

Meet John Doe

(A one-hour radio play)

Based on the screenplay (shooting draft, 1941) by Robert Riskin
and the story by Richard Connell and Robert Presnell

The original script is in the public domain.

by

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DESCRIPTION

A newspaper wanting to increase its circulation runs a scam when it creates a fictional John Doe, an Everyman who has threatened to jump off the roof of City Hall on Christmas Eve to protest the injustices of the world. They then hire a man needing money to impersonate this John Doe, as they call him, with the stipulation that on Christmas Day, he disappears with his payment in hand. However, his “protest” catches the attention of the nation, and an inadvertent political movement begins, co-opted by the owner of the newspaper for his own political ends. It all concludes on the rooftop of City Hall on Christmas Eve.

MAIN CHARACTERS

- JOHN WILLOUGHBY - 30s, an intelligent drifter
- COLONEL - 40s, JOHN’s gruff and misanthropic bosom buddy
- HENRY CONNELL - 60s, hard-boiled newspaper editor
- ANN MITCHELL - 30s, ambitious newspaper reporter
- D.B. NORTON - 60s, newspaper owner and ruthless businessman

UTILITY CHARACTER-FEMALE

- MATTIE (secretary)
- EDITH (photographer)
- MOTHER (Ann’s mother)
- STORMY (studio manager)
- VELMA (waitress in bar)

UTILITY CHARACTER-MALE

- OFFICE CLERK
- JOE (compositor)
- ANGELFACE

- EMCEE
- PILOT's VOICE

* * * * *

SOUND: A BUSY OFFICE: PHONES, TYPEWRITERS, ETC.

OFFICE CLERK

Ann Mitchell?

ANN

Yes?

OFFICE CLERK

Sorry, but here's your pink slip. You used to work for The Bulletin: "A free press for a free people." You now don't work for The New Bulletin, "A streamlined newspaper for a streamlined age," courtesy of Mr. D.B. Norton, new overlord, and Mr. Henry Connell, managing overlord. My work here is finished.

ANN

Mr. Connell, I can't be without work—

CONNELL

Sorry, Ann. I gotta clean house, and your kind of column is dead—just lavender and silk when Mr. D.B. Norton wants gin and nylon. He wants circulation.

ANN

I can gin and nylon with the best [of 'em]—

CONNELL

Ann, cashier's got your check, which you'll get when you finish your last column. Sorry, but you gotta go. So go.

SOUND: SLAMMING DOOR WITH REVERB.

ANN

Aaaarrggghhhh! Damn! Heads're rolling, are they? We'll see whose heads're gonna roll. Joe! Joe!

JOE

Yeah, Ann?

ANN

Get your pad and pencil—here comes my last column.

JOE

You're supposed to type it out—

ANN

Start writing!

JOE

I'm writing, I'm writing!

ANN

Okay—here goes. "Below is a letter which reached my desk this morning." You got that?

JOE

I don't see a letter, but I'm writing it down.

ANN

"It's a commentary on what we laughingly call the civilized world. 'Dear Miss Mitchell: Four years ago I was fired from my job. Since then I can't get another one. At first I thought it was my fault, but I realized it's bigger than me. The whole world has gone to the dogs, and someone's gotta shock everyone hard so they can change it. So in protest I'm going to commit suicide—"

JOE

Ann!

ANN

(ignores him)

"—by jumping off the City Hall roof on Christmas Eve!"

JOE

Ann!

ANN

(ignores him)

"Signed, A disgusted American citizen, John Doe." What?

JOE

Ann, you can't have a guy commit suicide, and then do it on Christmas Eve! How many enemies do you want to make?

ANN

For what this newspaper just did to me?

JOE

And to me, too—

ANN

Oh, Joe, no! Then a thousand, a million, enemies isn't enough. Besides, it's not real—just for shock value, for gin and nylon, for circulation—like leaving a dead fish in D.B. Norton's mailbox. I got one last thing to say. Write.

JOE

One dead fish coming up.

ANN

“Final note: If you ask this columnist, the wrong people are jumping off roofs.” You gonna show it to Connell?

JOE

Why be saints? This fish is going in the mailbox.

ANN

Let's give 'em some circulation.

ANN & JOE

Circulation!

* * * * *

SOUND: NEWSPAPER PRESSES MORPH INTO A BUSY OFFICE.

MATTIE

I went to Ann Mitchell's house, again, like you wanted me to.

CONNELL

And?

MATTIE

What'd'ya expect? It's in a bad way there. You know she supports a mother and two sisters.

CONNELL

Has she come back yet?

MATTIE

Nope. Her mom said that when Ann left the house she said she was going on a roaring drunk.

CONNELL

Great—only 2361 bars to check.

MATTIE

And how would you know that number?

CONNELL

I'm the editor of a newspaper.

MATTIE

You know the biggest thing I found out? Remember Dr. John Mitchell?

CONNELL

Indeed I do. Lots of stories about him. He had the gift of the laying on of those doctor hands.

MATTIE

That was her dad.

CONNELL

Didn't know that. I remember running his obit. Top of the page.

ANN

Hello hello hello, Henry. And Mattie.

MATTIE

Well, sister, you are one wanted woman. You want me in or out?

CONNELL

You've done your job—you can go.

MATTIE

Welcome back—for what it's worth.

ANN

I hear you've been wanting to see me. Because I remember, distinctly, being fired.

CONNELL

Which you still are. But you have property that belongs to this newspaper, and I'd like to have it!

ANN

Which is?

CONNELL

The letter from John Doe.

ANN

Oh.

CONNELL

The whole place is in an uproar. We've got to find him. The letter's our only clue.

ANN

There is no letter.

CONNELL

What?

ANN

There is no letter. I made it up. You said you wanted fireworks, sledgehammers. Circulation.

CONNELL

I think I just lost all of mine. There are nine jobs waiting for this guy. Twenty-two families want to board. Five women want to marry him, and the Mayor's ready to adopt him, just so he won't jump off his building. And you—there's only one thing to do—drop the whole business quickly. We'll run a story. Say John Doe was in here, sorry he wrote the letter—that would do it! Came in here and I made him change his mind. "New Bulletin editor saves John Doe's life." That'll work. I'll get it written it up.

ANN

Such a genius of a newspaperman!

CONNELL

I like my job as well as the next guy.

ANN

But you don't mind taking mine away.

CONNELL

Wasn't my call.

ANN

You got bumped up to shoot some life into this dying paper because you've always had those kinds of ideas, just that no one ever listened to you, the lowly copy desk editor, until D.B. Norton needed a hatchet man—

CONNELL

It's "Managing Editor" in gold leaf on the door.

ANN

So do some managing! You get the whole town curious about this man and then, just like that, you're going to play it safe and bury him. There's enough circulation in that man to fill the veins of 10 managing editors.

CONNELL

In what man?

ANN

In our John Doe! The one I made up!

CONNELL

Making him up doesn't make him real.

ANN

Minor matter. Between now and Christmas Eve, when he's gonna jump, I'd run a daily post starting with his boyhood, his schooling, his first job! A wide-eyed youngster facing a chaotic world. The problem of the average man, of all the John Does in the world. Now, then comes the drama. He meets discouragement. He finds the world has feet of clay. His ideals crumble. So what does he do? He decides to commit suicide in protest against the state of civilization. He thinks of the river! But no, no, he has a better idea. The City Hall. Why? Because he wants to attract attention, he wants to make a political statement, he wants to get a few things off his chest—who cares what?—and this is the only way he can get himself heard.

CONNELL

So he writes you a letter? I can't believe I'm discussing this like it's an actual—

ANN

Open your mind. Maybe he's written a hundred letters, to all the papers, no one takes him seriously. But he sees my lavender and silk, knows I have a heart—

CONNELL

A steel trap—

ANN

And I go dig him up because I am a kick-ass reporter. He is so grateful, he pours out his soul to me, and from now on we run his quotes: "I protest, by John Doe." He protests against all the evils in the world: the greed, the lust, the hate, the fear, all of man's inhumanity to man. Arguments will start. Should he commit suicide or should he not! People will write in pleading with him. We keep the question in play, right up to Christmas Eve.

CONNELL

And then?

ANN

Then he has a change of heart—sees the beauty of it all. You can give him that job. No one dies. Christmas comes. The Lord is risen.

CONNELL

That's Easter.

ANN

Doesn't matter—that's how people will feel. See?

CONNELL

Except John Doe isn't real!

ANN

So we hire somebody for the job.

CONNELL

Someone to say he's gonna commit suicide on Christmas Eve—that it?

ANN

Lots of desperate people out there.

CONNELL

Do me a favor, will you? Go out and get married and have a lot of babies—I gotta get my story in so I can repair what you did. Mattie!

ANN

You're supposed to be a smart guy! If it was raining hundred dollar bills, you'd be out looking for a dime you lost some place.

CONNELL

Listening to a mad woman—Mattie!

SOUND: A NEWSPAPER OPENING.

MATTIE

Did you see what the Chronicle is running on John Doe in today's paper? They're saying it's a fake. Imagine that!

CONNELL

"Amateur journalism. Palpably phony."

MATTIE

Palpably phony.

CONNELL

"It's a wonder anyone is taking it seriously."

MATTIE

My, my.

ANN

You have John Doe walk in, call the whole thing off: how's that gonna to play after this?

CONNELL

You've got me pinned to the wall.

MATTIE

I also got a dozen bums shoulder to shoulder out there all saying they wrote the letter.

ANN

Tell them all to wait.

MATTIE

Should I?

CONNELL

I fired her, but she's not staying very fired.

MATTIE

Not my fault.

ANN

Look, Mr. Connell, one of those men is your John Doe. They're desperate and will do anything for a cup of coffee—believe me, I know. Pick one out and you can make that rag eat its words—more circulation, more circulation—

MATTIE

If you ask me, "John Doe" is dynamite down your underwear.

CONNELL

That doesn't mean she isn't right. We can't let the Chronicle know the truth, so we've got to produce a John Doe, and it might as well be now. Go tell 'em to wait.

MATTIE

I am gone.

CONNELL

And you?

ANN

My job back.

CONNELL

Plus a finder's fee, I suppose?

ANN

A thousand dollars for keeping me from writing the words "I, Ann Mitchell, hereby certify that the John Doe letter was created by me—"

CONNELL

The going price these days?

ANN

It's the going price for my verified mom and two kid sisters.

CONNELL

Packs everything, including heat.

ANN

What's a poor girl gonna do?

CONNELL

Okay, Miss Mitchell, you've got yourself a deal.

ANN

Do you have to clear it with Norton?

CONNELL

I'll clear it with him—Mattie, show the first one in!—I have a feeling this isn't going to bother him at all. All right, have a seat over there. What's your name?

JOHN

Willoughby. Long John Willoughby.

CONNELL

And who's he?

COLONEL

I'm the Colonel—we travel together. We watch each other's backs.

CONNELL

What're you doing up here if you're traveling?

JOHN

The paper said there were some jobs around loose because of this John Doe thing. Thought there might be one left over for me.

ANN

Had any schooling?

JOHN

A little.

ANN

What do you do when you work?

JOHN

Baseball pitcher, until I busted my arm pitching a nineteen-inning game.

ANN

Where'd you play?

JOHN

Bush leagues mostly.

CONNELL

Got any family?

JOHN

No I don't.

ANN

So you're willing to make some money?

JOHN

Does a thirsty man drink water?

ANN

You be willing to say you wrote that John Doe letter—and do what we tell you to do?

JOHN

If that's what it takes, then I'll take it.

ANN

Look at the face, Henry—it's perfect.

COLONEL

Can we have those sandwiches on your desk?

CONNELL

Go ahead.

COLONEL

And the milk?

CONNELL

Sure.

COLONEL

Because we're hungry in the plural. Here, John.

JOHN

Thanks. It's been a while.

COLONEL

This John Doe business is batty, if you ask me.

ANN

Nobody asked you.

JOHN

That's never stopped him.

COLONEL

Trying to improve the world by jumping off buildings. You couldn't improve the world if the building jumped on you!

JOHN

The Colonel hates people. "Good faith" is just another dodge to him.

CONNELL

He likes you well enough to stick around.

JOHN

Met him in a box car a coupla years ago. I was playin' my harmonica; he joins in with his ocarina. Haven't been able to shake him since.

ANN

Excuse us—keep eating—we'll be right back. Henry, Henry!

(in a whisper)

He's perfect. He's the one. A baseball player. What could be more American!

CONNELL

I wish he had a family, though.

ANN

We'll have a hero without a family—something new for the masses to take in. He stands alone. Against the world. People love that fairy tale, and that's what'll make them believe him. Come on. That's our man. He's made to order.

CONNELL

How're you sure he'll fall into line?

ANN

When you're desperate for money, a person can pull that string for a long time. He's our man, I tell you. We'll clean him up, put him in a hotel room, under bodyguards. We'll make him a mystery, then reveal him. Henry, it's time to talk contract. You agree?

CONNELL

I agree. It's time to talk contract.

ANN

C'mon.

CONNELL

John, this job is yours if you want it. Colonel, can we trust you?

COLONEL

I hate everything about what you're doing, but I've got his back if he wants to do this.

JOHN

I'm in.

COLONEL

The first thing I want is a copy of the John Doe letter in your own hand.

ANN

We'll get it done.

CONNELL

This is the agreement: exclusive story under your name from now until Christmas Eve. On Christmas day you get one railroad ticket out of town.

JOHN

Two.

CONNELL

Two, sorry.

JOHN

And what about my arm? It'd be great if you could have Bone-Setter Brown fix my arm, so I could play again.

CONNELL

Done. Mattie, type this up—you sign it.

JOHN

And I won't have to jump.

ANN

That's just a come-on. We're not barbarians—two train tix Christmas Day and you're outta here.

CONNELL

From now on, you answer to John Doe, not Long John Willoughby.

JOHN

All right.

CONNELL

Mattie'll have fifty dollars spending money for you. And let the good times roll.

ANN

Take it easy, John Doe.

CONNELL

Get them set up at the hotel so we can get the rumors started. Then pound the typewriter. We can't let the Chronicle get any traction on what they've said. We need to blast their heads off.

ANN

Before you pop off too many rounds, don't forget that grand check for a grand. I'll take care of the rest: hotel, clothes, bodyguard.

CONNELL

Even in the rush, a memory like an elephant.

ANN

And the grace of a gazelle. Goodbye.

CONNELL

Don't leave out "fierce like a viper" and "foxy like"—a fox, I guess. A viper and a fox. Mattie! Get me Norton on the phone. Mr. Norton? Have I got a story for you. We are gonna have an interesting Christmas.

* * * * *

SOUND: NEWSPAPER PRESSES, THEN THE OPENING OF A DOOR.

JOHN

Colonel, smell the air in this hotel room—smells nice. Smell nice to you?

ANGELFACE

I'm just here to guard your carcass. Not his, just yours.

COLONEL

You ain't gonna get me to stay here.

JOHN

Sure you are.

COLONEL

No I'm not. That spot under the bridge where we slept the other night's good enough for me. You remember, don't you, we were headed for the Columbia River country before all this John Doe business came up.

JOHN

Did your ears pop coming up in the elevator?

COLONEL

Long John—I'm telling you—this is no good. That fifty bucks in your pocket's already beginning to show up on you.

JOHN

Stop worrying, Colonel. I got things covered for us.

ANGELFACE

Here's a newspaper. I can get you a paper, too.

COLONEL

I don't read papers and I don't listen to radios. I know the world's been shaved by a drunken barber, and I don't have to read about it.

ANGELFACE

Suit yourself.

COLONEL

I'm trying to. I've seen guys like you go under before, you know. Guys that never had a worry—

JOHN

Except for my arm—my means of production—

COLONEL

—then they get some money and go screwy.

JOHN

That's not me, Colonel. Fifty bucks ain't going to ruin me. And I'm getting my arm fixed.

COLONEL

He starts wantin' to go into restaurants—

JOHN

You're not listening to me again.

COLONEL

He wants to sit at a table and eat salads—and cup cakes—and tea—boy, what that food will do to your system!

JOHN

Sorry—got him wound up—

COLONEL

The next thing, he can't sleep unless he has a bed. I seen plenty start out with fifty bucks and wind up with a bank account!

ANGELFACE

What's the matter with a bank account?

COLONEL

Long John, when you become a guy with a bank account, they got you. They got you!

ANGELFACE
Who's got him?

COLONEL
The heelots!

ANGELFACE
Who?

JOHN
Hey. There's the City Hall tower I'm supposed to jump from.

ANGELFACE
Who's got him?

COLONEL
The heelots!

JOHN
Say, is this one of those places where you ring if you want something?

COLONEL
See? It's already working on your brain!

ANGELFACE
Just dial zero on the phone.

JOHN
I have always wanted to do this!

SOUND: DIALING "ZERO" ON THE PHONE.

COLONEL
The heelots are goin' to get you!

JOHN
Will you send up three hamburgers with all the trimmings—

COLONEL
Two.

JOHN
—three chocolate ice cream sodas—

COLONEL

Two.

JOHN

—and three pieces of apple pie? No, apple, with cheese.

COLONEL

Two!

JOHN

Yeah. Thank you.

SOUND: HANDSET REPLACED.

COLONEL

Heelots!

ANGELFACE

Who are the heelots?

COLONEL

Listen, sucker, you ever been broke?

JOHN

You asked for it now.

ANGELFACE

Sure. Often. Which is why I'm guardin' him.

COLONEL

All right. You're walking along—not a nickel in your jeans—free as the wind—hundreds pass you by in every line of business—nice, gentle people—and they let you alone. Right? Then you get some money, and what happens? All those nice, sweet, gentle people become heelots. A lotta heels. They begin creeping up on you—trying to sell you something.

JOHN

I told you.

COLONEL

They've got long claws and they get a strangle-hold on you—and you squirm and duck and shout and you try to push 'em away—but you haven't got a chance—they've got you! First thing you know, you own things. A car, for instance.

JOHN

He's good.

COLONEL

Now your whole life is messed up with more stuff—license fees—
and number plates—and gas and oil—and taxes and insurance—
and identification cards—and letters—and bills—and flat tires—
and traffic tickets and motorcycle cops and court rooms—and
lawyers—and fines—and a million and one other things.

JOHN

Here it comes across the plate.

COLONEL

And what happens? You're not the free and happy guy you used
to be. You gotta have money to pay for all those things—so you
go after what the other feller's got—and there you are—you're a
heelot yourself!

JOHN

You win, Colonel. Here's the fifty. Go on out and get rid of it.

COLONEL

As fast as I can! Gonna get some canned goods—a fishing rod—
and the rest I'm givin' away.

ANGELFACE

Givin' away? You can give it to me!

JOHN

No luck—he wants to save your soul!

SOUND: DOOR OPENING.

COLONEL

And here comes the queen of the heelots herself.

JOHN

I've got it covered, Colonel.

ANN

Well, well, well!

COLONEL

I'm goin'!

ANN

So go.

JOHN

I'll catch up with you—be sure to give all of it away that you can give.

COLONEL

Columbia River's calling.

ANN

So answer it. Stand outside, okay? I've got a photographer coming, so let me know when she's here.

ANGELFACE

Sure thing.

SOUND: DOOR CLOSED.

JOHN

A photographer?

ANN

It's all in what people see, John Doe—no one reads anymore, so they don't think anymore, they just look, and then they feel, and then they have opinions, and then we print newspapers. The great chain of being. We're gonna need some action in these pictures.

JOHN

Action?

ANN

Can you do it?

JOHN

Like I'm getting ready to pitch?

ANN

No, no, no. Not that, not something so—ordinary. Sit down. Let me comb your hair. There. That's better. You know, John Doe's got a nice face. Does he have a serious face?

JOHN

Can't. I'm feeling too good. And don't tell the Colonel that.

ANN

You are supposed to be disgusted with all of civilization.

JOHN

All of it?

ANN

Yes, you're sore at the world. Come on, now—mean! No! No! You don't have to smell the world! All right, stand up. Now let's see what you look like when you protest.

JOHN

Against what?

ANN

Against anything—it doesn't matter to them. Just protest.

JOHN
(laughs)

You got me—I just can't.

SOUND: DOOR OPENS.

EDITH

Here I am—have camera, will click.

ANN

Watch him close. I'm the umpire, and you just cut the heart of the plate with your fast one and I call it a ball. Ball! And it ain't the first one I've called like that. Ball! Ball!

JOHN
(real, not mock, anger)

Oh, you did, huh?

ANN

Yeah, I did!

JOHN

Why can't you call right, you bone-headed, pig-eared, pot-bellied—

ANN

Grab it, Edith, grab it! Grab it!

EDITH

Got it.

ANN

That's gonna go iconic! Yeah! Now read this with that same look, that same "I wanna kill the goddamn ump" look—

JOHN

"I protest against the collapse of decency in the world." "I protest against corruption in local politics." "I protest against all the brutality—"

ANN

Yeah, you got it. Wait till that starts hitting the streets!

JOHN

Is that okay? I do okay?

ANN

More than okay. Better than okay, John Doe, better than okay.

* * * * *

SOUND: MIXED IN WITH "AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL" IS JOHN'S VOICE, LOUD AND WITH ECHOES, AS IF HE'S IN A LARGE STADIUM.

JOHN

"I protest against the collapse of decency in the world." "I protest against corruption in politics." "I protest against politicians being in league with crime." "I protest against welfare being used as political football." "I protest against all the brutality and slaughter in the world."

* * * * *

SOUND: THE ECHOING REVERB OF JOHN DOE'S VOICE FADING AWAY.

ANN

Personally, Mr. Norton, I think it's just plain nuts if you let him drop it now. John Doe's going over like a house on fire!

NORTON

What are you afraid of, Connell? It's doubled our circulation, on the brink of even more.

CONNELL

Because everybody knows, in their gut, it's a phony—it's John Doe in the flesh they want.

ANN

So let's reveal the mystery. Mr. Norton—why not put him on your radio station?

NORTON

Why not? Station's no good if I don't use it.

CONNELL

Because we don't know what this bush-league pitcher will do under pressure. Get him out of town before this thing explodes in our pants!

ANN

If you do, Mr. Norton, you're just as much of a loser as he is! And excuse me for saying so.

CONNELL

Because you hate losing your meal ticket.

ANN

That meal ticket covers us both, and I like mine! But it's also a windfall for you, Mr. Norton—no secret about you and politics. That's why you bought the newspaper and the station, isn't it? Put John Doe on. He'll say what we want him to say, and we'll script how anyone gets to him. And if this arouses national interest—you'll be pulling those strings as well!

NORTON

Go to the office and arrange for some radio time.

CONNELL

D.B., don't fall for—

NORTON

Now.

CONNELL

Okay—consider it done. Come on, let's go.

NORTON

Miss Mitchell can stay. You can leave.

CONNELL

Exit stage left.

NORTON

This John Doe idea—it was yours.

ANN

Yes, sir.

NORTON

How much money does he pay you? It's a simple question.

ANN

Round up or down, it's still thirty dollars.

NORTON

And what are you after? A journalistic career? Respect for your craft?

ANN

(laughing)

Money.

NORTON

(laughing)

Good to hear somebody admit it! Could you write the radio speech that would put this man across?

ANN

I know I can.

NORTON

Do it, and you'll get a hundred dollars a week.

ANN

A hundred dollars.

NORTON

That's not enough?

ANN

Don't mistake being dumbfounded, Mr. Norton, for being ungrateful. I've just never had—

NORTON

That's only the start. Play your words right, and you'll never have to worry about money again. Ah, I knew could read it in that face. From now it'd be better if you work directly with me.

ANN

If that's what you want.

NORTON

I always say what I want. There's a car waiting for you at the front of the house. Until we meet again with your new speech.

ANN

Until we meet again.

* * * * *

SOUND: RING OF A CASH REGISTER MORPHS INTO TYPEWRITING.

ANN

Damn. Damn!

MOTHER

Ann.

ANN

Sorry. Irene and Ellen in bed?

MOTHER

And sleeping. Though with all this paper thumping around out here—

ANN

Stick a fork through me! I'll never get this speech right.

MOTHER

Oh, yes you will, Ann dear—you're very clever.

ANN

Clever as a lead weight. What are you looking for?

MOTHER

Your purse. I need ten dollars.

ANN

I gave you fifty the other day.

MOTHER

Yes, I know, but Mrs. Burke had her baby yesterday. Nine pounds! And there wasn't a thing in the house—and then this morning the Community Chest lady came around and—

ANN

And the fifty's all gone. Who's the ten for?

MOTHER

The Websters.

ANN

The Websters.

MOTHER

Those lovely people your father used to—

ANN

I know who they are.

MOTHER

I thought I'd buy them some groceries. It's a shame, those poor—

ANN

You're marvelous, Ma, just like Dad used to be—and look what that got him.

MOTHER

Don't get upset.

ANN

Do you realize that not long ago we didn't have enough to eat ourselves?

MOTHER

But these people are in such need, and we have plenty now.

ANN

That thousand dollars is practically gone because we owed everybody in town. You've gotta stop giving our money away!

MOTHER

Ann!

ANN

I'm sorry—sorry, sorry. I'm just upset about all—this. I have this great chance to get somewhere, get us some security, and I'm stuck. If I can put this speech over, your Mrs. Burke can have six babies and all the trimmings!

MOTHER

Stuck on what?

ANN

I don't know! I created somebody who says he'll give up his life for a principle, hundreds of thousands of people are gonna listen to him over the radio and, unless he says something that's, well, that's—pow!—there goes the money, there goes—

MOTHER

Well, honey, I don't know what you want to end up with, but if it's like all the others, I don't think anybody'll listen.

ANN

What do they want to hear?

MOTHER

There are so many complaining political speeches—everyone's got a plan to fix how rotten the world is. People are tired of all the doom and despair.

ANN

It's not great out there.

MOTHER

It doesn't need to be in their faces all the time. If you're going to get people to listen to him, have him say something simple and real, something with, I don't know, hope in it. If your father were alive, he'd know what to say.

ANN

The Doctor certainly would have the cure.

MOTHER

Wait a minute—

ANN

You've got your "I've decided something" look.

MOTHER

This is your father's diary.

ANN

I never knew he wrote a diary.

MOTHER

There's enough in it for a hundred speeches, simple things people ought to hear nowadays, be reminded of. Be careful with it.

ANN

You bet I will.

MOTHER

I'll let you work.

SOUND: PAGES TURNING.

ANN

This is great—this is really great. Ooh, yes, I can use that—and that, too—excellent!

SOUND: TYPEWRITER, PAGE RIPPED OUT, A NEW PAPER INSERTED, TYPING.

* * * * *

SOUND: A CLIP OF BIG BAND MUSIC ON THE RADIO.

JOHN

All right, Colonel, I admit it—I'm getting a little bored—

COLONEL

I don't know how you're gonna stand it around here till after Christmas.

JOHN

But I got the speech tonight, so that's something.

COLONEL

You'll have hell to pay tonight, you mean.

ANGELFACE

You have a lot of opinions.

COLONEL

Not opinions—facts. And here's another one: Ann Mitchell, that heelot: A woman like her you have to handle at arms-length and welder's gloves—and LJ, your arms are not that long!

ANGELFACE

Doesn't have to turn out like that.

JOHN

What d'ya mean?

ANGELFACE

You must've been a pretty good pitcher.

JOHN

About ready for the majors when I chipped a bone in my elbow pitchin' a nineteen-inning game! A major league scout came down after the game with a contract, but I couldn't lift my arm to sign it. But I'll be okay again soon.

ANGELFACE

Yeah, well, wish you luck with that, but still—

JOHN

What do you mean?

COLONEL

Uh-oh.

ANGELFACE

Well, you'll never be able to really play again.

JOHN

What are you saying? I told you I'm gonna get—

ANGELFACE

Think baseball's gonna hire a guy in a racket?

COLONEL

Columbia River, Long John, I can hear the—

ANGELFACE

Naw, he's gotta hear this. This John Doe business. As soon as it comes out, you'll be washed up in baseball.

JOHN

I never thought about that.

COLONEL

The clear cool river, LJ.

ANGELFACE

And what about all the kids that look up to ball players? What are they gonna think about you?

JOHN

What d'ya think, Colonel? Colonel—

COLONEL

Elevators are still runnin' from here to the ground floor, as I understand it.

ANGELFACE

But you can get something out of this mess.

JOHN

How's that?

ANGELFACE

When you get on that radio, all you have to do is say the whole thing's a frame-up. Makes you a hero for telling the truth.

JOHN

But my arm?

ANGELFACE

You're not being a hero for free. I know somebody that'll give you five thousand dollars to get on that radio and tell the truth.

COLONEL

Five thousand dollars?

ANGELFACE

And you get it right away. You don't have to wait till Christmas—it can be Christmas now.

COLONEL

You have it on you now?

ANGELFACE

The guy paying needs to know if he's takin' it.

COLONEL

They're closing in on you!

JOHN

Who's putting this up?

ANGELFACE

Look, I like you. This business just uses people up—get something out of it while you can. Here's the speech you gotta give—take it—

COLONEL

Five thousand dollars, Long John, five thousand heelots comin'. A whole army of them! Thirty pieces of silver and all.

ANGELFACE

It's on the level. But it's a one-time offer, limited edition. You read that speech—car'll be at the side door for you, money inside.

COLONEL

What's it gonna be, Long John, whose side you gonna be on?

ANGELFACE

Your friend makes some excellent points for once.

* * * * *

SOUND: SOUNDS OF A RADIO STUDIO GETTING READY TO BROADCAST.

STORMY

All right, everyone, put the harness on—we're live in three minutes and counting. Here he is, Miss Mitchell.

ANN

John, John—all set?

STORMY

We gotta keep it moving—

ANN

Okay, okay, I just need a moment.

STORMY

I can give you half of that. I'll be over there.

ANN

John, here's the speech, in caps and double-spaced so you won't have any trouble reading it. Not nervous, are you?

JOHN

No.

ANN

Of course not. He wouldn't be.

JOHN

Who?

ANN

John Doe. The one in those pages. Everything in that speech are things a certain man believed in—my father, John—a kind of John Doe himself, like you.

JOHN

I'm not your [father]—

ANN

And when he talked, people listened, just like they'll listen to you.

JOHN

Why would anyone listen [to me]—

STORMY

Half a moment's coming due.

ANN

Okay! You needn't be nervous, John. Just remember to make it sound sincere.

JOHN

That's all I gotta remember, huh?

ANN

Yes. Sound sincere, and that'll get you through. Good luck. I'll be on your shoulder, right there.

STORMY

I gotta get him up to the mike.

ANN

He's all yours—treat him well.

CONNELL

You aren't going soft on him, are you?

ANN

Not hard-boiled me.

CONNELL

Not hard-boiled you, no.

STORMY

In about three-and-a-half seconds a nervous man comes out of that door and rings the bell that gets this train moving. So, to keep it simple: from your pie-hole into the microphone. That's the secret of radio. I am now going to abandon you to the emcee. Good luck, bucko.

COLONEL

We can still get out of here alive, LJ. The door's right there.

EMCEE

Hey, what are you doing here?

COLONEL

That's what I'd like to know.

EMCEE

Out. Out.

JOHN

He's a friend of mine—I need him here, I need him close by.

EMCEE

Then stand right there and give him your silent support.

STORMY

Stand by, everyone!

EMCEE

Like she said, from here into there.

STORMY

On my count: Three. Two.

SOUND: AFTER A SILENT "ONE," AN ORCHESTRA FANFARE.

EMCEE

And good evening, ladies and gentlemen. This is Kenneth Frye, speaking for The New Bulletin, "a streamlined newspaper for a streamlined age." Tonight we give you something entirely new and different. Standing beside me is the young man who has declared publicly that on Christmas Eve he intends to commit suicide, giving as his reason, quote: "I protest against the state of civilization." End quote. Ladies and gentlemen, The New Bulletin takes pleasure in presenting the man who is fast becoming the most talked-of person in the whole country, John Doe! Don't be shy—go on. The whole country is listening.

JOHN

Ladies and gentlemen: I am the man you all know as John Doe. I took that name because it seems to describe—because it seems to describe—the average man, and that's me. Well, it was me—before I started speaking my mind. Now I'm getting all sorts of attention. The Mayor and the Governor, for instance. They don't like those articles that talk about my protests. And I even got a bribe tonight to come up here and say that I'm not really what people have been saying I am. I don't know who tried it, but I'll tell you it didn't work. I am who I am. I'm still here. And they can stop worrying. I'm not gonna talk about them. I'm gonna talk about us, the average guys, the John Does—and Jane Does, too, have to include the women. We're a great family, the John Does and Jane Does. We're the meek who are supposed to inherit the earth. You'll find us everywhere. We raise the crops, dig the mines, work the factories, raise the kids, wash the clothes and cook cook cook till everyone is full and can sleep soundly. We've existed since time began. We built the pyramids, we saw Christ crucified, we've been dying in war after war after war after war! In our struggle for freedom we've always bounced back! Because we're the people—and we're tough! And when we all pull in the same direction, nothing can stop us! I know a lot of you are saying "What can I do? I'm just a little punk. I don't count." Well, you're dead wrong! The little punks have always counted because in the long run the

character of a country is the sum total of the character of its little punks. But we've all got to get in there and pitch! We can't win the old ball game unless we have team work. And your teammate, my friends, is the person next door to you. Your neighbors! You're gonna need them and they are gonna need you. If they're sick, make a call. If they're hungry, feed them! If they're out of work, find 'em a job. Tear down the fences that separate teammates, tear down those hates and prejudices! I know a lot of you are saying to yourselves: "He's asking for a miracle. He's expecting people to change all of a sudden." Well, you're wrong. It's no miracle because I see it happen every year. And so do you. At Christmas! There's something great about what that spirit does to people, all kinds of people. Now, why can't that spirit last the whole year? If every Doe would make that spirit last three hundred and sixty-five days—366 in a leap year—we'd create such a tidal wave of good will that no human force could resist it. Yes, sir, my friends, the meek can inherit the earth, but only when neighbors start loving their neighbors. You'd better start right now. Don't wait till the game is called on account of darkness! Wake up! You are the hope of the world!

EMCEE

And that concludes this evening's broadcast by John Doe, hosted by The New Bulletin, "a streamlined newspaper for a streamlined age." Until next time—

SOUND: MUSICAL FANFARE PLAYS THE OUTRO. LOUD CRUSH OF CONGRATULATORY VOICES.

ANN

That was wonderful, so wonderful!

JOHN

Thanks—you don't have to hug—

CONNELL

(overlapping)

Good work, John, good work—you had me by the end. You really had me going!

JOHN

You don't have to shake [so hard]—

EMCEE

(overlapping)

Well done, Mr. Doe, very well done.

ANN

John, I want to introduce you to someone you don't know but who knows you pretty well.

NORTON

D.B. Norton, Mr. Doe.

COLONEL

John—

CONNELL

He pays the freight around here, John.

COLONEL

LJ—

NORTON

You interested in keeping this going?

JOHN

I signed a contract.

COLONEL

Which we can break any time we want by just—

NORTON

I'm asking you, John. I don't care about the contract. I want to know if you want to keep doing what we're doing here.

JOHN

What is it that we're doing, Mr. Norton?

ANN

John, you are John Doe. Mr. Norton wants to back what you started here—he wants to send you on a lecture tour, start up John Doe Clubs.

NORTON

This could grow into a powerful movement. You could make a difference in people's lives.

COLONEL

They mean, Long John, pitch you for nineteen innings and then throw you away—

JOHN

Colonel is right. This thing belongs to the newspaper, it belongs to you—just a bunch of whipped-up egg whites. Baseball is all I want, and I'm sticking to that.

NORTON

Good luck, with that arm of yours. And that reputation you're going to carry when people find out the truth.

JOHN

Come on, Colonel, let's get out of here.

ANN

John! Are you going to tell me that you didn't feel anything during that speech? That you didn't feel John Doe? You could've taken that bribe, but you didn't. You didn't. And why? Ah, see, I knew it—I knew you felt something, I can see it in your face! What you felt was true, John—no matter whose words they were, you made them true, made them yours, made them theirs. Henry, what about the telegrams?

CONNELL

They've already started coming in.

ANN

Letters'll be coming in too, by tomorrow. Thousands, John, thousands want to hear what you have to say.

COLONEL

Nineteen innings, Long John—

NORTON

What's it going to be, John? What is it going to be for John Doe? Nothing in your pocket, a nobody with a bum arm—or doing something that might do some good for somebody?

COLONEL

Aw, heck, John—John, I can see they got you—

JOHN

No they don't—

COLONEL

Yeah they do—you're too good to tell 'em to go take a flying leap. I'm not—

JOHN

Colonel!

COLONEL

Excuse me, folks, excuse me, excuse me, but I've got a date with the highway!

SOUND: THE SOUND OF AN EXIT DOOR OPENING AND CLOSING, WITH REVERB.

JOHN

Colonel!

ANN

Don't worry—let him go. We've all got you covered. This is going to be wonderful, John.

JOHN

Which John are you talking to?

ANN

The one who needs to hear this. The one who's gonna keep going on with this, making a better world.

JOHN

And which John is this again?

* * * * *

SOUND: TRAIN-TRAVELING MUSIC SHIFTS INTO TAPPING ON A MICROPHONE.

NORTON

Good evening. My staff has been following John Doe and making sure the John Doe Clubs are properly organized and the charters issued—they're working faster than a one-armed wallpaper hanger! And now—the John Doe Convention! The work you have done as the organizing committee will put our city on the map. Twenty-four hundred John Doe clubs are sending delegates! And we will roll out the welcome mat for them and my newspapers and radio stations will honor John Doe for his work! And now, if you will, just step into the outer office and look your best because photographers are waiting to take pictures of this historic moment.

* * * * *

SOUND: A STORM OF FLASHING STROBES.

NORTON

Anything else?

CONNELL

We've covered pretty much everything—the convention's all arranged just like you wanted it. And Ann and John are due to touch down from the western run in about an hour. All the pieces'll be in place.

NORTON

Did we forget something?

CONNELL

No.

NORTON

Then what?

CONNELL

You hired me because I'm supposed to know my way around, and so this is what I know: this John Doe movement costs you a fortune

NORTON

But?

CONNELL

I've got two pieces here and two pieces there—but I'm a sucker if I can make four out of 'em. Other than circulation, what's the pay-off to you?

NORTON

You can know that I will have the satisfaction of knowing that my money has been spent for a worthy cause.

CONNELL

I see. I'd better stick to running the paper and the station.

NORTON

Wise choice. And Connell—I'd like to have the John Doe contract, all the receipts for the money we have advanced him, and the letter Miss Mitchell wrote, for which I gave her a thousand dollars.

CONNELL

Yes. Sure.

NORTON

Before they touch down tonight.

CONNELL

I'll have it couriered right over when I get back to the office.

NORTON

You do that.

CONNELL

All right. I'll show myself out.

* * * * *

SOUND: AN AIRPLANE.

JOHN

It'll be good to get home. How many people you think we've talked to, outside the radio, I mean?

ANN

Looks like about three hundred thousand.

JOHN

Three hundred thousand. What makes 'em do it? I've been trying to figure that out.

ANN

(sighs)

Especially since what we've been handing 'em they've heard a million times: "Love thy neighbor," "Clouds have silver linings," "Turn the other cheek."

JOHN

Now you sound like the Colonel—wherever he is.

ANN

Well, he's not here with you.

JOHN

Don't be hard on him—he's been more right about people than I have, lots of times. I never thought much about people—just somebody in the bleachers to watch me play. But now—in their faces—I can see they're hungry for something. I know how they feel. I think I've been hungry for something practically all my life.

PILOT'S VOICE

Okay, folks, it's about ten minutes to touch down. You better buckle up.

JOHN

Coming in safe to home.

ANN

Yeah—we're coming in safe.

SOUND: AIRLINE SOUND GETS LOUDER, THEN FADES AWAY.

* * * * *

NORTON

You must be tired.

ANN

Multiple cities in multiple time zones will do that. Why did you want to see me? You already know everything that's been happening.

NORTON

Because I have a little something for you.

ANN

That?

NORTON

Yes.

ANN

A fur coat?

NORTON

You sound surprised.

ANN

A fur coat and I have never had a date. Oh! Oh, it's beautiful.

NORTON

You might want to check the pocket—

ANN

Oh! Oh, it's a lovely bracelet!

NORTON

I hear they are a girl's best friend. Tokens of appreciation. And there's one more thing.

ANN

Well, come on, spring what's on your mind.

NORTON

(roars with laughter)

That's what I like about you! All right, practical Annie, here it is. Tomorrow night, before fifteen thousand people, over a nationwide radio hook-up, John Doe will announce the formation of The John Doe Party. Devoted to the John Does of the country. He will also announce the party's candidate for the presidency. A man he endorses, the best friend the John Does have.

ANN

Mr. D.B. Norton.

NORTON

And the crowd goes, "Yes!"

ANN

And Mr. D.B. Norton is on his way.

NORTON

Good things come in threes, Ann. Your new contract.

ANN

Every word of this is true?

NORTON

Every word. And now this. This is the speech that John Doe will give tomorrow night. I want you to make sure it gets into his hands.

ANN

He never reads the speeches before he gives 'em.

NORTON

Even better. Just directly and sincerely, like all his others. And make sure Mr. Connell gets the second copy, for the next day's special edition. You willing to come along for this ride?

ANN
(laughing)
I guess you can count me in, Mr. Norton.

SOUND: THUNDERSTORMS BEGIN, WITH RAIN, RAIN, RAIN.

* * * * *

SOUND: STRAINS OF AN OLD-FASHIONED TORCH BALLAD, COMING FROM AN
AUTOMATIC PIANO.

CONNELL
Long John Willoughby.

JOHN
Mr. Connell, I got to get to the convention; Mr. Norton's got a car
coming for me.

CONNELL
(slurred but clear)
C'mon, you have time for one drink.

JOHN
I don't drink.

CONNELL
Then I'll have yours. Velma!

VELMA
Two more comin' up.

JOHN
Mr. Connell, it's gettin' close to—

CONNELL
You're a nice guy, John. I like you. You're gentle. I like gentle
people. Me? I come off tough, but under the tough, I've got a
weakness. The national anthem. Play it, and I'm a sucker for
anything. Always gets me in the throat.

JOHN
Start of every game—the back of the neck.

CONNELL

Well, every man to his own body part—as long as he feels something somewhere. Thanks, Velma.

VELMA

More than welcome.

CONNELL

I'm a sucker for this country—I like what we got here! But wouldn't it make you mad if you found someone betraying what we got?

JOHN

Yeah—betrayal's right up there—Colonel hates liars and cheats more than anything. "Worse than heelots" he calls them, and that's going some for him.

CONNELL

And right now I am mad, boiling mad, John, I'm sizzling! I'm getting mad for a lot of other guys besides myself—I'm getting mad for a guy named Washington! And a guy named Jefferson—and Lincoln. Lighthouses, John! Lighthouses in a foggy world! You know what I mean? It's because you're gentle you can't see what's happening. But betrayal—that's what's happening, to you. You're mixed up with a skunk, my boy, a no-good, dangerous skunk!

JOHN

You're not talking about Mr. Norton?

CONNELL

I'm talking about him and his pet poodle, Ann Mitchell.

JOHN

That's wrong, Mr. Connell, just plain wrong.

CONNELL

Here, read this—this is the speech you're giving tonight. And while you're reading, let me tell you a few things—read! Up at Norton's house tonight—keep reading—the big political bosses and the labor leaders and a lot of other big shots are carving up the John Doe Clubs—keep reading!—and Ann Mitchell's up there with 'em—fur coat and diamonds are the going price for her—keep reading!—she'd double-cross her mother for a handful of silver.

JOHN

Shut up!

CONNELL

You keep reading! Is that what you've been traveling the country to do, to make D.B. Norton a fatter cat than he already is? I know you weren't sold on "John Doe" at first—but I know it's gotten inside you, right at the back of your neck. So you gotta know this, John, I had to make you know. Read it, and then you'll know who to hit. And I should be first in line.

SOUND: CHAIR SCRAPING BACK.

CONNELL

John! John! Stay, don't go—they'll cut you—

SOUND: SLAMMING DOOR.

CONNELL

Damn! Damn! Velma!

VELMA

His seat's still warm.

CONNELL

That's the kind of guy he is.

VELMA

Well, what'd'ya got planned next, Mr. Connell, except the breaking of hearts and the dashing of dreams?

CONNELL

Everyone's a writer.

VELMA

So give me a job at The New Bulletin.

CONNELL

Fresh out. You better bring me a glass of milk.

VELMA

Wise choice. At least you'll get your stomach soothed. Coming right up.

CONNELL

I wish it was going to be as easy as drinking it down.

* * * * *

SOUND: THE SHARP CRACK OF THUNDER, THE SHARP FLASH OF LIGHTNING.

ANN

I—I—just cannot believe what went on at dinner in there.

NORTON

And what do you think “went on”?

ANN

I saw you—you were selling out the John Doe Clubs. I don’t know any other way to say it.

NORTON

I wanted you to hear it all. I wanted you to know what all your work has accomplished.

ANN

My work?

NORTON

Ann, you are lovely but not well-versed in the world. We live in daring times, with a new world order staring us in the face. This new order is vibrant, it’s dynamic and electric! Democracy has run its course—it no longer has the answers. It no longer has any voltage because too many concessions have been made to too many of the wrong people! What America needs is an iron hand and obedience!

ANN

Your hand. And your whip.

NORTON

And why not? Deep down what these John Does really want is safety—they’ll sacrifice much for certainty in uncertain times.

JOHN

Ann Mitchell!

NORTON

Well, look who’s here. The one who is all wet.

ANN

Oh, John, I’m so glad to see—

JOHN

Did you write this speech? Did you write this?

ANN

No, I didn't.

JOHN

But you knew about it.

ANN

Yes.

JOHN

And you handed it off to me like it was from you.

ANN

Yes, I did, John.

JOHN

So—a new order of things. Everybody taking a nice, fat slice of the John Does for themselves. Not after I go down to that convention and tell them exactly what you and all your “associates” here are cooking up for them! And in my own words this time.

NORTON

Listen to me, Long John Willoughby! The great John Doe! I own every particle of everyone in this room. And I own every particle of every John Doe out there tonight because I can give them what they really want: safety and security in return for a little bit of their freedom, which they don't use anyway. You want to tell them that “in your own words”? Go right ahead. And I will lay out for them what a fake you are, that you are such a good fake that you even got me, the great and successful D.B. Norton, to lay my money down on the promise that you were sincere and honest. You are a free man, John Doe, tell them whatever you want. But once you do, I will crush you to dust, then kill off the John Doe movement and lay all the blame for it on your grave. You think this is the only way we've got to get what we want? What is the great and illustrious John Doe gonna do now?

JOHN

The John Doe idea may be the one thing able to save this world from the dogs like you—because it's bigger than whether I'm a fake, it's got more power than that, it deserves better than me, and that's what I'm going to tell 'em!

NORTON

You are both charming and an idiot.

ANN

John, don't go! Don't go!

JOHN

Let me go.

NORTON

Let him go. Let. Him. Go.

SOUND: SLAMMING DOOR.

ANN

He will say what he said he's going to say.

NORTON

Do you think I've only got one plan?

SOUND: ROTARY PHONE BEING DIALED.

NORTON

Benedict, it's a go—get the newspapers to the convention, then cut the microphone cables.

SOUND: ROTARY PHONE BEING DIALED AGAIN.

NORTON

Commissioner—pick up Henry Connell, as we had discussed, and detain him until I say otherwise.

SOUND: NORTON HANGS UP THE PHONE.

NORTON

By the time he gets there, everyone will have in their hands a newspaper spelling out what a fake John Doe is—with special features like the confession of Ann Mitchell to writing the original letter. And he'll find the microphone cables cut anyway—no one will hear him over the roar of their disappointment.

ANN

They won't abandon him!

NORTON

The way you haven't? They'll abandon him before the cock crows three times.

ANN

I won't let him be alone—I won't! I won't!

SOUND: DOOR SLAMMING.

SOUND: ROTARY PHONE DIALING.

NORTON

Commissioner—would you also pick up Ann Mitchell? She'll be at the convention. Stick her with Henry Connell.

SOUND: PHONE BEING HUNG UP.

NORTON

Let the games begin! And so should I.

* * * * *

SOUND: A CROWD CHANTING, MUTED.

OTHER ACTORS

(sotto voce)

John Doe! John Doe! John Doe! John Doe! [continues as underscore]

COLONEL

Psst!

JOHN

Colonel, are you a sight for sore eyes! How'd you know—

COLONEL

I've been having you shadowed, John, ever since you got back. Lotsa poor people on the street with lots of eyes watching out for you.

JOHN

You didn't go up to the river?

COLONEL

Without you?

JOHN

We'll go, I promise, just as soon as I get this thing settled. But I can't find my way in to the stadium—I'm lost—

COLONEL

You don't want to go in there—the heelots are on the hunt! For you!

JOHN

I don't have a choice—I gotta go in, Colonel—but I don't know where I am—

COLONEL

You can still get out with your skin on.

JOHN

I don't have a choice, Colonel. You hear that? I don't have a choice.

COLONEL

Yeah, that's what you look like and that's what they sound like. C'mon—I got a way to get you in—the brotherhood of the janitors—

ALL ACTORS

(now full-throated, breaking into cheers)

John Doe! John Doe! John Doe! John Doe! Hooray!! Yippee!!
That's great!! [and so on]

JOHN

Ladies and gentlemen, friends, I have something I gotta say to you, something that's gotta be said, by me, about me, about everything we're trying to do here.

OTHER ACTORS

Fake!! Fake!! John Doe is a fake!! [continuing]

JOHN

Ladies and gentlemen! This is exactly what I came down here to tell you about tonight—

NORTON

John Doe, get away from those microphones. Don't listen to that man anymore! He is a fake! My name is D.B. Norton—you all know me! And I accuse this man of being a faker! We've all been taken for a lot of suckers! And I'm the biggest of the lot! I spent a fortune backing this man in what I believed to be a sincere and worthy cause, just as you all did! And now I find out it's nothing but a racket! Cooked up by him and two of my employees for the purpose of collecting dues from John Does all over the country!

JOHN

That's a lie!

NORTON

It's not a lie! You can read all about it in the newspapers there!

JOHN

That's a lie! Don't believe what he says—

NORTON

This man had no intention of jumping off City Hall! He was paid to say so! Do you deny that?

JOHN

That's got nothing to do with it!

NORTON

Were you paid for it—or weren't you?

JOHN

Yes! I was paid! But the—

NORTON

And the suicide note? You didn't write that, either!

JOHN

What difference does that make?

NORTON

Did you write it—or didn't you?

JOHN

No, I didn't write it, but—

NORTON

You bet your life you didn't! You look in your papers, ladies and gentlemen, and you'll find Ann Mitchell's signed confession that she wrote it!

JOHN

It's a fact that I didn't write the letter, but this whole thing started—

NORTON

You see? He admits he's a fake. And for what you've done to all these good people—they ought to run you out of the country—and I hope they do it! Go on—say whatever you want to say!

JOHN

Now that he's through shooting off his face, I've got a couple of things to tell you about—

VOICES

We can't hear you, we can't hear you, we can't hear you—fake fake fake fake—

JOHN

Ladies and gentlemen! Look—this thing's bigger than whether I'm a fake—

VOICES

Fake fake fake fake fake—

COLONEL

John! John! Leave it to the Pontius Pilates. We gotta get outta here!

JOHN

The idea is still good!

COLONEL

C'mon!

JOHN

Believe me, folks! You are the hope of the world!

COLONEL

Come on! Come on!

VOICES
(trailing away)

Fake fake fake fake fake—

* * * * *

SOUND: THE CROWD'S SHOUTING IN DISAPPOINTMENT SHIFTS INTO A CHORUS OF CHILDREN'S VOICES SINGING "SILENT NIGHT."

SOUND: BELLS TOLL THE THREE-QUARTER HOUR.

CONNELL

11:45. 11:45.

COLONEL

He'd have to be a bird to get up here without us seeing him.

CONNELL

You haven't seen him for weeks—maybe he's learned to walk on air to the top of City Hall.

SOUND: THE HEAVY ROOFTOP DOOR SLAMS OPEN.

CONNELL

Ann—Ann—what are you doing here? Ann, you're sick—you should be home in bed.

ANN

I couldn't stay—I couldn't stay there—

CONNELL

You're burning up with fever.

ANN

What does it matter? It doesn't matter.

COLONEL

Looks like we all got ourselves a fever.

SOUND: THE HEAVY ROOFTOP DOOR SLAMS OPEN.

CONNELL

Ah, Christ—

ANN

You should be ashamed.

NORTON

What makes you think I'm not?

ANN

It's a quality I never noticed.

CONNELL

D.B., you being here isn't right.

NORTON

Don't you think I know that?!

COLONEL

The way a dog buries what it leaves behind.

NORTON

He may not even come.

COLONEL

You'd like that—one less loose thread you'd have to—

SOUND: THE HEAVY DOOR SLAMS OPEN AGAIN.

ANN

John! John!

CONNELL

John, don't get so close to the—

NORTON

I wouldn't do that, John. It'll do you no good.

JOHN

What do any of you know about my good? I saw the police down there.

NORTON

Why do you think I made it so easy for all of us to get into City Hall at midnight on Christmas Eve? We all have a bet on you—don't we? We need to know how this plays out for John Doe.

JOHN

John Doe? You don't have to worry—that zombie's dead. John Willoughby? He's the one I don't know about. If he doesn't go over—then he has to live with this hard nut to crack: he wants to be John Doe again. John Willoughby must be the stupidest man alive because he wants to be born into John Doe again, have it all come alive again to make him feel alive again. Sometimes this hunger just makes him want to find the ledge.

ANN

Oh, John—it can live again, or Norton wouldn't be here—he's afraid! We can start it clean now—that old Ann is gone, too. Someone already died, nearly two thousand years, to keep John Doe alive, so you don't need to—

JOHN

Sssh—just sssh—

ANN

Help me!

COLONEL

What can we say, Long John? What can we do?

JOHN

You've all done whatever you can do. Now it's time.

SOUND: THE BELLS RING OUT MIDNIGHT.

SOUND: SOUNDS OF RUNNING.

ANN

No, John, no! Somebody stop him—stop him stop him!!

COLONEL

(overlapping)

Oh God oh God oh God—John, no!

SOUND: THE HEAVY ROOF DOOR OPENING AND SLAMMING SHUT.

COLONEL

(breathing heavily)

I can catch him! I can catch him! I'll catch him, I'll save him—just—gotta keep running—keep running—keep running—

SOUND: ANOTHER DOOR SLAMMING OPEN.

COLONEL

Oh God oh God oh God—John, John, I wasn't fast enough—I
wasn't fast enough to catch—you—I wasn't—aaahhhhhh!!!—

(wailing)

Long John, Long John, you poor sucker! You poor poor sucker!
Oh God oh God oh God—

SOUND: INCONSOLABLE LAMENTATION FADES INTO SILENCE.