

THE FRONT PAGE
Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur.

Walter Burns, Hildy Johnson, 2 men

Act Three

Chicago, 1920's. The pressroom of the Criminal Courts building. Ace reporter Hildy Johnson has decided to give up being a reporter and marry his fiancée. Everything is stopping him from leaving the newsroom. A convicted murderer, Earl Williams, has escaped from prison on the eve of his execution. Hildy has him hidden in a roll top desk in the newsroom, but is still determined to meet his fiancée at the train station. His editor, the charismatic and unscrupulous, Walter Burns, refuses to let him go.

WALTER
(grabbing Hildy's arm)

Where the hell do you think you're going?

HILDY
Let go of me! I gotta get my girl! She's downstairs in a cab all alone.

WALTER
Your girl! Good God, what are you? Some puking college boy! Why, in time of war you could be shot for what you're doing – for less than you're doing!

HILDY
To hell with you – there's your story- locked up in that desk! Smear it all over the front page – Earl Williams caught by the Examiner – and take all the credit... I covered your story and I covered it God damn right... Now I'm getting' out...

WALTER
You drooling saphead... What do you mean- a story? You've got the whole city by the seat of the pants!

HILDY
I know all about that, but...

WALTER
You know hell – You got the brains of a pancake... Listen. Hildy, if I didn't have your interests at heart would I be wastin' time now arguin' with you! You've done somethin' big – you've stepped into a new class...

HILDY
(D'artagnan never gave Richelieu an ear more startled or more innocent)
Huh?

WALTER
Listen, we'll make such monkeys out of these ward heelers that *nobody* will vote for them- not even their *wives*.

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HILDY

Expose 'em, huh...

WALTER

Expose 'em! Crucify 'em ! We're gonna keep Williams under cover till morning so's the Examiner can break the story exclusive.... Then we'll let the Senator in on the capture – share the glory with him.

HILDY

I see – I see! (*Blinking and warming up.*)

WALTER

You've kicked over the whole City Hall like an applecart. You've got the Mayor and Hartman back against a wall. You've put one administration out and another in. ... This ain't a newspaper story – it's a career. And you standin' there bellyachin' about some girl...

HILDY

Jesus, I – I wasn't figuring it that way, I guess. We'll be the white haired boys, won't we?

WALTER

Why, they'll be naming streets after you. Johnson Street! You and I and the Senator are going to *run* this town.. Do you understand that?

HILDY

Yeah... Yeah! But- wait a minute- we can't leave Williams here... One of those reporters'll...

WALTER

We're going to take him over to my private office right away... Where's the Examiner phone?

HILDY

That one. The red one. How the hell you gonna do it? They'll see him!

WALTER

Not if he's inside the desk. We'll carry the desk over. (*into phone*) Hello! Examiner. Give me Duffy. .. I'd have had him there now if you hadn't given me such an argument.

HILDY

You can't take that out. It's crawling with cops outside.

WALTER

We'll lower it out of the window with pulleys. Quit stallin'. (*To Hildy*) Hildy! Get that machine and start pounding out a lead, will you... Come on- snap into it...

HILDY

How much you want on it?

WALTER

All the words you got...

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HILDY

Where the hell is there some paper?

WALTER
(into phone)

Hello... Hello, Duffy. Get set! We got the biggest story in the world. Earl Williams caught by the Examiner... exclusive,

(Hildy has moved over to Bensinger's desk and is opening the drawers, frantically searching for paper.)

WALTER
(continuing into phone)

Duffy! Send down word to Butch McGuirk I want ten huskies from the circulation department to lam over here –press room criminal courts building. That's what I said – Butch McGuirk. *(To Hildy)* He'll get that desk out – nothin' ever stopped those boys yet.

(Hildy has unearthed a full package of Bensinger's personal stationary. He now picks up the typewriter.)

WALTER

Now listen, Duffy. I want you to tear out the whole front page... That's what I said – the whole front page... out... Johnson's writing the lead...