isn't it?

JACK

No, I got a job! I've been doing it all day.

SALLY

Jack, that's wonderful!

She goes to hug him, but catching a whiff, just pats off some dust.

SALLY (cont'd)

You must be working hard.

JACK

Do you know this new arena they're building, Sally, Madison Square Garden?

SALLY

Oh, sure, it's supposed to be grand. Did you find a writing job, Jack, just from the sheer force of your will? You're incredible. Are you the Garden's new public relations man for the construction? Will you be advertising the new building, providing promotional commentary?

JACK

Something like that. I'm helping build their new building, providing poured concrete. I spent the entire day jockeying wheelbarrows full of cement.

SALLY

Oh, Jack.

JACK

I don't mind. They pay daily. In cash!

JACK pulls out a fist of singles.

JACK (cont'd)

Let's celebrate. You're about done, right? I'll pick you up.



SALLY

In your truck?

JACK

Certainly. And with a full tank. We're going whole hog.

SALLY

What makes you so sure I don't already have a date tonight?

JACK

Drag him along. He can show us the best places to cut a rug. Too bad the truck's only got two seats though. I suppose YOU could ride in the back.

SALLY

Two will be plenty.

She takes his hand and leads him  
offstage (to change costumes.)

LIGHTS CROSS FADE TO A SPOT  
CENTER STAGE AS:

BENCHLEY (perhaps) strolls out.

NOTE: The following monologue is optional, as cover while Jack and Sally change. Alternatively, simply playing Charleston music and flashing some colored lights could fill the time needed.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Ah, well, youth today, am I right? Well, here we all are, hopefully, metaphorically, on the edge of our seats. And so, I simply wished to step out here again to applaud you all on your ability to thus far hold those seats, and, thankfully, also your bladders. So as our new best friends Jack and Sally enjoy their night on the town, at this very moment I should like simply to embark on a short history of the art of the Italian Renaissance, and then possibly scramble some eggs. Or, if you prefer, I might simply defer to some brightly colored flashing electric lights representing the high life and good times those two are currently enjoying out there, and to pray also that none of you now beloved audience members are prone to epileptic fits.

BENCHLEY exits.

CHARLESTON MUSIC FADES UP as the LIGHTS DIM and COLORED BEAMS SWEEP ACROSS THE STAGE.

LIGHTS BACK UP AS:

## SCENE 8

## ALGONQUIN HOTEL ROSE ROOM - LATE THAT NIGHT

SALLY, dressed in a shiny sexy flapper gown and a feathered headband, tumbles in from the lobby, laughing with JACK, now dressed in his "Sears Roebuck" jacket and tie.

JACK

I haven't had that much excitement since the sugar mill caught fire.

PIANO MUSIC wafts in from somewhere.  
SALLY cranes her neck to listen.

SALLY

Do you hear that? Jack, meaning no offense, and you did a swell job at it, but the Charleston is so 1924. Tonight, for your own good, I'm going to teach you the Black Bottom.

JACK

Well, I like the sound of that.

SALLY demonstrates the steps.

SALLY

Hop down front and doodle back. Mooch to your left then mooch to your right. Hands on your hips, do the mess around. Break a leg till you're near the ground. That's doing the Black Bottom Dance.

SALLY takes Jack's hand and guides him through it while whispering in his ear.

SALLY (cont'd)

Hop down front and doodle back. Mooch to your left then mooch to your right. Hands on your hips, do the mess around. Break a leg till you're near the ground. That's doing the Black Bottom Dance.

JACK spins SALLY over the floor. SALLY dances another impressive set by herself, complete with flapping hand gestures, as JACK beams and claps in tempo. SALLY grabs JACK and they do it all again. The SONG ends. They collapse laughing onto the bar stools.

JACK

Yes! I'd say we beat the Charleston to a fare-thee-well. Hot-cha-cha!

They catch their breath. SALLY removes the cover from the pie display. JACK makes an approving face.

SALLY

We'll have to go dancing every night if I keep feeding you like this.

JACK

What a city! I've got a dozen ideas for poems and stories just from this evening -- and they're all about you.

SALLY

Is that your Irish blarney talking now?

JACK

What do you think?

JACK has a bite of pie or popover.

JACK (cont'd)

Divine.

SALLY smiles.

JACK (cont'd)

Did you make this?

SALLY nods.

JACK (cont'd)

You could sell this all over town, Sally. You should open your own bakery.

SALLY

Jack, they're just desserts.

JACK

Well, that's all I'm after. My just desserts.

(a beat)

Somewhere in your heart of hearts, I'll bet you are too.

SALLY

Oh, I could never open my own little bake shop. This is a good job, Jack. I make almost 24 dollars a week.

JACK

Aha! Sure you could. You could call it "My Just Deserts." You've got the recipe for success right here.

SALLY

Oh, I don't know. It would be pleasant.

JACK leaps up.

JACK

I'll bet it would be pleasant. Someday all Manhattan will sing the praises of Sally's pie.

SALLY stands facing him.

SALLY

You are a hoot. Especially when you don't try.

JACK looks like he's about to kiss her. The lobby doors swing open and in walks DOROTHY -- dressed in a fur trimmed overcoat (as cover for her next outfit) -- cocktail in hand. She sways in. Lethal.

DOROTHY PARKER

Hello, Jack. Your dream came true, didn't it? You certainly made an impression.

JACK

Mrs. Parker, I am so sorry. Will you please offer my apologies to your friends?

DOROTHY PARKER

No apologies necessary. We - my "friends" - certainly, are not ones to cast the first stone. The second and third, perhaps. I'll admit, after your initial performance, at first we may have looked upon you not unlike some form of social disease. But as we embroidered the tale of your stunning debut, my companions found themselves somewhat intrigued. But you should be careful what you wish for, Jack. FPA almost did publish an account. He was going to entitle it "Wasted Youth."

JACK

(deadpan)

That's wonderful.

DOROTHY PARKER

Isn't it, though? But if you do wish for a curtain call, there is one condition.

JACK

I won't touch a drop.

DOROTHY PARKER

That's not it. I feel Jack, that for you own safety, before you rejoin what we ourselves call the Vicious Circle, I should tutor you in at least a couple of our coven bylaws.

JACK

(encouraged, excited)

We could visit for a spell.

SALLY looks disgusted.

SALLY

I should probably hit the bricks. By now my mom's probably phoned the police. Or the Pope.

SALLY takes Jack's pie plate and walks out to the kitchen, (to change back into her waitress uniform) as JACK tries to size it all up. DOROTHY has a sip of her whiskey highball.

DOROTHY PARKER

If you're sincere about this writer nonsense, I should at least arm you with what we've all had to learn. Because being funny is serious business. For starters...

(the PIANO perhaps hits a few  
inspiring chords, or MUSIC  
from a radio plays)

You're up against Shaw, Wilde, Moliere, and that's just the new boys.

JACK

What I'm up against is you.

DOROTHY PARKER

You'll get your chance. Aristophanes wrote forty comedies, ten of which are still in vogue. And you already know I don't mean the magazine.

(another sip)

Humor is built on surprise. Do you know what a non-sequitur is, Jack?

JACK

I don't follow you.

DOROTHY PARKER

Alright, that's one we can cross off our list. Mr. Benchley has the market cornered anyway. Of course, everyone knows what a pun is.

JACK

Celery.

DOROTHY PARKER

That's a homonym. Let's continue.

JACK

Lettuce.

DOROTHY PARKER

There's really only two kinds of puns, Jack: bad puns, which make you want to shoot someone, and even worse puns which make everyone else want to strangle you.

JACK

So be careful with your half baked puns.

DOROTHY PARKER

Stop that. Then there's humorous comparisons, or analogies.

JACK

I never metaphor I didn't like.

DOROTHY threatens a slap.

DOROTHY PARKER

You're living proof that a little education is a dangerous thing. Which brings us to the unexpected insult, which explains Woollcott, who even before he speaks is somehow offensive. Again, amusing hopefully because it's sneaky, which also accounts for exaggeration, satire, sarcasm, ridicule and irony.

The MUSIC ends with a flourish.

JACK

That's a lot of territory.

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

All else is just calisthenics with words. Real wit has truth to it, usually served with a twist. "The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about." Oscar Wilde, of course. An epigram like that will put you on the map, if that's all you want from life.

JACK

It is for now. So what you're saying is that real wit is something that you think about twenty-four hours... too late.

DOROTHY PARKER

(impressed)

My goodness, Jack. Who said that?

JACK

I did.

DOROTHY PARKER

First?

JACK

I think so.

DOROTHY PARKER

Not bad. L'esprit d'escalier.

JACK

Sorry?

DOROTHY PARKER

The wit of the staircase. You're exactly right. That's part of why we're writers, to document the knock out punch line we should have tossed in the first round, instead of after the bout was over. Half of what we spout on the spot we do spend days digging for. I've waited weeks sometimes to casually drop something into conversation that occurred to me while I was...

(seductively)

...shaving.

The MUSIC perhaps resumes, now more melancholy.

JACK

"Tell the joke that tells the truth"?

DOROTHY PARKER

That's right, the unexpected. Because, honestly, the last thing anyone expects anyone to tell is the truth.

She walks back over to JACK.

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

But these days, everything is possible. Do you know this new fellow, Jack, Ernest Hemingway?

JACK

Maybe.

DOROTHY PARKER

Good name for him, earnest. As a writer, he's got the right idea. He keeps to the short path, his prose stripped to its firm young bones. And his work is inspiring. After reading it, all I desire is to kill myself.

JACK just stares.

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

I know. I protest too much. But if you can figure out how to preach the gospel in some dangerous new tongue, you can skip the slapstick completely.

JACK

But is that sophisticated?

DOROTHY PARKER

Extremely. Maybe you should just go tell your simple stories about your plain spoken plainsmen.

JACK

But what's the point, if no one's listening?

DOROTHY PARKER

I'm all ears.

JACK takes an encouraged stance.  
DOROTHY moves almost uncomfortably  
close to listen.

JACK

I did have one idea I was working on that might fit the bill. Where I live, we have these workers who are known as paisanos, dirt poor fellows who survive in shacks with no electricity on the hill above the bay. One of them, Danny, wanted to impress his sweetheart with a shiny gift. He traded some scrap metal he'd found for the currency to purchase a chrome vacuum cleaner from the pawn shop. He knew his beloved's dwelling also didn't have power, but that gleaming cleaning machine was the symbol of the good life they together someday hoped to live. And the present did the trick for awhile; her affections for Danny were lavish and constant until one day another paisano snuck into her house while she was out, and stole the gift. The scoundrel traded it to the local cantina for two gallons of red wine. And it was only then, when the restaurant proprietor discovered that the vacuum cleaner had no motor, and word ascended up the hill back to the woman, that she abruptly ended her romance with Danny for insulting her with the useless machine.

DOROTHY PARKER

Well, I must admit, I haven't heard that one before. And it's a perfect example of what I'm talking about, amusing, ironic, true. And since FPA doesn't publish short stories, you should write that.

JACK

But if I want to be a writer, at some point I'll need readers, right?

DOROTHY stands.

DOROTHY PARKER

I'm not doing you any favors.

JACK

Do you mean to tell me I still haven't convinced you?

DOROTHY PARKER

Oh, you can join us. I'm just saying that letting you sit with us is no favor.

LIGHTS FADE AS:



They walk over to the table. JACK helps DOROTHY remove her coat to the rack or a chair, revealing her "next day's" outfit. The two sit.

LIGHTS BACK UP ON:

## SCENE 9

ALGONQUIN HOTEL ROSE ROOM - NOON

DOROTHY and JACK sit alone at the Round Table. DOROTHY drums her fingers, checks her watch.

DOROTHY PARKER

This is exactly why I make it a point to never be punctual. So, Jack, thrill me with another tale from that little hamlet you call home.

In stream WOOLLCOTT, in a bright red shirt, with BENCHLEY and KAUFMAN.

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

Oh, thank God!

They start to take their seats. And hot on their heels, it's FPA! You can see JACK's impressed, as they sit.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

You're early, Dorothy. This is a red letter day.

DOROTHY PARKER

Oh, hardly. I lettered ages ago. But your account is accurate, Aleck. The letter was scarlet.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

And from letters you've graduated to entire words.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Soon you'll be making sentences, Dorothy.

DOROTHY PARKER

If you like, Aleck, I could string one together for you right now.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

He's already heard that one.

(to Adams re: his attending)

What's the cause of your appearance today, Frank?

GEORGE KAUFMAN

He always looks like that.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Is your building fumigating for rats?

FRANK nods towards JACK.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Our guest of dishonor? Welcome back, Jack. Something to drink?

JACK holds up a glass of water.

ROBERT BENCHLEY (cont'd)

A shrewd choice.

JACK

I just wanted to thank you all for allowing me to apologize in person.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Our only hope was that you apologize in English.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

At least you weren't boring. Being tedious is the only sin we'll never forgive.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Or forget.

DOROTHY PARKER

Or permit.

BENCHLEY eyes Woollcott's red shirt.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Sure, easy for Cardinal Woollcott here to grant absolution.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Who better then to forgive Jack's cardinal sin?

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Now you're just pope-ing fun.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

That's sacrilege.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Not to your religion.

DOROTHY PARKER

You should be excommunicated for that pun, Mr. Benchley.

(turning to FPA.)

Print that in your paper.

FPA pulls a small pad from his jacket and jots it down.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

He should be exterminated for that pun.

JACK  
Crucified?

Suddenly, the group goes silent.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT  
What did you say?

JACK  
Um, I just wondered if Mr. Benchley should be punished religiously for his pun.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT  
(deciding if he likes it)  
Crucified.

ROBERT BENCHLEY  
I think you nailed it, Jack.

A few approving smiles. WOOLLCOTT waves his menu, changing the subject.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT  
Do you think perhaps we might come to order? I spy some new items.

FRANKLIN ADAMS  
You ate all the old ones.

KAUFMAN examines his menu. Points.

GEORGE KAUFMAN  
It appears they've started naming the dishes after actual people. I can only assume that "Chicken Cacciatore" here is inspired by some cowardly mob crony of Al Capone's. And look, here's Chick's girlfriend, Fluffy Potatoes.

ROBERT BENCHLEY  
And her girlfriend, Cherries Jubilee.

FRANKLIN ADAMS  
And Cherries' girlfriend, Peach Melba.

GEORGE KAUFMAN  
Melba is a peach.

FRANKLIN ADAMS  
I can't say I quite approve of this new trend towards honoring gangsters and traitors. Before you know it, restaurants will be serving up Eggs Benedict Arnold.

ROBERT BENCHLEY  
Or eggs to Benedict Arnold.

DOROTHY PARKER  
May we please order? I'm starving.

GEORGE KAUFMAN  
Is that an order?

DOROTHY PARKER  
Yes!

They check their menus. SALLY, back in her waitress uniform, walks in from the kitchen and waits nearby, taking it all in, her demeanor clearly indicating her feelings about last night's snub.)

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)  
I know I've previously declared that if one takes care of the luxuries, the necessities will take care of themselves. But occasionally a girl does need to eat.

GEORGE KAUFMAN  
(aside to FPA)  
Eat her words?

DOROTHY PARKER  
You may rest assured that I will have no further comments until after I've selected my meal.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT  
Oh, goody, now we're playing Charades.

DOROTHY PARKER  
We are not. Hold your horses, and your tongue, Aleck. You may plan your next bon mot while I plot my next course.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT  
At least I'll have something to chew on.

JACK'S eyes light up. Excited, seeing his chance, he sits up straighter.

JACK  
Oh! I guess then you could say that real wit is something that you think about twenty-four hours... too late.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT  
Pardon me?

JACK  
Real wit is something that you think about twenty-four hours too late.

GEORGE KAUFMAN  
From the mouths of babes.

Everyone looks over at FPA as he pulls out his pad and writes it down. JACK, pleased, notices. DOROTHY smiles.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

Truer words were never spoken.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

I believe I'll try the Chicken Cacciatore.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Just the one?

BLACKOUT.

EVERYONE exits except JACK and SALLY who remain.

LIGHTS BACK UP ON:

## SCENE 10

## ALGONQUIN HOTEL ROSE ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

JACK (no costume change required)  
stands to check his pocket watch. SALLY  
tidies the place settings.

SALLY  
Jack, if FPA wrote it down, then it will show up in today's  
paper.

JACK  
(reassuring himself)  
Page one!

SALLY  
He doesn't sit on the good stuff, Jack. Mrs. Parker's  
"horticulture" gag? I was standing right here when she said  
it.

JACK  
Really?!

SALLY  
The next morning...

JACK stands.

JACK  
Page one!

SALLY  
Sure as shootin'. You did it!

JACK again checks his watch.

JACK  
I did. You saw. It was just, suddenly...

JACK impulsively grabs SALLY and Black  
Bottom dances her around the room. He  
stops, beaming.

SALLY  
(realizing what time it is)  
They're probably here. You should go check.

JACK  
What?

SALLY nods towards the lobby.

SALLY

The morning papers. At the front desk.

JACK sprints out to the lobby. Returns immediately waving the World. He spreads it out on the table. Reads. His face falls. He just stares.

SALLY (cont'd)

What is it, Jack? Not there?

JACK

It's there. Listen to this, "I doth made my way to ye Round Table, whereupon I doth spy maid Dorothy and her new companion. And upon hearing that we would not be playing Charades, but rather word games this midday, she didst reply that real wit is that thing you think of twenty-four hours too late."

SALLY

That's great, Jack.

JACK

No, it's not. FPA says "SHE didst reply" not "HE didst reply."

SALLY

Oh. Didst.

JACK rolls up the paper and throws it down.

JACK

My name is nowhere to be found. He makes it sound like Dorothy Parker said it.

JACK repeatedly bangs his head against the table or the wall.

SALLY

It's not that bad, Jack.

JACK

I'm smack dab back where I started.

SALLY

Where's that glass half full guy?

JACK

Drowning.

SALLY

Is it really that terrible?



JACK

It is. Don't you see? Now I have to get Dorothy to get FPA to fix it.

JACK storms out towards the doors (to go to Dorothy's room) just as DOROTHY, dressed in the same rumpled outfit as yesterday, walks in. They nearly collide.

SALLY

Speak of the devil.

DOROTHY eyes JACK for a quick second.

DOROTHY PARKER

Sorry, but I need some coffee NOW.

SALLY

Certainly, Mrs. Parker. And for you, Jack? Morphine?

DOROTHY PARKER

Do you have that?

SALLY

Fresh out.

JACK

Mrs. Parker...

DOROTHY holds up her hand. SALLY moves to the counter to get coffee.

DOROTHY PARKER

Still? Mrs. Parker? Jack, before you utter another word, I must caution you, I have a hangover that should be in the Smithsonian under glass.

JACK picks up the rolled newspaper. Waves it before her.

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

What are you doing? I'm already housebroken.

JACK opens it in front of her.

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

Even if I could read that, forming those tiny grey clouds into words right now would just hurt.

JACK

It's FPA's column, all about the delightful banter we threw around yesterday. "And maid Dorothy didst reply that real wit is that thing that you think of twenty-four hours too late."

DOROTHY PARKER

Oh. Did I say that? It does sound familiar.

JACK stares, astonished.

JACK

Don't you even remember?

DOROTHY PARKER

Jack, this morning I wouldn't remember my own name if it wasn't stamped on the laundry tag in my bloomers.

JACK

So you don't know!

DOROTHY PARKER

Why are you so agitated? Do you believe deeply that real wit is NOT something we occasionally come up with after the fact?

JACK

I said that wonderful epigram.

DOROTHY PARKER

Well, congratulations. It has irony and truth.

JACK

But FPA says you said it.

DOROTHY PARKER

Well, join the club. Half of what I've said I didn't. And the other half I wished I hadn't.

JACK

But that's you getting credit for something you didn't do. This is me not... Well, it's still you getting credit, but it's ALSO me not.

DOROTHY PARKER

Jack, I've told you, none of this is of any consequence. Being a wise acre is not what's important in life. What matters is ME GETTING A CUP OF COFFEE RIGHT NOW!

SALLY appears with a pot on a tray.

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

Oh, thank heavens.

DOROTHY pounds down a cup. SALLY refills it. DOROTHY drains it.

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

Bless you, child.

SALLY leaves the tray, and exits.

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

Why is it so important to you anyway what other people think?

JACK

You should know that better than anyone.

DOROTHY PARKER

It's nothing. All I'm trying to do is make enough money to keep my body and soul... apart. If my work had any real merit, I'd be better paid for it.

JACK

That's not true. At least you make enough to keep writing.

DOROTHY PARKER

I write enough to keep living. It's not much of a life. It's not even much of a living.

DOROTHY inhales another cup.

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

And this is not helping one iota. Now I'm just cranky and awake. I'm going back to bed. The only sure cure for a Haig & Haig hangover is a Smith & Wesson.

DOROTHY starts to walk away, then turns back.

DOROTHY PARKER (cont'd)

Jack, if your work is honestly good enough, if you write that vacuum-cleaner story for example, then your words should be like a trail of bread crumbs leading your audience to you. You don't need FPA or any of this.

JACK

Do you sincerely believe that?

DOROTHY PARKER

I sincerely want to.

JACK

Then I'm at a loss for words.

DOROTHY PARKER

What I'm trying to tell you, Jack, with a tongue that feels like an old mattress, is that you may have something that actually does deserve to be nurtured. And since I would like to help you, God knows why, I've decided -- yes, I've decided -- that I'm not going to help you.

JACK

What?

DOROTHY PARKER

You heard me.

JACK

You're not going to help me?

DOROTHY PARKER

I'm going to help you -- by not helping you.

JACK

You're not?

DOROTHY PARKER

I am... not.

JACK

Well, that's convenient, Dorothy. So you've climbed out of your morning after haze to deny me the very thing that the rest of you try so hard to pretend is so important?

DOROTHY PARKER

You understand me completely.

JACK

That's impossible.

DOROTHY PARKER

Well, if it's that crucial, then go tell Moses yourself.

JACK

I should. Since from day one I've known that the only help you've ever really wanted to give me, was so you could help yourself TO me.

DOROTHY walks back over -- and slaps JACK clean across the face, just as SALLY walks back in.

DOROTHY PARKER

I'm afraid, Jack, you've let your body go to your head.

DOROTHY heads out the door. JACK slumps into a chair. SALLY sits beside him.

JACK

I'm ready for that morphine now.

SALLY takes JACK's hand.

LIGHTS FADE.

(POSSIBLE INTERMISSION)

LIGHTS UP ON:

## ACT 2, SCENE 1

## ALGONQUIN HOTEL ROSE ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

JACK walks in on SALLY. He holds up his elbow, scraped and bloody, sticking out through his torn sleeve.

SALLY

Jack, what happened?

JACK

I got there bright and early. The Garden agreed to give me the day off, so I figured that if he's not already there, at least I can stake out the lobby till he walks in.

Without even asking, SALLY pours a cup of coffee and hands it to JACK.

JACK (cont'd)

Thanks.

SALLY

Are you alright?

JACK

Yeah, yeah. So I sweetly asked the receptionist there to tell Mister Franklin Pierce Adams that one of the members of his luncheon group was waiting to see him.

JACK moves into the restaurant, acting it all out.

JACK (cont'd)

She rises from her desk, steps into the office behind her, and closes the door. Doesn't say "I'll tell him," or "He isn't in yet," just gets up and leaves. I hear voices, getting louder. And then a minute later she steps out to announce, "Mister Adams has not yet arrived."

Another sip of coffee.

JACK (cont'd)

Which is bunk, right? Why didn't she just tell me that right off the bat? Which is what I told her, not so sweetly. Instantly, she's transformed into Medusa: "He's not here!" Well, who was she talking with then? Suddenly I can see the gears grinding as she concocts this ridiculous tale about having had to check with the editor and everyone else that's ever worked there to see where FPA was, and on and on.

SALLY

Oh, Jack.

JACK

Of course, I'm not buying it, and the Irish is just rising up in me -- everyone's staring, telling me to keep it down, buddy -- until finally I just push past to talk to whomever she really did have a word with. A couple of big goons leap up, probably reporters from the east side, "You can't go in there", and they're literally chasing me through the joint...

JACK dodges among the tables.

JACK (cont'd)

...while I sprint around looking for, well I don't know what I'm looking for, until I find it. Then, after a few waste cans upturned and rolling chairs pushed aside, there it is...

JACK arrives at the Round Table.

JACK (cont'd)

...FPA's desk, his name on the nameplate, stationery, photographs...

JACK picks up plates as stand-ins.

JACK (cont'd)

...everything, irrefutable evidence that this is where the great man sits. His throne is empty, but his lit cigar is still smoldering in the ashtray. The two guys catch up, grab me, hustle me down the stairs, and...

JACK flings himself to the floor.

JACK (cont'd)

...throw me out the front door onto Park Row.

JACK stands.

SALLY

Shit.

JACK

You meant criminy, right?

SALLY

What did I say? Are you still alright?

JACK

Yeah. So now, I can honestly claim to have been tossed out of every newspaper office in New York City. So much for freedom of the press.

SALLY

Not quite what you were shooting for.

Not quite.

JACK

SALLY shakes her head.

SALLY

Could it get any worse?

Suddenly, in storms DOROTHY.

DOROTHY PARKER

I thought that was you.

She walks over to JACK and smacks him across the face.

JACK & SALLY

Again!?

DOROTHY marches back to the door.  
Turns.

DOROTHY PARKER

I do not appreciate being roused at 10 AM by a phone call from Mister Adams to apprise me of your antics at his office this morning.

DOROTHY walks out. JACK slumps into a chair. Rubs his jaw, rubs his arm.

JACK

I was so sure I could make this work when I bought that road map in Sacramento. In college they taught that "a writer writes", but that's not exactly a precise plan of action, is it?

SALLY

College and a truck. Impressive.

SALLY moves to retrieve that bottle of Haig & Haig whiskey, which has been visible throughout.

JACK

What's the occasion?

Rather than opening it, she just sets it on the table.

SALLY

In New York City, they say a writer drinks.

JACK

Not sure that will help. I really believed that if I was so damn creative, then I should be able to create a break.

SALLY

You'll find your way.

JACK

Thanks, Sally. Maybe instead of a bake shop, you could open a newspaper and hire me.

SALLY

Do you play poker, Jack?

JACK

Oh, I see. Like, "How do I play the hand that life's dealt me now?"

SALLY

No. I mean, do you play poker?

JACK

Everyone plays poker.

SALLY

You got that right.

JACK

What do you mean?

SALLY

Every Saturday night every one of those loudmouths, except Ma Parker, sits down for their regular game of poker - right here at the Gonk.

JACK

So that's what Dorothy meant, that FPA is a Saturday night poker face.

SALLY

Usually upstairs. But this week that room's being papered. This week, they meet right here.

JACK

But how on earth would I be allowed to sit in with them?

SALLY

Because, from what I've seen, what those jokers welcome far more than a quick wit, is a fast buck.

JACK furrows his brow, thinking. SALLY inches the whiskey bottle towards him.



Hunh.

JACK

LIGHTS FADE AS MUSIC SWELLS.

During the blackout JACK and SALLY clear the table, then exit to the kitchen with the bottle, (so JACK can put on the waiter jacket) while ADAMS, KAUFMAN, BENCHLEY and WOOLLCOTT casually walk in from backstage to set down their cards and poker chips to take their seats after hanging their coats on the rack and seat backs.

LIGHTS FADE UP ON:

## ACT 2, SCENE 2

## ALGONQUIN HOTEL ROSE ROOM - NIGHT

A light shines down on the table. (Not necessarily "the" table.) Around it, seated in their usual order from stage right to left, ADAMS, KAUFMAN, BENCHLEY and WOOLLCOTT, have just concluded a round of five card stud. Their jackets hang over their chairs or on the rack, and their ties have been loosened or removed.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

Well, how would you have played it?

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Under an assumed name.

WOOLLCOTT, the dealer for this next round, shuffles the cards, as BENCHLEY seems about ready to nod off.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

George, would you please poke sweet old Bob to confirm he's still breathing?

BENCHLEY stands to get a napkin from the bar.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Just because I haven't said anything lately doesn't mean I'm not completely incoherent.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

That's very seldom of you, Bob.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

If by some miracle there ever is a lull in the conversation, I'll make sure I leap right in.

WOOLLCOTT keeps shuffling.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Are you almost done tossing that salad, Caesar?

WOOLLCOTT cuts the cards, stacks them, shuffles again. KAUFMAN glares.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

You know what a perfectionist I am.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

I do. That's why I wondered what was taking so long.

BENCHLEY returns to his chair.  
WOOLLCOTT deliberate drags this out until finally he's ready to deal -- with the other three on the edge of their seats -- when in walks a man from the kitchen in a waiter's jacket bearing a covered tray and a familiar bottle of Haig & Haig.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

Now who ordered this?

The waiter sets the tray down, turns, and steps into the light. It's JACK.

JACK

I did.

WOOLLCOTT

Oh look, it's Dorothy's puppy.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

(daggers, re: office visit)

You've got some nerve crashing this party.

JACK

I thought I'd up the ante with some antipasto to see if you'd let me sit in.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Is that apple pie?

JACK

You should taste it.

WOOLLCOTT savors the aroma.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

(tersely)

Jack Beck. Are you any good at poker?

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Look who's talking.

JACK

My money is.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Of course you're welcome. We only play for small stakes anyway.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

That's right. For small steaks and baked potatoes.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Frank, wouldn't you at least welcome the opportunity of someone new to lose to?

FRANKLIN ADAMS

Shut up.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

There's that renowned raconteur.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Whadda ya say, fellas? It is just a friendly little game, after all.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Fine by me.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

(begrudgingly)

Alright. I'll go along with Aleck.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

That's a first.

WOOLLCOTT looks around the table and nods conspiratorially.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

The motion is carried.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Welcome, to the Young Men's Midtown Thanatopsis Literary and Inside Straight Club. Before you recline my fair knights and...

FRANKLIN ADAMS

Knock it off, already.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Like the money changer said, we're all just small fry here. The starting buy-in is a mere two hundred dollars.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

I need a stack.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

I should say you do.

ADAMS counts out \$200. KAUFMAN (the bank) takes it and slides him his chips. WOOLLCOTT sits.

GEORGE KAUFMAN (cont'd)

Have a seat, Jack.

JACK remains standing.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Something the matter, puppy?

JACK

I was just thinking how for some folks two hundred dollars is almost a year's rent.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Yes, we do occasionally pause between hands to ponder the plight of the poor.

JACK

The first day I met you, all I had was eight dollars in my pants pocket.

JACK reaches into his trousers and pulls out a wad. He counts it out onto the table.

JACK (cont'd)

Twenty, forty, sixty, eighty, one hundred, twenty, forty, sixty, eighty, two hundred.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

Whose pants are those?

JACK

Stack, please.

JACK takes the empty seat stage left next to Woollcott.

JACK (cont'd)

If you must know, I sold my truck.

KAUFMAN takes the money and counts out Jack's chips.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

You own a truck?

JACK

Not any more. I unloaded it so I won't have to keep answering that question.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

What's your game, stud?

JACK  
 (oblivious)  
 Sure, five card stud is fine with me.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT  
 Then stud it is. Does anyone else need chips?  
 (eyeing Kaufman's mound)  
 Not the House of Rockefeller here, obviously. You, Bob?

ROBERT BENCHLEY  
 I'll ride. Maybe my luck will change.

GEORGE KAUFMAN  
 Keep your eyes crossed.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT  
 Alright, then. Ante up.

JACK watches as each player tosses in a chip. WOOLLCOTT palms the first prepared deck.

GEORGE KAUFMAN  
 Ten dollars, Jack.

JACK  
 Wow.

GEORGE KAUFMAN  
 You wanted to roll with the high rollers, right?

FRANKLIN ADAMS  
 Pay to play.

JACK slides in his chip. WOOLLCOTT deals.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT  
 First card, down and dirty.

WOOLLCOTT deals a card down to each player, then a second up all around.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (cont'd)  
 Second card, up and ugly.

Everyone checks their hole card.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (cont'd)  
 Jack high for Bob. Maybe your luck will change.

GEORGE KAUFMAN  
 And a deuce low for Jack. You'd better hope yours does.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

For the benefit of new members, we do have just a few more rules.

WOOLLCOTT

Jeez.

WOOLLCOTT stands to get some pie.

JACK

Of course.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

One is that all wagers must be cash in hand, no personal checks.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

That's Frank's favorite.

JACK

That's fine. I don't have a checking account anyway.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Or savings, now.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Admittedly, if you do manage to escape alive tonight with any of our money, you will be chased down and invited back next week.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

And the other rule is that whilst playing, we never talk shop.

JACK

Shop?

FRANKLIN ADAMS

Work. We make a point of never discussing business over cards.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

No business before pleasure.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

That's our pleasure.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Otherwise, you wet blanket, what's the point?

FRANKLIN ADAMS

Do you agree to these terms?

GEORGE KAUFMAN

...your honor.

WOOLLCOTT sits back down.

JACK

Look, I know you fellows don't really know me...

FRANKLIN ADAMS

That's only part of it.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Hey, pals, it's a friendly game. We're all friends here.

JACK

No shop talk?

FRANKLIN ADAMS

No kidding.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

All kidding. No talking.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

That might be a bit tough, chums, thank you. I'll bet twenty fins.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Sounds fishy to me.

BENCHLEY throws in his chips. WOOLLCOTT calls, sliding in his.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

Are you in, Jack?

JACK calls, adding his.

JACK

Twenty it is.

FRANK and GEORGE do likewise. WOOLLCOTT deals the next card up all around.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Another deuce for Jack. A pair of twos.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Now Jack can join the ballet.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

(getting it)

Two twos. Hah! I'm laughing, all the way to my bank.



GEORGE KAUFMAN

Stay on you toes, Bob.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

A pair of nines showing for Frank.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Them's big shoes to fill.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

A ten for Kaufman. And a ten for Robert. Possible straight for sweet old Bob.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

(to Woollcott)

There goes all that salad tossing down the drain.

WOOLLCOTT deals himself.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

And nothing for me.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

You're dealing, and you still have zip?

ROBERT BENCHLEY

You're a disgrace to card sharps everywhere.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Don't you worry. My doctor has forbidden me to gamble unless I win.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

And when have you ever taken your doctor's advice?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

No time like the present.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Well, be sure to let me know when you feel that winning streak coming on, Aleck, so I can schedule my bathroom break.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

George, if you're in the john, it'll mark the first time this evening that any of us will have any clue what you're holding.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

I wager forty bones.

With Frank's two nines showing, KAUFMAN and BENCHLEY slide in their bets to call.

FRANKLIN ADAMS (cont'd)  
(to Woollcott)

Et tu, Brutus?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT  
Just two words, Frank: I'll call. Jack?

GEORGE KAUFMAN  
That's three words.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT  
You can shed the jacket, Jack, unless you want to keep bringing us things.

JACK hesitates - it's a lot of money - then slides in his chips to call Frank.

JACK  
Easy come, easy go.

ROBERT BENCHLEY  
Said the girl to the sailor.

JACK quickly stands to hang his jacket on the back of his chair. Sits.  
WOOLLCOTT deals another round.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT  
A trey for Jack to serve his deuces on, no big deal. Well, well, another nine for Frank.

FRANKLIN ADAMS  
Revenge is a dish best served cold.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT  
So's this pie. Another ten spot for Kaufman. Seven for Bob, no help there. And one more pathetic card for yours truly.

WOOLLCOTT grabs Jack's whiskey bottle and pours each a splash. They look to Frank to bet.

FRANKLIN ADAMS  
Forty more bones.

GEORGE KAUFMAN  
Frank, that's an entire skeleton. Are you enjoying this, Jack?

JACK  
So far, so good.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

As far as it goes. Feel free, Jack, at any point, to come up with your own cliches. I'll call, obviously.

KAUFMAN adds his bet. They glance over at BENCHLEY as he checks his hole card.

GEORGE KAUFMAN (cont'd)

Robert?

ROBERT BENCHLEY

I'm out. Not quite tiddlywinks, is it?

They look to WOOLLCOTT to call.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Nothing to say, Aleck?

WOOLLCOTT flings his cards over his shoulder.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

I'm out.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

A shrewd move, no doubt. You, Jack?

JACK considers it.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Have you contracted what we like to call Loser's Syndrome?

GEORGE KAUFMAN

More commonly known as Frank Adams Disease.

FPA makes a face.

JACK

I'll call.

JACK slides in his chips. WOOLLCOTT deals one more card to the three players left.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

The moment of truth. Another trey for Jack. Amazing. An ace for Frank. And a five for Kaufman's tens. Frank bets. Pretty breathtaking, boys.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

It all evens out. Let's see, Jack. You, it seems, have ninety dollars left in the world. I could raise over that, and you'd have to bust.

But since we're all friends here, and I'd hate to deprive you of your cab fare home, I'll wager... ninety dollars. Will you be seeing me, George?

GEORGE KAUFMAN

I've seen enough. Like the Arabs, I shall fold my tens and silently steal away.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

Well said. Jack?

JACK simply slides in his remaining chips.

FRANKLIN ADAMS (cont'd)

You call?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

You do know three of a kind beats two pair, right, boy?

JACK

I call.

ADAMS turns over his hole card, revealing:

FRANKLIN ADAMS

Three nines.

JACK turns his over. It's another two!

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Full house?! Is that what that is? I have no experience of having ever actually seen that before, personally.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Talk about beginners luck.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

I wish my new play had a full house.

JACK scoops up the chips.

GEORGE KAUFMAN (cont'd)

When exactly did you learn this game, Jack? And don't tell me this afternoon. I want to know what time this afternoon.

JACK

Maybe I should quit while I'm ahead.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Now why would anyone wish to do that?

JACK

That way, you'll invite me back.

(to Kaufman)

That's what you said.

JACK stands, starts to gather his chips. WOOLLCOTT pours another round.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Sit down. We haven't finished your bottle yet. This is a sport that demands commitment.

WOOLLCOTT reaches for a second slice of pie.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (cont'd)

Actually, while you're up, do you mind?

WOOLLCOTT gestures at the cards on the floor.

JACK

Fetching?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

That's a good dog.

JACK gathers the cards and hands them to WOOLLCOTT, who then begins elaborately shuffling them. BENCHLEY grabs them away.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

My turn. I'd like to get home before Arbor Day.

BENCHLEY knocks out a quick fancy cut and shuffles.

ROBERT BENCHLEY (cont'd)

(Southern drawl)

That's how it's done where I come from.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

(joining in)

On the mighty Mississippi? Chips, anyone?

FRANKLIN ADAMS

Stack.

ADAMS counts out \$200 from his billfold. KAUFMAN slides him his chips.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Major Benchley?

BENCHLEY sets down the deck and pulls \$200 in a money clip from his shirt pocket. KAUFMAN gives him his chips.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Thanks, Colonel.

BENCHLEY picks up the deck, surreptitiously switching it with the second prepared deck, then deals one card down to each player, then one card up. The following is played briskly.

ROBERT BENCHLEY (cont'd)

Gentlemen. A deuce for Aleck. One Ace to Jack. Not to be confused with one Jack to Ace. One nine, again, for Frank. One five, by George. And an eight for me. Jack bets.

JACK checks his hole card.

JACK

(joining in the accents)

Well, wadda ya know? I guess I am still in the game.

(reverting, realizing he's overstepped)

I'll bet forty.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

He catches on quickly.

They all slide in their matching bets. BENCHLEY deals another round.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

A deuce for Woollcott. Queen for Jack. Seven for Adams. Six for Kaufman, possible straight. And a king for me.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Thanks, Bob. For following my doctor's orders.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Your tests aren't back yet.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Aleck bets.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Aleck gloats.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Forty should suffice. For now.

JACK

I'll call.

JACK adds his chips to the pot.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

As shall I.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

(deadpan)

I'll see you, and raise twenty.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Again. The sphinx.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Said the sphincter.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Don't be an ass.

Everyone looks at BENCHLEY to see what he'll do. BOB nods his head and stifles a grin.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Anyone who even glances at Robert's face right now will be thrown out for cheating.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

I'm in. Early days.

BENCHLEY matches the bet, then deals another round.

ROBERT BENCHLEY (cont'd)

A four for Aleck. One King for Jack. Chance of a straight.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Slim chance.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

A tray for Frank. Pair of sixes for Kaufman. And a tray for me.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

Where are the large cards hiding, do you suppose?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Jack has 'em.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Kaufman bets.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

I'll bet forty. Bob?

Certainly. Aleck?  
ROBERT BENCHLEY

Doctor's orders.  
ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Give it a rest.  
ROBERT BENCHLEY

Bed rest?  
GEORGE KAUFMAN

WOOLLCOTT calls, then looks over at  
JACK, the elephant in the room.

Tell me again. Why are you here, dog's-breath, blocking the  
view?  
ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Oh, we see through him.  
FRANKLIN ADAMS

I like poker?  
JACK

Not for long.  
GEORGE KAUFMAN

I know till now I've done a pretty bad job at making a good  
impression.  
JACK

We already forgave you, somewhat. Water under the... table.  
ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

It's just... I am just a farm boy, no joke, here to visit my  
sister in the big city. But I'm also a writer. You know that,  
a writer like you, chasing a break.  
JACK

We. Said. No.  
FRANKLIN ADAMS  
(possibly between puffs on his  
cigar)

I know. You said no business. I respect that. I respect you.  
But writing isn't my business. Not yet. THAT'S why I'm here.  
And I guess, in a nutshell, that's all I came here tonight to  
say.  
JACK

(a beat, then back into the  
Southern accent)  
That, and I raise you forty bucks.



Game on.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

I'm out.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

ADAMS pushes in his cards.

GEORGE KAUFMAN  
(adding his chips)

Hope springs eternal. Robert?

BENCHLEY checks his hole card. Takes forever to weigh his options. Everyone stares at him.

GEORGE KAUFMAN (cont'd)

That was exciting for a few seconds there.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

I'm out.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

It was a moral victory, at least.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT  
(matching the bet)

I'm in.

BENCHLEY deals the last card.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

A queen for His Highness. There's your high card. An ace for Jack. That's another. And a deuce for George. Pair of aces showing. Jack bets.

Jack arranges a giant pile of chips and slides them in.

JACK

Four hundred dollars.

Everyone looks impressed.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Has man's best friend learned a new trick?

ROBERT BENCHLEY

How badly do you want to know?

GEORGE KAUFMAN

He does catch on. But maybe we can learn him another new stunt.

KAUFMAN counts out three stacks from his personal hoard.

GEORGE KAUFMAN (cont'd)  
I'll see that, and raise you... six hundred, if only to annoy Aleck. What do you make of that, Florence Nightingale?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT  
One thousand dollars? Damn my physician. I'm cured.

Aleck slides in his cards. JACK looks at his few remaining chips.

JACK  
I can't match that. I didn't think... That's all my money.

FRANKLIN ADAMS  
And some of mine, too.

GEORGE KAUFMAN  
I'd hate to see you leave now, after we were just getting to know you. And I would like to see that card. Are you certain you're not sitting on any other assets?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT  
No more vehicles?

FRANKLIN ADAMS  
His only fleet is of foot.

GEORGE KAUFMAN  
Hazzah!

JACK pulls out his pocket watch.

GEORGE KAUFMAN (cont'd)  
Unless that watch is solid gold, I don't believe your timepiece will fly.

JACK  
You said you don't accept markers.

ROBERT BENCHLEY  
We don't accept checks. What else might you have lurking up your sleeve?

JACK pulls some folded sheets from the jacket on his chair.

GEORGE KAUFMAN  
Or coat pocket. What's that?

JACK

You've heard of betting the farm? I have a farm. Twenty rolling acres on the California coast, with water, a little house and a barn.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

What's that worth?

JACK

My life. Six hundred dollars.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

You're just saying that.

JACK

Give or take.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

I would like to see that hand. I'll take. Along with your watch and the rest of those chips.

JACK slides them in, then lays the pages on the table and begins to write out his IOU with a pencil.

GEORGE KAUFMAN (cont'd)

Does someone have a pen?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

I do. Some writer.

He hands it to JACK. JACK writes, returns the fountain pen, then slaps down the document into the pot.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

That should make someone a nice little vacation home.

JACK

Someone. I call.

KAUFMAN flips over his hole card.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Two pair.

JACK turns his over, a Jack, revealing he was chasing a straight. Unfortunately, all he's got is two aces.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Wow. That's it? A pair. What an idiot.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

That was some bold play, Jack, on a pair. Not on the table, on you. And it almost worked. I believed it right up till now.

JACK

So did I.

JACK stands, speechless. A long pause as it all sinks in. WOOLLCOTT rises to hand him the waiter jacket.

WOOLLCOTT

Don't forget this. You may need it for your next bar mitzvah.

JACK takes it and slowly drags out.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Shalom, Jack. Don't forget to write.

JACK slowly walks towards the LOBBY doorway out. THE LIGHTS DIM behind him, leaving the impression that he's now alone. The card players freeze. DOROTHY appears from the bar. Without a word, she walks right past Jack, then looks back to him with forgiveness. The two make their way out towards the lobby. As they walk off, SALLY, in street clothes, emerges into view from the kitchen, obviously having seen it all.

LIGHTS FADE.

The poker players exit backstage during the blackout with props in hand (to change.)

LIGHTS BACK UP ON:

## ACT 2, SCENE 3

ALGONQUIN HOTEL ROSE ROOM - MID-MORNING, THAT SUNDAY

JACK, wearing the jacket from Scene 1, walks in from the lobby with his suitcase, and with the waiter's jacket on a hanger. He hooks it on the coat rack upstage, and turns to go. He pauses to look wistfully around the room. SALLY, still in her own clothes, walks in from the kitchen. (Sally assumes Jack spent the night with Dorothy, but Jack doesn't know Sally saw.)

SALLY

I don't believe it. I guess someone got lucky last night.

JACK

What? It was a complete waste of time.

SALLY

(icy)

Clearly not completely?

JACK

You were right all along.

SALLY

(frozen)

About what?

JACK

About everything. I came here to get a shot, and thanks to you I got one. But I guess I'm just not ready. Dorothy said...

SALLY

Dorothy.

JACK

Dorothy said that if my work was truly good, then it would be like a trail of bread crumbs leading my audience to me. I should have gone home while I still had one.

JACK looks at SALLY, expecting another question. He can see something's off, but doesn't know what.

JACK (cont'd)

After I lost all the money from my truck last night, I put the family farm up, and soon enough lost that, too.

He looks to SALLY for sympathy, but she just stands there.

JACK (cont'd)

Are you alright?

SALLY

(wooden)

That's a shame, Jack.

JACK

I don't even know where home is now.

SALLY

(re: suitcase)

And so you're shacking up with that tramp?

JACK

What?

SALLY

You intend to cohabit with Dorothy Parker?

JACK

I'm leaving town. I just came by to tell you before I hit the road. Why would you think..?

SALLY

I know you slept with her last night.

JACK just stares.

SALLY (cont'd)

I saw her take you upstairs.

It's JACK's turn to be silent.

SALLY (cont'd)

You did, didn't you? You slept with Dorothy Parker.

JACK

Alright! I slept... with her. I didn't sleep on her. If you must know, we spent most of the night commiserating.

SALLY

Is that what you call it?

JACK

Nothing happened! You've seen me pass out enough times to believe that.

SALLY

Nothing happened?

JACK  
Nothing like that.

SALLY  
You're leaving town?

JACK holds up his suitcase. Sticks out his hitchhiking thumb.

SALLY (cont'd)  
Where?

JACK  
Wherever the bread crumbs lead.

SALLY  
Dorothy again.

JACK  
Never again.

SALLY  
What will you do?

JACK  
Keep going till I get there.

Suddenly, in strides GEORGE KAUFMAN. He bows slightly to Sally, and continues.

GEORGE KAUFMAN  
Mister Beck. You were a very brave man last night, downright fearless. After your departure, we remained through the wee hours conscientiously finding new ways to redistribute your wealth. I return this morning hoping to glean information on your whereabouts, and instead I discover the genuine article. On behalf of our little card club, I'd like to extend an invitation to a special Sunday service, as it were, to join us on this, your fine sabbath, here, at your regular table.

JACK glances at it.

JACK  
I'm on a diet.

GEORGE KAUFMAN  
Food for thought, then. We have a few pressing questions about redeeming that generous deed you bet. You bet.

JACK  
What sort of questions?

GEORGE KAUFMAN

(gesturing)

The kind best discussed right here. Until then.

KAUFMAN offers his one finger in the air salutation and heads towards the table.

JACK

I wonder what that's about?

Immediately in fly WOOLLCOTT, FPA, BENCHLEY, and from the lobby, DOROTHY, all pretty much dressed as they were in their opening scene. DOROTHY hustles JACK to the table. FPA stands, planted at the center, flanked by BENCHLEY and KAUFMAN standing to his right. WOOLLCOTT sits stage right, as does DOROTHY stage left. JACK remains standing. SALLY moves to a corner to take it all in.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Thanks for sticking around, Jack.

JACK

You were just here.

Everyone stares at JACK, who says nothing, but there's a lot unspoken going on. DOROTHY looks at JACK fondly, and everyone else seems to have something on their minds.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

That was some hand.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Poker does help us forget ourselves.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Since during the work week we, ahem, scarcely think of little else.

KAUFMAN pulls out Jack's IOU.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Now, the first order of business today is this little voucher Jack slipped my way Saturday night. After you left with your tail between your legs, Jack, it changed hands a few more times in the course of play, and its rightful ownership is currently somewhat in question.



And that question, what we're all dying to know is, is this deed good? Are the rights to this document valid?

JACK

Of course they are. Why wouldn't they be?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Once we'd read the thing, we began to wonder somewhat.

JACK

I wish it was fake. But you don't just invent a thing like that.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

But you did make this up. What we need to know, is did you throw the game so that you could toss this our way?

JACK

Do you mean to say you think I deliberately lost?

FRANKLIN ADAMS

We said no business, but you found a way. When you retrieved those cards from the floor, did you pocket a few?

JACK

Why would I cheat to lose?

ADAMS turns to BENCHLEY and PARKER.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

When Mr. Beck first hit town, seemingly under Dorothy's... wing, we all of course dismissed him as just one more glib scribe chasing a leg up. So imagine my surprise when he summoned the courage last night to invade our very own sanctum sanctorum here bearing gifts. I almost swallowed my cigar.

DOROTHY pats FRANK's hand.

DOROTHY PARKER

There, there, dear.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Imagine that.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

He convinced us to let him in soon enough with his whiskey and money.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

I suppose there's very little on this tired old planet that one can't get with sufficient whiskey and cash.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

But then you pulled a fast one. I'll admit, even I felt a small twinge of sorrow after seemingly relieving you of all your earthly possessions. Until the end of the night - morning - when we settled up, and set down to review our winnings.

He unfolds Jack's document.

GEORGE KAUFMAN (cont'd)

The deed to your little piece of heaven, conveniently written on...

(reading)

"The Story of Paisano Danny of Tortilla Flat, and How He Was Ensnared by a Vacuum-cleaner." It goes on from there, as you well know. So what we wish to confirm is whether this story is available free and clear.

JACK

The story?

GEORGE KAUFMAN

We need to clarify that the rights to this original tale are unencumbered and legally assignable.

DOROTHY PARKER

Don't you just love it when George S. Kaufman takes the law into his own mouth?

JACK

Not the farm?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Why would anyone in their right mind want a vacation home in California? We want this story.

JACK

Who does?

GEORGE KAUFMAN

We all do.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

I don't.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Everyone but Frank.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

If you jazz it up, it could be perfect for my next anthology.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

I'd like to adapt it as a Broadway play.

DOROTHY PARKER

We know some movie people.

BENCHLEY nods.

JACK

Is that a fact?

DOROTHY PARKER

That's why we need your story.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

That's why we need you to decide.

JACK

Me? You? May I see that, please?

KAUFMAN hands the document to JACK.  
JACK takes one look, and tears it up.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Hey!

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

What!

JACK

I didn't throw that game. I lost my family home fair and square.

DOROTHY PARKER

Your home is here, Jack.

JACK

It's not. You showed me that. And if I want to tell the truth as I see it, about simple honest people, then that's where I should be, among them. Not... you. I'll buy it back if you don't want the farm. I'll spin that yarn into a novel, and I'll pay you back. If you'd like to see it when it's done, that's fine with me.

You can see from their expressions that his words have hit close to home.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

How dare you refuse our help!

JACK

But you've already helped me. All of you.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

That's the stuff.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

All you've done is confirm what I thought all along. You, my boy, are an imbecile, dropped on his head at birth.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Aleck, we love every pound of you, and that's a lot of love, but you do know that sometimes you're just full of Ship High In Transit.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

You have some nerve!

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Jack does. I would have given up this whole writing act ages ago, except by the time I realized that I had no real talent, I was already too famous.

DOROTHY PARKER

(re: Jack)

He's right, you know. There are things that never have been funny, and never will be.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

Like Aleck.

DOROTHY PARKER

Ridicule may be a shield, but it's not a sword.

FRANKLIN ADAMS

(a beat)

Or that.

BENCHLEY walks over to shake Jack's hand.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Good luck, Jack. Good for you.

KAUFMAN offers his one finger salute, and JACK returns it.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Break a leg, Jack.

DOROTHY embraces JACK. Finally, FPA walks over and shakes JACK's hand in acceptance. JACK looks over at Woollcott for his accolades.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Fry in hell.

JACK takes a step.

JACK

Thanks. Thank you.

JACK moves towards the door. Pauses.

JACK (cont'd)

So, I guess if I'm determined to tell the truth...

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Now what?

JACK

If I do intend to make this work, then I'm going back to writing under my real name.

DOROTHY PARKER

Jack Grossteinbeck? (Gross-Tin-Beck)

JACK

No.

(a beat)

John.

(a beat)

John Steinbeck.

DOROTHY PARKER

Well, Benvenuto and Bon Voyage.

JACK picks up his suitcase and walks over towards SALLY. He sets it down and looks at her.

JACK

Sally...

EVERYONE leans in to eavesdrop.

SALLY

This is a switch. Look, the Round Table wants to hear YOU.

He looks over. It's true. And back.

JACK

Good bye, Sally.

SALLY

Good bye, Jack Beck. And hello, John.

She gives him a big, long kiss. She doesn't care who's watching.

DOROTHY PARKER

Jesus. What do they think this is? A hotel?

BLACKOUT.

THEN LIGHTS BACK UP:

For everyone's bows.

THE END.