

1.

STOP THE PRESSES!
A Comedy in Two Acts
by
Charles Reuben
Directed by Steve Wexler

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This play was inspired by "The Chain Gang," (University of Missouri Press, 1996, 304 pp.) by former Santa Fe Reporter publisher Richard McCord. Mr. McCord has consulted with me on this project.

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THE PLACE:

Santa Fe is the capitol of New Mexico, located 50 miles north of Albuquerque. It is served by a 100-year-old weekly tabloid news paper called The Morning Star ("Locally Owned and Operated") and a syndicated broadsheet daily called The Santa Fe Daily News.

THE TIME: SPRING 2001**THE SET:**

The set is divided into three parts. Stage right serves the editorial offices of The Santa Fe Daily News, stage left The Morning Star, and stage center is where the rest of the drama will take place. Each newspaper has its name printed above its stage position in large, vinyl lettering.

THE CHARACTERS:

BEN 17-year-old high school graduate. Ben was raised in an insulated, suburban environment. He is naive with very little experience in work or romance.

BEN (V/O): This is the grown Ben, voice-over, acting as the narrator of the play. He helps tie scenes together and explains onstage events.

BEN'S MOM: Concerned, loving Mom in her late 50's.

DICK MAVERICK (Publisher, The Morning Star): Renowned journalist Dick Maverick has taken over his late father's ailing 100-year-old weekly newspaper, The Morning Star. Dick is a Southern Gentleman, easygoing and always manages to stay calm.

MAXINE SINCLAIR (Publisher, The Santa Fe Daily News): Maxine works as a "hit woman" for a national, syndicated newspaper chain that drives small locally-owned newspapers out of business. She is a sophisticated lady, accustomed to having things her own way.

JAMIE MAVERICK

Dick Maverick's 14-year-old, wild, androgynous streetwise daughter. Very much of a tomboy. Tough, angry and very cute. Jamie has little interest in journalism and less in academics. She works in the bindery, with the "boys" and helps her Dad out any way she can.

MARTY (Editor, Morning Star)

Marty is a throwback to the sixties, with hair down to his ass, thick glasses and a Cheshire cat grin. He is deliberate and precise in his language. He has an ulcer that he tries to tame by drinking lots of skim milk.

FRANK

Frank runs The Morning Star's bindery. A passionate Hispanic in his late 50's, he has a quick temper and a foul mouth. He has been with the paper for over 30 years.

MARIA

A 30-year veteran at Maverick Printing, she operates a pocket on the stitching machine in the bindery and is well into her seventies. She is deaf and dumb and communicates with sign language as well as guttural-sounding approximations of words.

HOWIE

Howie works in the bindery with Frank and Maria. He can be cast as another Hispanic, but he is not nearly as responsible as the foreman, Frank.

CHARLIE

Burned-out, broken-down Hispanic publisher who was bankrupted by Maxine Sinclair. He lives in a tiny town named Galisteo, just outside of Santa Fe. Charlie drinks way too much.

GUS

Gus manages the local Paymart. He is an old friend of Maverick's. His loyalty to the community runs deep.

WILLIE

Sinclair's right-hand man in the advertising department.

PRODUCTION MANAGER

Like Willie, he's part of Sinclair's inner circle.

JUDGE

Big black judge who won't take crap from anyone.

COP

Stereotyped policeman. Wears handsome uniform and hat.

PAPERBOY & READERS Tiny, yet essential parts.

ACT I SCENE I

SUNDAY BREAKFAST, MOM AND BEN.
MUSIC "THE TYPEWRITER" BY LEROY
ANDERSON

BEN V/O (Fade out music)

There comes a day in a boy's life when he must reluctantly set aside the joys of youth and get a job. For me that dreaded moment arrived on a beautiful spring morning in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

SILVERWARE CLINKING, BIRDS SINGING

MOM Ben.

(No response)

MOM Ben! Put that silly comic book away! Sit up straight and eat like a mensch.

BEN It's not silly! It's the first Spiderman. It's probably worth a fortune.

MOM Listen Ben, I want you to go out and find a job.

BEN (Whining) But Mom, none of my friends have to work!

MOM Your friends are rich. You have to save for college.

BEN If I need money, I'll take out student loans.

MOM Someday they'll catch up with you and bury you in debt.

BEN And when they do, I'll be a rich Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter!

MOM What makes you think you can make it as a reporter?

BEN I just won The Daily News' Junior Press Award, didn't I?

MOM Why don't you just go into engineering? They're begging for engineers.

BEN I want to be a writer. I don't want to be an engineer.

MOM Fine: Write. But I will not have you sitting around all summer long reading comic books.

PHONE RINGS

BEN Hello?

MAXINE SINCLAIR IS KICKING BACK AT HER DESK, TALKING ON THE PHONE.

SINCLAIR May I speak to Mister Benjamin Hedges, please?

BEN Yes. This is he.

SINCLAIR My name is Maxine Sinclair. I wanted to personally congratulate you on winning The Daily News' Junior Press Award...

BEN (Aside) Hey Mom, it's the publisher of The Santa Fe Daily News!

SINCLAIR That story you wrote about the homecoming queen was brilliant.

BEN Thanks! (Shyly) You all didn't happen to read any of my hard news stories as well, did you?

SINCLAIR Those homecoming queens got the judges mighty hard, son.

BEN I'm serious!

SINCLAIR (Casually) Yes, we did glance at them. (Firmly) But people don't want to read that stuff anymore...They want sex!

BEN Well I guess you know what people want....

SINCLAIR Tell me, Ben: Are you really serious about a career in newspapers?

BEN I've always wanted to be a reporter, more than anything!

SINCLAIR Ah, a reporter. The glamour, the mystique. Fact is, there are no openings in the editorial department at present. But there are other opportunities.

BEN What kind of opportunities?

SINCLAIR Ben darling, why don't you stop by the plant this afternoon and pay me a visit?

BEN OK.

SINCLAIR Fine. I'll see you then.

SOUND OF PHONE HANGING UP

BEN Well what do you know?! Maxine Sinclair just offered me a job at The Daily News!

MOM She did?! I don't trust her. She's fired half the reporters since buying the paper. (Picks up thick copy of daily paper) The Daily News is a rag! It's a pathetic excuse for a newspaper! (Slams it on the table)

MOM (Cont.) I mean, for heaven sakes: Where has all the local news gone?

BEN Here's news. See: "Spiderman Costumes Missing from LA Movie Set!"

MOM That's national news, darling. I want local news. I want to know what's going on in Santa Fe.

BEN What do you mean by "local news?"

MOM The new golf course that's sucking up the drinking water: That's local news. The gas station with the leaky storage tank: That's local news. The high school production of "South Pacific" and the kid who broke the four-minute mile, that's local news, too! But none of these stories are going to find their way into Maxine Sinclair's paper because all Maxine cares about are dog shows and beauty pageants!

BEN So, what you're saying is...

MOM You want to know what real "local news" is? Read The Morning Star. Here. (She throws a tabloid newspaper on the table) That's local news.

BEN (Picks up paper, glances at it) The Morning Star is skimpy. Look, not even a horoscope! Not even a comic section! (Throws Morning Star to side, picks up Daily News) The Daily News, on the other hand, is fat and sassy, "Fortune 500," "big time:" Chock full of booze and cigarette advertising! THIS is my backdoor ticket to success...

MOM Dear, if your heart is set on working at The Daily News, be my guest. Just don't say I didn't warn you.

BEN Hey, thanks, Mom...(Looks at watch) I gotta go.

(Ben kisses Mom, footsteps, door slam) Bye!

MOM (Collecting dishes) That boy! I swear! Just like his father, God rest his soul. Newspapers, of all things! (She nods her head sadly and exits)

MUSIC: "THE TYPEWRITER"

ACT I SCENE II

STAGE RIGHT. BEN WALKS LOBBY OF THE SANTA FE DAILY NEWS. HE RECOGNIZES THE PUBLISHER AS SHE WALKS OUT OF THE NEWSROOM FOLLOWED BY WILLIE.

BEN Ms. Sinclair! Ms. Sinclair!

SINCLAIR (End footsteps) Yes? What is it?

BEN (Out of breath) Ms. Sinclair! I'm Ben Hedges... On the phone... You offered me a job...

SINCLAIR Ben? Oh yeah, Ben Hedges! (To Willie) My new boy toy!

BEN What?

SINCLAIR Hey Willie! Shoot Ben here through personnel, will ya?

WILLIE No problem. Uh, boss.

SINCLAIR Yes, Willie?

WILLIE (Urgent whispering) What do you propose doing with you new "boy toy?"

SINCLAIR (Aside) Oh Hell, I don't know.... (Thinking aloud) Put him in circulation... No! Let him work in the pressroom... No! (Decisively) I know: Put him in dispatch! Just don't let him anywhere near the newsroom. The chain needs fresh, young blood, Willie. (To Ben) You'll make a perfect pit bull, won't you Ben?

BEN Pit bull?

SINCLAIR That's what we call our team members! Willie, show Ben the ropes. Good luck, lad! (Exit)

BEN (Uncertainly) Thank you.

WILLIE Ben, Ms. Sinclair wants you to work in dispatch.

BEN What's "dispatch?"

WILLIE You meet with the client and show 'em their ad. They proofread it and make corrections. Then you bring it back here.... Nothing to it!

BEN That's not exactly what I had in mind, Willie. I want to write! Don't you understand? I want to be a reporter!!!

WILLIE Ah a reporter! Unfortunately there are no openings in the newsroom at present. And anyway Ben, you've got to pay your dues! You can't just waltz into the newsroom and take over.

BEN I see.

WILLIE Ben are you ready to go to work right now?

BEN Sure, why not?

WILLIE Good. I want you to do something.

BEN What's that?

WILLIE In the newspaper business, we have this silly thing called "Professional Courtesy." That means that after we run an ad, we deliver it to The Morning Star, so that they can run it too. Ca-peesh?

BEN (Slowly, like a schoolboy reciting his lesson) Sure. Even though we're competing against them, since we share some of the same advertisers, we deliver our ads to The Morning Star after we run them. As a courtesy: A professional courtesy! Right?

WILLIE Very good Ben! However today we're going to be a little less courteous.

(Willie puts his arm around Ben and leads him offstage)

ACT I SCENE III

BEN APPROACHES THE CUSTOMER SERVICE DESK OF PAYMART TO SHOW THE MANAGER HIS AD FOR THE SUNDAY EDITION OF THE SANTA FE DAILY NEWS.

MANAGER May I help you?

BEN I'm from The Santa Fe Daily News. I'm Ben. I have a final proof of your Sunday ad....

MANAGER Great. Lemme see it.

AS BEN HANDS GUS THE AD,
ENTER JAMIE MAVERICK, AN OUT-OF-BREATH TEENAGE GIRL, VERY CASUALLY DRESSED, LIKE A TOMBOY.

JAMIE Hey Gus!

MANAGER Jamie! I thought you'd never get here!

JAMIE Gus we had to rebuild your entire ad.

MANAGER (Confused. Angry.) Why? The Daily News ran it last night. They were supposed to give you the ad this morning! All you had to do was stick it in the paper and run it!

JAMIE (Bitterly) The Daily News told me they lost your camera-ready ad! All they gave us was an envelope full of typewriter copy and photographs. The ad department had to rebuild your ad from scratch. It took forever!

MANAGER Ben, did you guys really lose my ad?

JAMIE That's him, Gus! He was the guy that gave us that typewriter copy this morning! He lost your ad!

MANAGER (To Ben, curiously) Who exactly are you?

BEN My name is Ben Hedges. I just started working at The Daily News.

MANAGER (To Ben) And this is Jamie Maverick from The Morning Star.

BEN Pleased to meet you. Ben holds out his hand. Jamie stares at him with scorn.

MANAGER (Diplomatically) So Ben, you were supposed to deliver my camera-ready ad to The Morning Star this morning. What happened to it?!

BEN I don't know anything about this.

JAMIE (Sarcastically) Yeah right. (To manager) You know, The Daily News has been losing a lot of ads they were s'posed to give to us. I think they do it on purpose. I think its one of their new policies!

BEN (Frivolously) Don't get so bent out of shape, kid. It's just an ad.

JAMIE (Sternly) Hey, we are on deadline.

BEN (Condescendingly) Temper, temper. Aren't you over-reacting?

JAMIE (To Manager) This guy is really starting to piss me off.

MANAGER Easy there Jamie. Ben is new. Explain it to him.

JAMIE OK. (Pause) We had to re-set all the type, re-shoot all the pictures and re-make the entire ad. All this ONE HOUR before deadline and all because YOU "lost" the ad.

BEN Look, I'm sorry!

JAMIE "Sorry's" not good enough! We never pull this crap on you!

BEN Look, I was jusô following orders, kid.

MANAGER You were? What orders?!?

JAMIE (To Ben. Angrily.) I said: Don't call me "kid!"

JAMIE PUSHES BEN TO THE GROUND AND STARTS TO BEAT THE DAYLIGHTS OUTTA HIM.

JAMIE (Con't) You bastard, I'm gonna kill you! Take that and that and that!

BEN DROPS HIS BRIEFCASE IN THE SCUFFLE, WHICH CRASHES TO THE FLOOR AND OPENS, LIBERATING THE "LOST AD." JAMIE QUICKLY NOTICES THE AD.

JAMIE (Con't) Hey will you look at that! Guess who found the "lost" ad in question! (To Ben) You scum bucket!

MANAGER (Astonished) Ben, I must say, I am very disappointed. What were you thinking? I'm going to have to have a word with Willie about this.

BEN (Angry) You can save your breath. Willie told me to get rid of your ad.

JAMIE You see, Gus? You see what a bunch of slimeballs The Daily News is? (Looks at watch) Hey! I gotta go. Is your ad OK to run or isn't it?

MANAGER Jamie, it's fine. Now go on, both of you. Out'a here! I've got a shipment of condoms to track down.

JAMIE OK, Gus.

(Ben and Jamie start walking away. Ben puts his hand on Jamie's shoulder)

BEN Hey Jamie, I'm sorry this happened.

JAMIE Don't touch me, slime-boy. Next time I see your sorry face, you are a dead man. (Exit)

ACT I SCENE IV

MAXINE SINCLAIR MEETS WITH WILLIE AND HIS PRODUCTION MANAGER.

SINCLAIR Willie have we got Paymart on board yet?

WILLIE I offered Gus 13 full color ads for \$500. That's half price, boss. And he still won't bite. I mean, we just can't give our ads away, can we?

SINCLAIR Who says we can't? Tell this "Gus" he can run his ad in The Daily News for whatever he wants to pay. Just be sure he promises never to advertise in The Morning Star again.

WILLIE But boss what about the rate card?

SINCLAIR Forget the rate card! Can't anybody understand English around here?!

PRODUCTION MANAGER Yes boss. But if word gets out....

SINCLAIR What word?

PRODUCTION MANAGER Y'know....that we're not sticking with the rate card.... that we're trying to run. The Morning Star outta town.... And what if the Federal Trade Commission hears about this.....

SINCLAIR (Sharply interrupting) Listen: I have nothing against The Morning Star. I read it every week.

PRODUCTION MANAGER You do?

SINCLAIR Look, I will deal with Paymart. But from now on, every deal we make is to be done verbally. No more paper trails. Understand?

WILLIE Sure. Hey boss, what about the kid?

SINCLAIR What kid?

WILLIE You know: Ben Hedges. Your "boy toy."

SINCLAIR What about Ben? I'm going to save his spoiled, rotten, suburban soul!

WILLIE He's been asking a lot of awkward questions. And he got me busted by Paymart for telling him to destroy their ad.

SINCLAIR What?

WILLIE Look, he's sticking his nose into everybody's business. I have a bad feeling about your boy toy.

SINCLAIR Then keep it to yourself. Case closed. (Collecting papers) OK gentleman, that's it. I want you to continue spreading rumors that The Morning Star is going under. "Operation Demolition" will proceed according to plan. And remember: Pit bulls never sleep!

PRODUCTION MANAGER Uh boss! One other thing....

SINCLAIR What's that, John?

PRODUCTION MANAGER The pressmen are going to strike.

SINCLAIR Why, in heaven's name?

PRODUCTION MANAGER (Shrugs shoulders) They want mo' money.

SINCLAIR I'll show 'em mo' money.

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE FOLLOWS.
SPOTLIGHT ON SINCLAIR AS SHE WALKS
STAGE CENTER. BACKGROUND: SIRENS,
GROWLING DOGS.

SINCLAIR (Con't) Willie, get me security! Get me helicopters. Get me dogs. I want all the pressmen drug tested NOW! If anybody refuses, fire 'em! If any Union representative is found to have even a trace of a poppy seed in their urine: Fire 'em! Let all other departments slide but make sure they're terrified.

WILLIE I'll get right on it.

SINCLAIR And make sure their supervisors watch them pee!

WILLIE Yes, boss.

SINCLAIR Fine. Have the lab results ready in the morning. I'm outta here. Everyone gathers their papers and exits excitedly.

ACT I SCENE V

SIRENS START RINGING, STROBES START
FLASHING.

BEN (V/O) That was the final straw. True: The Morning Star may not have had a comic section or a even horoscope, but damn! it was a

good, honest local newspaper. I stormed out of the building. But Willie saw me leave and ran after.

WILLIE Hey Ben where you goin'?

BEN I'm outta here pal.

WILLIE No way! You've got proofs to deliver!

BEN Hey Willie, why is Sinclair drug testing?

WILLIE Oh, she's doing that so she can break the pressman's union. It's the only legal way she can fire them. Don't worry, he'll leave us alone.

BEN Man, this whole things sucks. (Decisively) I quit!

WILLIE You can't leave! Sinclair loves you! You're our baby pit bull!

BEN I am not a pit bull! I am not a boy toy! And I do not want to dispatch ads. I want to write!

WILLIE Look, if it's about money...I'm sure we can work something out. Ms. Sinclair is a very generous woman!

BEN It's not about money! Man, I can't believe you call this place a newspaper!

WILLIE You'll get used to it. Everybody does.

BEN My Mom was right: If it wasn't for The Morning Star, nobody would know what's going on in Santa Fe.

WILLIE Yeah, yeah, yeah.

BEN Y'know the only reason this paper exists at all is because you're getting huge daily cash transfusions from New York!

WILLIE Don't worry, when The Morning Star is outta the picture everything will be different.

BEN We shouldn't be trying to destroy The Morning Star, Willie. They cover all the local news, arts, and sports events. They cover marriages, engagements and bankruptcies. We just kinda skim them....

WILLIE Ben, we are giving Santa Fe exactly what they want! Nobody cares if we print local news or not!

BEN Well, The Daily News obviously doesn't care any more. But that's really not the point.

WILLIE Well then, what is your point?

BEN Don't you get it? When you work for an arse, you become an asshole. You don't even see it happening. I can't take it anymore, Willie! Dispatch your own ads: I quit!

FOOTSTEPS. BEN BEGINS TO WALK OFFSTAGE.

WILLIE (Yelling after Ben) Well, don't let the door hit your arse on the way out!

BEN (Sarcastically) Yeah, right. (Exit)

SIRENS FADE. BEN IS WALKING AROUND LIKE A LOST SOUL ON STAGE. MUSIC: BLUES. HE REMOVES HIS TIE. HE SLOWLY WALKS TO STAGE LEFT AND APPROACHES THE MORNING STAR.

ACT I SCENE VI

BEN (V/O) The Morning Star is a dump and I wonder if I've made a mistake by quitting my cushy job at The Daily News. There are no acres of lush, green grass. No looming glass and steel lobby. Just an old two-story brick building that used to be a bowling alley. It's a depressing place, but I need a job.

STAGE LEFT. MORNING STAR. BEN WALKS UP TO MARTY, THE MANAGING EDITOR.

MARTY (Looks up) Can I help you?

BEN My name is Ben, Ben Hedges. I heard you were looking for a copy editor.

MARTY (He kicks back.) I see, I'm Marty. I'm the managing editor. Do you have any experience, Ben?

BEN Well, I did write a few stories for my high school paper but more than that, I've always wanted to work for a Pulitzer Prize-winning publication.

MARTY I see, so you don't have any experience editing copy....

BEN Uh, well, not in editing....but I do know some Tennyson by heart.

MARTY REACTS SOMEWHAT SARCASTICALLY, SOMEWHAT PATERNALLY.

MARTY Tennyson? Alfred Tennyson? Alfred, Lord Tennyson? Why, that changes everything.

BEN (Surprised) It does?

MARTY (Proudly) I wrote my doctoral thesis on Tennyson, 20 years ago.

BEN (Sadly) My mom says editors don't care if you read poetry.

MARTY And, is your Mom an editor?

BEN No.

MARTY Well then, there you are. So, let's hear some Tennyson. (He lifts an eyebrow)

BEN "A still small voice spake unto me,/Thou art so full of misery,/Were it not better not to be?"

MARTY (Happily playing along) "Then to the still small voice I said:/Let me not cast in endless shade/What is so wonderfully made."

UPSTAGE. JAMIE BUNDLES AND TIES A STACK OF PAPERS AND OVERHEARS THE DIALOGUE. SHE MAKES FUN OF BEN, SILENTLY MIMICKING HIS WORDS.

BEN (Acccusingly, pointing finger) "Thine anguish will not let thee sleep/Nor any train of reason keep;/Thou canst not think, but thou wilt weep."

MARTY (Excited. Delighted. Savagely.) "Tis life, whereof our nerves are scant,/O, life, not death, for which we pant;/More life, and fuller, that I want." (PAUSE, THEN THOUGHTFULLY) All right, Ben, this is highly irregular, but, I'll give you a shot.

(Exit Jamie)

BEN Oh yeah?!

MARTY Your job will be to compile obituaries, weddings, engagements and births. You will learn how to make-up dummies and write headlines. If we run short handed you will make up pages in the production department.

BEN And the pay?

MARTY Two twenty-five an hour!

BEN Two twenty-five? That's slave wages!

MARTY Think of yourself as an intern, Ben. On the job training!

BEN Well....

MARTY And there are benefits....

BEN Great! Like sick pay and vacation time?

MARTY No but we do stock the coke machine with beer and you can bring your dog to work!

BEN Hmmm. OK, I'm interested. But I do have one request.

MARTY What's that?

BEN I'd like tp write some stories. Y'know, on the side.

MARTY Oh. OK. No problem. (Shuffles through papers) I can let you review Cafe Altamira. Free dinner for two if you'll write me a 500-word review by tomorrow. Can you handle it?

BEN Yes. Gladly. No problem.

MARTY Excellent. So, are you ready to start working right away?

BEN Sure!

MARTY All right then, let's start with The Morning Star's design philosophy.

BEN Excuse me Marty.

MARTY Yes.

BEN Did you say you stock the Coke machine with beer?

MARTY Yeah. I've been trying to get Tecate, but the accountant insists on Miller Lite. Anyway, Ben: Pay attention. In dealing with the page as a whole the idea is to keep it simple.

BEN Oh yeah?

MARTY It is my belief that the most misunderstood design element is white space. (Looks at watch) Let's talk about white space after lunch.

BEN I'm your "white spaceman!"

MARTY Cool. Uh, why don't you wander around the place and get to know people?

BEN Good idea.

AS BEN GETS UP TO LEAVE, HE SEES, MUCH TO HIS HORROR, JAMIE, THE 14-YEAR-OLD GIRL WHO ROUGHED HIM UP AT PAYMART, WALK INTO MARTY'S OFFICE. SHE IS COVERED WITH INK, WEARS BIB OVERALLS AND NO SHIRT. SHE IS CARRYING A STACK OF PAPERS AND GLARES AT BEN.

JAMIE Hey Marty! We're ready to run Rio Rancho now! (HANDS MARTY A PAPER) Wanna check the paper?

MARTY Thanks, Jamie. (He looks at the paper) Looks good, but ease off a little bit on the red, OK?

JAMIE Yes, sir.

AS JAMIE STARTED TO EXIT, SHE BUMPS INTO BEN HARD AND THEN KICKS HIM WITH HER KNEE INTO HIS GROIN. BEN DOUBLES OVER IN PAIN. JAMIE SEEMS DELIGHTED.

JAMIE Oh sorry. Musta slipped.

BEN (Recovering. Out of breath) No problem.

MARTY Looks fine, Jamie: Let 'er roll! I'm outta here. See you after lunch. (GRABS MILK CARTON. EXIT MARTY. EXIT JAMIE.)

ACT I SCENE VII

STAGE CENTER. BEN WALKS OUT OF THE OFFICE AND STAGE CENTER WHERE JAMIE APPEARS FROM OUT OF THE SHADOWS AND TACKLES HIM. SHE GRABS HIS ARM AND BEGINS TWISTING IT HARD.

BEN Ouch! Stop it....Stop it!

JAMIE (Mimicking Ben) Stop it! Stop it!

BEN Stop it! Stop it!

JAMIE Stop it! Stop it! So! You've come here to cause more trouble, huh?(In Ben's face) What in the hell are doing here?

BEN I work here! I'm the paper's new coph editor!

JAMIE You are? Damn! That Marty'll hire anyone! What about your fancy Daily News job?

BEN I quit The Daily News! And I'm sorry about the Paymart ad. I was just following orders, y'know.

JAMIE (Mimicking) "Just following orders." (Fiercely) Well, don't mess with me. My Dad's the publisher. And I bet you're a spy.

BEN I am not a spy!

JAMIE Y'know what we do with spies around here, Little Lord Tennyson?

BEN (Concerned) No.

JAMIE We hang 'em by their balls and shove red ink up their ass! All right, get up.

BEN (Gets up. Brushes himself off) Hey look, since we're going to be working in the same building now, I'll tell you what....

JAMIE (Severely) What?

BEN What do you say we go out for dinner after your shift? Y'know, to patch things up...

JAMIE (Suspicious) I dunno. You might be a pervert.

BEN C'mon. I'm buying. Cafe Altamira. All you can eat.

JAMIE You mean that joint Marty's featuring in the food section next week?

BEN (Guilty) Uh yeah.

JAMIE Marty told me to photograph the joint. You're writing it up?

BEN Yup.

JAMIE Then you're getting a free meal, right?

BEN Uh yeah.

JAMIE So don't make it out like you're buying, cuz you're not dick wad! (Looking at watch) Jeez it's getting late. Oh what the Hell. Let's go.

BEN Now?

JAMIE Yeah. Let's surprise 'em. Let me get my camera, puss.
(Grabs camera)

BEN I am not a puss!

JAMIE You're a puss and a wuss!

BEN Why?

JAMIE Because you work at a desk. I work in the bindery... Hey, you got a girlfriend?

BEN (Blushing) Uh, no.

JAMIE Too bad. Ever get it on?

BEN (Softly. Surprised by Jamie's forwardness) No....actually, I'm a virgin.

JAMIE What?

BEN I'm a virgin!

JAMIE What's the Hell's the matter with you?! Don't like girls?

BEN (Looks away) No! I'm shy!

JAMIE Shy, huh? We can work on that!

BEN What needs work?

JAMIE Well, you can start by getting a haircut. The sixties are over, man!

BEN What's wrong with my hair?

JAMIE It's sloppy. I thought you wanted to get laid!

BEN I didn't say that! (Playing along.) OK. Got it. Get a haircut. Next?

JAMIE Then you can quit your fruitcake job in editorial and go to work in the bindery, with me and the boys! We'll make you tough and teach you how to get laid!

BEN But I think I'm gonna like working upstairs. I'm learning all sorts of new things!

JAMIE Fine. Then how 'bout working in the bindery part time.

BEN (Laughs) I dunno. I've never done manual labor!

JAMIE Oh yeah? Let me see your hands. (Ben allows Jamie to examine his hands) Ah hah! Just as I suspected!

BEN What's that?

JAMIE (Looks at hands) Look, smooth as a girl's!

BEN A girl's? What about yours?

JAMIE DISPLAYS HER HANDS. BEN SIGHS.

JAMIE What about em?!

BEN (Inspecting Jamie's hands) These are calloused, blistered, ink-stained hands. You ought to take better care of them.

SELF-CONSCIOUSLY, JAMIE REMOVES HER HANDS FROM BEN'S AND PLACES THEM BEHIND HER HEAD.

JAMIE So then, what do you say?

BEN About what?

JAMIE About working in the bindery? You wanna?

BEN Why do you want me to work in the bindery, for God sakes?

JAMIE I dunno. You could be my pet project.

BEN "Pet project?"

JAMIE Yeah, I could save a rich, white suburban kid from becoming a spoiled brat. I'll make you tough. I'll make a man outta you! And I'll pay you \$3.50 an hour!

BEN You do pay better than Marty. I don't know. I'll think about it.

JAMIE All right. Think about it. And when you're done thinking about it, you can come work for me! Let's eat: I'm starving!

EXIT BOTH. MUSIC: THE TYPEWRITER.

ACT I SCENE VIII

STAGE CENTER. PAYMART CUSTOMER SERVICE BOOTH IS PLACED STAGE CENTER. GUS, THE MANAGER, IS SEATED, CHECKING OUT A COPY OF THE DAILY NEWS. IT IS A QUIET MOMENT. MAXINE SINCLAIR, APPROACHES. FOOTSTEPS, ELEVATOR MUSIC, SOUND OF BUSTLING SHOPPERS.

SINCLAIR (Gruffly) I want to talk to the manager of Paymart.

MANAGER That's me.

SINCLAIR Name's Maxine Sinclair. I own The Daily News.

MANAGER I'm Gus Martin.

SINCLAIR You're still advertising with The Morning Star, aren't you?

MANAGER Uh....

SINCLAIR Why? Every sensible advertiser in this city knows the Daily News is the only show in town.

MANAGER That may be the case, but The Morning Star is the only paper that practices serious journalism.

SINCLAIR I beg your pardon?

MANAGER The Daily News has gone to hell since your chain bought it and you took over.

SINCLAIR How so?

MANAGER Well for one thing, you've fired half the reporters!

SINCLAIR Who needs those drunks? News off the wires is good enough for most people and look! Circulation has skyrocketed since I took over.

MANAGER That's a laugh! Where do you get these numbers? Maybe you're printing more papers.... but who's reading them?

SINCLAIR What the hell do you think I'm doing? Taking 'em to the dump?

MANAGER Yes I do. Everyone's cancelling their subscription! Your paper is a rag. I mean look at this crap, (picks up paper) "Headless Body Found in Topless Bar," and here's a gem, "Is There a Ring of Debris Around Uranus?"

SINCLAIR (Unfazed) And our ad rates! Where are you going to get ads for what we charge?

MANAGER Ms. Sinclair, what will you charge for ads after you drive The Morning Star out of business?

SINCLAIR (Awkward silence. Clears throat.)

MANAGER You'll set your prices anywhere you please and advertisers will have nowhere else to go! I will not help you create a newspaper monopoly in Santa Fe!

SINCLAIR (Calmly) I want you to know, Gus...that I plan to write a letter to your main office.

MANAGER A letter?

SINCLAIR Yes. Because you don't know how to manage your advertising budget.

MANAGER What business is that of yours?

SINCLAIR Gus, I find it unbelievable that Paymart would waste its money on ads in The Morning Star.

MANAGER What the...?!

SINCLAIR Furthermore, I think you're incompetent.

MANAGER (Offended) Incompetent? What do you mean?

SINCLAIR I mean The Morning Star is going down the tubes and you're pouring money into it anyway...

MANAGER If The Morning Star is going down the tubes, it's because you are forcing it out of business.

SINCLAIR Hey! My chain pulls a lot of weight with Paymart.

MANAGER So what?

SINCLAIR "So what?" Listen: If you care about your job, drop The Morning Star. And here's something to get your brain in gear, darling.

SINCLAIR PULLS A THICK WAD OF HER PURSE. SHE BEGINS PEELING OFF HUNDRED DOLLAR BILLS AND PLACING THEM ON GUS' DESK, CAREFULLY WATCHING HIS REACTION. WHEN SHE STOPS, GUS SCOOPS UP THE BILLS AND PUTS THEM IN HIS POCKET.

MANAGER I'm sorry. I've been under a lot of stress lately. I'll think about what you said, Ms. Sinclair. And I'll get back to you soon.

SINCLAIR Good. I'll be waiting.

EXIT SINCLAIR. MUSIC: THE TYPEWRITER

ACT I SCENE IX

MORNING STAR. BEN IS HARD AT WORK AT HIS DESK. MARTY ENTERS, FUMING. HE THROWS A COPY OF THE MORNING STAR ON BEN'S DESK.

MARTY How could you do this to me?

BEN What'd I do?

MARTY That restaurant review you wrote.... The owner just called.

BEN Oh yeah?

MARTY He was appalled by the table manners of you and your companion...

BEN That was Jamie I dined with.

MARTY He described your stomachs as "bottomless pits" and your behavior as rude and obnoxious!

BEN Hey! We're growing teenagers!

MARTY And, to top it off, you misspelled his name!

BEN No! Let me see that. (He checks out a paper. Wait, that's right: Chris Pain. C-H-R-I-S P-A-I-N.

MARTY (Furiously) No! It's Chris with a "K" and Payne with a "Y" and an "E".

BEN Geez, I'm sorry Marty.

MARTY Sorry's not good enough. How the hell do you expect to cover hard news when you can't write a simple restaurant review?

BEN I said I was sorry!!

MARTY You mess up again and you're outta here. Do you understand?

BEN Yes, sir. (Pause) Marty?

MARTY What?

BEN Mind if I walk around the plant for a few minutes? My back's killing me.

MARTY Go ahead. And be sure to punch out this time. Mr. Maverick doesn't pay you to screw around all day.

GRUMPY BEN GETS UP AND PUNCHES OUT ON THE OLD TIME CLOCK (SOUND EFFECTS: A SEVERE "DING") AND SADLY WALKS, UP CENTER STAGE, INTO THE BINDERY.

ACT I SCENE X

UP CENTER STAGE. THE BINDERY. A LARGE OVERHEAD SIGN READ "AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY. SET LIGHTING A HELLISH RED. ON A RAISED PLATFORM IN THE MIDDLE OF THE BINDERY STANDS MARIA, WHO IS DEAF AND DUMB, AND BESIDE HER FRANK, THE FOREMAN. WITH ROBOTIC MOVEMENTS, THEY PLACE SECTIONS OF THE PAPER INTO THE "POCKETS" OF A HUGE STITCHING MACHINE. HOWIE KNOCKS SCRAPS OF PAPER OUT OF THE END OF THE "STITCHER" WITH A RAKE. JAMIE TIES BUNDLES OF THE FINISHED PAPER AND PLACES THEM ON A WOOD PALLET.

HOWIE (Yelling) Whoa! Too much glue! The papers are sticking together!

FRANK STOPS THE ASSEMBLY LINE AND THE BINDERY IS FILLED WITH TOTAL SILENCE.

FRANK Pinche cabron. This chingada labeling machine is all messed up. Maverick and his great ideas!

JAMIE (Scratching his head) Bummer in the summer! What we need here is a smoke --- ten feet long big guy!

HOWIE Ice cold beer! Get your ice cold beer! Right here! Ice cold beer!

FRANK (To the crew) All right everybody, hode it down! Howie, c'mer and gimmee a hand!

HOWIE (Saluting) Yes, sir!

BEN, HOWIE AND FRANK APPLY THEMSELVES TO FIXING THE BROKEN STITCHER. JAMIE MOTIONS BEN TO JOIN HIM OUTSIDE. SHE LEADS HIM TO THE BACK OF THE BUILDING AND INTO A LOT FILLED WITH DENSE WEEDS AND ABANDONED, RUSTING CARS. (NATURE SOUNDS) THEY TAKE A SEAT IN A BURNED OUT VOLVO. JAMIE HANDS BEN A POUCH OF TOBACCO.

ACT I SCENE XI

STAGE LEFT JAMIE AND BEN KICK BACK. JAMIE BEGINS TO HAND-ROLE A CIGARETTE.

JAMIE God, I wish I was back in New York City!

BEN Why?

JAMIE The kids here think they're such hot shit just cuz their folks have a lot of money. Every one of 'em needs to spend a week in the bind'ry. Here, have a drag.

BEN No, thanks. I honestly never smoked before.

JAMIE Go ahead. It'll do you good.

BEN OK (Ben sucks the pipe and begins coughing) Damn, this tastes like cheap tobacco....

JAMIE If you don't cough, you won't get.... (Stops abruptly) So, have you given any thought to my little business proposition?

BEN Truth is I have been thinking about working down here. (Pathetic laugh) My writing career is going nowhere.

JAMIE (Victoriously) Great! I'll work it out with Frank! You'll start work tomorrow. (She leans over and kisses Ben)

BEN (To audience) Cool!

ENTER HOWIE.

HOWIE (To Jamie) Hey! What the hell's goin' on? We've been looking all over for you. This ain't no seed catalog!

BEN (To Jamie, confused) Seed catalog?

JAMIE (To Ben) A seed catalog only comes out once a year, Ben. We come out every week.

BEN (Still Confused) Ohhhh!

JAMIE (To Howie, yelling) It's OK, Howie! I'll be there in a minute! Start without me.

JAMIE AND BEN WALK BACK INTO THE SWELTERING BINDERY. FRANK TAKES HIS PLACE AT THE HELM OF THE STITCHER AND PRESSES THE "GO" BUTTON. (SOUND EFFECTS OF PRINTING EQUIPMENT.) JUST THEN, DICK MAVERICK, PUBLISHER OF THE MORNING STAR WALKS INTO THE BINDERY.

BEN Hey! Who's the guy in the suit?

JAMIE That's my Dad: The publisher.

BEN Wow I've never met him before.

JAMIE He rarely leaves the office.

BEN What's he doing back here?

JAMIE Checking up on us. He stuck a new labeling machine on the assembly line: Like that's going to solve our problems. Y'know Ben: My Dad's an idiot.

BEN Who knows? Maybe it will make things more efficient around here.

JAMIE My Dad hired an efficiency expert once.

BEN What'd he say?

JAMIE He said what you need to do is take a bulldozer and work your way from the front of the plant to the back. And then start all over.

BEN Not what he wanted to hear, I bet.

JAMIE What this place really needs is an air conditioner. When these papers start sticking together, you'll never get out!

BEN Do you think he'll put one in?

JAMIE (Sarcastically) Oh sure. Right after he installs the walnut paneling and white shag carpeting! Scuse me. Gotta go.

JAMIE JOINS THE ASSEMBLY LINE AS MAVERICK APPROACHES THE LABELING MACHINE. FRANK PUSHES THE GREEN BUTTON. (LOUD PRESS SOUND EFFECTS). A SINGLE LABEL GETS HOPELESSLY CHEWED UP. MAVERICK REACHES OVER AND PRESSES THE RED SHUT-OFF BUTTON ON THE CONTROL PANEL. THE ENTIRE STITCHER GOES DEAD. (SILENCE)

FRANK Whaz the matter, Dick?

MAVERICK Why is this machine shredding the address labels to our paid subscribers?

JAMIE Because it's A piece of shit, Dad!

MAVERICK I'm talking to Frank!

FRANK I dunno, Dick. Jamie may have a point. But we can't stop for every single label that doesn't get glued on right: We'll never get outta here!

MAVERICK OK. (Awkward Pause) Sorry, Frank.

FRANK No problem, Dick. (To the crew) All right, get back to work!

FRANK PUSHES THE GREEN BUTTON AGAIN AND THE ASSEMBLY LINE ROARS TO LIFE. THE PUBLISHER, LOOKING AWFUL GUILTY, TRIES TO MAKE UP BY CARRYING A STACK OF PAPERS TO MARIA'S STATION. THE ASSEMBLY LINES STOPS AGAIN. MARIA SMILES AT MAVERICK AND SPEAKS IN A GUTTURAL, BARELY DECIPHERABLE TONGUE.

MARIA Doe! Doen't do dat! Yul get dooty!

MAVERICK (Apologetically) I've got to be good for something around here, Maria.

MARIA TAKES THE STACK OF PAPERS FROM THE PUBLISHER AND BRUSHES HIM OFF.

MARIA Tank you, Mitah Mavwick! Tank you vewy much!

MAVERICK SMILES, BOWS, BACKTRACKS AND SENSING THAT ALL IS AS WELL AS IT'S EVER GOING TO BE TURNS HIS BACK TO THE CREW AND RETREATS TO HIS "OFFICE." THE STITCHER STARTS UP AGAIN AND IMMEDIATELY GRINDS TO AN ABRUPT HALT. FRANK SCRATCHES HIS HEAD.

FRANK What now?!

HOWIE (Holding a broken bicycle chain) The timing chain broke.

FRANK Do we have another one?

HOWIE They stopped making 'em 20 years ago.

FRANK So now what do we do?

HOWIE I think I can make one out of a motorcycle chain.

FRANK Fine. Go to Chick's Harley Davidson and see what you can come up with. Rest of you: Go to lunch.

ALL EXIT.

ACT I SCENE XII

STAGE LEFT. MAVERICK'S OFFICE.
MAVERICK IS SEATED BEFORE A DESK
COVERED WITH PAPERS IN A VERY PLAIN
OFFICE. A REBEL FLAG HANGS ON THE
WALL. HE TAKES OFF HIS JACKET,
LOOSENS HIS TIE. JAMIE COMES IN WITH A
PAPER.

JAMIE Here's the El Dorado edition, Daddy.

MAVERICK (Checks it out) Excellent. How are things going?

JAMIE Stitcher's acting up. Looks like it's gonna be another late one.

MAVERICK God damn stitcher. (Pause) Oh, Jamie!

JAMIE Yeah?

MAVERICK Give the bank a call. Have them transfer \$5,000 from my personal savings account to the company's checking account, OK?

JAMIE There's not much left in your savings account.

MAVERICK Really?

JAMIE Yeah, really. Y'know: This whole thing sucks eggs. You really should have sold the paper after Grandpa died, when it was worth something.

MAVERICK Jamie, don't talk about things you can't possibly understand!

JAMIE But no, you had to leave New York and move to the armpit of the nation. I cannot believe you gave up your job at The Times for this rag.

MAVERICK We are a Pulitzer Prize winning publication, Jamie. Just do what I say for once, OK?

JAMIE No problema. I'll call the bank right now and tell them to flush the rest of our money right down the toilet! And oh yeah....

MAVERICK What?

JAMIE The electric company called again. They're gonna cut the power if we don't pay our bills.

MAVERICK (Slapping his forehead) Jeez! I forgot all about them. Beg for a few mre weeks.

JAMIE Also, we just got a call from Gus at Paymart. He's dropping us.

MAVERICK (Reeling) What?!

JAMIE Gus has decided to no longer advertise in our paper!
Understand?!

MAVERICK After all these years?! That does it!

MAVERICK PICKS UP PHONE. DIALS A
NUMBER. LOOKS AT JAMIE.

MAVERICK That'll be all, Jamie.

JAMIE (Mimicking) "That'll be all, Jamie. That'll be all, Jamie."
(Screaming) Why don't you get yourself a goddamn secretary.....

MAVERICK Why don't you get yourself a dress?

JAMIE (Screaming) Why don't you get yourself a life?

MAVERICK Why don't you get lost before I kill you. (Telephone connects) Uh yes....Hello. May I speak to Maxine Sinclair, please? Tell her it's Dick Maverick. (Beat) Yes I'll hold.

STAGE RIGHT. SPOT ON SINCLAIR, FEET
UP, CIGAR IN HAND, WITH WILLIE AT HER
SIDE. SHE PUSHES A BUTTON ON THE
SPEAKER PHONE.

SINCLAIR Dick Maverick! What an un-expected pleasure! Haven't heard from you in ages!

MAVERICK Listen, Maxine, I have got to talk to you. Are you free for lunch?

SINCLAIR How 'bout the Coyote Cafe at noon?

MAVERICK That's great. Thanks, Maxines

MAVERICK HANGS UP PHONE, GETS UP
AND EXITS. SINCLAIR VICTORIOUSLY
PUNCHES THE SPEAKER PHONE AND
TURNS TO WILLIE WHO IS SEAT CLOSE BY.

SINCLAIR Did you know Dick and I went to Columbia University together?

WILLIE No, I didn't.

SINCLAIR (Smiling) Dick Maverick was top in his class. He's a damn good reporter but he knows squat about business.

WILLIE Don't worry, boss. We can give him a job after we bankrupt him!

SINCLAIR Yeah! We can get the sonovabitch to clean the press!

WILLIE AND SINCLAIR BURST OUT
LAUGHING. SCENE FADES TO BLACK.

ACT I SCENE XIII

STAGE CENTER. MAVERICK WALKS UP TO
A TABLE AND SITS. HE IS SERVED A
BEEFEATER. SINCLAIR WALKS UP TO THE
TABLE. SOFT JAZZ PLAYS IN THE
BACKGROUND.

MAVERICK Maxine! Have a seat! Good to see you!

SINCLAIR Dick! It's been too long! How's Jamie?

MAVERICK A handful. Just turned 15. She's learning the press.

SINCLAIR Smart kid. Pressmen make good money.

MAVERICK Actually, I was kinda hoping she'd take a liking to
knitting or baking.... Waiter!

WAITER APPROACHES.

MAVERICK (Con't) What'll you have, Maxine?

SINCLAIR (To Waiter) Gimme a Tom Collins. (To Maverick)
You're looking good, Dick. A few gray hairs.

MAVERICK You gave them to me, Maxine.

SINCLAIR Always the joker!

MAVERICK (Seriously) You're busting my balls, Maxine. You're
not playing by the rules.

SINCLAIR What "rules"? This is business, man! I'm not supposed
to be nice to you!

MAVERICK Do you really think you can just waltz into Santa Fe,
buy the Daily News, and then drive my newspaper out of business?

SINCLAIR Yes, Dick, off the record, I do. I've done this many
times before.

MAVERICK Why?

SINCLAIR It's my job. I'm the hammer and you're gonna get
nailed. Don't get me wrong. I greatly admire your work. And those
sexy muscles aren't bad either.

MAVERICK GLARES ANGRILY AT
SINCLAIR. THERE IS AN AWKWARD
SILENCE. MAVERICK RESUMES IN A
DIPLOMATIC TONE.

MAVERICK Look, I was thinking.... We both have our special
talents.

SINCLAIR You're the best reporter in the business.

MAVERICK And you're the best businessman around.

SINCLAIR Combine our talents and we'll make a helluva team.

MAVERICK That's exactly what I'm trying to say.

SINCLAIR (Overjoyed) It's a marriage made in heaven, Dick! So then, are you really willing to scrap your operation and come aboard? I'll make you managing editor.

MAVERICK That's not what I had in mind.

SINCLAIR And what, pray tell, did you have in mind?

MAVERICK A joint operating agreement. We share advertising, circulation and business operations, but maintain separate newsrooms and editorial staffs. There's room in this town for two papers, Maxine. You don't have to be the only show in town.

SINCLAIR Y'know, if it was up to me, I'd say "fine." But it's not acceptable to the chain. (She promptly gets up)

MAVERICK No, wait! Listen! Under a joint operating agreement, we both make lots of money and I can still give this town an alternative editorial voice!

SINCLAIR (Sitting down again) I don't give a rat's ass about that.

MAVERICK OK. Let me try again. Under a joint operating agreement, a lot of very good people get to keep their jobs.

SINCLAIR I don't care about them, either.

MAVERICK Well, then, what do you care about?

SINCLAIR The chain, Dick. And the chain wants The Morning Star dead. Not a "joint operating agreement." Dead.

MAVERICK Jesus, Maxine. You've already got a million-dollar art collection, a Lear jet, a suite in the Waldorf and a chauffeured limousine! What more can a person possibly want?

SINCLAIR Nothing personal, Dick, but I do have my orders.

MAVERICK You're a tyrant, Maxine. Haven't you heard? Monopolies are illegal in this country! You'll never get away with it.

SINCLAIR (Exasperated, somewhat thoughtlessly) SO SUE ME!

**MAVERICK GETS UP, GRABS HIS COAT,
AND THROWS SOME BILLS ON THE TABLE.**

MAVERICK Maxine! I knew I could count on you for a good idea!

SINCLAIR DOWNS DRINK IN ONE GULP.

SINCLAIR Wait a minute, Dick.

MAVERICK Yes?

SINCLAIR That was only a figure of speech! A joint operating agreement is not on the table, but there is another way outta this.

MAVERICK Yes?

SINCLAIR (Pulls out a paycheck) I will write you a check for one million dollars, if you will just stop your presses for good.

MAVERICK You're offering me a million dollars?!

SINCLAIR Yes. For the building, the presses, your debts, your inventory, everything.

MAVERICK So, now you want to pay me off so that you can create a newspaper monopoly in Santa Fe?

SINCLAIR What do you say, Dick?

MAVERICK What about my people? Will you guarantee them jobs?

SINCLAIR No, unh-unh, forget it! I'm running a business, not a halfway house for circus freaks!

MAVERICK Is that how you regard my people? As freaks?

SINCLAIR What the hell do you care what I think? Just take the money and run! Dick, I'm offering you a million dollars!

MAVERICK No! You're offering me blood money! My people don't want severance checks. They....

SINCLAIR They're not your problem!

MAVERICK I owe my employees everything, Maxine. And all they ask in return is steady work: It's their life!

SINCLAIR You've done your best, now get out while you still can, with dignity and a little cash!

MAVERICK No!

SINCLAIR Face it: The days of the small, independent, hometown newspaper are over.

MAVERICK This town does not want some huge East Coast chain feeding them wire copy. They want hard-hitting local news, arts and sports. Stories you just won't cover. (Getting up) Sorry, Maxine. No deal. (Exit)

SINCLAIR Fine. Have it your way.

RIPS CHECK IN HALF. ALL EXIT. CLEAR SET.

ACT I SCENE XIV

UP CENTER STAGE. THE BINDERY.

BEN (V/O) And so I began working with Jamie in the bindery. I raked the trimmed newspaper cuttings from the stitcher sometimes for fifteen hours a day. The noise was deafening, the hours seemed endless and it was hotter than hell.

FRANK AND MARIA FEED THE POCKETS. JAMIE JOGS STACKS OF PAPER AS THEY COME OFF THE ASSEMBLY LINE. HOWIE TIES THE STACKS OF PAPER ON THE TYIN MACHINE. SUDDENLY THE STITCHER GRINDS TO A SCREECHING HALT. (SILENCE)

FRANK I hate this job. We're never getting outta here. Maverick doesn't give a shit. All right, take five!

JAMIE (To Ben) It's time to smoke a big, fat hand-roll, big guy!

BEN AND JAMIE WALK AWAY FROM THE ASSEMBLY LINE.

FRANK (Furious) Hey, you little morons. The door swings both ways at The Morning Star. You brats keep messing around and I swear you've had it!

BEN (Getting bold) Who do you think you are anyway? God? Just because I get paid crap doesn't give you the right to treat me like it!

JAMIE Way to tell him, Ben!

FRANK (To Ben, in his face) Look, twerp, I'm your boss. You do what I say, understand? (To Audience) I don't know what's the matter with kids these days. I'm an old man and I bet I can still out-work and out-screw anybody here!

BEN So what d'you want? A medal?

FRANK Nah, I just want you to do your job. Now let's get going, big boy!

JAMIE (To Ben) Hey, I liked the way you handled that. Now if we could just get some work out of you....

BEN I work hard, dammit! Don't you start now. I do the best I can. I'm sorry if I don't meet your expectations but....

JAMIE But what?

BEN I'm not used to working around such big, noisy machines. Sometimes I think the stitcher is gonna take my hand right off!

JAMIE It will if you're not careful. The trimmer don't care if there's a newspaper or your arm under its blade!

BEN And other times I get hot and tired and I want to leave and say forget this crap. I just don't care anymore.

JAMIE (Gently) That's because you just started. It's not easy to break into the shop routine. Especially when you're as weak and skimpy as you are!

BEN I'm not skimpy!

JAMIE You are. You're thin and you're weak and you don't have any stamina. Jamie catches herself she sees what impact her words have on Ben, who is about to cry. Jamie puts an arm around Ben's shoulder.

JAMIE (Con't) But you're getting stronger every day. I can see it, man. Soon you'll be just as tough as me.

BEN Do you always have to be so tough? Can't you just be sweet and gentle for once?

JAMIE Maybe I can and maybe I can't. Anyway this ain't the time or the place. C'mon, we're holding up production. (To Frank) Go ahead, Frank. We're ready.

FRANK 'Bout time.

The assembly line starts up again and goes for a few seconds before jamming up again.

FRANK Shit! Howie, give me a hand, will ya?

Ben turns around and notices Marty who has crept up behind him.

BEN (Smiling) I don't think I'm cut out for this line of work, Marty.

MARTY Well, you wanted to work down here. (A Pause. Then dead serious) Oh yeah. Maverick wants to see you in his office. Now.

BEN Why? Did I do something wrong?

MARTY Go on! Now!

Ben hands the rake to Jamie who looks at him like he is a traitor for abandoning him. Jamie gives him the finger and takes over Ben's responsibilities in addition to his own.

BEN I'll be right back.

FRANK All right everybody, take five! (Exit all)

ACT I SCENE XV

BEN walks out of the bindery and into the publisher's office. Dick Maverick is playing with an old French pistol.

MAVERICK Ben Hedges, you are looking at a desperate man.

BEN Don't do it Mr. Maverick! Life is good!

MAVERICK That's it? "Life is good?" Haven't you learned anything here? (Beat) My father gave me this gun. I was thinking of auctioning it. It's a 19th century French 6mm "Merveilleux" repeating pistol. It's worth a lot.

BEN Then, this probably wouldn't be a good time to ask for a raise....

MAVERICK Uh, no. (Puts gun away) Ben you've been with us for a month now. How do you like it here?

BEN Mr. Maverick, I love this newspaper.

MAVERICK Call me Dick. Ben, why do you like it here?

BEN I dunno. But I think Ben Franklin and Joseph Pulitzer would have been proud to work here.

MAVERICK PULLS A FANCY BOTTLE OUT OF HIS DESK AND POURS THEM BOTH A SHOT OF WHISKEY.

MAVERICK Frank likes your spirit. And even Marty likes your work. (Hands Ben a glass) And he tells me you want to write. Here's mud in your eye.

BEN Cheers! (Downs shot. Hoarsely) I'd really like to write.

MAVERICK Ben, I want you to know how proud I am to have you on my staff.

BEN You are?

MAVERICK Yes. We have great expectations.

BEN You do?

MAVERICK You are very talented.

BEN I am?

MAVERICK After a rocky start, you have learned to set down names, places, dates and events with accuracy. You never come in late and you never miss a deadline. Ben, I think your time has come.

BEN It has?

MAVERICK Ben, I have the biggest story of my life brewing and I can't cover it. I need your help.

BEN What's the story?

MAVERICK I need to find out what's been going on at The Daily News since Maxine Sinclair bought it two months ago.

BEN You know, I worked there for a while.

MAVERICK No, I didn't know that. (He picks up phone) Hello Frank? Tell Jamie to get up here. (To Ben) What exactly did you do at The Daily News?

BEN I worked in dispatch.

MAVERICK Hmmm. And what did you think of the place?

BEN State of the art, but I think Sinclair is a crook.

MAVERICK What do you mean?

BEN She was careful not to document anything bad she did, but I overheard lots of talk about a paper in Galisteo...

MAVERICK Yes. The Weekly Gazette. Charlie Winter was publisher: An old friend of my father's. Charlie took Maxine Sinclair to court.

BEN Did Charlie win?

MAVERICK He lost his paper, and his mind, I might add.

JAMIE WALKS IN

JAMIE What's up?

MAVERICK Have a seat, Jamie.

BEN Do you think Charlie can help us out?

MAVERICK I don't know. Maybe. You got a car?

BEN Yes.

MAVERICK Why don't you two go to Galisteo and pay Charlie a visit. Find out anything you can about Sinclair. Jamie will take pictures. (Maverick pulls some money out of his wallet). Here's a hundred bucks for expenses.

BEN Hey, thanks! Thanks a lot!

MAVERICK (Walking them offstage) Ben, if we don't get something good on Sinclair soon, this paper is shutting down.

BEN I'll do my best, sir.

ACT II SCENE I

DAILY NEWS BOARDROOM. SINCLAIR,
WILLIE AND PRODUCTION MANAGER.

SINCLAIR The Morning Star should have been bankrupt by now! What's the hold up?

WILLIE We've finally won over all the full page advertisers. Now we're chiseling away at the quarter page and half page ads. Maverick has a very loyal following, boss...

SINCLAIR Do whatever it takes to win them over, if only for a few weeks.

WILLIE How boss?

SINCLAIR Give them free cruises and trips to Vegas. Shoot, everybody needs a vacation, Willie. Just be sure they agree not to advertise in The Morning Star for a while!

PRODUCTION MANAGER I know for a fact the paper's floundering.

SINCLAIR What do you know, John?

PRODUCTION MANAGER My wife works at the bank. She says Maverick is drawing money out of his personal savings account to keep the paper alive.

SINCLAIR Excellent. What else?

WILLIE I heard Maverick plans to auction an antique pistol for 50 grand. Some sort of family heirloom. Boss, this guy is hurting.

SINCLAIR I want that pistol, Willie. (Pause) Gentlemen, if we don't bankrupt Maverick soon, there's gonna be some heads rolling!

WILLIE Boss! The Morning Star has been around for 100 years! These things take time. It took three years to put the Galisteo Gazette out of business.

SINCLAIR (Musing) The Galisteo Gazette... Willie whatever happened to all those files The Gazette subpoenaed from us for that stupid trial? They're still sealed, aren't they?

WILLIE After the verdict was read, everything became part of the public record.

SINCLAIR So anybody can get a hold of them?

WILLIE If they know where to look at the old plant. But boss, nobody's gonna want to read that crap....

SINCLAIR You nitwits! Don't you understand? Maverick is a journalist! And we are so very, very close.... (Decisively) Willie, get the car. John, you're in charge. Sinclair collects his papers, throws them in a brief case and exits.

PRODUCTION MANAGER What's his problem?

WILLIE (Chasing after Sinclair) Beats me.

ACT II SCENE II

STAGE CENTER. BEN AND BAREFOOT JAMIE ARE SEATED ON A BENCH, PRETENDING TO DRIVE A '65 FORD FALCON. CLASSIC ROCK IS BLARING FROM THE CAR STEREO.

JAMIE Cruising! Can you handle it, big guy?

BEN Oh yeah! Turn it up!

Jamie turns up the volume. Ben looks up at the rearview mirror.

BEN What's that?

JAMIE What's what? (Turns down music)

BEN Somebody's following us! Look!

Jamie turns around. Ben turns down music.

JAMIE Uh oh! It's a cop!

BEN Oh my God! Stash the Top Tobacco!

JAMIE Where?

BEN I dunno. (Beat) Eat it!

JAMIE BEGINS EATING THE CIGARETTES, WHICH HAS ALL BEEN ROLLED INTO TINY CIGARETTES.

JAMIE I can't eat them all!

BEN Well then throw them out the window!

JAMIE No way!

BEN Just do as I say!

JAMIE All right!

JAMIE TOSSES ALL THE HAND-ROLLED CIGARETTES OUT THE WINDOW. BEN IS SWEATING.

JAMIE All gone! (Turns around again) He's still following us!

BEN Damn! They want me!

JAMIE Why on earth would they want you?

BEN They're after me for contributing to the delinquency of a minor. I'm sure of it! Jamie, remember that beer we drank last week?

JAMIE Oh yeah! That was great! Guinness wasn't it?

BEN Yes....No! You must be mistaken. It was non-alcoholic!

JAMIE What is your problem, anyway?

BEN Nothing. No problem.

Ben looks at the rear view mirror. The cop is still there.

BEN Damn!

A POLICE SIREN GOES OFF AND THE
REVOLVING LIGHTS COME ON. BEN
STARES AT A SOMEWHAT AMUSED JAMIE.

JAMIE Uh oh.

BEN Oh my God! What do we do now?

JAMIE Pull over. Don't make any sudden movements. And please be polite. Say "yes sir" and "no sir."

Cop approaches car. He is chewing a huge wad of gum and has a Southern accent.

COP Get out of the car. Both of you.

BEN We didn't do anything.

JAMIE KICKS BEN.

COP (To Ben) Shuddup. Outta the car.

THE COP LINES BEN AND JAMIE AGAINST
THE HOOD FO THE CAR. HE FRISKS BEN.

COP You boys definitely are not cool. Could'a sworn I seen little mari-wanna cigarettes dancing across the roadway.

BEN They weren't. That is, we aren't. Please sir! We didn't....

COP What's the matter with you, boy? Cat got your tongue? Calling me a liar. Lem'me see you're license.

BEN FUMBLES WITH HIS WALLET AND
PRESENTS HIS PAPERS.

COP OK Mr. Hedges. You are under arrest for the suspicion of trafficking an illegal substance and..... (Beat)

PLACES HANDCUFFS ON BEND AND SNAPS
THEM HARD.

BEN Owwww!

COP And the corruption of a minor. You have the right to remain silent....Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law.

JAMIE Officer!

COP Yes?

JAMIE My friend is a little nervous, but he really doesn't mean any harm.

COP Get to the point, kid.

JAMIE My name is Jamie Maverick. I'm the daughter of Dick Maverick, publisher of The Morning Star. Here's my press card.

COP Lemme see this.

JAMIE HANDS CARD TO COP WHO STUDIES IT, CAREFULLY.

JAMIE We're on an assignment, officer.

COP Oh, c'mon. You're just a kid!

JAMIE No, really. My Dad has always run a simple operation. Y'know: Low overhead. (Beat) Kinda like the way Charlie Winter used to, at The Joliet Gazette.

COP You know Charlie?

JAMIE Sure! Charlie Winter put out the best local newspaper in the state!

COP He did at that. My brother worked for him.

JAMIE Oh yeah?!

COP Yup! Second pressman!

JAMIE I'm a second pressman!

COP No kidding! (Sadly) Y'know the Gazette went under....

JAMIE We know all about it. That's why we're here. Ben's writing a story and I'm taking pictures. (Beat) Maxine Sinclair drove Charlie Winter out of business and now he's trying to crush my Daddy. We just wanna ask Charlie some questions, officer. (Putting on the charm) Please, please can't you give us a break?

COP Charlie's always been a good friend of mine. But he hasn't been the same since the presses stopped rolling.

COP SADLY WALKS OVER TO BEN, UNLOCKS HIS HANDCUFFS. BEN MASSAGES HIS WRISTS.

COP OK, kid. You're free to go. Charlie's at the old plant. Go down main street and hang a left on Fifth.

JAMIE Ben, aren't you forgetting the officer's retirement fund?

BEN Whatever you say. (Hands \$50 to cop) Thank you, Officer-sir.

COP No...Thank you. And I don't want to see you kids smoking none of that Mary-wanna, hear? Now, go on: Git.

COP EXITS. BEN AND JAMIE CONTINUE TO "DRIVE."

JAMIE Phew. That was close. All right, turn here. Now park. Excellent.

THEY GET OUT OF THE CAR.

JAMIE (Snapping away, with flash) I wanna get some exterior shots. Check the front door.

BEN (Approaching door) Oh, c'mon, this place has been deserted for years.

BEN TRIES THE FRONT DOOR AND IT OPENS SLOWLY, REVEALING A GHOST TOWN OF A PRINT SHOP.

ACT II SCENE III

UP STAGE LEFT. BARS OF SUNLIGHT CUT THROUGH THE STAGNANT AIR AND ANCIENT COBWEBS. BEN AND JAMIE ENTER THE ALIEN ENVIRONMENT, WARY, GROPING THROUGH THE DARKNESS.

BEN (V/O) Jamie and I drove my beat up '65 Ford Falcon to Galisteo and the abandoned offices of The Gazette, which had been long been shut down. We came upon a printer dressed in old work clothes, wearing a black visor, running an old Linotype machine. This was CHARLIE WINTER, former publisher of The Daily Gazette.

CHARLIE You're early!

JAMIE We are?

CHARLIE I told you the ad wouldn't be ready until nine!

JAMIE (Looking at watch) But it's after noon!

CHARLIE REACHES TO HIS SIDE AND FETCHES A BOTTLE OF WHISKY, FROM WHICH HE TAKES A LONG DRINK. HE OFFERS THE BOTTLE TO JAMIE WITH A GRUNT, WHICH THEY POLITELY REFUSE.

CHARLIE You low down, good for nothing, son of a sea serpent. Don't gimme no back talk. I've got a paper to put out. I'm on deadline.

JAMIE I'm Jamie Maverick. My father is Dick Maverick, publisher of The Morning Star.

CHARLIE Maverick? Maverick? Oh yes, Dick Maverick! It's been too long! (Shakes Jamie's hand)

JAMIE And this is my partner, Ben.

CHARLIE I can always find time to spend with a fellow newspaperman....even at deadline!

JAMIE We need your help, Charlie.

CHARLIE I'd do anything for you, Dick. You name it. It's yours!

JAMIE It's about Maxine Sinclair.

CHARLIE (Startled) Can't talk about her. I got outta line and Judge slapped a gag order on me.

JAMIE That was two years ago! The case is over. The gag order has been lifted!

CHARLIE The case is over? Who won?

JAMIE (Rolling his eyes) Charlie, Maxine Sinclair won! She shut you down!

CHARLIE I closed the shop? Yes, I closed the shop. Got out while the going was good. Saw the handwriting on the wall. She paid me off. I took the blood money. Hey! Who'd you say you were?

JAMIE (Getting exasperated) My name is Dick Maverick! I publish The Morning Star! Charlie, didn't the town help you when things got bad?

CHARLIE No help. Zip. No help at all.

BEN I bet Galisteo misses you now.

CHARLIE They miss me now. Local news is gone. Ad rates are sky high. And it's too late to do anything about it. It's too late, isn't it, Dick?

JAMIE It's not too late to help me, Charlie. What can I do?

CHARLIE Do? Oh, just tell everybody what Sinclair's up to! That bitch is probably doing the same thing to you that she did to me. You're a goddamn newspaper, Dick! And you're the front-page news!

JAMIE (Deliberately) We're the news? We're the story? (Pause) Of course! Why not? Ben, this story is red hot! Oh yeah Charlie, one more thing.....

CHARLIE Yes, Dick?

JAMIE I'm thinking of taking Sinclair to court. But I have no physical evidence of wrongdoing.

CHARLIE Behind me, in the file cabinet. Help yourself. Take it all. Get it outta here.

CHARLIE TURNS HIS BACK AND RETURNS TO SETTING TYPE ON THE LINO TYPE MACHINE. JAMIE AND BEN WALK TO A DUSTY FILE CABINET. JAMIE OPENS ONE SHELF AND, READING OUT LOUD, EXAMINES A FILE STAMPED IN A THREATENING RED TYPEFACE:

JAMIE “Confidential: Do Not Duplicate.” Bingo! Gimmee a hand with these papers, Ben. We've got to get 'em back to the plant, fast! Hey, thanks, Charlie!

CHARLIE No problemo. Sure you don't want a swig of Johnny Walker?

JAMIE Maybe later, Charlie. We'll take a rain check!

BEN AND JAMIE GRAB THE BOXES AND SPLIT. CHARLIE CONTINUES TO "SET TYPE" FOR A FEW SECONDS, THEN FALLS ASLEEP. WHEN HE WAKES, HE IS CONFRONTED BY WILLIE AND SINCLAIR.

ACT II SCENE IV

CHARLIE I know you. You killed my paper.

SINCLAIR Cut the crap, Charlie. Just tell me, where are the court papers?

CHARLIE I don't have 'em.

SINCLAIR What do you mean you don't have 'em? Where are they? Who'd you give 'em to?

CHARLIE (Looking Up) I mean I don't have 'em. That's all. They're gone.

SINCLAIR PULLS OUT THE MERVEILLEUX REPEATING PISTOL AND HOLDS IT TO CHARLIE'S NECK.

SINCLAIR All right Charlie, we're done playing games. Where are the files?

CHARLIE (Choking. Frightened.) I gave them to Dick Maverick. Right before you got here.

WILLIE Impossible. I know for a fact that Dick's in Santa Fe right now!

SINCLAIR (Ignoring Willie) You had no right to give those files away. (Looking around) What the hell are you doing here, anyway? You should be out on the beach in Aruba getting a tan! You're trespassing!

CHARLIE (Patiently) Maxine, I appreciate your concern, but I'm on deadline. The presses are ready to roll!

SINCLAIR The presses are gone, Charlie! They're dismantled and sold for scrap.

WILLIE Let's go, boss. This guy is nuts!

SINCLAIR You're right. (Sinclair releases Charlie and throws him to the floor) Let's get out of this dump.

WILLIE The files probably just got mislaid. Nobody's gonna give us any trouble.

SINCLAIR (Leading Willie offstage) Guess you're right, Willie. How about a drink?

WILLIE You buyin'?

WILLIE AND SINCLAIR EXIT

ACT II SCENE V

STAGE LEFT. MORNING STAR BINDERY.

BEN (V/O) And so the entire staff of The Morning Star gathered near the press to hear an unprecedented announcement by Dick Maverick. Everybody began whispering excitedly among themselves. (Maria and Howie converse in sign language.)

STAGE CENTER. MAVERICK AND MARTY ARE IN THE MIDST OF A HEATED DISCUSSION.

MARTY You sold the Marveloo? I cannot believe you sold the Marveloo!

MAVERICK (Correcting him) "Merveilleux"

MARTY Mar-ve-loo.

MAVERICK "Merveilleux"

MARTY Whatever. How could you sell it?!

MAVERICK The time had come to put that gun to good use.

MARTY Don't give up! What about Jamie and Ben? Maybe they'll come up with something!

MAVERICK I can't wait for them any longer. Maverick and Marty enter the bindery and assume a prominent position in front of the group.

MAVERICK (To crew) All right! Quiet down! I have an announcement to make!

EVERYBODY HUSHES

MAVERICK The Morning Star was born on this old flat, bed press 100 years ago. (Maverick gestures to an old press) Last year, when my father died, I left my job at The New York Times to keep the paper going. I have failed you miserably. The Morning Star will cease publication after today's issue.

EVERYONE IS SHOCKED. THERE IS MUCH GRUMBLING.

FRANK Don't give up, Dick!

MARIA Mitah Mavwick! Mitah Mavwick!

MAVERICK Yes, Maria.

MARIA (Signing) Mitah Mavwick! Ef wee wahk fahter und tuk now bruks kin wee kept dah paypah alive?

MAVERICK (To Frank) Little help here, Frank?

FRANK (To Maria) Maria, Maria Sangria. (To Maverick) Maria wants to know.... If we work faster and give up our breaks.... If that can keep the paper from going under?

MAVERICK There is not a crew anywhere that can work faster than ours. And you Maria, are the fastest one here.

MARIA Tank you, Mitah Mavwick!

MAVERICK (Resolutely) But all good things must come to an end. Marty and I have set the front page of our last edition. It reads "Goodbye Santa Fe!"

MAVERICK DISPLAYS A MOCK UP OF A PAPER WITH A SPLASHY HEADLINE THAT READS "GOODBYE SANTA FE!"

MAVERICK All the money I have left in the world has been divided into severance checks. For each year you have worked at The Morning Star, you will receive three hundred dollars. Maria, our longest, most loyal employee, will receive a check for \$9,000!

MARIA (Receiving envelope. Astonished) Tank you, Mitah Mavwick!

EVERYBODY CLAPS AND SHOUTS "ALL RIGHT! WAY TO GO, DICK!"

MAVERICK Frank Villanueva, bindery foreman, who has been with us for over 25 years, will receive a check for \$7,500!

FRANK Gracias Dick!

MAVERICK Howie, who has set type for fifteen years....

JAMIE AND BEN COME RUNNING ON
STAGE CARRYING BOXES OF FILES

MAVERICK Jamie! Ben! Are you all right?

JAMIE We're OK, Dad.

MAVERICK Thank God! (To the crew) All right! The show's over. Frank will hand out the rest of the checks. We've got one last paper to put out, so let's get back to work! (Signals to Jamie. Press starts up) Marty!

MARTY (Shouting) Yes, Dick?

MAVERICK Let's see what the kids have got!

THE PRESS IS NOW RUNNING AT FULL
SPEED. MARTY AND MAVERICK ARE
EXCITEDLY GOING THROUGH THE BOXES,
LIKE LITTLE KIDS ON CHRISTMAS
MORNING.

MAVERICK Extortion? Bribery? I can't believe it!

MARTY We have struck gold!

MAVERICK (Smiling at Marty) You wan'na say it?

MARTY I've been in the business 30 years. Never said it once.

MAVERICK Me neither. OK. Here goes: One, Two, Three!!!

MAVERICK & MARTY STOP THE PRESSES!

FRANK (In Spanish, to Howie) STOP THE PRESSES!

HOWIE (To Maria) STOP THE PRESSES!

MARIA (To Jamie) TOP DA PWESSES!

JAMIE STOP....

JAMIE LOOKS AROUND AND, FINDING NO
ONE ELSE TO TELL, WALKS OVER TO THE
PRESS AND PUSHES AN IMAGINARY
ARRAY OF BUTTONS AND LEVERS THAT
BRINGS THE PRESS TO AN ABRUPT HALT.
MARTY, GRINNING LIKE A CHESHIRE CAT
ASSEMBLES THE GROUP.

MARTY There has been a recent turn of events that may change everything.

MAVERICK (Looking at watch) It's 2:30 now. I want everybody back here.... (He looks at Marty) I want you all back at midnight.

FRANK But Dick! We're exhausted!

MAVERICK I'll pay you double time. The Morning Star will not go down without a fight!

HOWIE (Grumpily) Does that mean we have to give back our checks?

MAVERICK Of course not!

THE CREW CHEERS.

FRANK Atta boy, Dick!

HOWIE Your daddy would have been proud!

MAVERICK So then, can I count on all of you?

FRANK We'll be here, Dick. (To crew) Everybody go home. Get some rest. I want you back here at midnight!

MAVERICK Great! Marty, c'mon. Get your writers together. We have work to do!

EXIT EVERYBODY. LIGHTS DOWN.

ACT II SCENE VI

FULL DAYLIGHT. A CUTE NEWSBOY, DRESSED IN TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY CLOTHES HAWKS PAPERS CENTER STAGE.

NEWSBOY Extra! Extra! Read all about it! Daily News wants Morning Star dead!

MAN Thanks, kid. Keep the change.

NEWSBOY Wow! A whole quarter! Thanks mister. (Pockets coin. Exits)

BACK AT THE MORNING STAR, MARTY GRABS A PAPER.

MARTY Congratulations, Ben. Your very first news story.

BEN (Beaming) "THE NEWSPAPER THAT WAS MURDERED.... HOW THE GALISTEO GAZETTE DIED. WILL THE MORNING STAR BE NEXT?!" By Marty Berger and Benjamin Hedges. Cool! (Beat) But don't you think it should read "By Benjamin Hedges and Marty Berger?"

MARTY Don't push your luck, Ben.

BEN OK. So Marty, do you think anybody will care?

MARTY I don't know. We'll find out soon.

READERS, DRESSED IN THEIR EVERYDAY CLOTHES, STEP FORWARD, STAGE CENTER, READING THE TABLOID.

READER #1 Good God, Mary! Sinclair calls his salesmen "Pit Bulls!"

READER #2 Sinclair wants to make Santa Fe a one newspaper town!

READER #3 Yeah, and once she's killed The Morning Star she'll triple the ad rates....

READER #4 And get rid of the local news!

PAPER BOY AND READERS EXIT.

ACT II SCENE VII

SINCLAIR STANDS, HEAD BOWED, FACING A BIG, BLACK JUDGE WEARING A BLACK ROBE, WHO WON'T TAKE CRAP FROM ANYBODY.

JUDGE Ms. Sinclair, your chain has acted no better than the oil barons of the 1900s. If anything, this case is worse because of the moralistic cloak in which The Daily News wraps itself.

SINCLAIR Your honor, we are a business, like any other....

JUDGE You are wrong, Ms. Sinclair. The business of putting out a newspaper is like no other business. (Beat) Heywood Hale Broun once said, "I wouldn't weep about a shoe factory or a branch-line railroad shutting down...but newspapers are different."

SINCLAIR Your Honor, Mr. Broun's romantic view of newspapers does not change the laws of economics, to which we must all submit.

JUDGE Ms. Sinclair, your aggressive and predatory business practices make it impossible for The Morning Star to compete, let alone exist. You shut them out of the game.

SINCLAIR Your Honor, I have destroyed the economic base of The Morning Star fair and square. They don't deserve to stay in business.

JUDGE Ms. Sinclair, you have violated every tenet of the 1890 Sherman Antitrust act as well as the Newspaper Preservation Act of 1970. I do believe it is in the public's interest to find a way to preserve two separate editorial voices in Santa Fe.

SINCLAIR The public be damned!

JUDGE Silence! I hereby order The Daily News to pay The Morning Star damages in the sum of five million dollars. (Slams gavel)

SINCLAIR Your honor, I object!

JUDGE Out of order! Judgment is final. Ms. Sinclair, if you don't like it, might I suggest an editorial in tomorrow's Daily News?

DELIGHTED, CHEERING EMPLOYEES
CARRY MAVERICK ACROSS THE STAGE.
MUSIC: "HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN!"
FADE TO SILENCE.

ACT II SCENE VIII

COMPANY PICNIC ON LAKE CONCHAS.
WAVES ARE HEARD LAPPING THE BEACH.
IT IS A GORGEOUS FALL DAY. A LARGE
BANNER ANNOUNCES THE MORNING
STAR'S COMPANY PICNIC. JAMIE IS
THROWING ROCKS ON THE WATER.

JAMIE Hey Ben, have you thought of getting out of this hellhole and going off to college?

BEN Uh, not really. Do you think I should?

JAMIE Geez, if you want to get a girlfriend, ya gotta go to college! That's what it's for. (Skips a rock) You can't imagine what's walking around on those campuses!

BEN (Perking up a little) Oh, yeah?

JAMIE (Enthusiastically) Something for everyone! Even you! Get out of this cowtown, man. Have fun for a change.

BEN I do have fun, just hanging out with you. You know, I've been meaning to say something to you for some time.

JAMIE Yes?

BEN I've been meaning to tell you something but I just don't know how to say it.

JAMIE Just say it.

BEN I want to say it but I just can't say it.

JAMIE If you don't say it I swear I'm gonna kick your ass.

BEN OK. Here goes. Jamie, I love you. I love you so much it hurts.

JAMIE I love you too Ben, but I don't love you like that .

BEN How do you know how I love you?

JAMIE It's written all over your face. Anyway, I think you better know, I'll be leaving Santa Fe soon.

BEN What? No way!

JAMIE Yup. My Dad's calling it quits. He's had all the fun he can stand. He's saved The Morning Star and now we're going back to The New York Times and I'm going with him. The Morning Star's up for sale.

BEN Oh c'mon, who's gonna buy that dump?

JAMIE We're replacing all the presses, the bindery equipment, everything. Marty'll be in charge until we can find a buyer.

BEN (His voice cracking) You can't leave! Why didn't you tell me?

JAMIE I didn't want you to get all upset. You know how you are.

BEN You taught me so much....about things....things that really matter, like hard work and friendship. Don't you understand, I don't want you to go!

JAMIE PUTS HIS ARM AROUND BEN'S SHOULDER.

JAMIE (Gently) Look, I like you Ben. I like you a lot. But this just ain't in the stars. You deserve a nice Jewish girl who will take care of you, feed you and change your diapers. I'm not the one. You know, you've taught me a few things, too.

BEN What's that?

JAMIE Well, you taught me that a guy and a girl can be friends, good friends, without there being any sex. Before I met you, I thought that was the only thing guys think about. Now I know I was wrong.

BEN Oh yeah?

JAMIE Ben, I want you to know that you are the best friend I ever had.

BEN (Shyly) Really? Hey, I've got something for you!

JAMIE Oh yeah? What's that?

BEN (Pulls comic book out of back pocket) Here. It's the first Spiderman. I want you to have it.

JAMIE Oh man, you didn't have to do that.

BEN Hang on to it. Someday it'll be worth a fortune.

JAMIE Maybe so, but you'll never see me sell it.

BEN That's good.

JAMIE And oh yes Ben, I have something for you as well.

BEN You do?

JAMIE Oh yeah. Come here baby.

BIG, FAT KISS OF THE CENTURY

JAMIE (Coming up for air) Oh wow. Where'd you learn to kiss like that?

ENTER SINCLAIR, WEARING A COWBOY
HAT

BEN Ms. Sinclair! What are you doing here?

SINCLAIR I came to see Jamie.

JAMIE Great! Wanna hot dog?

SINCLAIR No. I just wanted to give this to you. It belonged to your grandfather. (Hands Jamie the Merveilleux repeating pistol)

BEN It's the Marvaloo!

SINCLAIR & JAMIE (Severely) MERVEILLEUX!

BEN Whatever.

JAMIE Thank you. But why? You bought it fair and square.

SINCLAIR I want you to have it.

JAMIE But....

SINCLAIR Jamie, never in my life have I done "the decent thing." Don't spoil the moment. Just take it.

JAMIE Gee, thanks.

SINCLAIR Don't mention it. Please, don't mention it. I lost the paper, y'know.

BEN You got fined five million dollars. Pocket change. Shoot, you'll probably just appeal the decision...

SINCLAIR (Severely) No, The Santa Fe Daily News has been taken away from me.

BEN How is that possible?

SINCLAIR The previous owner of The Daily News, the person who sold me the paper, just filed suit for breach of contract. Says I destroyed his paper and lost him thousands of readers. He wants the paper back.

JAMIE Won't you fight it?

SINCLAIR What's to fight? He's right. I did destroy his paper. I'm tired of fighting, Jamie. I'm cutting my losses. I want out. The chain wants out. Coming here has been one huge miscalculation.

JAMIE Where you headed?

SINCLAIR Anywhere but here, kid. Good bye!

BEN Bye!

JAMIE Bye!

BEN Now, where were we?

JAMIE (Playing with gun) You were telling me you were going to join a monastery.

BEN No!

JAMIE Yes. You said you wanted to live a life of celibacy.

BEN No!

JAMIE You said, and I quote, the worldly life is not for me.

BEN I did not!

JAMIE Then, you don't want to be a virgin no more?

BEN I do not.

JAMIE You wanna get a girlfriend, don't you?

BEN I guess so.

JAMIE (Place gun in pocket, puts arm around Ben's shoulder) Then listen to me. You have just got to get laid or you're gonna go nuts. And Ben, college is the perfect place to make it happen!

BEN Even if I went to college, I still wouldn't know what to say, or what to do.

JAMIE Oh sure you do. You've got it down. (Thoughtful pause) But, let's start again from the beginning. You need to get a haircut.

BEN Why?

JAMIE (Leading Ben offstage) I thought you said you wanted to get a girlfriend!

BEN I did?

FADE OUT ON THE TWO WALKING ARM IN
ARM INTO THE WOODS TOGETHER. MUSIC:
"THE TYPEWRITER."

THE END