

Algonquin Nights:
The Invention of Nonsense

Pilot Episode 101
"The Chef and the Showgirl"

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"Algonquin Nights: The Invention of Nonsense" - Pilot

EXT. THE CASINO THEATRE, NEW YORK CITY - EVENING - 1924

RAGTIME MUSIC, or perhaps BESSIE SMITH BLUES, sets the era. The theater marquee reads, "The Four Marx Brothers in 'I'll Say She Is.'"

ROBERT BENCHLEY, an affable everyman, stands out front. He checks his watch. DOROTHY PARKER, petite, with dark hair, strolls up. Benchley eyes her quizzically.

DOROTHY PARKER

Don't ask.

Benchley offers his arm, and the two walk in together.

INT. THE CASINO THEATRE - CONTINUING

The house lights flash a final warning as Parker and Benchley skootch past a row of their fellow theatre critics to their seats, past ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT, CHARLES MACARTHUR, GEORGE KAUFMAN, MARC CONNELLY, MARGALO GILLMORE, FRANKLIN PIERCE ADAMS, HAROLD ROSS and JANE GRANT. We'll meet them all again soon enough, along with their proper descriptions.

INT. THE CASINO THEATER - MINUTES LATER

The audience HOWLS at the Marx Brothers performance. GROUCHO is onstage in uniform as Napoleon.

GROUCHO MARX

The Russians are in full retreat,
and I'm right in front of them. So
for now, farewell, fair Josephine.
Caesar had his Brutus, Charles had
Cromwell, and I've got rhythm! Hot
cha, cha!

As Groucho exits offstage, HARPO MARX pops up from behind the sofa. He romantically lunges at Josephine.

Clearly all friends, the row nod and smile at their "discovery" of the Marx Brothers. A few take notes. As the show rolls on, we continue to see their comradery and affection at play. Marc and Margalo are clearly a couple, as are Harold and Jane. Dorothy seems the least engaged, as though preoccupied. MacArthur looks over at her, then away as their eyes meet.

INT. THE CASINO THEATRE - LATER

The audience leap to their feet for a standing ovation.
Dorothy seems now more at ease.

INT. THE CASINO THEATRE - BACKSTAGE

The gang cluster backstage.

ROBERT BENCHLEY
Now that was something!

Dorothy hangs on Benchley's arm at the joy of it all.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
I agree, but what?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
The future of Broadway.

Marc Connelly gestures at Kaufman.

MARC CONNELLY
I thought that was us.

They flood into the dressing room. Groucho, who seems to know some of them, looks over.

GROUCHO MARX
Jesus, what is this, a raid?

The room is packed, echoing the stateroom scene in "A Night at the Opera."

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
Jesus? What would you know about
him, you Christ killer?

GROUCHO MARX
Well, I think you just answered
your own question, you preposterous
windbag.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
He's got you there, Aleck.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
How rude! A man after my own heart.

Aleck pats Groucho on the back, then offers his hand to Harpo, who puts his leg in it, the old switcheroo. Harpo HONKS his bulb horn in Aleck's face.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CASINO THEATRE - NIGHT - LATER

They're all on the sidewalk now, still reminiscing and hailing cabs. Benchley's pulls up. He opens the rear door for Dorothy.

INT. CAB - NIGHT - MOVING - DOROTHY AND BENCHLEY

DOROTHY PARKER
Eddie would have loved this. Not a single big word in sight.

ROBERT BENCHLEY
Still in Hartford?

DOROTHY PARKER
That's where Mr. Parker is currently parked. So tonight, with all thanks to my so-called spouse, I can thoroughly fling myself into concocting my reviews.

They arrive at Dorothy's apartment. She gets out. Then turns to learn in and touch Benchley's arm.

DOROTHY PARKER (CONT'D)
Thank you, Fred.

INT. DOROTHY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - SERIES OF SHOTS

Dorothy's on the phone.

DOROTHY PARKER
Would you be so kind as to send over whatever tonight's special is? That's a dear.

Dorothy sits at her typewriter mouthing her review as she types. A bottle of whiskey sits nearby.

DOROTHY PARKER (CONT'D)
And it is my great pleasure to report that at least two of these four Marxes are two of the funniest men on earth.

(MORE)

DOROTHY PARKER (CONT'D)
 So, yes, I'm awarding high marks to
 the Marxes. And if you know me at
 all, dear reader, then you know
 that in my book, or magazine in
 this case, that assessment is
 against some mighty long odds
 indeed.

Dorothy stops to refill her glass. She shuffles into the bathroom.

Drunk, she stares into the mirror. She opens the medicine cabinet and shakes out two sleeping tablets. She pours some water from the sink tap. Then downs two more Veronal. Her absent husband's straight razor sits on the lower shelf.

She returns to the typewriter. Stares at it. Sips at another generous drink.

Back in the bathroom, she eyes the bottle of pills, then spots the razor. Dorothy takes a close look at the throbbing veins of her left wrist. She retrieves the razor, and takes a solid whack. Blood drips. She falls backwards, out cold.

CUT TO:

OPENING TITLE SEQUENCE:

EXT. MANHATTAN, NEW YORK CITY

HOT JAZZ PLAYS over B&W FOOTAGE of the wild Roaring Twenties, a MONTAGE of Prohibition speakeasy raids, dance contests, WW1 soldiers parading down 5th Avenue, then settling into more somber shots of Depression-era bread lines, soup kitchens, and shabby-clad men with cardboard signs, yearning for work, as cops on horseback keep the peace. We find ourselves outside the:

EXT. ALGONQUIN HOTEL - DAY - 1930

With its lettered awning and spiral topiary. COLOR FADES BACK IN. The awning is green. So is the topiary.

MARGALO GILLMORE (O.S.)
 Those were wild times, I'll tell
 ya.

END OF TITLES, CONTINUING INTO:

INT. ALGONQUIN HOTEL ROSE ROOM RESTAURANT, 1930 - DAY

Margalo Gillmore, 33, blond, upbeat, looks right into the camera. Her clothes and cloche hat confirm it's 1930.

MARGALO GILLMORE

The Jazz age, the Roaring Twenties, they've named it now, the Age of Wonderful Nonsense. But you recall, you were there.

ANOTHER ANGLE reveals that Margalo is speaking to a REPORTER, JAMES THURBER, 35, thick glasses, still a few years before his cartoonist fame, pad and pencil in hand, in the hotel's otherwise empty Rose Room Restaurant. The reporter gestures around the gilded room.

JAMES THURBER

Not here. Not much. Not then.

MARGALO GILLMORE

Well, your boss sure was. Here. Then. But I know, a lot has changed in ten years. Who knew?

JAMES THURBER

That's certainly the truth. That's why I'm here now, since you were here - there - back then.

MARGALO GILLMORE

Thanks to Marc Connelly, initially. Alright, maybe that's one Round Table yarn that's yet to be unraveled. But why not corner Connelly, or Ross, or any of the more famous others?

JAMES THURBER

You're famous.

MARGALO GILLMORE

And you're sweet. But aren't some of them still on your payroll?

JAMES THURBER

Some of them don't wish to speak.

MARGALO GILLMORE

Marc Connelly always wishes to speak.

JAMES THURBER

Sure, we'll get him on the record. Along with Murdock and Toohey. But Dorothy Parker, Robert Benchley, George S. Kaufman, all too busy, or these days, just not interested.

MARGALO GILLMORE

To be fair, with the crash, I reckon it may all seem somewhat frivolous now.

JAMES THURBER

That's why boss Ross wants me to document the shape of things now gone, to write down how it was in the beginning, when you were all still living it up.

MARGALO GILLMORE

A regular Book of Genesis.

JAMES THURBER

Yes! While you were collectively raising Cain! A profile piece on the entire period. You'd think the memory of a good impertinent wisecrack would be needed now more than ever.

Margalo steps to a large round table at the rear of the room, already set for lunch.

MARGALO GILLMORE

No one had any idea then that most of 'em would become such... well, that they'd become "them."

SARAH VICTOR, 63, African-American, wearing a white turban and apron, strolls out through the kitchen door like she owns the place.

SARAH VICTOR

Well, hello darlin's.

Sarah slides over to the reporter, and affectionately touches his shoulder.

SARAH VICTOR (CONT'D)

What mischief are you youngsters up to?

Margalo points at Sarah and smiles accusingly.

MARGALO GILLMORE
She's the one.

SARAH VICTOR
The one what?

MARGALO GILLMORE
This was all your fault, Sarah.
Without you, none of this would
have ever happened.

JAMES THURBER
What, the entire decade?

SARAH VICTOR
Child, to what do you refer?

MARGALO GILLMORE
Yes, the complete mad span! If she
wasn't such a seductive pastry
chef...

SARAH VICTOR
Seductive?!

MARGALO GILLMORE
It was so much a giddy time. And I
seriously doubt that any of it
would have, you know, transpired
without her recipe for apple pie.

EXT. MANHATTAN SKYLINE, NEW YORK CITY - DAY - 1919 - EST.

A Model T auto sputters by. Newsies hawk dailies.

EXT. CONDE NAST OFFICES - DAY - 1919

The summer sun shines off the W. 44th Street brick façade.

INT. VANITY FAIR OFFICES - DAY

A crisply-lettered door reads "Vanity Fair." Inside, Dorothy
Parker, 26, Robert Benchley, 29, and all 6'7" of ROBERT
SHERWOOD, 23, thin, cluster around their desks.

DOROTHY PARKER

Mr. Benchley, just because you've been foolishly left in charge is certainly no reason to assume that you can just blurt out your suggestions for how I might best employ my time on the company clock.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Mrs. Parker, I was already your editor before Crownie ill-advisedly deemed to embark on his summer vacation.

DOROTHY PARKER

My point exactly. And when did I ever listen to you then?

Their sly smiles tip that they're just clowning for the new guy, Sherwood.

DOROTHY PARKER (CONT'D)

Besides, with my Eddie back from the war, I've been pretty fucking busy. Or vise versa.

Sherwood looks shocked.

DOROTHY PARKER (CONT'D)

Oh, dear Mr. Sherwood, don't look so aghast. You were in the army.

ROBERT SHERWOOD

The Canadian Army.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

And I'll bet you looked downright intimidating in your Canadian Highlander kilt.

DOROTHY PARKER

At that elevation, he looks intimidating out of it. I'm surprised the Germans didn't surrender immediately at the mere sight of you.

Benchley waves a list.

ROBERT BENCHLEY
 Suggestions, Mrs. Parker. These are
 simply my humble proposals
 regarding the latest Broadway shows
 that you may wish to review.

DOROTHY PARKER
 Oh, Fred...

ROBERT SHERWOOD
 Fred?

ROBERT BENCHLEY
 I know from my own experience, that
 you, Mrs. Parker, are capable of
 performing an almost unlimited
 amount of work, just so long as it
 isn't the work that you're supposed
 to be doing.

DOROTHY PARKER
 But Mr. Benchley, you do so know
 how much I abhor being
 disappointed.

ROBERT BENCHLEY
 Do you, Dottie, terribly, honestly?

DOROTHY PARKER
 And how I so value other's
 opinions... of me.

ROBERT BENCHLEY
 Is that a fact?

DOROTHY PARKER
 Don't you think it's important what
 they think about what I think?

ROBERT BENCHLEY
 Ya think?

DOROTHY PARKER
 The only sure way I can imagine to
 entirely shun letting them down,
 and thus skip penning one of my
 charmingly ironic reviews, is to
 abstain completely from attending
 any of those new shows.

ROBERT BENCHLEY
 But Mrs. Parker, you've already
 reviewed all the old ones. Aren't
 you in the least bit curious?

DOROTHY PARKER

For the sake of my own sanity,
 Freddy, no, since we both know full
 well what that characteristic of
 curiosity has already wreaked on at
 least one fearless feline.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Oh, Mrs. Parker, if you could just
 commit a fraction of the words that
 flow so fluently from that petite
 maw of yours onto paper, I'd be
 quite content.

DOROTHY PARKER

But what if this June the Great
 White Way is just not making them
 like they used to?

ROBERT SHERWOOD

Do you mean like they made them in
 May?

DOROTHY PARKER

Maybe. Listen, I enjoy losing
 myself in an appreciative audience
 as much as the next schoolgirl, and
 I don't ask for much, generally, do
 I? But what I genuinely treasure is
 when a new play looks hopefully
 other than to last's year's dog-
 eared hits for inspiration and
 royalties.

Benchley hands Dorothy the list.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Suggestions.

DOROTHY PARKER

(reading)

Hmmm... Dillingham, Belasco, and
 Zeigfeld. Is this some new law
 firm?

ROBERT BENCHLEY

I feel quite confident that you
 are, in fact, already well aware
 that those are the producers of
 this season's most noteworthy and
 anticipated Broadway shows.

DOROTHY PARKER

Anticipated by whom?

ROBERT BENCHLEY

By our advertisers Chuck Dillingham, Dave Belasco, and Flo Ziegfeld, naturally. Mr. Sherwood here, on the other hand, has actually been requesting writing assignments as a way to court some extra cabbage.

DOROTHY PARKER

You didn't say there was a bonus involved.

(to Sherwood)

And I think I liked you better, if you'd like to hear the long and short of it, ten minutes ago, before you started trying... my patience.

Benchley jangles a key.

ROBERT SHERWOOD

What's that, Rob?

ROBERT BENCHLEY

The keys to the kingdom, Rob, the petty cash drawer. The galleys are docked, and I'm just overjoyed to report they're in sore need of some padding.

Benchley picks up a proof and points.

ROBERT BENCHLEY (CONT'D)

Trevor's "Well Dressed Man" article in particular is looking somewhat threadbare. What are your thoughts, do you think, Rob, regarding men's fashion?

DOROTHY PARKER

He's in favor.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

You haven't seen the kilt.

Sherwood takes the page to read it. The door swings open and an OFFICE BOY pushing a mail cart rolls in. He selects a few envelopes, looks to Benchley.

OFFICE BOY

Sorry, I'm new. Are you Mr. Benchley?

DOROTHY PARKER
Well, benvenuto and bon voyage.

ROBERT BENCHLEY
Guilty as charged. Thank you. I'll gratefully receive the general mail for Conde Nast, Vanity Fair and Vogue, as well as those specifically for Mr. Crowninshield.

The boy hands them over. Then produces several envelopes.

OFFICE BOY
And would you be Mrs. Parker?

DOROTHY PARKER
Mea culpa. Do you mind much?

The boy surrenders them, then looks at Sherwood, and back through the mail.

ROBERT BENCHLEY
There's nothing for the leaning tower there. He's new, like you. A mere sapling.

DOROTHY PARKER
Hasn't had time to sprout, or spout enough to annoy anyone yet in print.

ROBERT BENCHLEY
Yet.

DOROTHY PARKER
Only in person.

Sherwood smiles, getting it, as the mail boy rolls on.

ROBERT SHERWOOD
I suppose I just haven't been applying myself. But I'll do my level best.

DOROTHY PARKER
Do your worst.

ROBERT BENCHLEY
That's the stuff.

Dorothy checks the return addresses on her mail, then opens one with a letter opener.

DOROTHY PARKER

Well now, what fresh hell is this?

She unfolds it.

DOROTHY PARKER (CONT'D)

It's an invitation from Murdock Permberton to a luncheon celebrating Alexander Woollcott's return from the war.

(showing it to Benchley)

But they've misspelled Woollcott's surname five different ways, with the T's and O's and L's flying every which way, and then topped it off by listing him as the only guest speaker at his own feast. What's that all about, do you suppose? I know Murdock and his eminence are friends, but surely the only armed conflict Aleck encountered overseas was with his fountain pen.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

To be fair, I'm not sure even Aleck is certain on how many letters cohabit in that name, Woollcott. That's certainly a lot of vowel movement going down there.

Dorothy smirks.

ROBERT SHERWOOD

But why would the Hippodrome's publicist throw an event spoofing New York's most important drama critic? After you two, of course.

DOROTHY PARKER

Of course.

INT. TIFFANY'S, 5TH AVENUE - DAY

Alexander Woollcott, 32, owlish, portly, with a squeaky voice, strides into the famous jewelry store with Jane Grant, 27, stylish, down to earth. They approach a glass counter staffed by a snooty SALESMAN who (perhaps) looks and acts like a younger John McGiver from "Breakfast at Tiffany's."

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

I am Alexander Woollcott, and this is Miss Jane Grant, and we wish to buy a wedding ring.

SALESPERSON

Excellent.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Aren't you going to say, "Well, you've come to the right place"?

SALESPERSON

We like to think it goes without saying, sir.

The salesperson gestures at the rings. Woollcott eyes them, Jane, and the salesperson.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Do you have something with perhaps a bit more sparkling personality?

TIFFANY SALESPERSON

Certainly. I'll be right back.

He leaves. The two chat.

JANE GRANT

Do you think perhaps he thought you meant him? It'd be funny if someone else comes back.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Did you hear? With the troops home now, in addition to you gaining a husband, I'm getting a banquet.

JANE GRANT

That may be some indication of both our current stations in life.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Stations? Good Lord, it's true.

Woollcott makes the sign of the cross, then extends his arms.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)

You're falling for the first time, and I'm about to be crucified.

She stifles a smile.

JANE GRANT
Why do you say that?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
I appreciate the attention and inevitable accolades, but I can't help feeling somewhat suspicious.

JANE GRANT
Suspicious?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
What do Murdock and his cohort - cohort - John Toohey want?

JANE GRANT
What more could anyone possibly want, Aleck, beyond the pleasure of your own company, and the honor of honoring you?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
You know this Toohey, correct? He's one of Harold's poker pals, isn't he?

JANE GRANT
Yes, if my intended is being completely honest about how he spends his Saturday nights.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
Oh, I certainly hope not. A successful marriage should be firmly founded on deception.

JANE GRANT
John Peter Toohey, I believe, is some sort of theatrical press agent. I can't imagine what he'd want with you.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
Or, more likely, from me. I'll ask Murdock. If this bash is about the war, I certainly don't wish to be ambushed. Now, as far as your little war of the sexes...

Jane gestures around the room.

JANE GRANT
Thank you, Aleck for all your help.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
It's the least I can do, given your
appalling choice of fiancés.

JANE GRANT
I've only selected the one, Aleck.

The salesperson returns with a tray. They review the options.

TIFFANY SALESMAN
This orange blossom design is au
courant at the moment.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
It's current currently, is it?

TIFFANY SALESMAN
As you say, sir, oui, very popular.

JANE GRANT
I do like that.

She tries it on.

JANE GRANT (CONT'D)
It almost fits. I'll take that as a
good omen.

She slides it off. The salesman hands her the ring sizer
card. She slips it on. He jots the information.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
(re: sizer)
Or you could just wear that for the
ceremony.

Jane removes it.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)
I admire your taste in jewelry,
Jane, at least.

The salesperson looks confused.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)
We'll take that one, if you'd be so
kind as to have it delivered to the
Times office on West 43rd.

Aleck pulls out his billfold.

TIFFANY SALESMAN
Certainly, sir. Do you wish both
your initials be engraved inside?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
No, just the lady's. She may want
to use it again.

INT. TIMES BUILDING - DAY

Aleck holds the door open and Jane walks in. Their desks are fairly adjacent. Alec's is larger and more grand, as suits the newspaper's department head.

JANE GRANT
Harold's taking me to lunch today,
Aleck, you can ask him about Toohey
yourself.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
The suspense is killing me. Maybe
I'll wait.

Aleck goes to his desk. Notices:

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)
Who's been using my typewriter?

He scans some typewritten pages. Yells:

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)
Kaufman!

George Kaufman, 29, sticks his head in sheepishly, as though just arriving.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)
Kaufman, you fawn's ass! You have
your own typewriter.

George, who is somewhat like a young Woody Allen in appearance and ironic demeanor, takes the pages from Aleck.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
Thanks, boss. I wondered where I
left those.

Aleck puts his hands on his hips.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
Well?

GEORGE KAUFMAN
Your typewriter works better.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
 Don't I know it, and I'd like to
 keep it that way.

Aleck grabs the pages back.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)
 What's this nonsense anyway? Are
 you writing another play?

GEORGE KAUFMAN
 No... I'm typing it.

Aleck reads the title page.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
 Marc Connelly? You're collaborating
 with that elf? That's brave of you,
 Kaufman, after the drubbing that
 hack, and your namesake, S. Jay
 Kaufman gave Connelly over his last
 theatrical outing. I'm surprised
 Marcus would have anything to do
 with you, or anyone saddled with
 that unfortunate...
 (coughing)
 Kauf-man moniker.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
 Well, then hopefully there's
 strength in numbers, and we've got
 my doppelganger outflanked. We've
 gone all in on Frank's Dulcinea
 character, and are cooking up a
 whole play around her for Lynn
 Fontanne.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
 Well, I hate to say it, but that
 idea might actually be terrible.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
 Terribly great.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
 Of course that's what I meant. I
 was being succinct.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
 That's a first.

Jane looks on amused as she settles at her desk.

GEORGE KAUFMAN (CONT'D)
We only work evenings. Your machine
makes nicer words.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
Don't I know it. But then, when -
if - your show opens, I'll have to
review it on the same typewriter
you scoundrels used to concoct it.
That seems unseemly to me, almost
incestuous.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
Well, Aleck, don't fret yet. You
can cross that sibling off when you
cross it.

Harold Ross, 26, with a crew cut and big teeth, walks in.

HAROLD ROSS
Good morning, gents, lady.

Kaufman nods a greeting.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
Ross.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
Well, well, speaking of inbreeding.

INT. PARKER'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Dorothy Parker, still in her office garb, walks up the stairs to her apartment, and lets herself in. Inside, she picks the mail up from the floor (from the mail slot.) Her pet Scottie scampers over. She pets it. Then fills a water glass at the kitchen sink. She slides into the bedroom. Her husband, EDWIN PARKER, 26, charmingly handsome, is asleep fully clothed on the bed. Dorothy eyes a bottle of Haig & Haig whiskey on the nightstand, then opens their armoire. Eddie stirs awake.

EDWIN PARKER
Dottie.

DOROTHY PARKER
Darling.

She kisses him. He sits up.

DOROTHY PARKER (CONT'D)
That's marvelous, my love. You're
all rested up. And you taste aged
to perfection.

Dorothy selects an outfit from the cabinet.

DOROTHY PARKER (CONT'D)
Be my escort tonight, dear, won't you?

EDWIN PARKER
Oh, I don't know.

DOROTHY PARKER
A welcome change of scenery for you. It's the new Follies. You'll like it, it has nearly naked showgirls, and a fully clothed Eddie Cantor.

Dorothy starts to undress.

EDWIN PARKER
(meaning her)
The show's already started.

DOROTHY PARKER
At least join me at Neysa's?

EDWIN PARKER
Sure thing, baby.

He pours himself another drink. Dorothy holds up her dress.

DOROTHY PARKER
Do you approve, husband?

EDWIN PARKER
It's the cat's PJs. It'll be a downright honor to be seen out and about with you.

Dorothy's stripped to her camisole.

DOROTHY PARKER
And it will be my honor to be obscene with you.

She again kisses Eddie.

DOROTHY PARKER (CONT'D)
No rush on Neysa's.

The two fumble. Dorothy unbuttons his shirt, slides off his belt. Eddie seems willing enough as the seduction continues, until, suddenly, he passes out drunk. Snores. Dorothy shakes her head, goes back to dressing.

Finished, she returns to the table, and pours herself one from Edie's bottle, muttering.

DOROTHY PARKER (CONT'D)
Don Juan is gone.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Dorothy, smart in her evening ensemble, walks across the hall, opens a door...

INT. NEYSA'S STUDIO - AFTERNOON

And is suddenly in the midst of a cacophonous afternoon soiree. A scrawny PIANO PLAYER pounds out "Alexander's Ragtime Band" on an upright, as DEEMS TAYLOR, 34, glasses, looks on approvingly. Frank Adams, 37, confident, puffs a cigar as he navigates an intense conversation with HEYWOOD BROWN, 30, vaguely disheveled. On the far side of the room, barely noticed, Robert Benchley and Charles MacArthur, 24, handsome, rearrange a bookshelf. Everyone seems to know everyone else, as Dorothy nods and smiles, and keeps moving to the next room.

NEYSA MCMEIN, 31, blond, sits in a smudged painter's smock at an easel, sketching in pastels a magazine cover portrait of a self-possessed model perched before her. She continues to work, as her friends congregate, as though it's the most natural thing in the world. Dorothy saddles over, checks out the picture, the model, and back to the portrait.

DOROTHY PARKER
Wish we could get you for our rag,
Neysa, class up the joint.

NEYSA MCMEIN
That's darling.

DOROTHY PARKER
And you're busy.

Dorothy surveys the room as Neysa works, eyeing those enjoying the stopover before their dinners and theatre. Neysa, still sketching, notices Dorothy's wistfully expression.

NEYSA MCMEIN
A penny for your thoughts, little
one?

DOROTHY PARKER

Ah, just wondering if you should get a traffic cop in here. It's all just too perfectly chaotic, don't you think?

NEYSA MCMEIN

When I'm working, I try not to think.

Dorothy looks at the portrait again, then picks up a black pastel crayon.

DOROTHY PARKER

May I?

Neysa has no idea what she's asking. Playing along:

NEYSA MCMEIN

Sure.

Dorothy walks over to the model and affectionately draws a movie villain mustache on her upper lip.

Dorothy hands the crayon back to Neysa, then walks into the other room. Spots:

DOROTHY PARKER

Frank!

Dorothy walks over to Frank Adams, the older gent with the cigar, still chatting with Heywood Broun.

DOROTHY PARKER (CONT'D)

Frank, Heywood, I'm surprised you two are still talking.

HEYWOOD BROUN

Whatever do you mean, Dorothy?

DOROTHY PARKER

I mean, between the two of you, I'd have thought you'd have already cracked every topic there is to solve.

FRANK ADAMS

Don't say that. There'd be nothing left to write about for our columns.

HEYWOOD BROUN

The world obligingly still provides ample folderol for our musings.

DOROTHY PARKER

Well then, boys, what's all this nonsense about honoring Woollcott, when he's misspent his entire youth trying to at least appear dishonorable?

FRANK ADAMS

Pemberton's luncheon at the Algonquin? Just fuel to the flame, I'd imagine.

DOROTHY PARKER

But then where's the fire? It all makes me very nervous.

FRANK ADAMS

Nervous?

DOROTHY PARKER

Frank, you were in France with Aleck. Why aren't you being fêted?

Adams takes a drag on his cigar.

FRANK ADAMS

I already glean all the attention I crave, and then some.

DOROTHY PARKER

Were you invited? Of course you were.

FRANK ADAMS

And I do think you're accurate, Dorothy. If Murdock and Toohey are behind this, you're right to suspect something's fishy. But Aleck is whom they're looking to hook, not me. It'll still be fodder for my column, however it plays out. You know the drill, Dottie, if any of your mob say it, then I'm just the man to misquote it in print.

HEYWOOD BROWN

See that, Dottie? You're the folderol.

She playfully punches him. The PIANO PLAYER announces:

PIANO PLAYER
 Here's a new one, folks, debuting
 tonight right down the road. I'm no
 Eddie Cantor, but still, whadda you
 think?

He launches into:

PIANO PLAYER (CONT'D)
 (singing)
 A pretty girl is like a melody...

Clearly, the piano player is IRVING BERLIN.

EXT. THEATRE - NIGHT

The marquee of "The Comedy Theatre" announces "Up From
 Nowhere."

INT. THEATRE - NIGHT

It's Margalo (22 in 1919) performing on stage as "Etta."

MARGALO GILLMORE
 Oh, father, don't you know all the
 girls are dressing like this now?

MR. SILVER
 Well, your mother sure isn't.

She's delightful, and the audience seems to love it. We
 discover Marc Connelly, 28, balding, a big smile on his face.
 He jots something in his program.

INT. THEATRE, BACKSTAGE

Margalo emerges from the dressing room in street clothes. A
 STAGEHAND approaches waving a business card.

STAGEHAND
 Supposedly a critic from the
 Morning Telegraph.

Marc, his head now covered by a straw porkpie hat, stands
 nearby. Margalo looks over. Marc smiles and leans back
 against the wall so that his hat tips itself.

INT. TONY'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Cocktails before them, Marc and Margalo chat at a table. Most in the room smoke.

MARC CONNELLY

How come I don't already know you?

Margalo glances at his business card.

MARGALO GILLMORE

Marc Connelly? Should I know you?

MARC CONNELLY

Yes, so that at least we'll never have to repeat this conversation.

MARGALO GILLMORE

I'm fairly new to the boards. Just a few shows under my belt.

She runs her hand through her hair.

MARGALO GILLMORE (CONT'D)

I was an extra for the moving pictures at Vitagraph, in Brooklyn, you know, last year, for three whole days, before this came through.

MARC CONNELLY

Oh! I wrote some scenes for a movie serial myself last year. But I don't imagine that business is going to make either one of us millionaires.

The two clink glasses.

MARC CONNELLY (CONT'D)

Here's mud in your eye.

MARGALO GILLMORE

Mud in your eye. I never understood why that should be lucky.

MARC CONNELLY

And I never ever even thought about it, until right this very moment.
Hmmm.

MARGALO GILLMORE

All I've ever wanted in my eyes are the stage lights. I'm so...

(MORE)

MARGALO GILLMORE (CONT'D)
relieved that it seems to be
starting to happen.

Marc looks smitten. He leans in. Suddenly, JOHN TOOHEY, 39,
stout, walks in, spots Marc.

JOHN TOOHEY
Marc!

MARC CONNELLY
He knows me.

John heads over.

JOHN TOOHEY
Marc, I hoped I'd see you around.

MARC CONNELLY
And now your wish is granted.
Margalo, this is John Toohey. He
writes, press releases, mostly.

JOHN TOOHEY
Not for long, unless this Woollcott
gag goes off as planned.

MARGALO GILLMORE
(Everyone knows:)
Woollcott?

JOHN TOOHEY
That's what I wanted to snag you
for, Marc. Murdock's trying to
help, God bless him, but you're
pals with Kaufman, and Kaufman
works with Woollcott, so...

MARC CONNELLY
So, what? What are you two up to
anyway, really?

JOHN TOOHEY
Aleck's a big man...

MARC CONNELLY
I'll say.

JOHN TOOHEY
It takes a lot to get his
attention.

Margalo looks intrigued.

MARC CONNELLY

Your celebration? I suspect even he's suspicious of your true intentions.

JOHN TOOHEY

Well, of course I want something! Like you said, it's my job.

MARC CONNELLY

Well, fair enough, but then what do you want from me?

Margalo looks on, curious. Marc looks over and grins, then reassuringly touches her hand.

JOHN TOOHEY

We just want to ensure his highness grants us an audience. This is a lot of trouble if he doesn't show up.

MARC CONNELLY

Audience. Interesting choice of words.

JOHN TOOHEY

It's the exact right choice of words, er, word. Now, listen, Marc...

They all lean in. Dorothy Parker, solo, appears at the door. She scans the room, spots Marc.

MARC CONNELLY

Dorothy!

He waves her over. Margalo looks impressed that he knows:

MARGALO GILLMORE

Well, well, Dorothy Parker.

The men momentarily rise courteously. Dorothy sits.

DOROTHY PARKER

Hello, Marc, John. Who is this divine creature that you've somehow coerced into being seen in public with the likes of you?

MARGALO GILLMORE

Margalo...

DOROTHY PARKER
Margalo Gillmore.

MARC CONNELLY
She's just opened at the Comedy
Theatre.

DOROTHY PARKER
And now here you are, up from
nowhere.

They all looked impressed that Dorothy knows the title of her
show.

MARGALO GILLMORE
I adored your last Vanity Fair. So
clever.

DOROTHY PARKER
Sweet girl. Wait'll you see this
one.

JOHN TOOHEY
From whence do you hail, Dorothy?

DOROTHY PARKER
The new Follies. An ill wind blew
me there.

MARGALO GILLMORE
Oh! How was it?

DOROTHY PARKER
I'm still digesting. Pretty much
like Ziegfeld's last outing, only
more so. For now let's merely say
that I'm just a wee bit concerned
for the entire fate of our nation.

Marc flags a waiter for a drink for Dorothy.

INT. VANITY FAIR OFFICES - THE NEXT DAY

Dorothy reads to Benchley and Sherwood from her own
typewritten copy.

DOROTHY PARKER
"This season's Follies are as
gorgeous to behold as any of their
predecessors.

(MORE)

DOROTHY PARKER (CONT'D)
 But with Prohibition now looming on the horizon, whereas last year various haughty beauties undulated across the stage barely costumed as Mint Juleps, Martinis and Gin Fizzes, this year they appear respectively as Coca-Cola, Sarsaparilla, and Lemonade. In the past, a lady adorned in bunches of shimmering grapes represented Champagne; This season, she must content herself with impersonating Welch's Grape Juice."

Sherwood and Benchley grin. Dorothy continues.

DOROTHY PARKER (CONT'D)
 "The accompanying songs are penned by Irving Berlin, sounding, unfortunately, like a medley of his own past hits. To be fair, however, it does take real ingenuity to rhyme Sarsaparilla with Rockefeller."

Dorothy proudly hands the pages to Benchley.

DOROTHY PARKER (CONT'D)
 And there you have it, your honor. I rest my carcass.

ROBERT BENCHLEY
 You're a bold little giant killer, Mrs. Parker. Thank you.

DOROTHY PARKER
 The pleasure, clearly, was all yours.

Benchley turns to Sherwood.

ROBERT BENCHLEY
 Now, Rob...

ROBERT SHERWOOD
 Yes, Rob?

ROBERT BENCHLEY
 Do you think you might apply that same light touch to embroidering that clothing piece?

ROBERT SHERWOOD
 I'll tell you, I'm inspired now.

DOROTHY PARKER

Crownie should have quite an array of impressive journalism to savor on his return from summer camp. But is that enough, Fred, truly, do you think?

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Enough what, Mrs. Parker?

DOROTHY PARKER

Do you still hold the key to that bulging cash locker, Mr. Benchley?

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Perhaps. But, Mrs. Parker, whatever do you have in mind?

SERIES OF SHOTS

Benchley unlocks the drawer and extracts a fistful of bills.

The three walk down the avenue into a Woolworth's Five and Dime.

They cruise the aisles, grabbing crepe paper, banners and bunting, and ridiculous clown art prints, holding items up for one another's approval, the stupider the better.

INT. BACK AT THE OFFICE - CONTINUING

Back at work, they set to "decorating" their boss's office.

They survey their accomplishment -- it looks like a circus wagon exploded -- and collapse laughing.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Now that's a delightful reason to return home!

DOROTHY PARKER

And to then gleefully quickly flee.

INT. ALGONQUIN HOTEL RESTAURANT - DAY

John Toohey sits with MURDOCK PEMBERTON, 31, at a table set for three. It's just a bit before lunch, and the restaurant is still fairly empty. In the background by the kitchen door, the hotel's manager, FRANK CHASE, 46, self-assured, chats with Sarah Victor (53 in 1919), the pastry chef we met before. Toohey checks his watch.

JOHN TOOHEY
Was this even a good idea?

MURDOCK PEMBERTON
We'll find out soon enough. If he even shows up.

JOHN TOOHEY
And if he doesn't?

MURDOCK PEMBERTON
Then this was your idea.

Woollcott appears, filling the doorway. He dramatically walks over. The two stand.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON (CONT'D)
Aleck...

He waves them off.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
Yes, yes.

Aleck catches the eye of a WAITER, who clearly knows him. He walks over.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)
Good morning, Luigi. Might I please be issued a ration of coffee, and with not a moment to spare?

WAITER
Certainly, sir.

He leaves to fetch it.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
Murdock, John Toohey, what's this all-too-early curtain call about?

The waiter returns, and pours a cup. Aleck holds his finger up like, "Wait." Aleck drains the cup, then watches as it's refilled. He nods and dismisses the waiter, who leaves the carafe. Aleck sips, as...

JOHN TOOHEY
Marc Connelly thought you might appreciate a meeting before our meeting.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
Marc Connelly! What does that little man have to do with me?

MURDOCK PEMBERTON

Well, of course, he plays cards with Ross, and he is working with Kaufman.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

That's right, thank you for reminding me! Connelly is the imp that's been occupying my typewriter, by George. I should be charging that puny runt rent, or royalties, something.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON

Marc's not the playwright we're here to discuss.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Ah, ha! The clouds part.

The waiter returns, and accommodatingly refills cups.

WAITER

Any lunch for you gents?

John and Murdock look to Aleck. Alex looks towards the kitchen. Chase and Sarah are now gone.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

I'm stuffed, just had breakfast. However, might there be lurking about one of Sarah's delightful deserts?

WAITER

I'll check, sir.

As he walks off...

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

I couldn't possibly consume another bite, but I do so like it when people bring me things.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON

That's an admirable trait, Aleck, since John is here to present you with his latest play.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

And whom are you shilling for, Mr. Toohey? And why is Murdock aboard helping shovel your load of Ship High In Transit?

MURDOCK PEMBERTON
It's pretty good, Aleck.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
What is?

JOHN TOOHEY
(encouraged)
The new show opening at the
Morosco.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
That you would just love me to
favorably review.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON
Well, attend, at least.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
What's the title of this
masterpiece?

JOHN TOOHEY
What's important is who the author
is.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
Well?

JOHN TOOHEY
Eugene O'Neill.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
Who?

JOHN TOOHEY
He's new. You can be the one to
discover him, and champion him to
the world.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
(messing with them)
Now why on earth would I ever wish
to do that?

On the other side of a pillar, obscured from their view, sits Frank Adams, last seen at Neysa's gathering, eavesdropping as he picks at his lunch. He unwraps a cigar. Murdock cocks his head, having heard... something. Frank thinks better of lighting it, not wanting to tip his presence. The waiter returns with apple pie for Aleck. Behind him a few lunch customers arrive and are seated. Aleck savors a bite.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)
Excellent.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON
And so is O'Neill.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
Wait a minute! Is that what your
banquet is all about? You think
flattering me will get me to sing
the praises of...
(indicating Toohey)
...this nobody's new nobody?

Neither reply. Aleck glares.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)
That's it, isn't it?

JOHN TOOHEY
Partly.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON
Shut up, John. That's not it.

A fellow journalist, WILLIAM MURRAY, 29, spots them and walks
over. He takes a seat like an old friend.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
Saved by the bell. What the hell,
Bill?

WILL MURRAY
As am I also, overjoyed to see you,
Aleck. What are you goons cooking
up?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
Well, whatever it turns out to be,
it'll run a poor second to this
apple pie.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON
John here was just about to pitch a
fascinating story to Aleck about
his new client, Gene O'Neill.

Murray's expression indicates he's also never heard the name.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
Do tell.

Murdock glances encouragingly at Toohey.

JOHN TOOHEY

And so I shall!

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

I suppose I'm your captive audience, at least until I spot the bottom of this pie plate, so get it over with.

JOHN TOOHEY

So this new play from O'Neill, it's entitled "Beyond the Horizon", since that's exactly where the playwright was when he wrote it.

Woollcott cocks his head. Murdock looks pleased that he seems interested.

JOHN TOOHEY (CONT'D)

Turns out Eugene had knocked up his new girlfriend, and when O'Neill's dad got wind of it, he crafted a plan to keep the two apart. He made a deal with the captain of a tramp steamer, then took his son down to a saloon at the docks, met the captain for dinner, and got his boy dead drunk.

WILL MURRAY

Imagine that, a writer who enjoys a cocktail.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON

Indeed.

JOHN TOOHEY

They hoisted him aboard and set sail. Turns out the joke was on dad, since Eugene had already done right by the girl and married her. And the two are now blissfully reunited, the proud parents of a son. But while he was still on his forced exile circling the globe, O'Neill did manage to pen a play partly inspired by his kidnapper captain.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Opening, and closing, soon at the Morosco Theatre.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON

Yes, that one. But, Aleck, that's the sort of public interest story your readers might find amusing, yes?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

My readers will be amused when I'm sued for libel.

JOHN TOOHEY

You don't have to use his name.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Then what's the point for you? Did you even think this through?

MURDOCK PEMBERTON

John imagined it as a sort of get acquainted offer.

Aleck has another bite, and keeps talking.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Well, I'm not buying. Bill, what's your verdict on this nonsense?

Murray is about to speak, when Aleck notices ART SAMUELS, blond, 30, enter.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)

Art! Get over here!

Art walks over, remains standing.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)

I'll defer to a jury of my peers.

ART SAMUELS

Ah, well, in that case I suppose I should drop anchor.

He sits.

ART SAMUELS (CONT'D)

What's this about? Are you talking about the war?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

No. That would be interesting. Oh, really, this isn't even worth repeating. Now, when I was in the theatre of war...

ART SAMUELS

Last month.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Yes, last month. What were we even fighting for? Certainly not for the privilege to print the sort of pabulum John Toohey here, yes, remember that name so you can forget it, John Toohey here is trying to force feed me.

Aleck stands. Frank, behind the column, keeps listening.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)

I thought you were my friend, Pemberton! Why would you conspire...

Aleck looks around the room. Every patron leans over to listen, including the manager and their waiter, huddled together.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)

I'm the one who's been shanghaied, not your Eugene O'Neill, another name I shall promptly purge from my memory, along with any recollection of how my dear, dear buddy Murdock could possibly have thought to corner me over so trivial a concern. You have some nerve!

He storms towards the door, then returns to finish his last bite.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)

Both of you!

He stomps out. From his concealed table, Frank pulls a reporter's notebook from his jacket pocket to jot notes.

INT. VANITY FAIR OFFICES - THE NEXT DAY

Benchley reads Frank's column from the morning Tribune to Parker and Sherwood.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

"And I doth made my way to the stomping grounds of the lodge of the Algonguin, and there, whilst trying to consume my own meager repast, doth overhear the angry shrieks of A. Woollcott, himself apparently back on the warpath after just returning from the recent unpleasantries overseas. So it will remain to be seen if next Saturday eve the tribes still deign to convene to honor their chief.

DOROTHY PARKER

Well, there you have it, another Pepys (peeps) out of Frank.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

"Deign to convene." It rhymes better in print.

DOROTHY PARKER

I'll take your word for it.

They notice that Sherwood again looks confused.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

The Woollcott dinner? Well, clearly, that's not something we need concern ourselves with for yet another three days.

Benchley folds the paper.

DOROTHY PARKER

If ever.

The door swings open and in walks FRANK CROWNINSHIELD, 47, dapper, holding the latest Vanity Fair.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Greetings boss, welcome home.

Dorothy curtsies. Frank holds up the magazine and shakes his head.

DOROTHY PARKER

We missed you, too.

FRANK CROWNINSHIELD

Dorothy, Dorothy, Dorothy, I suppose that's what we pay you for, but would someone please explain to me what's happened in the men's fashion page? Did Trevor have a stroke?

ROBERT BENCHLEY

A stroke of genius was my aim.

Sherwood looks guilty. Frank scans the article.

FRANK CROWNINSHIELD

I'm just wondering how these particular phrases made their way into an article about the coming season? "All signs seem to indicate that there is a Renaissance dawning in men's dress precipitated by the merciful lifting of the depressing shadow of the Great War. Soon all fashionable fellows will be clad completely in yellow, with their shoes now made from the same bright fabric as their dinner jackets, and with their vests glittering with cut jade."

Sherwood's eyes sheepishly dart between Dorothy and Benchley.

ROBERT SHERWOOD

Do people read that page?

DOROTHY PARKER

You know what, mister? If you're not just quite as wholly thrilled at the sight of us as we are to spy you, well, I'd like to think we've thought of everything.

Dorothy coyly takes Crownie's hand and leads him to his office. She proudly opens the door. Her boss takes in the ridiculous decorations. Sherwood cranes his neck to catch the reaction. Crownie's jaw drops. He slowly shakes his head, and grins.

INT. ALGONQUIN HOTEL - DAY - 1930

We're back with Margalo, Sarah and Thurber.

JAMES THURBER

Is this where your apple pie
figures back in?

Sarah looks to Margalo.

MARGALO GILLMORE

It's not. Yet. Hold your horse...
apples.

JAMES THURBER

I see that wise-cracker trait rubs
off.

Sarah snickers to herself.

SARAH VICTOR

Ha, "cracker."

MARGALO GILLMORE

They were all too clever by half.
But you already know that, James.
That's what put them on the map in
the first place. But what you don't
know, for the record, I guess, is
what happened next. Of course, Marc
told me.

EXT. HAROLD'S APARTMENT - EST. - NIGHT - 1919

It sounds like something's up in Harold's Greenwich Village
apartment.

INT. HAROLD'S APARTMENT - THE POKER GAME - NIGHT

Frank Adams, George Kaufman, Harold Ross and Heywood Broun
sit (camera left to right) around two card tables that have
been pushed together, having just concluded a round of five
card stud. Their jackets hang on chairs or a rack, and their
collars and ties have been loosened or removed. Kaufman is
the bank, with a tray of chips on a table nearby, along with
liquor bottles and plates of sandwiches. Most smoke.

FRANK ADAMS

Well, how would you have played it?

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Under an assumed name.

Broun shuffles the cards. Ross stifles a yawn.

HEYWOOD BROUN

George, would you please prod Ross
to confirm he's still breathing?

Ross stands to fix a drink.

HAROLD ROSS

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

GEORGE KAUFMAN

That's very seldom of you, Ross.

HAROLD ROSS

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

Broun keeps shuffling.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Are you almost done tossing that
salad, Caesar?

Broun cuts the cards, stacks them, shuffles again.

HEYWOOD BROUN

You know what a perfectionist I am.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

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

Ross returns to his chair. Marc Connelly walks in.

MARC CONNELLY

Gentlemen.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Finally. Frank, at least, should be
relieved to see you.

FRANK ADAMS

Why me, specifically?

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Wouldn't you welcome the
opportunity, Franklin, of someone
new to lose to?

FRANK ADAMS

Shut up.

MARC CONNELLY
There's that renowned raconteur.

Connelly settles in next to Broun.

MARC CONNELLY (CONT'D)
Where's Woollcott?

GEORGE KAUFMAN
He sends his regards from Broadway.
Better odds for you.

Connelly looks disappointed.

MARC CONNELLY
We'll see about that.

HEYWOOD BROUN
Who needs chips?

FRANK ADAMS
I need a stack.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
I should say you do.

Adams counts out \$200. Kaufman takes it and slides him his chips. Connelly buys in with his own \$200.

MARC CONNELLY
Hopefully this will buy me more
tonight than just your giddy-up
comradery.

HEYWOOD BROUN
Thus far the stakes have been
fairly modest.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
That's right, tonight it's just
been small steaks and baked
potatoes.

HAROLD ROSS
Huzzah! But to what the hell do you
refer, Connelly?

MARC CONNELLY
It's about Woollcott's party this
weekend.

Broun glances at FPA, re: his article.

HEYWOOD BROUN
It's in all the papers. Anyone
else?

Broun eyes Kaufman's mound.

HEYWOOD BROUN (CONT'D)
Not the House of Rockefeller here,
obviously. You, Ross?

HAROLD ROSS
I'll ride. Maybe my luck will
change.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
Keep your eyes crossed.

HEYWOOD BROUN
Alright, then, ante up.

Each player throws in a chip.

FRANK ADAMS
Pay to play.

HEYWOOD BROUN
First card, down and dirty.

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

HEYWOOD BROUN (CONT'D)
Second card, up and ugly.

Everyone checks their hole card.

HEYWOOD BROUN (CONT'D)
Jack high for Ross. Maybe your luck
will change.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
(noticing)
And a deuce low for Connelly. You'd
better hope yours does.

MARC CONNELLY
Just getting to spend time with you
lads is luck enough for any man.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
Let's see if we can work a bit of
that enthusiasm into our play,
Marc.

(MORE)

GEORGE KAUFMAN (CONT'D)
 If we can fake that level of
 sincerity, well, we should really
 have something.

FRANK ADAMS
 Truer words were never spoken.

George nods to Frank.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
 Says Dulcinea.

HEYWOOD BROUN
 High card bets.

HAROLD ROSS
 Thank you, God dammit. I'll wager
 twenty fins.

Ross slides in his chips.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
 Sounds fishy to me.

Broun looks at his cards, then slides in his matching chips.

FRANK ADAMS
 Are you in, Marc, or should we just
 rechristen you Father Christmas?

MARC CONNELLY
 Twenty it is.

Frank and George do likewise. Broun deals the next round up.

HEYWOOD BROUN
 Another deuce for Marc, a pair of
 twos.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
 Now Marc can join the ballet.

MARC CONNELLY
 Two two's. Ha! I'm laughing, all
 the way to my bank.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
 Stay on your toes, Marc.

HEYWOOD BROUN
 A pair of nines showing for Frank.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
 Them's big shoes to fill.

HEYWOOD BROUN
 A ten for Kaufman. And a ten for
 Ross. Possible straight for
 America's sweetheart.

Broun deals himself a six.

HEYWOOD BROUN (CONT'D)
 And nothing for me. That's just
 fine.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
 There goes all that salad tossing
 down the drain.

HAROLD ROSS
 You're a disgrace to card sharps
 everywhere.

HEYWOOD BROUN
 Don't you fret, my doctor has
 barred me from gambling unless I
 win.

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

HEYWOOD BROUN
 No time like the present.

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

HEYWOOD BROUN
 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.

MARC CONNELLY
 Good one!

GEORGE KAUFMAN
 Number one.

FRANK ADAMS
 I wager forty bones.

With Frank's two nines showing, Kaufman, deadpan, slides in
 his bet to call.

HEYWOOD BROUN
Kaufman, ever the sphinx.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
Said the sphincter.

HEYWOOD BROUN
Don't be an ass.

Ross rechecks his hole card, stifling an excited grin.

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

Ross slides in his bet.

HAROLD ROSS
I'm in, early days.

FRANK ADAMS
And you, Broun?

HEYWOOD BROUN
I'll call, doctor's orders.

HAROLD ROSS
Give it a rest.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
Bed rest?

FRANK ADAMS
Marc?

GEORGE KAUFMAN
Anthony? Are you here to bury
Caesar?

MARC CONNELLY
No, I'm here on the urgent behest
of Murdock Pemberton to get you
mugs to get Aleck to attend his own
party this Saturday.

HAROLD ROSS
Then let's make this interesting.
If you take this hand, then I'll do
my best to persuade Aleck. If one
of us does, then all bets are off.

Marc looks from Ross to Adams, then slides in his chips to
call Frank.

EXT. PARKER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The windows glow from Dorothy's apartment.

INT. PARKER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Edwin stands near the door. Dorothy sits at the desk, typing.

EDWIN PARKER

But those are your work friends,
Dottie.

DOROTHY PARKER

They're my only friends.

(beat)

You see that, Eddie? I'm not
talking about them, I'm talking
about me. You want to understand
me, don't you? Well, there it is.
My life. Right there. And I'm
trying to share it with you, Eddie.

EDWIN PARKER

Being with your friends is like
work - for me.

DOROTHY PARKER

(mocking)

Oh, right, right. That's what it
is, work. That's what it is for
you. But you were doing important
work. You were on the front lines.

(slowly)

I know. I know. I'm so proud of you
I can't...

(gestures)

I can't even find words. You did
the only important thing in the
entire world, saving the world.
Right?

EDWIN PARKER

Well, there you have it.

DOROTHY PARKER

Well.

EDWIN PARKER

Well.

DOROTHY PARKER

Here we are, Eddie. Here we are.
The great, grand, noble "here we
are."

EDWIN PARKER

Yup. I should say we are.

DOROTHY PARKER

I've got everything any woman could
possibly want. And you? You've
got... me.

EDWIN PARKER

Don't do that, Dottie. Don't do
that talk.

DOROTHY PARKER

I'm not doing anything. I'm talking
to you, Eddie. You wanna hear it?
You want the truth? I'm trying to
tell you something, something
simple. I'm just trying to tell you
how I feel. You know how you think
you've been through hell? You know
how you think you've done the one
real thing?

(pause)

I've been here, Eddie. Typing.
Typing.

(shrugs)

That's what I do. And you don't get
it. You don't get me. Not really.
But, hey, you've been busy, right?
Helping fight the war, and then
fighting furiously to try to forget
it. Your dance card is still
clearly full.

EDWIN PARKER

I can't even tell when you're being
sarcastic. Are you, just - always?

DOROTHY PARKER

This is me, Eddie, your long-
suffering wife, desperately
endeavoring to feign sincerity.

EDWIN PARKER

I can't endure this, Dottie, and
neither can you.

DOROTHY PARKER

All I asked, Eddie darling, just
one tiny, little thing, was if you
could join me Saturday at the
Algonquin with my few true friends.

INT. HAROLD'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The poker game continues, right where we left it. Franks eyes
the growing pot.

MARC CONNELLY

Easy come, easy go.

HAROLD ROSS

Said the girl to the sailor.

FRANK ADAMS

That's right.

Broun deals another round.

HEYWOOD BROUN

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

Ross reaches for a snack.

FRANK ADAMS

Revenge is a dish best served cold.

HAROLD ROSS

So is this sandwich.

HEYWOOD BROUN

Another ten spot for Kaufman. Seven
for Mary Pickford, no help there.
And one more pathetic card...
(dealing an eight)
...for yours truly.

Broun grabs a bottle and pours each a splash. They look to
Frank to bet.

FRANK ADAMS

Forty more bones.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Frank, that's an entire skeleton.
Are you enjoying this, oh, pal o'
mine?

MARC CONNELLY

So far, so good.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

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

Kaufman adds his bet. They glance over at Ross as he again checks his hole card.

GEORGE KAUFMAN (CONT'D)

Harold? I mean, Mary?

Ross takes forever to weigh his options.

GEORGE KAUFMAN (CONT'D)

That was extremely exciting for a few seconds there.

HAROLD ROSS

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

GEORGE KAUFMAN

It was a moral victory, at least.

They look to Broun to call.

GEORGE KAUFMAN (CONT'D)

Nothing to report, Heywood?

He slides in his cards.

HEYWOOD BROUN

I'm out.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

A shrewd move, no doubt. You, Marc?

He considers it.

HEYWOOD BROUN

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

GEORGE KAUFMAN

Better known as Frank Adams disease.

Frank blows cigar smoke towards George.

MARC CONNELLY

I'll call.

Marc slides in his chips. Broun deals one more card up to each of the three remaining players, announcing:

HEYWOOD BROUN

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

Frank is loving this. He takes a long drag on his cigar.

FRANK ADAMS

It all evens out. Marc, I'd hate to deprive you of your victory, or your cab fare home, so I'll just 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.

FRANK ADAMS

Well said. Marc?

Marc silently slides in his remaining chips.

FRANK ADAMS (CONT'D)

You call?

HEYWOOD BROUN

You do know that three of a kind beats two pair, correct, Connelly?

MARC CONNELLY

I call.

Adams turns over his hole card, revealing:

FRANK ADAMS

Three nines.

Marc turns his over: another two!

HAROLD ROSS

Full house! Is that what that is? I certainly have no personal experience of having ever actually seen one of those before.

MARC CONNELLY

I guess God loves me.

HAROLD ROSS

Clearly, he hates me. I guess I'm talking to Woollcott.

GEORGE KAUFMAN

I hope our new play has a full house.

Marc smiles and scoops up his chips. Ross grimaces.

EXT. THE HIPPODROME - DAY

An elaborate circus show, or a bevy of bathing beauties, or both, load into the block-long theatre.

INT. THE HIPPODROME - CONTINUING

Pemberton and Toohey admire a red felt banner draped over a table. In gold letters: "AWOL - cott. S. Jay Kaufman Post No. 1."

JOHN TOOHEY

Very nice.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON

All in good fun. He'll love it.

JOHN TOOHEY

Jay Kaufman, that's a fine touch.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON

I tried to think which reporter Aleck detests the most.

JOHN TOOHEY

How long did that take? You didn't invite him, did you?

MURDOCK PEMBERTON

S. Jay? No, of course not. That's part of what Aleck will appreciate, everyone we shunned.

Toohey drums his fingers.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON (CONT'D)

Relax. You don't know Aleck like I do. If all you had to go on is what you saw at the Gonk...

JOHN TOOHEY

And what I read in the papers.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON

Well, you already know what they say about that. Connelly assured me - repeatedly - that Harold Ross has got this covered.

Suddenly, Ross appears at the door. He notes the banner.

HAROLD ROSS

God damn it. Well, hopefully you can use that for one of your other shows, the back side.

JOHN TOOHEY

What happened?

HAROLD ROSS

Well, nothing. Aleck informed me that he got a better offer. He claims his college is honoring him this weekend, and he's taking the train upstate in the morning.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON

Well, do you believe that!

HAROLD ROSS

I'm not sure I do. But you know how... contrary Aleck can be.

JOHN TOOHEY

You were just in the army together!

HAROLD ROSS

He said he'd like to forget that.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON

I've invited half of New York! Two dozen top newspapermen have already replied! And some wives.

HAROLD ROSS

It's Aleck. They'll understand.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON

They certainly will not! This is my ass now.

JOHN TOOHEY

Asses.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON

Speak for yourself.

HAROLD ROSS
God damn it, men.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON
Harold, when you're right, you're
right.

INT. ALGONQUIN HOTEL - 1930

It's Margalo and Sarah and James again, again.

JAMES THURBER
Now?

SARAH VICTOR
Oh! I remembers now! Is that what
got all those peoples here the next
day?

MARGALO GILLMORE
Your home cooking.

SARAH VICTOR
Land o' Goshen! Just 'cause those
boys, Mr. Pemberton and Mr.
Toohey...

We SEE this play out as they describe it, all happening in
these same settings a decade earlier.

SARAH VICTOR (CONT'D)
They asked Mr. Case, especially
seeking one of my apple pies. And
since there wasn't any planned that
day, he had me bake one up on the
spot.

We SEE Sarah chopping apples.

SARAH VICTOR (V.O.)
Well, a dozen, while I was at it,
but one for Mr. Woollcott
expressly. They waited, can you
imagine?

Murdock and Toohey chain smoke their cigarettes and cigars.

SARAH VICTOR
They left with it, in a pretty
bakers box, still warm from the
ovens. I still don't have any
inkling what happened next.

Margalo smiles.

MARGALO GILLMORE

I do. Murdock walked that delicacy right over to the Times, got Jane Grant to bring it up directly to Aleck, you know, to avoid another scene, along with a hand written note that Murdock later described to Marc as the best press release he ever wrote in his whole stinking life.

Sarah smiles, just now realizing the entire scope.

MARGALO GILLMORE (CONT'D)

Of course, everyone knows what didn't happen next.

THE BIG DAY - SEQUENCE OF SHOTS
INT. PARKER'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

Eddie sits, in bathrobe and pajamas, reading the newspaper. He has a sip of cocktail, then sets his highball on the current Vanity Fair, which sits unopened on the table, serving as his coaster. Behind him, Dorothy seems to have just finished getting dressed.

DOROTHY PARKER

Join me for some fresh air, at least, darling?

EDWIN PARKER

Inside the Algonquin?

DOROTHY PARKER

That is where they keep it.

EDWIN PARKER

Oh, you know... still no.

DOROTHY PARKER

I suppose the bubbles in your seltzer will suffice.

She reaches for her hat.

INT. TIMES BUILDING - SATURDAY AFTERNOON

Kaufman sits at Woollcott's typewriter, as Connelly paces, brainstorming about their play.

MARC CONNELLY
 Dulcy, Dulcy, Dulcinea. What would
 our girl say next?

Connelly glances at the clock, almost 3:00, then at Kaufman.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
 I could live without a visit to
 that fat duchess today. If he even
 shows up.

MARC CONNELLY
 Hey! "Fat duchess!" Put that in the
 script.

Kaufman returns to typing.

MARC CONNELLY (CONT'D)
 Anyway, I've already done my part.

GEORGE KAUFMAN
 "My part." For Pemberton, of for
 our play?

EXT. ALGONQUIN HOTEL - AFTERNOON

Benchley strolls up the sidewalk. Dorothy appears from across
 the street and joins. Benchley again offers his arm, and the
 two walk in past a uniformed doorman.

INT. ALGONQUIN HOTEL PERGOLA ROOM - AFTERNOON

The two emerge into a private room of about twenty people.
 The red "AWOL-cott" banner hangs on the back wall. Murdock is
 suddenly right there, startling Benchley.

MURDOCK PEMBERTON
 Thank you so much for coming, Bob,
 Dottie.

DOROTHY PARKER
 And your guest of dishonor?

MURDOCK PEMBERTON
 Still AWOL.

He looks over at Toohey, smoking nervously as he works the
 room.

ROBERT BENCHLEY
 That's true to form, regardless.

They spot Sherwood sticking out, and wade over through the long tables, passing Harold and Jane, Heywood Broun, with wife Ruth Hale, Frank Adams, Deems Taylor, Art Samuels and William Murray, all whom we've previously met. A gent with a crutch, LAURENCE STALLINGS, 25, ambles in.

Waiter Luigi drops off plates of popovers and stuffed celery sticks for snacks, as Frank Case supervises, smiling at the assortment of literary talent. Most know each other, and talk shop.

Benchley, Parker and Sherwood chat. Benchley notices Murdock and Toohey frantically conferring about what to do next. He steps forward to address the room.

ROBERT BENCHLEY (CONT'D)

Well, well, as well-seasoned newspaper men...

He acknowledges Dorothy, Jane and Ruth.

ROBERT BENCHLEY (CONT'D)

...and women, I've no doubt you'll applaud profusely when I make the very obvious observation that here we all are, and you're with me so far, aren't you, here we are at the very epitome of that kind of special event that we so most treasure attending, and by that I mean, and you've guessed it already, haven't you, which is to say, here we all are assembled at yet another obligatory celebratory banquet.

Smirks. Dorothy smiles lovingly at Benchley. Frank Adams, especially, seems to know what he's referring to.

ROBERT BENCHLEY (CONT'D)

Alas, there will be no distribution of engraved fountain pens or commemorative pocket watches for this particular ceremony, but in advance of our own Mr. Woolcott revealing himself to us, or revealing his intention not to, I thought I might simply embark on a short history of the Italian Renaissance, and then possibly we might scramble some eggs, or perhaps mix up a few mixed metaphors.

He's got their attention now. Dorothy and Sherwood look collectively impressed.

ROBERT BENCHLEY (CONT'D)

So we've settled on the fact that this is not a bank banquet, although it yet may prove to be a bunk banquet. And after so many of these, starting when I was still engaged in the halls of higher learning, in grade school, and still in knickers - last week - I'd like to flatter myself that in the field of impromptu ramblings, a field in which I am standing out in at this very moment, er, that is, I meant to say outstanding in, well, now I've put my foot in it haven't I, out in that field, I'd like to think, after extensive long minutes of practice and rigorous introspection, I've become quite inept at the entire enterprise. So, as unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, I'll simply endeavor to string together just a few words about the subject of what is clearly turning into a life sentence.

We learn a lot about everyone as we track their reactions throughout, reading the story in Dorothy's face as she realizes that this is her chosen family.

ROBERT BENCHLEY (CONT'D)

Friends, you roaming about, and countrymen, and women, lend me the rent, it's in arrears. I come not to praise Alexander, but to get him laid to rest, which may be a first. The evil that Aleck's done to theatre producers lives on, yes, but the good in that man is oft interred in his bones.

He looks over at Heywood Broun.

ROBERT BENCHLEY (CONT'D)

Brutus, or rather Broun, Heywood Broun, has said that Aleck is ambitious, and Broun is an honorable man.

Everyone grins at the Shakespearean paraphrase.

ROBERT BENCHLEY (CONT'D)
 But this was the most unkindest cut
 of all. I speak not to disprove
 what Broun spoke - who dares? - but
 here I am to speak what I do know.
 You all did love Aleck once, not
 without cause, so what cause might
 withhold us now?

Suddenly, Woollcott, clad in an opera cape and top hat,
 storms in and up to the front.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
 I'll take it from here, traitor.

ROBERT BENCHLEY
 That's fortunate, because that's
 all of the folio that I can recall.

Aleck hands his cape to Benchley, who obligingly hangs it on
 a rack. Woollcott then remove his top hat, collapsed it, and
 sails it to Murdock like a frisbee, as everyone applauds
 Aleck's arrival. Murdock catches it, pops it open, and puts
 it on, gratefully cheering.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
 I couldn't stomach the thought of
 you all having to amuse yourselves
 without me. Also, the matinee I was
 attending was dreadful.

Harold and Jane smile, their mission accomplished.

HAROLD ROSS
 Matinee? So no alma mater
 accolades?

Woollcott pointedly ignores him.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT
 I am not unaware of our host's oh-
 so-obvious ulterior motive in
 holding you all here hostage.

Murdock looks at Toohey, where's this going?

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)
 But if my flag waving collaborators
 Harold Ross and Frank Adams have
 decided to fall in today, then it
 would seem downright unpatriotic of
 me not to join up for a few
 reminiscences.

(MORE)

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)

Frank, perhaps you can inaugurate the proceedings with some impromptu stanzas regarding my bravery on the front lines.

ART SAMUELS

Do you mean the headlines you typed for the newspapers, Aleck?

FRANK ADAMS

That would be my pleasure, Aleck.

Frank collects his thoughts over a drag on his cigar.

FRANK ADAMS (CONT'D)

Sargent Woollcott: He couldn't fight, and he couldn't shoot, but boy, our man could sure salute.

HAROLD ROSS

Do you mean, man, our boy could sure salute?

They raise their drinks.

ALL

Salute!

To the man on a crutch:

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Larry, you were there, you know how it was.

LAURENCE STALLINGS

Sure, but I was a fighting soldier, not one of those writing soldiers.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Well, that was a sneak attack. You're dismissed. Now, when I was in the theatre of war...

WILL MURRAY

Aleck, if you were reporting from the theatre of war, it was from the back row.

ART SAMUELS

Yes, and on the aisle!

More knowing smirks.

HAROLD ROSS

To be fair, he did manage to get an inspiring article in a least once a week.

WILL MURRAY

From a Paris café.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

Thank you, Harold.

HEYWOOD BROWN

A true newspaper man; Give him a deadline and he'll dazzle you with punctuality and punctuation.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

I'll admit, as a civilian with nothing more adventurous than being a reviewer of plays, by the simple process of holding up my arm, and then getting that arm jabbed with typhoid vaccine, I did draw a reserved seat at the war. So, yes, Bill, it was my patriotic privilege to print the praises of the American infantry. Our doughboys bore the greatest burden, suffered the greatest hardship, and it was our boys that won the war.

His sincerity is unexpected, looks like.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)

So, as a first hand witness to the Yankee soldiers summoned for the third and final phase of the Argonne drive, I will remember that camaraderie all the days of my life. But the memory that will lie always closest to my heart and will color most the stories that I will continue to tell in years to come...

HAROLD ROSS

No doubt.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

...is not the memory of their pursuit of the enemy, which was heroic, nor of their speed, which was beyond all words exhausting.

(MORE)

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)

It is, rather, the recollection of the fraternity of the scores of communities reclaimed in the path, all the little, long-lost fragmented towns of France.

Some seem impressed and interested. Dorothy looks downright choked up by Aleck's gravity and eloquence, thinking also, perhaps, of Eddie's tenure in the war.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)

From that misty September morning when the First Army struck its initial blow near Verdun, to that murky November morning when the order "Cease Firing" sounded from Switzerland to the sea, more than 150 towns and villages were won back by force of American arms. A full half of these were amazingly little battered by the war, and in all of them, decimated or not, a half-incredulous, altogether jubilant, population stood waiting with outstretched hands, waiting, with laughter and tears and songs and coffee and kisses, the advent of their deliverance.

All look on, now entranced. Dorothy glances at Benchley, then around the room at her "friends." Woollcott is loving the attention.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)

Sometimes they went out into the fields, the women and the old men and the children, there to wave sheets as white flags of friendliness and appeal.

We continue to pan from face to face. There's something about this that is really moving Dottie.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)

Sometimes they went fearfully into their cellars and stayed there till they heard the uproarious and unmistakably American voices calling down to them, "The Germans have parted, the Boches are gone." In most of these towns, when dawn came that following triumphant Monday morning, there could be heard the jingling of harnesses on the frosty morning air, the rumpus of the mules, the growing chorus of curses and laughter, the music of an American regimen waking up. It was that same morning that the great news came. Surely bells rang forth the tidings from Rome to San Francisco, but there are some of us who will always believe that, in all the heralds --

Aleck nods to Ross.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)

Harold, -- which sounded across the world that morning of November 11, the sweetest notes of all came from the liberated belfries of France.

An impressed silence. No wisecracks now.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT (CONT'D)

Or some such merde.

Reaction shots all around. As RETRO JAZZ SWELLS, the group mingle and chat.

EXT. ALGONQUIN HOTEL - AFTERNOON

The afternoon sky is ablaze, throwing long shadows down 44th Street. Parker, Benchley and Sherwood emerge from the lobby, followed by Murdock and Toohey.

ROBERT BENCHLEY

Well, that was certainly no worse than a bad head cold.

Toohey beams.

JOHN TOOHEY

We should do this again.

Dorothy looks like she approves.

ROBERT BENCHLEY
Don't be daft.

Benchley approaches a gent in uniform.

ROBERT BENCHLEY (CONT'D)
Pardon me, sir, but might you be
persuaded to hail us a cab?

MAN IN UNIFORM
Pardon me, sir, but I'm no doorman.
I'm an Admiral in the United States
Navy.

ROBERT SHERWOOD
He's sorry.

ROBERT BENCHLEY
Indeed I am. In that case, would
you please get us a battleship?

They all crack up as the officer harrumphs off.

DOROTHY PARKER
Well, I can't top that.

Suddenly, Eddie, still in his pajamas, gallops up from around the corner on a police horse, bathrobe flying. In the distance, a cop runs up after. Eddie leans down towards Dorothy and offers his hand.

EDWIN PARKER
Need a lift, doll?

The horse WHINNIES. The approaching cop blows his WHISTLE.

CUT TO:

INT. ALGONQUIN HOTEL ROSE ROOM RESTAURANT, 1930

Without uttering another word, Margalo, Sarah and Thurber exchange looks. Thurber makes a gesture like, "Yes, and then?" Frank Case appears from the lobby. Their eyes all settle on the empty round table.

FADE OUT:

END OF SHOW