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Miss Wallace Rhymes With William

A Comedic Romance in One Act

by

Nathan J. DiPerri

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CHARACTERS

7F / 5M / 1 Either + Extras

MISS WALLACE (F): *A fashionable newspaper receptionist in her early 30s.*

WILLIAM (M): *A clean-cut writer in his mid-30s eagerly awaiting a job interview.*

BARBARA (F): *The Editor's 30-something-year-old estranged wife in pursuit of a divorce.*

EDITH (F): *The Editor's 40-something-year-old ex-wife in pursuit of child support.*

AUDREY (F): *The Editor's 20-something-year-old fiancé in pursuit of a meal ticket.*

HELEN (F): *A meek representative from The Mayor's office.*

RANDALL (M): *A lazy teenage delivery boy in search of a date.*

GLADYS (F): *A paranoid old woman delivering her daily "letter to the editor."*

PETER (M): *The Mayor's 40-year-old campaign manager crony.*

THE MAYOR (M): *A quick-tempered empty suit in his mid-60s running for re-election.*

MRS. KEELER (F): *The prim and proper chairwoman of the I.D.I.O.T.*

PROTEST LEADER (M or F): *A citizen irate over the comic strip section.*

PROTESTORS (M or F): *A mob of citizens irate over the comic strip section.*

ANDERSON (M): *The 60-year-old newspaper editor wanted dead or alive.*

SETTING

A newspaper office, 1961

Miss Wallace Rhymes With William

by Nathan J. DiPerri

A Comedic Romance in One Act

SCENE 1

(AT RISE: 1961; A newspaper reception lobby. To the left, an entrance and to the right MISS WALLACE's desk behind which is a coat rack. At center left is a small couch. Framed newspapers decorate the walls along with mounted letters to spell out the name of the paper: "The Sun Rises Daily." A separate door leads off to an inner office. A SPOTLIGHT through a darkened theatre representing the early morning sun reveals BARBARA and a very pregnant EDITH frozen grouchily on the couch. MISS WALLACE ENTERS through the door and flips a light switch, which brings the stage LIGHTS UP. BARBARA and EDITH unfreeze. EDITH rocks a baby carriage with her foot. MISS WALLACE walks behind them stage right and the telephone on her desk begins to ring. Placing her coat on the rack, she sits and answers the phone.)

MISS WALLACE

(Calmly) Good morning. The Sun Rises Daily. This is Miss Wallace speaking. How may I help you?

WILLIAM

(Entering Audience in a burst of confidence) Good morning!

(LIGHTS DOWN ON MISS WALLACE, BARBARA and EDITH who freeze as SPOTLIGHT finds WILLIAM. He begins rehearsing variations of his greeting underscored by 1960's Jazz music.)

WILLIAM, *Continued*

Good morning. My name is Mr. William Madison. I'm a writer. *(Pause)* Good morning. My name is William Madison. I have an appointment with your editor. Good morning! Mr. Madison here to see Mr. Anderson. Good morning. I'm here for the staff writing position. *(Stops short of stage and gathers himself, inhaling deeply)* Here goes nothing.

(WILLIAM ENTERS the office quietly, unnoticed as LIGHTS RESTORED and CHARACTERS BREAK FREEZE. WILLIAM stands before MISS WALLACE who does not immediately acknowledge his presence.)

MISS WALLACE

Good morning. May I help you, Sir?

WILLIAM

Yes. I'm here for a job.

MISS WALLACE

Do you have an appointment?

WILLIAM

I do. The Editor is expecting me at eight.

MISS WALLACE

Well, Mr. Anderson is running a bit late. He's in a meeting right now.

WILLIAM

Oh, that's all right. I can wait, Miss...Miss...

MISS WALLACE

(Placing a name plate in front of her desk) Wallace.

WILLIAM

Pleasure to meet you, Miss Wallace. I'm William Madison. I'm a writer. Here are my credentials.

(WILLIAM hands her his resume while trying to mask a smile.)

MISS WALLACE

"Past work experience: wrote on the walls and sidewalk as a child. Wrote and passed notes in grade school and most recently, wrote checks to the government."

WILLIAM

I'm only kidding. It's a joke. But I'm not here to write the funnies. *(Hands her another sheet of paper)* This is my real resume.

MISS WALLACE

(Looking over the resume) Very impressive, Mr. Madison. I'll let Mr. Anderson know that you're here. Please have a seat.

WILLIAM

Thank you.

(AUDREY ENTERS. WILLIAM and AUDREY reach the couch at the same time. She sits. WILLIAM stands in front of the women for a moment, hesitant to sit between them.)

BARBARA

Well? Are you going to sit down or are you just going to stand there?

WILLIAM

No, I'm terribly sorry. I didn't mean to be rude.

(WILLIAM searches for room on the couch before uncomfortably squeezing himself in between BARBARA and AUDREY.)

WILLIAM

(Making the best of it) Are you ladies here for work too?

AUDREY

(Laughs) Oh, how perfectly wicked! I don't work.

EDITH

(Exhausted) I've already worked for Anderson. Now I want my money.

BARBARA

That's right. And when I'm through with him, he won't have two pennies to rub together!

WILLIAM

I see. So you're a former employee seeking compensation, you're her lawyer, and you're here looking for job?

BARBARA

No! We're his wives!

AUDREY

Really! Speak for yourself, Barbara. I'm his fiancé.

EDITH

I'm his ex-wife.

BARBARA

And I'm his soon-to-be ex-wife. If that louse is ever man enough to show his face and sign the divorce papers.

EDITH

Barbara, I tried to warn you about him. If you had only listened to me, you would have saved yourself this trouble.

BARBARA

Edith, please. All right? I don't need to be lectured by you.

AUDREY

Well, if you ask me, the faster this whole divorce is settled, the better it will be for all of us.

BARBARA

Now you listen to me, you gold-digging floozy. I wouldn't take your advice on how to make cereal.

AUDREY

Maybe that's why you're getting a divorce! He likes his breakfast cereal crunchy. You always let it sit so long that by the time you served it, it was soup for lunch.

BARBARA

If he thought I was going to wait on him like barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen over here, he had another thing coming.

EDITH

At least I loved him once. For all I know, you and Audrey had the same motive from day one.

AUDREY

I beg your pardon? Are you insinuating that I have an ulterior motive?

BARBARA

Don't play innocent, Kid. We're all after the same thing. At least I made it less obvious than you do. *(To WILLIAM)* So what's your story, handsome?

WILLIAM

No story yet. But if I get a job here, I hope to be writing lots of them.

BARBARA

Do you see that, Audrey? Even this guy is after Anderson's money. So you'll have to wait in line.

AUDREY

I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about.

MISS WALLACE

(Picks up phone) Mr. Anderson, your eight-o'clock is here. Yes, Sir. *(Hangs up)*

WILLIAM

Well, ladies, it sounds to me that my interview is about to begin. I'll put in a good word for you all once I get the job.

(WILLIAM walks to stand beside the desk, clears his throat after a moment to get her attention.)

MISS WALLACE

Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Madison. Mr. Anderson isn't quite ready for you yet. Please take a seat.

WILLIAM

Oh. All right.

(WILLIAM obediently sits once again among the ladies on the couch.)

GLADYS

(ENTERS through main office door) The Sun Rises Daily—and so have I—since 1877!

MISS WALLACE

Good morning, Gladys. How are you?

GLADYS

(Shuffling towards MISS WALLACE) How am I? Why, I woke up this morning.

WILLIAM

And isn't that the best way to start a day! Gosh, you have such a wonderful attitude, Ma'am!

GLADYS

I woke up this morning with a pain in my wrist! I'm doing lousy! My back is stiff, my knees don't work, I haven't been able to breathe out of my nose since aught nine . . . and besides all of that, my roof is leaking!

BARBARA

I'll say it is.

GLADYS

You know, you kids these days have to be in everybody else's business. This one here says "He's got a nicer automobile than I do" and this one over here says "He's got a new television." Before you know it, they're killing each other! For what? Keep still! Be happy with what you've got for crying out loud! What's the matter with you, anyway?

MISS WALLACE

What do you have for me today, Gladys?

GLADYS

Just my latest masterpiece, Dear. Fit for the front page.

AUDREY

(To WILLIAM) She writes one editorial letter everyday. She insists on hand-delivering it.

WILLIAM

Why? For the personal touch?

AUDREY

No. She just doesn't trust mailmen. She had a bad experience when she was a child.

EDITH

She had eyes for some Johnny and one day he just stopped writing her letters.

WILLIAM

That's it?

AUDREY

Rather than accepting the truth, she convinced herself that the mailman was withholding them. She has severe paranoia, you know. The poor dear.

WILLIAM

How do you know all of this?

AUDREY

I'm engaged to the editor. Just because a story never gets published, doesn't mean it never gets told, Mr. Madison.

MISS WALLACE

(Reading) "Dear Mr. Editor: I would like to express my frustration over an experience that I recently had at the café on the corner of State Street."

GLADYS

They gave me a new waiter! I don't know him! The boy gave me a menu! A menu? The fellow I usually get doesn't work there anymore. He went off to college or ran off with his girl or something. Or maybe he enlisted. I think Frances mentioned something or other about him heading overseas...

BARBARA

Meanwhile, back at the ranch...

GLADYS

At any rate, I used to be able to walk in, he knew where I like to sit, he knew exactly what I was going to have. I didn't have to **tell** him! I like the tripe.

AUDREY

What is tripe?

EDITH

It's cow stomach, Audrey.

AUDREY

Ugh!

GLADYS

This new waiter sits me in the back next to the waterfall!

WILLIAM

A waterfall? That sounds rather nice.

BARBARA

"The waterfall" is what she calls the powder room.

WILLIAM

Oh.

GLADYS

They like to lose business? Well, they're gonna LOSE business! Used to be that you could walk into a place and "Good morning, Miss Gladys. How is your mother doing?" But now it's "Hello. What are you having?" Get outta here! As soon as you get comfortable in a place, they go and change it on you! I don't like having to train a waiter and I'll never go back in there again.

MISS WALLACE

Well thank you for your troubles, Gladys. I really appreciate your bringing this in.

GLADYS

Bless you, Sweetheart. There ought to be more people like you in the world.

MISS WALLACE

Thank you. I'll be sure to see that Mr. Anderson gets your letter.

GLADYS

Oh no! I'm going to wait for him to deliver it myself. I want to see the look on his face when he reads it. And then I'm going to ask him why he refuses to print any of them! If he thinks he's going to run a paper for the people and then try to silence them, well he has another thing coming!

MISS WALLACE

(Somewhat concerned) But he's very busy this morning and I doubt that—

GLADYS

(Walking towards the couch) Don't you worry about that, Dear. I have plenty of time—
(Looks up) God willing.

(GLADYS Stops in front of WILLIAM, looks at him sharply and hits him with her cane.)

GLADYS, *Continued*

Here! Where are your manners? Can't you see that I'm an old woman? What's the matter with you?

WILLIAM

(Stands, rubbing his leg) I'm very sorry, Ma'am. *(Relinquishing his seat)* There you are.

GLADYS

Yes sir. I'm going to set right here and deliver my letter! And I'm not moving until I see him.

WILLIAM

(Crosses to MISS WALLACE'S desk) How long do you suppose it'll be, Miss Wallace?

MISS WALLACE

(Without looking up from stamping a pile of papers) I honestly couldn't say.

WILLIAM

I really need this job.

MISS WALLACE

You need the money.

WILLIAM

No, it isn't the money. I need this job to breathe. Have you ever felt so passionately about something that you realize your entire existence depends on it? And if you can just have this one thing in your life, then no matter what's going wrong in the world, you'll know that everything will be all right. That's how I feel about writing. Even if everything around me is crumbling, if I have a typewriter in front of me, I can create my own reality. The music of the keys and the slide of the carriage intertwine with my heartbeat in a symphony of soaring and unlimited potential. I don't know who I'd be if I couldn't write.

MISS WALLACE

Sounds like quite a love affair. You and your machine.

WILLIAM

I don't know about a love affair but... *(Changes subject)* Gosh, you sure are organized. I'd say you've got the hardest job at this paper.

MISS WALLACE

You don't know the half of it.

WILLIAM

Seriously, I don't know how you do it. How do you?

MISS WALLACE

How do I do what, Mr. Madison?

WILLIAM

Please. Call me William.

MISS WALLACE

Mr. Madison.

WILLIAM

How do you do life? You know, with you having my resume, you know a lot about me but I know nothing about you.

MISS WALLACE

(Placing her work aside) What do you want to know about me?

WILLIAM

Well, for starters, what's your first name, Miss Wallace?

MISS WALLACE

It's irrelevant.

WILLIAM

I see. Yes, let's not stray from business then. Where do you see yourself in five years?

MISS WALLACE

The same place I see myself every day. In a mirror. Anything else you'd like to know, William?

WILLIAM

That pretty much takes care of everything. Except...

MISS WALLACE

Yes?

WILLIAM

What are you doing for dinner tonight?

(RANDALL ENTERS just in time to hear WILLIAM's question.)

RANDALL

That's what I'd like to know. *(Confidently strides across the room to the desk; brushes WILLIAM aside)* What do you say? How about dinner tonight?

MISS WALLACE

(Annoyed) Ugh. Randall, shouldn't you be getting chased by dogs on your paper route?

RANDALL

I already made my deliveries and the dogs chased me the whole way. Dogs is always chasing me. But I ain't looking for a dog. I'm looking for a fox like you, Baby Doll.

MISS WALLACE

Randall, this is William. He's interviewing to join the writing staff.

(WILLIAM offers his hand for a handshake but RANDALL refuses.)

RANDALL

Oh, so Big Shot comes in here with his fancy education to write a love letter to my girl, eh?

WILLIAM

Hey, I never—

MISS WALLACE

I'm not your girl, Randall.

EDITH

Maybe if you'd finished high school, Randall, you'd be able to write her a letter too.

GLADYS

You kids all think you can just drop out of school and that the world's going to owe you a living! Look at you! A scrawny nothing, riding his bicycle all over town and ringing his little bell. You're pathetic!

RANDALL

Scrawny? That's a laugh! *(To MISS WALLACE)* Check it out, baby. *(Pushes his sleeve up and flexes his bicep)* I've been lifting weights. How about some eye candy to make the day go by?

WILLIAM

Look, buddy—

RANDALL

Is anybody talking to you, Shakespeare? Huh?

EDITH

The writer can't keep his nose clean, can he?

GLADYS

I think I have a tissue in my purse somewhere...

WILLIAM

Look, all I'm saying is that Miss Wallace obviously has a lot of work to do and I think it would be respectful if you left her alone.

RANDALL

Yeah, sure. I'll leave her alone. But I ain't gonna leave you alone. Not with her! I know what you're up to, Romeo, and I ain't gonna let you storm in here scheming on my girl while I'm out working my tail off.

BARBARA

If you call that working.

MISS WALLACE

Randall, besides the fact that you're half my age, we've never so much as been on a date.

RANDALL

Come on, don't try to hide it. You know we had a special day together.

MISS WALLACE

(After a brief pause) That was two years ago! And all I did was hold that door open for you!

RANDALL

A-ha!

(PETER ENTERS abruptly. HELEN meekly follows.)

PETER

Where's Anderson?

MISS WALLACE

May I help you, sir?

PETER

I represent The Mayor and I'll have you know that he is most displeased with what your editor wrote about him in today's paper.

WILLIAM

What does it say?

PETER

You look old enough to vote, young man so I'm sure you realize that tomorrow is Election Day. Which is hardly the time for Anderson to write a scathing exposé about The Mayor's alleged past affairs.

MISS WALLACE

I'm sorry, Sir, but Mr. Anderson is busy at the moment. I'm afraid you'll have to try back later.

PETER

Oh, I'll be back all right. The Mayor is furious and convinced that Anderson may cost him the race tomorrow. You can tell Anderson that not only is The Mayor on his way but he's already prepared Anderson's obituary! Ready for print!

WILLIAM

(Standing between PETER and MISS WALLACE) Hold on! Just a minute! I beg your pardon, Sir. But empty threats and intimidation tactics are hardly the way to get The Mayor re-elected.

MISS WALLACE

After all, how would something like this look in the papers?

PETER

As I said, I will be back WITH The Mayor and we look forward to our conversation with Mr. Anderson. Helen! The door!

(HELEN promptly holds open the door and PETER EXITS through it.)

HELEN

Oh dear, oh dear! *(EXITS)*

BARBARA

Frankly I wouldn't mind it if The Mayor tore him limb from limb. It would save me the trouble.

AUDREY

As the future Mrs. Anderson, I simply won't stand for you speaking this way!

BARBARA

Relax, Kid. There are a thousand other "future Mrs. Andersons" who feel the same way.

GLADYS

Ahh! "The future!" What future? People today? They're animals! No respect or concern for anybody! Mark my words: the world is going to end soon and it'll be all the better for it.

RANDALL

The world ain't gonna end. They been saying that for billions o' years and we're all still here. Besides, even if it does, by that time we'll all be living in outer space.

AUDREY

And since you've been living there for sometime already, you'll be able to give the guided tour.

BARBARA

(Stands) This is getting ridiculous. I need these divorce papers signed so if he's not coming out here, then I'm going in there.

EDITH

(Grabs BARBARA'S arm and pulls herself up) Not before I get my child support! I was here first.

AUDREY

(Pushing to the front of the line) If he's going to want to see anyone now, it's me!

GLADYS

I see what's going on here! A lady strolls in with her fancy charms, so she's going to get preferential treatment! I may not be the best-dressed woman around here and maybe my looks have faded, but by golly, I've got a piece to speak. Now stand aside!

(WOMEN ad-lib: Don't you push me! Get outta here, you old bag! Let me through! I demand to see Anderson now!)

MISS WALLACE

(Shouting) Just a minute! I think I hear the phone ringing! Quiet! *(Answers the phone)* Hello? *(To ALL)* It's Mr. Anderson. *(ALL immediately lean against desk in silence like children at a story hour.)* Yes, she's here. *(Pause)* Mhmm. They all are. *(Pause)* You'd like to see whom? *(Pause)* Oh, yes. Of course, Sir. Right away. *(Slowly hangs up the phone)*

EDITH

Well? What did he say? Who does he want to see?

MISS WALLACE

Mr. Madison. It's time for your interview.

WILLIAM

Oh!

(WOMEN ad-lib disgust: Ugh! That old fool! I can't wait forever. Locked away in his fortress like some king! Etc.)

WILLIAM

(To MISS WALLACE) All right then. This is it. Wish me luck. How do I look?

MISS WALLACE

You look very handsome, Mr. Madison. *(Pause; MISS WALLACE and WILLIAM exchange a smile.)* Follow me; I'll show you to his office.

(MISS WALLACE and WILLIAM EXIT to inner office.)

GLADYS

I've got an expiration date, you know!

RANDALL

Anderson'll never hire that guy. Never.

(ALL freeze as LIGHTS DIM TO BLUE in reception area and LIGHTS UP on inner office as MISS WALLACE and WILLIAM ENTER.)

WILLIAM

(Looks around; astonished) There's nobody here...

MISS WALLACE

(Fearful) William, can you keep a secret?

WILLIAM

Of course. Probably. I mean I guess so. Maybe...

MISS WALLACE

My first name is Daphne.

WILLIAM

That's your secret?

MISS WALLACE

And you don't have a job interview today.

WILLIAM

Oh. Was it rescheduled?

MISS WALLACE

We're not hiring any writers.

WILLIAM

I don't understand. Where's Mr. Anderson?

MISS WALLACE

He isn't here. He's gone. He's been gone for two months. He was overwhelmed and one day he confided in me that he was taking a leave of absence and he didn't know when he'd be back. No one but me was to know that he had left and he entrusted me to run the newspaper while he was gone. I've been here for four years and I thought that I knew him well enough so that I'd be able to cover for him. I thought he would only be gone for a few days. A week maybe—at most. I can't give his wives the run-around forever and I thought for sure that Gladys would have stopped writing by now. I can't keep this up any longer. It's gotten out of control. Now The Mayor is on his way...

WILLIAM

Why did you advertise that you needed a writer?

MISS WALLACE

(Panicked) I needed to find someone that I could trust. You know it's difficult to meet a good man in this city. I figured... one can really learn a lot about a person in a job interview.

WILLIAM

One certainly can. I'm beginning to learn an awful lot about you, Miss Wallace.

MISS WALLACE

Oh, I suppose I deserve that, but please don't look at me that way, William. Under normal circumstances, of course I would behave differently but I'm at my wit's end. I thought that for sure you'd help me. From the moment you walked through the door, I knew you were

MISS WALLACE, *Continued*

different. You're a gentleman and earnest and clever. So much more so than any of the others who came to interview.

WILLIAM

I see. So am I just the latest sap to come prancing in here under false pretenses to be made ridiculous? How many writers have you had this conversation with anyway? Why it's a wonder the whole city doesn't already know that Anderson is gone. What kind of a secret is this?

MISS WALLACE

Nobody else knows that he's gone, William. Only you and I know. I couldn't trust any of the other writers but I know that you're different. I know I can trust you. **Please**, I have to be able to trust you, William. I need your help. I can't do this anymore! I can't.

WILLIAM

All right, hold on. I've gotta— let me think for a minute. Just stay calm, okay? We'll figure something out. I'll help you.

MISS WALLACE

Oh, you will? Thank goodness! Oh thank you, William! Thank you so much! (*Throws arms around WILLIAM excitedly*)

WILLIAM

(*Pulling away from the embrace*) Look, don't thank me yet. We still have our work cut out for us. But you needn't worry, Miss Wallace. At least I hope not. And once we get through this, perhaps we'll see that we make a lovely team. We're in this together now. I promise.

MISS WALLACE

I'm counting on you.

WILLIAM

I know.

(*MISS WALLACE and WILLIAM EXIT to Exterior Office as LIGHTS RESTORE and ALL unfreeze.*)

AUDREY

Did you get the job?

WILLIAM

(*Stops in his tracks*) What job? Oh! The job! Right... well, I went into his office and he took one look at me and said... (*Sighs*) To tell you the truth... (*MISS WALLACE looks alarmed.*) ...No, I didn't. Not yet, anyway! I saw Mr. Anderson but he was busy and asked me to wait a little while longer. He seems like a nice man though.

WOMEN

A nice man?

EDITH

Who did you talk to?

BARBARA

Wait a second here. Who did you talk to? What does Anderson look like?

WILLIAM

(Exchanges a glance with MISS WALLACE) What does he look like? *(Pause)* He looks like...

MISS WALLACE

He's going to have a very long day.

PETER

(ENTERS dramatically) He's here! *(Slams the door in HELEN'S face. She opens the door a moment later to ENTER.)* The Mayor is here! Now, when he enters, I want everyone to stand. You are not to speak to him and you are not to touch him. Is this understood?

GLADYS

What if I speak at him? For example, giving him a piece of my mind.

PETER

Out of the question! You are never to speak!

AUDREY

What if he sneezes? Can we say "God bless you?"

PETER

Yes! Fine! But nothing more!

EDITH

What if he's choking? Can we save him?

PETER

No!

BARBARA

You wouldn't want us to save his life?

PETER

I'll save him! He won't be eating anything anyway.

GLADYS

Sour grapes.

PETER

He hates grapes!

RANDALL

I'm gonna shake his hand.

PETER

No! The Mayor is old and susceptible to disease! I don't want anyone to so much as breath on—

(THE MAYOR ENTERS.)

THE MAYOR

Well, good morning, everyone! How are we all doing today? Hmm?

(PETER hastily signals for everyone to stand. ALL stand.)

THE MAYOR, *Continued*

Oh, that's all right, you needn't put yourselves out for me. Relax.

(ALL begin to sit before PETER shakes his head and signals for them to remain standing. ALL are puzzled and STAND back up again.)

THE MAYOR, *Continued*

(To GLADYS) Hello there, youngster. I'm so glad to see you this morning. What's your name?

GLADYS

(To PETER) Can I answer him?

(PETER shakes his head fiercely. THE MAYOR turns to look at PETER who smiles.)

THE MAYOR

Go ahead, young lady.

GLADYS

(Condescending) My name is Gladys. And what is your name, you little reprobate?

THE MAYOR

Ha ha ha ha ha ha! Aren't you just adorable? Here, now I want you to have this.

(THE MAYOR signals to PETER who quickly grabs from a bag of election buttons that HELEN is holding. THE MAYOR takes one from PETER and places it in GLADYS'S hand.)

THE MAYOR

Now tomorrow you will remember to cast your vote for me!

GLADYS

(Sweetly) Thank you. I know exactly what to do with this.

(GLADYS places the pin on the ground and then smashes it with her cane. THE MAYOR turns beet red. His eyes bulge and he lifts his arm to backhand GLADYS.)

THE MAYOR

Why you—

(PETER quickly places a hand on THE MAYOR's shoulder.)

PETER

Sir!

THE MAYOR

(Reverts to a sweet demeanor) I want you to know that the senior citizens of this city mean a lot to me and I'm going to continue to do everything I can to make sure that you're taken care of.

GLADYS

Like what?

PETER

(Coughing to cover voice) No questions!

THE MAYOR

Look at these beautiful women. With faces like these I can tell who you're voting for tomorrow!

(GLADYS SITS.)

EDITH

Mhmm. The other guy.

BARBARA

Unlike you, we each only have one face.

(THE MAYOR boils but remains relatively calm, speaking through gritted teeth.)

THE MAYOR

That is so kind of you to say. Your concerns are important to me. I will remember this when I am re-elected and you can be sure that I will do something about it. *(Looks into EDITH's carriage)* My, what an ugly baby.

(THE MAYOR shoves the baby carriage out of his way. EDITH catches it just before it hits the wall.)

RANDALL

Hello, Mr. Mayor. *(Extends his hand for a handshake)*

THE MAYOR

(Cheerful) Well hello there, my good man! *(Forcefully offers his left hand for an awkward handshake; RANDALL stares at their shaking hands.)* It's great to see you on this fine morning at The Sun Rises Daily! What a wonderful institution of honest, hard-working blue-collar citizens. *(Under his breath)* So called. *(Returns to full volume)* I truly appreciate everything you do here on a daily basis to bring Democracy to print.

RANDALL

(Finally realizing) You shake hands with your left hand!

THE MAYOR

(Squeezes RANDALL'S hand, pulling him closer) That's right, Son. I'm left handed. I'm proud of who I am and I refuse to change just to satisfy others. With me, what you see is what you get.

RANDALL

Then what's the return policy?

THE MAYOR

(Releases RANDALL'S hand and erupts into an overdone, phony laugh) Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha! That's very clever. *(Wipes away a fake tear; darkens to a menacing growl)* Peter! Take this unenlightened young man outside for a breath of fresh air, will you? It's a beautiful day outside and I think he'd enjoy a look at our wonderful city that I've been honored to serve for the past six years.

RANDALL

I'm all set, actually. I was outside all morning...

THE MAYOR

I insist. It's time you've seen the light. Peter?

PETER

(Firmly takes RANDALL by the shoulders) Let's go, friend.

(THE MAYOR sneezes.)

OTHERS

God bless you.

THE MAYOR

Thank you.

(PETER EXITS with RANDALL to the outside. THE MAYOR Stands before MISS WALLACE and WILLIAM wearing a menacing smile.)

THE MAYOR, *Continued*

I have come to have a word with your editor.

MISS WALLACE

(Nervously) I-I'm sorry, Mr. Mayor, but Mr. Anderson is quite busy at the moment. No one can see him.

THE MAYOR

It is very important that I do.

MISS WALLACE

He left strict instructions not to be disturbed.

WILLIAM

There are no exceptions.

THE MAYOR

What do you go by, Sweetheart?

(PETER ENTERS.)

MISS WALLACE

Miss Wallace.

THE MAYOR

(Sweet and sinister) Miss Wallace. That's lovely. Will you deliver a message to our dear, respected friend, Mr. Anderson?

(MISS WALLACE cautiously looks for a pad of paper and pencil then holds it up, anticipating a dictation. After a moment, THE MAYOR shouts at the top of his lungs.)

THE MAYOR, *Continued*

You tell that stuffed-shirt editor of yours that if he doesn't drag his empty, spineless shell out of that office in the next 60 seconds, it'll take a team of detectives and surgeons a year to put him together again!

MISS WALLACE

I think I got all of that. I'll go tell him. Come on, William

(WILLIAM and MISS WALLACE EXIT to the inner office.)

AUDREY

Hey! Why does he get to go back there all of a sudden?

PETER

(Dusts THE MAYOR off and straightens his tie) You handled that brilliantly, Sir.

THE MAYOR

Thank you, Peter. I am exhausted. I need to lie down.

(PETER begins lifting and pushing EDITH off the couch and AUDREY is bumped off.)

PETER

You heard him, girls. Clear out! Move!

BARBARA, EDITH and AUDREY

(Ad lib) Hey! Watch it! Don't touch me! Etc.

PETER

You too, Grandma. Let's go!

(PETER takes GLADYS' arm to lift her. GLADYS hits him with her cane and STANDS. PETER brushes off the couch.)

THE MAYOR

(Crossing to couch and lying down) I'll have a glass of water with lime.

PETER

(Spins around looking for water.) Water! Where is the water served here?

EDITH

This is a newspaper office not a restaurant.

BARBARA

There is a fountain in the hall. Good luck finding a lime anywhere close by.

GLADYS

I know a café on State Street.

PETER

State Street! That's only twelve blocks!

HELEN

Sir, I'd be happy to go and get it for you—

PETER

I'll do it! We can't afford for anything else to go wrong. Hold on, Sir. I'll be right back!

(PETER EXITS on a run. The DOOR SLAMS and LIGHTS DIM TO BLUE. ALL FREEZE as LIGHTS UPS on MISS WALLACE and WILLIAM in the inner office.)

MISS WALLACE

What'll we do now, William? That mayor is a lunatic. If he finds out that there's no Anderson and that I wrote that editorial, there's no telling what he'll do.

WILLIAM

Calm down, all right? I've got a plan.

MISS WALLACE

You do?

WILLIAM

And it just might work!

MISS WALLACE

(Takes WILLIAM by the hand) Thank goodness!

(WILLIAM takes MISS WALLACE's hand in both of his. THEY SMILE briefly.)

WILLIAM

Come on then, let's go.

(WILLIAM opens the door to the outer office, which breaks the freeze and LIGHTS RESTORE. Just before he enters WILLIAM growls in frustration and stomps his feet.)

WILLIAM

(ENTERING) Ugh! I am so angry! *(Throws a pencil from the desk on the floor)* Ugh! I am mad!

(MISS WALLACE ENTERS.)

AUDREY

What happened?

WILLIAM

I came here for a job interview and that darn editor will not even look at my work! He is so rude! He is a rude, rude man!

EDITH

The rudest.

BARBARA

Yeah, he's the worst.

WILLIAM

I am a great writer! But will he read my work? Will he publish it?! No! He will not publish it!

GLADYS

He won't publish any of my work either!

WILLIAM

I am giving him the chance to publish some honest journalism in his paper and instead he wants to continue printing lowbrow stories.

THE MAYOR

That blithering fool! A child could run this paper better than he does!

EDITH

Hear, hear!

WILLIAM

Did I cover everybody?

RANDALL

(ENTERS through STAGE LEFT door, appearing disheveled, beaten and bruised) How about me?

WILLIAM

Oh, that's right. You're fired.

RANDALL

What?

WILLIAM

I have had it! I am going to get my revenge on him. Do you know what I am going to do?

OTHERS

What?

WILLIAM

I am going to go home!

OTHERS

What?

RANDALL

Good.

WILLIAM

That is right. I am going to go home! That will show him! He is not worth my time. Thank you, Miss Wallace.

(MISS WALLACE'S makes a failed attempt to shake his hand, trying to play along.)

WILLIAM, *Continued*

(Crossing to door and flinging it wide open) I will be leaving right now. Who is with me?

(No one moves. The room is silent. Suddenly THE MAYOR leaps to his feet and charges the front desk shouting violently.)

THE MAYOR

ARE YOU IN THERE, ANDERSON? COME ON OUT WITH YOUR TAIL BETWEEN YOUR LEGS, YOU COWARD! NOBODY DRAGS MY NAME THROUGH THE MUD AND GETS AWAY WITH IT! GET OUT HERE AND I'LL SHOW YOU WHAT IT'S LIKE!

(MRS. KEELER ENTERS through the open door. She sees RANDALL and approaches.)

MRS. KEELER

(To RANDALL) Pardon me. Young man, will you help me with the boxes outside?

RANDALL

Sure.

(RANDALL EXITS with MRS. KEELER. MISS WALLACE pulls WILLIAM aside and away from the others. THE MAYOR sits at her desk.)

MISS WALLACE

That was your plan?

WILLIAM

Hold on. It might still work...

(MRS. KEELER ENTERS with RANDALL close behind. He carries a large box labeled "I.D.I.O.T.")

GLADYS

What's this, Randall? You got a box to mail yourself off in?

RANDALL

(Places the box in front of the desk) There's about a hundred of these in the street.

WILLIAM

(Crossing toward RANDALL) Gosh! A hundred of them? Let's all go outside and take a look!

(Lifts EDITH, BARBARA, GLADYS, and AUDREY up and guides them toward the door.)

WILLIAM, *Continued*

I'll help you up, miss. Yes, sir! There you go. Right this way now, everyone!

GLADYS

Can it, writer!

EDITH

(Shuffling back to her seat) We're not going anywhere.

AUDREY

What is all of this?

MRS. KEELER

This is Mr. Anderson's dessert order. I'm with the I.D.I.O.T.

BARBARA

You mean Randall? You don't have to spell it. He knows what he is.

MRS. KEELER

No. The I.D.I.O.T. is the International Dessert Institute of Tomorrow. We serve only the finest baked goods and pride ourselves on exceptional quality. I'm Mrs. Keeler, the chairwoman.

AUDREY

If you're the chairwoman of an international organization, then why are you making deliveries?

MRS. KEELER

It isn't often that we receive such a large order. I thought it appropriate to deliver it personally and to express my appreciation for Mr. Anderson's patronage. Can you imagine? Over 33,000 key lime pies!

MISS WALLACE

Thirty-three...thousand?

MRS. KEELER

Yes. Thirty-three thousand, three hundred thirty-three to be exact. Of course I can't imagine what he's going to do with all of them. But if you'll have him sign here, I'll collect his payment and be on my way.

(A group of IRATE PROTESTERS ENTER.)

MISS WALLACE

Thirty-three thousand?

MRS. KEELER

And three hundred and thirty three.

PROTEST LEADER

Now what's all this funny business with the newspaper funnies section? How come my favorite comic strip got replaced with this stupid one instead? Where is the editor?

(LIGHTS DIM TO BLUE as ALL freeze except MISS WALLACE and WILLIAM.)

MISS WALLACE

I can't pay for 33,000 pies!

WILLIAM

If you can't pay for 33,000 pies, then why on Earth did you order 33,333?

MISS WALLACE

Key lime is his favorite.

WILLIAM

(Alarmed) So you ordered 33,333 of them?

MISS WALLACE

No! I kept placing his weekly order of three to avoid suspicion. I must have accidentally hit the three on the typewriter too many times.

WILLIAM

How do you accidentally hit a number four extra times? That isn't even possible on a typewriter!

MISS WALLACE

We just got one of those new *Selectric* typewriters everyone's talking about. I'm trying my best to learn how to use it but the keys are so sensitive! If your finger stays on the key just a moment too long, it—oh, what does it matter, anyway?! I've made a mess of everything! I'm sorry that I dragged you into this. You must think very badly of me.

WILLIAM

(Gravely) Look, Miss Wallace, I've gotten more than I bargained here today. I came here for my dream job and all the while it never existed for me in the first place.

MISS WALLACE

I know. I'm sorry that I tricked you into coming here and if you want to leave, then I won't blame you for it. I just...from the moment I first saw you, I just knew you were the one for me. I mean... the one who could help me.

WILLIAM

(Solemn) Have you ever felt so passionately about something that you realize your entire existence depends upon it? And if you can just have this one thing in your life, then no matter what's going wrong in the world, you'll know that everything will be all right.

MISS WALLACE

(Averting her eyes) That's how you feel about writing.

WILLIAM

(Sincerely) That's how I feel about you. *(MISS WALLACE looks up in surprise.)* Even if everything around me is crumbling, if I could be with you then I know I'd survive. My life before was an imaginary one, lived out through poetry and prose. But you've become my reality. I don't care about the job or under what circumstance we've met. All that matters now is that we're together. I don't know who I'll be if I can't be with you, Daphne.

MISS WALLACE

William, right now I don't know where I'd be without you. But I just can't see a way out of this for me. I've got to confess. I have to tell them the truth.

WILLIAM

(Takes MISS WALLACE'S arm) No! I won't let you take the fall for this, Daphne.

MISS WALLACE

There's no point in trying to save me, William.

WILLIAM

Sure there is. Because I'm in love with you, Daphne. And I'll do whatever it takes to be with you.

(WILLIAM leans in for the kiss; LIGHTS RESTORE and break the freeze.)

EDITH

(Seeing the kiss) Hmph. I guess she wasn't having an affair with Anderson after all.

BARBARA

When he was with you, he was having an affair with me.

GLADYS and AUDREY

And me too.

(ALL gasp.)

AUDREY

Really?

GLADYS

Of course not, *really!* (*OTHERS exhale in relief.*) I've got self-respect! Unlike *some* people here. Do you think I'd ever go out in public in those shoes?

(GLADYS points to AUDREY's shoes. AUDREY shrugs. PETER pushes through THE PROTESTERS to ENTER through the door. He is soaked with sweat, holding a glass of water with a lime.)

PETER

Here is your water, Mr. Mayor.

THE MAYOR

Peter, honestly, what took you so long? My mouth is dryer than a sheet of sandpaper in the Sahara.

PETER

I'm sorry, Sir. I got your water from the fountain in the hall but then I had to go to the café on State Street. I told them that all I wanted was a lime but the waiter seated me and gave me a menu.

GLADYS

See? See?

MISS WALLACE

(Taking charge) Everyone, I have an announcement to make. I have to tell you that—

This is Not the End of the Play

Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes