

# THE REAL NEWS

By

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## CHARACTERS

*In order of appearance*

|                               |                                       |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ST. JOHN FISH                 | News editor of <i>The Daily Flash</i> |
| CONNIE LATTERLEY              | A woman reporter                      |
| MISS SO-AND-SO                | A secretary                           |
| JOHN BROOK                    | A news reporter                       |
| "MAC" MACFARLANE              | Editor of <i>The Daily Flash</i>      |
| SIMON SLADE                   | Secretary to Mr. Macfarlane           |
| THE RT. HON. ERIC<br>HAMILTON | A Cabinet Minister                    |
| ROBIN MORTIMER                | A theatre critic                      |

Two Copy Boys   A Cleaning Lady   A Photographer

The place is in the office of *The Daily Flash*. The time is the present

ACT I

## ACT I

*The scene is a typical newspaper office just before going to press. St. John Fish, the news editor, sits at a table, stage right, facing the audience. On the extreme stage right is the desk of Miss Connie Latterley, the well-known woman columnist, who is scribbling the last words of her day's story as the curtain rises. It is 10 p.m.*

*Stage left is the editor's desk which, as the curtain rises, is empty. Up stage, right, there is a desk where his secretary types busily and noisily without ceasing as long as she is on the stage, except when she is taking dictation from Mac. Up stage centre is the door of the editor's room with the name on it: "Editor—Mr. Macfarlane". Running all across the back of the scene on the wall above the editor's door, is the slogan of The Daily Flash—"The Truth Shall Make You Free".*

*As the curtain rises, a boy runs through the door, stage right, knocks at Mac's door and, sticking his head through the door, shouts:*

BOY Ten minutes to go. The stone is waiting for your editorial, sir. *(Which is greeted with a colossal bellow)*

MAC Get out! Leave me alone.

*(The boy, obviously used to this treatment)*

BOY Yes, sir.

*(Is scuttling out again when Fish, without looking up, yells)*

FISH Copy down, boy.

*(And hands over his shoulder several pages of copy. The boy takes this and disappears. Miss Connie Latterley collects her*

*manuscript, which amounts to about twenty pages, and lovingly looking at it, goes over to Fish's desk)*

CONNIE Here you are, Fish. It is the best thing I have ever written. *(Fish takes it)*

FISH What's it about today ?

CONNIE It is the exclusive story of why skirts will be longer in Paris this year.

FISH Why will they ?

CONNIE Well, if they do turn out to be longer, this is as good an explanation as any.

FISH *(Scanning the pages for about three seconds)* Copy down, boy. *(Another boy rushes in)*

FISH Tell them to cut this to two inches and put it on page two. *(The boy rushes out)*

CONNIE Honestly, Fish, this is the end. It is the best thing I ever wrote.

FISH I heard you.

CONNIE You never even read it.

FISH If you read one thing that any woman writes in any newspaper anywhere, you've read 'em all.

*(At this point the first boy returns with a tray of tea and sandwiches which he drops with a crash at Fish's side)*

FISH Oh, you vile boy !

BOY Yes, sir.

FISH *(To Connie)* Did you ever stop to think what happens to these boys when they grow up ?

CONNIE That's an interesting thought. There might be an angle on that. (*Makes a note*)

FISH If you want the real story, you had better write what happens to them after they are dead.

(*The editor's door opens and John Brook comes out, and says to Fish*)

JOHN Mac says he will be out in just a moment. He is finishing the Leader now. It certainly does pack a punch!

FISH Oh, my God! Don't use *clichés* like that. Packs a punch! Don't you know the golden rule for newspapers? Short sentences. Watch the adjectives. No *clichés*.

(*And John Brook joins in with a grin*)

JOHN And don't waste words.

FISH Astonishing! Who told you that?

JOHN Why, my father used to say that, every day when he came back from the office when I was a kid.

(*A roar comes from the room within. John goes back inside Mac's room*)

CONNIE (*To Fish*) Well, I must say this for you, Fish. You are just as rude to him as you are to me, though I notice you give his stories more space than you give mine.

FISH Of course; the other obvious point may not have occurred to you.

CONNIE (*Rather bewildered*) What's that?

FISH That his stories are worth more space than yours.

CONNIE He writes one short story, wins a competition, and Mac takes him on as one of his blue-eyed boys. And here have I been working on newspapers for ten years.

FISH Oh, shut up! I remember you coming on the job twenty-six years ago. And anyway, Connie, give the boy a break. He really has got the same kind of nose for a story that his father used to have in the old days. He was a great newspaper man.

CONNIE (*Not at all pleased*) You men make me sick. You always stick up for each other. Anyway, I must say it is a relief for a girl to have one man in the office under fifty. (*Fish does not pay the slightest attention. He has been through this every day for years*)

CONNIE (*With a parting shot*) And also a man who has not worked in "The Daily Flash" long enough to lose all his manners.

FISH (*Yells again*) Copy, boy.

(*Boy rushes in. Takes out more copy, knocking into Connie as she flounces out. As the copy goes out, Fish relaxes for a precious few minutes before he has to go down to the stone, and pours himself out a cup of tea*)

(*Enter John*)

JOHN We are just on the last few lines of the editorial. (*Rather anxiously*) I hope it will be on time.

FISH (*Laughs*) You need not worry about that. I will say this for the old man: he has not missed a deadline as long as I have known him.

JOHN No, he is a great man.

FISH Yes, I suppose he has turned out more square miles of printed matter than all the rest of us put together. I only hope he doesn't mean it all. Sometimes I wonder.



° (*Enter Mac, followed immediately by Simon, who is quietly suggesting as they enter*)

SIMON Might it not be a good point, sir, to say that dictatorship in any form is repugnant to our people ?

MAC (*Without a pause and in a loud voice*) Dictatorship in any form is repugnant to our people. I say, Miss So-and-So, (*To the stenographer*) dictatorship in any form is repugnant to our people. Are you getting it ?

(*Miss So-and-So, who is used to all this, without a flicker stops typing, takes out the sheet of paper, puts another sheet of paper in the machine and starts typing*)

MAC (*Continuing*) Our long tradition . . .

SIMON Perhaps, sir, our age-old tradition.

MAC Don't interrupt. . . . Our age-old tradition of freedom makes it impossible for any alien ideology to flourish here. (*Boy enters and says to Mac*)

BOY Two minutes to the deadline. The stone is waiting for your copy, sir.

(*Mac turns on the boy, and in a lower but passionate voice pulling out his watch*)

MAC It is two minutes and forty-seven seconds precisely to the deadline. Will you tell the stone to leave me alone with their blasted messages ! (*Continues to dictate*) That is why the present tendency of our Government to truckle to America is repugnant in the hearts of our people. It is said that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the Right Hon. Eric Hamilton, sees this issue clearly. . . . (*At which*

*point Mac breaks off with)* And what in thunder shall we tell that fellow to do today ?

*(There is a pause while nobody knows what to say. Finally Simon suggests)*

SIMON It seems to me, sir, that in ordinary honesty, if he disagrees with the policy of the government he should resign from it.

MAC Yes, but I don't think that we can print that yet. *(Continues to dictate)* . . . Mr. Hamilton's viewpoints should be sustained and supported by all those who love freedom. *(Miss So-and-So, the secretary, finishes typing the last sentence, takes it out of the machine and hands the sheet to Mac, who says to Simon)*

MAC Take this down, will you, to the stone and see it through. *(Simon goes out, carrying the editorial. Fish picks up his last bits of copy, shouting)* Boy, copy down, Boy. *(Goes after him)*

MISS SO-AND-SO Can I tidy up in there now, sir ?

MAC Yes. Go on. But don't make it all so damned tidy that I can't find what I'm looking for.

*(Miss So-and-So leaves her desk and goes into his office)*

*(Mac turns to John Brook)* Well, young fellow, how do you enjoy working on a newspaper ?

JOHN I love every minute of it. Honestly, sir, I do appreciate the chance of the training you give me.

MAC *(Highly delighted)* Oh, nonsense ! Why, the moment I set eyes on that entry of yours for "The Daily Flash" prize, I knew you were a winner. You know, it reminded me so

much of your father's style of writing, with all the unexpectedness of the sentences.

JOHN (*Rather hurriedly and a little uncomfortable*) My father loved the old days working with you, sir. He has talked about them ever since I can remember. And he was on the paper when this fellow Hamilton was in newspapers, wasn't he ?

MAC (*Laughing*) Yes, the Right Hon. Eric Hamilton, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. He used to be a nervous little fellow who wouldn't say boo to a goose. Do you know, he got his start in newspapers by winning "The Daily Flash" prize just the same as you did. And I had the training of him from the start. It is an amazing thing, you know, to take a young fellow with ink all over his fingers, train him, toughen him, put him wise to the world and watch him go to the top. But of course, Hamilton made one fatal mistake.

(*As Mac has been talking to John, Simon has come back into the room, and stops in his tracks when he hears the words, "Made one fatal mistake"*)

JOHN What was that, sir ?

MAC Why, went out of newspapers into politics, of course. It's a hell of a thing when a good newspaper man takes to politics. It is far worse than taking to drink, and you don't get over it so quickly, either.

SIMON (*Who looks relieved when he hears the last few sentences, respectfully*) Eric Hamilton owes a great deal to you, sir ; but then so do we all.

MAC Nonsense. Don't give me that kind of talk. Why, you are all waiting to climb into my shoes one day. Don't think I don't know. I did it myself.

SIMON Why, "The Daily Flash" would never be the same without you, sir.

MAC Rubbish. This young fellow here (*Pointing to John*) will be putting better papers than mine to bed long after I have gone. By the way, Simon, Hamilton is looking in later this evening, after the Cabinet meeting.

SIMON Is it anything particular, sir?

MAC Oh, he didn't say anything on the phone! You know he drops in here sometimes. I think the old boy likes a breath of fresh air in a newspaper office, after all that stale business of politics. But, to be honest, I have a hunch something is in the wind. He particularly asked not to let word get around the office that he was coming down here tonight.

(*Turning to John*) Keep your ears open and your mouth closed. Not a bad rule for newspapers anyway, eh, Simon?

SIMON No, sir. (*Looks at watch*) I don't know whether you would feel it right, sir, but you have got a few minutes now before Mr. Hamilton comes in. (*As Mac looks a little irresolute*) You know you will be very tired before the night's out, sir. (*Enter Fish*)

MAC (*To Fish*) This damn secretary of mine looks after me like an old nursemaid. Why, it has come to the point now that he even tells me when I am to go and get a drink. (*To Simon*) All right, Simon. I will hop out and have a quick

one. Come with me too, if you like. I'll be back in a few minutes, Fish. (*Exit Mac and Simon. As soon as they have left, Miss So-and-So rises and begins to prepare to leave the office*)

(*Exit Miss So-and-So*)

FISH (*To John*) That girl knows her stuff. Every night it's the same thing. Simon always remembers there's time for a quick one to spare Mac the embarrassment of remembering. Mac is always taken by surprise and goes. She always hops out before Mac gets back. It gives her a chance to make a day of it. Otherwise she would be here till God knows when.

JOHN Did the Leader make the deadline, Mr. Fish ?

FISH Oh, just call me Fish ! everyone else does. Sure it made the deadline.

JOHN What did you think of it ?

FISH Well, if you would like to know what I really think, it's just as well our columns are not as lousy as that Leader column. If they were, we would soon be out of business.

JOHN Do you really mean that ?

FISH Of course I mean it. Old Mac there puts the stuff together all right. He has the art of writing so that the average reader feels that someone has blown a bugle inside his stomach ; but as for understanding what old Mac is trying to say, the reader doesn't and neither do I, and the bits I do understand I don't agree with. (*Fish has said this in order to shock John, and John is shocked*)

B

JOHN (*With all the loyalty of youth*) I think Mac is a tremendous person. Why, look at the way he has built up "The Daily Flash" ! Why he is "The Daily Flash" !

FISH Exactly. And could you think of anything more damning to say of your worst enemy ?

JOHN I can't understand why you stay here, if you feel like that.

FISH That's quite simple. I am here for the same reason as you are. Money. My parents were called Fish, they gave me the name of St. John Fish, though why, God knows. But it was a stroke of luck. It was at the end of the first war. I was in hospital, down and out with this game leg. Mac heard it. After he stopped laughing, he offered me a job. He said I had a name none of his readers would ever forget. And I guess that is true. If you see St. John Fish at the bottom of an article, you don't worry about the article, you just remember the name. And that, if you want to know, is the secret of my success in newspapers.

JOHN That is not what my father says, Fish. He has told me you are a great newspaper man, and a great news editor.

FISH I like your father. He did well here, and what's it done for him ? Nothing. He's old, he hasn't saved a penny, and nobody wants him around here any more ; and it was his own damn fault, he was just too pig-headed.

(*As John is about to protest—continues*)

You may not like what I am saying, but it is the truth. He wouldn't listen to any of us, and now where is he ? What's

he living on ? You, I suppose. That is what you are doing in "The Daily Flash", isn't it ?

JOHN There's nothing wrong with that, is there ?

FISH I don't say there is anything wrong in it ; but if you ask me what I am here for, it's the same reason as you—for the sake of three children and my wife ; and as far as I am concerned, Mac can write all the nonsense he wants in "The Daily Flash" to the end of time. I'm going to hang on to my job and wait for my next rise in pay.

*(Boy comes in)*

BOY The run starts in five minutes, Mr. Fish.

FISH Well, I'll have to get down there again, John. See you presently. *(He goes. John sits down at his desk and is about to write, when the Rt. Hon. Eric Hamilton enters from the door upstage left. He stops when he sees John)*

HAMILTON I don't think I know you.

JOHN I don't think I know you. Can I do anything for you ? *(Then, with sudden realisation)* Oh, I suppose you must be Mr. Hamilton ! You are quite different from your newspaper pictures.

HAMILTON Well, that's something.

JOHN Mac told me just a few minutes ago that you might be looking in tonight. *(Then, realising what he has just said, adds quickly)* But he made me promise I would tell nobody that you were coming, and I haven't. Mac will be back in just a minute, I know he will.

HAMILTON You must be the fellow Mac told me about.

Didn't you win the prize for "The Flash" short story competition ?

JOHN Yes, sir. I did.

HAMILTON You may not know it, but I won that prize myself —back in the dim ages.

JOHN So Mac told me. That certainly gives me hope, sir.

HAMILTON I remember walking into old Mac's office that first day, and saying to myself : " Eric Hamilton, you have actually got yourself a job ! "

JOHN Did you feel like that, too ?

HAMILTON Oh, I was going to change the Government's policy and put the universe to rights, all in the course of about three leading articles !

JOHN Then Mac bawls you out a few times and you want to crawl under the stone and die.

HAMILTON All the same, it's a grand training.

JOHN It has certainly taken you a long way, sir.

HAMILTON Yes. But somehow when you get there it is not what you thought it was going to be. (*Turning away*) It is all very different from what I felt in those days. (*Enter Mac, followed by Simon*)

MAC Oh, there you are, Eric ! glad to see you again. Have you come to earn an honest penny as a newspaper man ?

HAMILTON How are you, Mac ? Good to see you. Oh, there you are, Simon ! (*To Mac*) That fellow certainly sticks to you like a shadow.

MAC A pretty slender shadow for a man of my size. (*Simon*



*smiles dutifully*) Here you are, Simon. Take my coat, will you ?

HAMILTON Well, the fact is, Mac, I have come down to ask you for advice.

MAC (*Preening himself with delight*) Advice ! If you politicians accepted some of the advice I give you every day in " The Daily Flash ", things would run a lot better in this country.

HAMILTON Yes, yes, Mac, I know all about that. But this is serious. (*He glances at John*)

MAC Well, you can talk to us all here. This young man has just won the prize that you won all those years ago, Eric ; and I am treating him the same way as I treated you. Remember ? You can be quite sure that anything you say and hear, stays within these four walls. What is it ?

HAMILTON All right, then. I want you to know that a big story is going to break within the next forty-eight hours. There is a serious crisis in the Cabinet.

MAC Oh, every crisis is serious in the Cabinet, Eric ! and they have a crisis every day. Why, what's it all about this time ?

HAMILTON Well, strictly between ourselves, there is to be an agreement signed between us and America which provides reciprocal facilities for shipping, air bases, and scientific research.

MAC Well, that's news. I suppose we can't print it. What do you think of it, Simon ?

SIMON I remember what you said in your Leader tonight, sir.

No truckling to America. It seems to me that a deal of this sort is exactly that.

HAMILTON You're right. I and some of my colleagues think that this is the chance we have long been waiting for, to bring things to a head. You see, Mac, the public are very confused about this whole American issue.

MAC Well, I have been trying to hammer the truth as I see it into their thick skulls day after day.

HAMILTON Yes, Mac. Your editorials, if I may say so, have been absolutely magnificent. But what the Prime Minister has in mind now is this. He is planning to have a debate in Parliament, and use it to inform the public about this new arrangement with America, and enlist them in support of his policy. If he does that, we are all convinced the deal will go through.

*(Enter boy)*

BOY Run just beginning, sir.

MAC Get out ! *(Exit boy)* Listen. They're just starting up now. Well, there they go. There go the machines. Out with it, Eric. What's in your mind ? What do you want me to do ?

HAMILTON The question I want to ask you is, what do you think I should do ? I think this agreement is wrong. I have just come from the Cabinet and, between you and me, at least six of my colleagues are very uneasy about it. What do you think I should do ?

MAC *(Repeating the words of his Leader which Simon put into his*

*mind*) Well, Eric, if you were not a politician, I'd say that in ordinary honesty you should resign.

HAMILTON I'm glad you say that, Mac. That is what I have felt myself. But I am afraid that a sudden resignation might so easily be misunderstood by the public.

MAC Don't you worry. We'll put your case strongly. We will give you a great show.

HAMILTON Oh, I'm sure you would do that ! I don't doubt it. There's just one way, though, where you can help me.

MAC What's that ?

HAMILTON Supposing some newspaper got hold of the story of this deal before the debate in Parliament. If such a story were printed, it would catch the Prime Minister unprepared. I and my colleagues would resign at once and give our reasons why. It would mean the end of the Government. Do you see what I mean ? (*As Mac is still thinking it over, he continues*) It would give the public a chance to face up to the real issue, instead of getting a great dose of soothing gas from the Prime Minister, and just nodding away under the anaesthetic.

(*Mac interrupts*).

MAC We will print the news if you will give it to us ; but have we your permission to run the story ?

HAMILTON Certainly not ! Of course you haven't. And not one word of this conversation must ever be repeated to any other living person. It's a high Cabinet secret. But a nod's as good as a wink, Mac. You are the best newspaper man in this country. If there is any way in which you happen

to get hold of the story and could break it, I think it would strengthen our hand enormously.

MAC I've got you. So far as we are concerned you have never been here, Eric. But now we know the story is there, we will get young Brook and Fish on to it. You can accept my word that we will print the news tomorrow night.

HAMILTON But not one word before then, Mac. It's vital nothing leaks out.

MAC What do you take me for ? I want the story for my paper, not for someone else's.

HAMILTON (*Obviously relieved at what his coming has accomplished*) Mac, you are a great friend, and I will not forget you. I knew you would understand. And I honestly believe this is in the best interests of our country. (*Taking a great breath*) My, it's good to be back ; the same old smell of the ink, the same old sound of the machines ! Listen to them running. History in the making, Mac.

MAC My God, Eric! you have learned to look like a politician and think like a politician, now you are even talking like a politician.

(*As the men listen, you can hear in the distance the steady hum of the machines, which began while Hamilton and Mac were half-way through their conversation together. It is a far away drone rather like a distant aircraft engine. And as they listen, suddenly the machines stop*)

MAC They've stopped, haven't they, Eric ?

HAMILTON They certainly have. The silence that falls in a newspaper office when the machines stop running.

MAC For God's sake, shut up ! Come on, John, let's go and see what's happened. (*Mac and John go out quickly*)

(*Simon gives a long look at Hamilton, who also looks at him.*

*Then Simon speaks in quite a new tone of authority and equality*)

SIMON You did that really well. You know the old fool really thought you had come here to get his advice.

HAMILTON Don't talk so loud, for God's sake !

SIMON Don't worry. They'll all be down below now.

HAMILTON In any case, Mac is only doing what he thinks is right. It won't be the first time that he and I have acted together for the public good.

SIMON You don't need to talk that way to me. I am not one of your constituents.

HAMILTON (*Suddenly becoming human*) I hate leading the old man along by the nose.

SIMON I don't mind you hating it so long as you do it.

HAMILTON I have nothing against the Prime Minister personally. I like him. I owe him a lot. I suppose it is true to say he and Mac helped me more than any other two men. This is bigger than personalities. This cuts across every private feeling. It is . . .

(*As he is talking Simon cuts right in*)

SIMON In two days' time you will *be* the Prime Minister.

HAMILTON Yes, I've always wanted to be Prime Minister ever since I was a child, and I never thought I would be. Certainly not in this way. But you have to do things you don't like doing if you really want to serve the public.

SIMON Isn't it as well to remember that you have not exactly got where you are without help ?

HAMILTON Look, I want to make this perfectly clear. In the course of a fairly extensive career one does favours and one receives favours. You and some of your friends have helped me one way and another ; I don't deny it. By the same token, I may have been of some assistance to you. But, believe me, if the responsibility of being Prime Minister should come my way, all this is a thing of the past. I shall enter into that office a free man.

SIMON I would like to be sure you fully understand the position you are in.

HAMILTON I want to do things to benefit this country that I have thought about and planned for, for years. To do them, I have got to have an absolutely free hand.

SIMON That sounds to me like the triumph of hope over experience, if I may say so.

HAMILTON I mean it ; and to show I mean it, it may be better to call off this whole business with Mac now. I don't wholly like these deals, I will admit. I never have. They are part of the price you have to pay for public life.

SIMON And it is the price of private life, too. Don't forget.

HAMILTON What do you mean by that ?

SIMON Only what I say. Now, look here, Hamilton, I don't mind you having your moments of softness and sentimentality, it is all in character. But seriously, as you enter into the highest office that a man can hold in this country, it is as well just to recall the facts.

HAMILTON Facts ? What facts do you mean ? I don't know what facts you are referring to.

SIMON Don't you ? Well, supposing we say the facts about those little gifts of money you've been receiving from time to time over the last twenty or thirty years.

HAMILTON What do you mean ?

SIMON I know everything. I have known it for years. It's my business. That is why I am here. Nobody else need know it, so long as you go along with us as you always have. But I have been working on Mac for years. I am one of many people who have been under orders to make you Prime Minister. And it will be as well for you to remember, when you are there, who you are and the cause you serve. *(At this moment through the door, stage right, enters Robin Mortimer, the dramatic critic. He is in tail clothes and has been thoroughly enjoying his evening at the theatre. He looks towards the Foreign Secretary and says with a glad shout)*

ROBIN My God ! If it isn't old Eric ! Haven't seen you around for ages, old boy ; where have you been ?

HAMILTON *(Pushing him off)* Oh, hullo, Robin !

ROBIN Let's see, what are you doing now ? I remember that you used to do the theatres before I took on that soul-destroying job. Didn't they move you on to sport or something ?

SIMON For Heaven's sake, pull yourself together, Mortimer. Hamilton's in the Cabinet now.

ROBIN Of course, I remember. What a degrading business ! I pray I may never sink so low as politics.

*(Fish comes in, as the sound of the machines start)*

FISH Hullo, Eric ! Hullo, Robin ! What was the play like tonight ?

ROBIN No idea at all, old boy. I only stayed for the first five minutes of it, but I had a glorious evening. In fact, you might say a good time was had by all.

FISH Well, let's have your copy first thing in the morning.

JOHN *(Who has entered immediately behind Fish)* If you were only there five minutes, how could you know it was a good play ?

ROBIN Of course it was a good play, the author's a friend of Mac's. Praise it to the skies. Praise it to the skies.

SIMON *(As Mac enters)* Everything all right downstairs, sir ?

MAC Yes. They're started up again. Listen. *(They listen and can hear the machines)* Just some rumour about trouble in the Government. We fudged it in the stop press, but of course there is nothing in that, is there, Eric ?

HAMILTON Certainly not ! Nothing at all. Well, I think I must be going. Remember, not one word till tomorrow night. I will be down in the afternoon to help with the story.

*(Exit Hamilton—Miss Latterley comes in)*

MAC Let's call it a day.

SIMON Don't forget the book reviews before you go, sir.

MAC Oh, no ! Who would like to do book reviews ?

FISH Give me three of the biggest. They are good for twenty-five bob any day of the week.



(All are now putting on their coats. Up till now they have been working in their shirt sleeves. They are taking their hats out of the cupboard at the back)

MAC Here you are, Mortimer. "Daily Life in the Monasteries in the Sixteenth Century."

ROBIN "Daily Life in the Monasteries" . . . You know, this could be quite a new field for me.

MAC Not so new as you think, Robin. Don't forget it was the monks who invented Chartreuse and Benedictine, too.

ROBIN Oh, is that so ? That reminds me, I have just got time for one more before they close. Be back soon. (To Connie) Good night, my dear. (Exit)

MAC Here you are, Miss Latterley. "Modern Mountaineering Techniques."

FISH Anyone would think Connie was a climber.

MAC She's certainly no glacier.

JOHN Haven't you anything for me, sir ?

MAC What in the world's this ? (He reads) "People don't seem to see eye to eye. They have their own ideas and are prone to push them on to others. Confusion comes from compromise. Clarity comes from change."

SIMON (Looks up) Where's that from, sir ? I'd like to do that one.

MAC It's a speech called "The New Statesmanship to End Confusion".

SIMON Oh, that's just propaganda !

MAC Remember the old tag ? Anything positive is propa-

ganda, anything negative is news. See what angle there is to it, John. What does it say? "Confusion comes from compromise. Clarity comes from change." Not bad. I wish I'd thought of that myself. I would have put it in the Leader today.

*(Simon helps him on with his coat, and he says as he leaves)*  
Good night, all. *(To Fish)* Don't ring me in the night unless something really big breaks. John, you get here early tomorrow morning. It will be a big day.

*(He nods to Simon. John picks up the book, and walks out reading it as the curtain falls)*

CURTAIN

ACT II

## ACT II

*It is the following morning. As the curtain rises, the cleaning lady is busy at her work, and singing in the doleful undertone that only cleaning women in newspaper offices possess. Much of the debris of the previous night is cleaned away. Through the door of the editor's office stick the feet of the dramatic critic, Mr. Mortimer, who is sleeping it out, as usual, on the editor's sofa. John enters, reading the speech, and, seeing the cleaner, he says :*

JOHN Good morning. You're at work early. It really amazes me how wonderfully tidy you manage to make this place look.

CLEANER (*Who has been startled out of her wits by the politeness of this remark*) It's the first time anyone has said a thing as nice as that to me since I came to work in this office. Anyone sober, I mean.

JOHN You must have quite a job around here.

CLEANER Oh, me ! I'm like Lord God Almighty. Here, there and everywhere.

JOHN (*Catching sight of the boots through the editor's office doorway*) Who in the world's that ?

CLEANER That ? Oh, that's Mr. Mortimer what writes those lovely bits about the theatre ! I always says to my old man, " What's good enough for Mr. Mortimer is good enough for us. Why go to the theatre when you can read 'im ? " (*She gently dusts the boots sticking through the doorway*)

JOHN Does Mac know he sleeps there ?

CLEANER Bless yer 'eart, sir ! He knows well enough. Between you and me, I have seen Mr. Mac sleep there himself sometimes. There ain't no flies on Mr. Mac. You know, some of me friends say it must be wonderful to clean out the room of a great man like the editor of "The Daily Flash", always pulling down governments and tipping the winner. But all I can say is (*As she sweeps up a few more bits of paper lying on the floor*) he leaves just as much mess around as my old man, and that's a lot, I can tell you.

(*Fish comes in*)

FISH Haven't you finished here yet ?

(*Cleaner picks up her bucket and scuttles out, winking to John*)

CLEANER Good morning, sir. (*As she goes, she gives Fish a dirty look*)

FISH Good morning, John.

JOHN Good morning, Fish.

FISH (*Hanging up his hat*) Any news this morning ?

(*Before John can answer, Connie enters, carrying her book on mountaineering in one hand and a large bundle of manuscripts in the other*)

CONNIE Yes. I've got news. This is the big story. It is the best thing I have ever written—honestly, Fish.

FISH What is it this time ?

CONNIE That book on mountaineering. Why, it kept me awake all night, Fish. I just couldn't sleep. I just felt as though I might be the first woman to climb Mount Everest. Here's the story.

FISH (*Taking the story*) Wake him up now, John. Tell him to show a leg.

(*John goes across and shakes the leg of the sleeper who, after a few grunts and groans, staggers out into the daylight wearing his evening trousers and braces, and carrying his evening coat, collar and tie in his hand*)

(*Boy enters*)

BOY Here's your milk, Mr. Fish. (*Boy goes*)

ROBIN Got a mouth like sandpaper. (*Giving the story to Fish*) Here's your review, Fish. Everything all right at home, my dear? (*To Connie*)

CONNIE Yes, the bed's made. You will find some cold ham in the fridge.

ROBIN (*Claps his hand to his head*) Cold ham! My God!  
(*Fish gives him an envelope*)

FISH Here's your tickets for tonight, Robin.  
(*Robin looks at them and groans*)

ROBIN Oh Lord, another thriller! (*He exits*)

CONNIE (*shouting after him*) Don't forget to put the ants' eggs in the goldfish bowl, dear.

FISH (*To John, who is looking absolutely flabbergasted*) Didn't you know? They have been married thirty years. It's the happiest home in newspapers. She works hard all day, and he sleeps it off all night. They never have a row, do you, Connie?

CONNIE Fish, that honestly is the best story I ever wrote.

FISH Well, I have got something big for you today, Connie. Here it is. (*He hands her an envelope from his news desk*)

CONNIE (*Opening it*) What's this ? Opening of public baths at Newtown. Ticket to hear the Mayor speak. Look here, Fish, what's all this about ?

FISH Last time that fellow spoke, he quoted a bit of one of Mac's Leaders. We never heard about it till three days afterwards, when he wrote to Mac asking why the story had not appeared. So you trot off there, like a good girl, Connie, and if he quotes anything from Mac again we will find you at least three inches on page four.

CONNIE (*Putting on her hat again, which she swept off in the excitement of her entry*) What a life ! Upon the Alpine heights all night, swimming baths today. Oh, well ! (*Turning at the door*) I suppose I can take a taxi down there, Fish ?

FISH (*Without looking over his shoulder*) You will go by bus, you will charge the taxi fare and I shall okay it, Connie. Why bother me with that ?

(*Connie goes. John meanwhile has been sitting quietly at his desk, occasionally writing*)

FISH I don't know why, but I have a sort of sense it is going to be a big news day.

JOHN I think so, too.

FISH Have you read the papers, John ?

JOHN Yes, I've been through all of them.

FISH Anything fresh ?

JOHN We got a beat on the story of the necklace robbery, and also the news of the French race horse in the sports

pages. The "Echo" scooped us on some story about a window-smashing gang down in the docks.

FISH (*His pride rising*) Oh, no they didn't ! That's a phoney. I heard about it at midday yesterday. It's a phoney story. It's those damned advertisers of that new unbreakable glass. You'll see. They will issue a statement today that the only windows not smashed were made of their blooming product.

(*As John looks at him in amazement*) I tell you ! In my job you need the nose of a bloodhound, the mind of a sewage rat, and the cynicism of the Sphinx.

(*John goes on writing quietly*) What are you doing there, John

JOHN Well, as a matter of fact I'm trying an experiment.

FISH An experiment ?

JOHN Yes. You remember that speech Mac gave me last night ? He told me to find an angle on it. Well, I've found quite an angle.

FISH (*Interested*) Any news in it ?

JOHN Well, there was certainly big news for me. He talks about getting guidance.

FISH Getting what ?

JOHN Getting guidance. Listen. (*Reads from speech*) "It is not those who talk, but those who listen who receive guidance." I've been trying it.

FISH (*standing up, and coming over to his desk*) Say, what goes on here ? What's this all about ?

JOHN Well, I read the speech going home last night. And you know, it really did keep me awake all night.



FISH (*Laughing*) Just like Connie.

JOHN (*Holding up a couple of sheets of paper*) Well, I didn't write quite as much as she did, but I certainly got a few ideas.

FISH Such as what ?

JOHN Listen to this. "Absolute moral standards are the well-spring of inspired statesmanship. We talk of peace and unity, but forget that no man who harbours ill-will can solve the hates of nations." Do you know who I thought of, Fish, as I read that sentence ?

FISH Who did you think of ?

JOHN I thought of you.

FISH Me ?

JOHN Yes. You see, it's silly, in a way, of me ; but my father means a great deal to me. He is all I have got left of my family ; and somehow, when you were talking about him yesterday, you sounded so cynical and—well, belittling him, somehow ; and I just got mad inside. I thought if we were going to work together in this office, I had better tell you about that and say "sorry". (*Reads from book*) "We talk of peace and unity, but forget that no man who harbours ill-will . . ."

FISH (*Cutting in*) Oh, John, for Heaven's sake ! You don't need to pay any attention to me. I talk like that to everyone. It doesn't mean a thing. It's my ulcers. When you have been in this office for a few years you will be talking like it yourself.

JOHN Well, I wanted to tell you, anyway.

*(Fish goes back to his desk. John just sits there quietly. After a moment . . .)*

FISH Well ! That doesn't seem much of an experiment to me.

JOHN Oh, there's more to it than that !

FISH What more ?

JOHN Well, I hope it won't be so, Fish, but I may be out of a job by lunch-time today.

FISH *(Not taking him too seriously)* Why, have you forgotten to post one of Mac's letters, or something ?

JOHN No, but I have got to tell Mac something that he won't much like.

FISH What is it ?

JOHN You know that prize I won ?

FISH Yes, sure ! It was a darn good story. If only Connie could write like that we could give her more than three inches.

JOHN The only trouble is, I didn't write it.

FISH You—what ?

JOHN It was my father. I just had to get that job. We had no money, and Dad somehow enjoyed trying to get one back on Mac. He said he would make it the best darn story he had written for "The Daily Flash", even if it was his last. I felt like hell yesterday when Mac was talking about how the story reminded him of my father's style. And somehow, when I read that speech last night and sat quietly thinking, it was the only thing that seemed to stick in my mind. The thought just kept on coming, "Tell Mac the truth, the truth shall make you free."

FISH Well, I'll be damned ! (*Thinks it over*) I will be damned ! That certainly is a story ! But you know, John, I wouldn't take it too seriously. Think of the stories that have gone out over my name in this paper. Why, by the time the subs and the super-subs and the sub-subs have finished with them there is scarcely a word in one of them that I have written myself. Everyone does it in newspapers. I am glad you told me, but I wouldn't think any more about it. (*And warningly*) I certainly would not tell Mac.

JOHN I am going to tell him.

FISH Look here ! You are doing a good job here. You are learning a lot. You are worth every penny they pay you, and a bit more, too, if you ask me. How you got into the paper doesn't make the slightest difference to Mac, or me, or anybody. How you get out of the paper—that's important, and this is a foolish way to go. (*As John says nothing but just looks at him, Fish realises that he is going to tell him*)

FISH Well, anyway, if you must tell him, for Heaven's sake get the old boy in a good mood.

JOHN I am going to tell him as soon as I can ; and I have got something even harder to tell him.

FISH Harder ? What's that ?

(*As he speaks, Simon enters without saying anything ; but merely nodding in their direction, he goes quickly across stage and into the editor's room, shutting the door*)

FISH (*Excitedly*) Get ready ! The big man will be here in a minute now. It's the funniest thing. I have worked in this office for twenty years, and every morning, without fail, he

gets here just about a minute before Mac arrives. It's uncanny.

JOHN Like darkness before dawn, I suppose ?

FISH Like the smell before the big cheese. (*Lowering his voice*) Take a tip from me. If you have got to say something to Mac, don't let Simon hear about it. Keep your mouth shut when Simon is around. He's no Simple Simon, believe me. He sucks up to Mac, and stabs everybody else in the back. Why Mac doesn't see through him I just can't imagine.

(*Mac comes bursting into the office like a bull on the spree*)

MAC Hullo, boys ! This is going to be a big day, one of the biggest yet. That's right, isn't it, John ?

JOHN (*Rather doubtfully*) Yes, I think it is.

MAC (*Turns to Fish*) Don't think you are the only one who can get news, Fish. This young fellow here and I, we have got a story up our sleeve that will settle the front page for you tonight, anyway. Is Simon here ?

JOHN Yes, he got in just ahead of you.

MAC Amazing fellow, Simon. I don't know where I would be without him.

FISH What is this big story, Mac, that you talk about ?

MAC (*To John*) I don't think we will let him know just yet, do you, John ? We will wait till we have got it ready for him, and then drop it right into his lap. I am going to let you write it, John. This is the biggest chance I ever gave a young fellow on my paper. This is a story that may break

the Government, but it will certainly make you, if you do it right.

JOHN Mac, there's something I've got to tell you first.

MAC Oh, we've no time for that now ! We've got a big day in front of us, you know.

*(He is just about to go into his office when John says)*

JOHN No, Mac. It will only take a minute. But you've just got to know. It's about that prize story that got me my job here.

MAC Oh, for Heaven's sake, some other time ! We've got to think about today's news now.

JOHN No. I must tell you now. I never wrote a word of that story that won the prize. Not a word.

MAC What the hell do you mean ? Of course you wrote it.

JOHN No, I didn't. My father wrote the whole thing.

*(Mac caught between wind and water, stands shaken for a moment, and then bursts into roars of laughter)*

MAC My God, if that isn't one of the darndest stories I ever heard of in my life ! Simon ! *(Simon appears through the door)*

SIMON Yes, sir ?

MAC Listen to this. This young fellow has just been telling me that he never wrote that story at all that won the prize. It was old man Brook, his father. I like that. That's just the kind of man we need in newspapers, eh, Simon ? *(To John)* I would like to tell you that you didn't fool me a minute, but I will be dead honest with you, you fooled me right down the line.

SIMON You did say once or twice, sir, if you remember, that the boy's style reminded you very much of his father's.

MAC That's true. I did say so. But there you are ! John, I'm glad you told me. Don't think any more about it, my boy. You have developed a style of your own now, and I can honestly say I am glad you put it over on us. I must write a note to your old father. It's like the things he and I used to get up to in the old days together. Now take my coat, Simon.

*(Simon takes his coat in, and comes out again from the editor's room)*

Let's sit down and hold a council of war. Did John tell you what was in the wind ?

FISH No, Mac, he didn't.

MAC *(To John)* Good boy ! keep your mouth shut. Well, Fish, tomorrow Hamilton is going to resign, the Government will fall, six of the other men are coming out with him, and we are to break the story today that will start it all up. This will make him Prime Minister. And John is the man I want to write the story.

JOHN There is just one other thing I ought to tell you, Mac.

MAC You're not still worrying about that, are you ? Heavens, boy, I admire you for it ! You can't afford to be too finnick in this game. You will need just that go-getting quality today.

JOHN I don't feel happy about today's story.

MAC Not happy about it ? Why, you can't be serious. We are going to scoop the world on it. It's exclusive.

JOHN It was reading that speech you gave me to take home last night, Mac.

MAC (*Who has forgotten all about it*) Speech ? What speech ? Well, what of it ?

JOHN Well, after I had read that speech, Mac, I just didn't think the way we were doing business over this story was quite straight.

MAC Not quite straight ? You are not going to suggest, are you, that I would tolerate in this newspaper anything contrary to professional etiquette ? Not straight ? Why, the man came down himself, gave us the news, asked us to write the story, and we are going to print it. What's wrong with that ?

(*John says nothing*)

MAC (*Getting up and really roused*) What are you suggesting, boy ? What's on your mind ?

JOHN The new statesmanship to end confusion. I don't think Hamilton should have come here at all with that story. If he was being straight, why was he so anxious nobody should know he had come here ? (*Reads from the speech*)  
". . . schemes that add nothing to the solution of our problems. Leaders are prone to do it in their own selfish way. They say it's for the good of the country, but it's mostly for the good of themselves."

SIMON (*Before Mac, who is by now really sizzling with rage because his own pride is so deeply involved, can speak*)

If I may say so, sir, this attitude is a little unrealistic when it comes from a man who has just admitted to you that he and his father conspired to cheat you.

MAC That's right ! You and your father deliberately got together to try and pull the wool over my eyes. Not that you fully succeeded. I had my suspicions, didn't I, Simon ? And then you have the nerve, with a few months' experience behind you, to come and tell a man who has built up the whole of this paper until it has become one of the most powerful organs in the country—a highly respected voice of public opinion—to tell him what is the right and wrong way to do business . . .

*(As John says nothing, Mac recovers himself a little)*

Oh, hell ! Let's stop all this argument. Let's do the story first and talk about this later.

JOHN I hope you can get someone else to do it, Mac. I just don't feel I can.

MAC Now, look here. Let's get one thing straight. If you are going to work in this office, you do what you are told when you are told to do it. If that doesn't suit you, you don't suit me, and I will ask you to take your hat off the peg and get out of this place and never come back again. That's my last word to you.

*(He looks at John to see whether this will finally crumple him)*

JOHN *(Quietly)* Well, Mac, I guessed that was the way you would feel, and you have every right to feel it. *(He takes his hat off the peg)* I would only like to say that I have loved every minute of my time here, and I certainly shall not



forget the way you have taken me in and trained me and given me all you could. It has meant a lot to me. Good-bye, Fish.

*(He moves towards the door)*

SIMON Just a minute !

MAC All right, Simon, what is it ?

SIMON I was just thinking, sir, that there is no need for him to go like this. And as a matter of fact it might be awkward for everybody if he does.

MAC Awkward ? Why ?

SIMON Well, we should certainly want to give some explanation. It would be awkward without it. People talk too much. There was a lot of publicity in connection with that prize. I think you will have to let John Brook know before he goes, sir, that in fairness to "The Daily Flash" we shall have to print the whole story about how he came to the paper. It is a pity his father is involved, sir, but I see no other way to it. I think you will agree, sir.

MAC My God, that's right !

JOHN *(Coming back)* Look ! You can do anything you like to me. That is within your rights. But leave my father out of it. He is old, and he is an old friend of yours, too. It will just about finish him if you do this.

MAC *(Who feels he is getting the upper hand again)* You should have thought of that before you persuaded him to write the story that got your job for you.

FISH *(Coming forward, and talking quietly at the start but becoming louder as he finishes)* Now, look here, Mac ! I have stuck

around this office for a good many years, and I have swallowed anything you have given me to swallow and grinned as if I liked it. But this one is a bit too much. John told me about the prize just before you came in. I advised him not to say anything to you, and I still think he was a fool to do it. I didn't know what he felt about this other story. It is the first time I have heard about it. I don't feel that way myself about the stuff we have to print here. If I were sick about the stuff I am required to write in this paper, you would need a whole squad of cleaners to tidy up the mess. But he is new to it. He doesn't feel that way.

SIMON The issue is perfectly simple, sir. Is the government crisis today's story, or isn't it ?

MAC *My God, it is!* I will have that story on the front page tonight, if it is the last thing I do in this world. I will put it there if I have to write the damn thing myself.

SIMON I don't think that will be necessary, sir. Mr. Fish has worked here for a long time. Mr. Fish knows the newspaper game. He and John Brook get on well together. I think it would be the natural thing for them to do the story together today.

MAC That's it. Fish, you and I are old friends. I like this boy. You stick with him, that's a good fellow, and help him ; and let's forget all this. Go ahead now and do it.

*(Without waiting for an answer, he turns and goes towards his office. Simon, following, says to Fish)*

SIMON I am sure that will be best, Mr. Fish. You can help him forget all those growing pains.

MAC (*Sticks his head back through the door*) Now, go to it !

John has all the facts. And I want to see that story by four o'clock.

(*Silence*)

FISH (*After a pause—to John*) Well, John :

JOHN (*looks back*) Well, Fish :

FISH You had better tell me what the story's to be, and then we can get cracking. (*John just looks at him and smiles slightly*) Now look here, young fellow ! There are certain things we have got to get straight. I have been at this game for more years than you can remember. And there is only one of two ways of looking at it. That is, if you want to keep sane—in so far as any newspaper man does keep sane. Either you're a lawyer with a brief, you take your money and you make the best case you can, or else you are a harlot and you just take your money. This is Mac's paper. He wants the story. He pays us to write it. And it is up to him.

JOHN Do you really think that way, Fish :

FISH (*Talking even louder to convince himself*) I do think that way. I have thought that way for a long time, and I will go on thinking that way until they put my obituary in "The Daily Flash"—half-inch back page, small point, if I know anything. Let's get down to it, write the story and then we can get out to Paddy's. And we will drink a toast to conscience, to freedom of speech, and to the glories of the moral universe. Seriously, young fellow, I admired what you did with Mac. I shan't forget it in a hurry, and neither

will he. But you have said your piece, you have made your stand, you have cleared your conscience—and now the whole thing's gone far enough.

JOHN I'm sorry, Fish. I'm grateful for all you say, but I'm not going to write that story. Anyway, Fish, I'll tell you something.

*(Crossing over to Fish's desk at the end, facing audience)*

FISH *(Intrigued in spite of himself)* What are you going to tell me ?

JOHN I don't think you really believe all that stuff you have been booming at me, any more than Mac believes all the stuff he churns out in his leaders.

FISH Look here ! I know Mac. You think you know him, but I know him better than you do. I've had to live along with that fellow for thirty years ; and I tell you, John, as sure as we stand here, that if the government crisis story isn't written and ready to print by four o'clock for the early run, your dad will read about his latest adventure in the newspapers in tomorrow's edition. Mac will print the story, he will be the story tomorrow. He will make the headlines, too, if I know Mac. He will splash it all over the paper—and it's up to us.

JOHN I think you're right. I don't mind for myself, but I hate like hell to hurt my father. Just the same, this thing goes far beyond just me and my father, Fish. Why do conferences between nations fold up all over the world today ? Simply because everyone is out for their own selfish interest. Statesmen haven't got the guts to stand up for what's right.

And newspapers like this haven't got the guts to stand up for what's right either, and that is one reason why nations are folding up all over the world. Fish, the whole thing is rotten and you know it. It stinks. If we use a betrayed confidence of the Cabinet to pull down the Cabinet itself, we will be ashamed of it as long as we live, and we deserve to be. (*Pointing to the slogan*) "The truth shall make you free." Why, this is just a damned piece of dishonesty, to confuse and divide the country and to make Hamilton Prime Minister. If you and I fold up now, Fish—well, I will go round to Paddy's with you, and we can drink and drink and drink until *our* nation folds up too. But you would never forgive me, Fish, and you know it.

FISH I never realised it went so deep with you.

JOHN I never realised it myself until last night. But I have been feeling after this thing for years, longing somehow, somewhere, to find a way of helping to put things right in the country. When I got a chance of working here, I thought I could use my pen to do it. Somehow the things you said yesterday . . . I don't know . . . the whole business with Hamilton . . . I felt hopeless. Then I read that speech Mac gave me last night, and something went click right inside my heart. Everything came into place. Listen to this. (*John picks up the speech and shows it to Fish*) "The New Statesmanship to End Confusion". "Confusion comes from compromise. Clarity comes from change." Remember ?

FISH Yes, I do remember. But you are forgetting your old dad, aren't you ?

JOHN I am not forgetting him for a moment. If Dad makes the headlines tomorrow, he will hate it more than anything else that has ever happened. (*Crosses to centre and stands*)

FISH (*Gets up, and banging the desk*) By God ! There's only one thing he will hate more.

JOHN What's that ?

FISH If you were to give in now, I believe your old father would kick you out of the house, unless he has changed a hell of a lot since I knew him. If there is one thing your father hated more than anything else, it was anyone who sucked up to Mac. If he had taken my advice and done a bit more bowing and scraping round this place, he would be here still ; but he never would, and it seems to me you are exactly like him. (*Coming towards him*) You know, John, it goes against all my years of experience. It means breaking every New Year resolution I made since I first came to work here—to put my job first and principles last. But if you are going to make a fool of yourself over this, I will make a fool of myself with you.

(*As John is about to say something, Fish cuts him short*)

Now don't start talking back to me, but just tell me something. We are clear we are not going to write the story.

What exactly *are* we going to do ?

JOHN (*Laughing*) I wish I knew. I wish I could tell you. I honestly don't know what to do.

FISH (*Cynically*) Well, John, as I remember, it was that guidance of yours got us into this mess. (*Laughs*) You had better try some more, and see if it will get us out of it.

JOHN You're right, Fish, that's exactly it. Let's sit down and try it together.

CURTAIN

ACT III



### ACT III

The curtain rises on a stage empty except for Miss So-and-So, who is not working, but eating her lunch out of a bag and reading a somewhat lurid-looking novel propped up on the desk in front of her. She hastily grabs the novel and tries to conceal it, as the door bursts open and in comes Connie followed by her husband, Robin Mortimer. Robin is dressed in evening clothes, ready for his evening's stint (though it is only about 3.45 in the afternoon). Connie, with a sheaf of papers waving in her hand, calls as she comes through the door :

CONNIE Fish! Fish! oh, where is Fish ?

MISS SO-AND-SO Not back from lunch yet, Miss Latterley. I can't get out for mine until he comes back.

ROBIN Can't be finishing his lunch now. It's after three o'clock. The pub closes at three.

CONNIE Oh, Robin, don't be so vulgar ! You think that every newspaper man drinks as much as you do. Oh, I do want to see Fish ! This (*Waving the papers in the air*) really is the greatest story I have ever written.

ROBIN (*Sitting down resignedly*) I'm sure it is, my dear.

CONNIE It is amazing what a really good reporter can get out of the opening of a public swimming bath. And the Mayor really did quote one of Mac's leaders. Oh, I'm sure I will get on the front page tonight !

ROBIN Yes, my dear. I'm sure you will.

CONNIE Just run your eyes over this story, there's a dear.

ROBIN (*Picks it up gingerly and begins to read it*)

CONNIE (*Eagerly*) Well ?

ROBIN My dear, you really have got genius. I have always said so. You capture the very atmosphere of the baths.

CONNIE You really are a dear, Robin. I must say you always have appreciated my work. That is why I married you. But I do wish they would take you off that stupid old theatre work, so we could just occasionally see something of each other.

ROBIN God forbid ! (*Then as Connie turns*) I mean to say, I would to God they would ! (*He goes on hurriedly, seeing he has a certain amount of ground to make up*) Seriously, my dear, all theatres are insipid to me after the amazing drama you have made of our marriage.

CONNIE Oh, Robin, you really are a pet ! (*Connie moves across to Miss So-and-So*) Now, look here, dear, I've got to go out on another story. It's a dog show. I think there really may be an angle to it. But I am going to leave the swimming bath open on Fish's desk, and will you be sure to let him know, dear, that I want at least half a column ? Don't forget to tell him, dear.

MISS SO-AND-SO No, dear.

CONNIE Thank you, dear. (*To Robin as she prepares to leave*) Can't you come along with me just this once, Robin ? We haven't gone on a story together since we were engaged. You have plenty of time to get back to your silly old theatre. You never see the play, anyway.

ROBIN Well, everyone tells me I'm going to the dogs, so we

may as well go to the dogs together. (*As Connie sweeps out he moves after her, saying*) After the actors and actresses I have to see every night, the dogs will be like a gala performance.

(*After a moment, John Brook pokes his head through Mac's private door, and then comes in, saying*)

JOHN All clear, Fish. Only Miss So-and-So here.

(*Enter Fish*)

MISS SO-AND-SO Miss Latterley and Mr. Mortimer have only just this moment left. They've gone to a dog show together. You can catch them if you want them.

FISH No, thanks, I don't want them.

MISS SO-AND-SO Miss Latterley left this copy, Mr. Fish. (*Hands it to him*) She asked me to say she wants at least half a column.

(*Fish takes it and begins to read*)

MISS SO-AND-SO I'm going to lunch now, Mr. Fish. (*Goes*)

FISH Copy down, boy. (*Enter boy. Fish hands Connie's copy over*) Tell 'em one inch on the back, if there's space. Otherwise spike it. (*Exit boy*)

Well, John, I feel better for lunch. Now I'm ready for Hamilton, Mac, or anyone else who comes along.

JOHN I feel like before a big football match, as if I've got a lot of ice that won't quite melt, somewhere near the top of my stomach.

FISH You don't need to be scared of old Eric Hamilton. He knocked around the office for years. He doesn't scare me.

JOHN Nor me—at least, not much. He should be here any minute now.

FISH He'll be punctual. He was a good newspaper man. No, it's that fellow Simon who worries me. I've a feeling in my bones he'll do as much damage as he can to us. However, if I'm making a fool of myself, John, over all this, it won't be for the first time in my life.

JOHN I have a hunch it will work out, Fish. Don't worry.

FISH You and your hunches ! (*John goes into Mac's office. Fish is working at his desk as Eric Hamilton enters*)

HAMILTON Hullo, Fish ! where is everybody ?

FISH You and I are here. John Brook's in there. Mac will be back around four o'clock. I don't know about the others.

HAMILTON (*Looking at his watch*) I told Mac I'd be in to see him. I'm dead on time. He'll have to work fast on that story if he's not back here till four.

FISH He's told young Brook to do the story. He wants us to have it ready for him when he gets back.

(*John comes back out of Mac's office*)

JOHN Good afternoon, Mr. Hamilton.

HAMILTON Hullo, Brook ! I hear you are doing the story of the Government crisis.

JOHN Well, I wanted to talk to you about that.

HAMILTON Right. But remember ! Nobody's to know I have anything to do with the story. Nobody's to know I've been down here. Mac made that perfectly clear to you, I suppose.

JOHN Yes, he did.

FISH Go on, John. Put him out of his misery. Tell him how we stand.

HAMILTON Nobody knows I've been down here, do they, Fish?

FISH Nobody knows, Eric ; and in the circumstances as they now are, I don't think anybody will care much, anyway.

HAMILTON What do you mean ?

FISH We've had quite a day here, Eric. Go on, John. You'd better tell him.

JOHN After you left last night, Mr. Hamilton, Mac gave me a speech to review. It's called " The New Statesmanship to End Confusion ".

HAMILTON I've heard of that. A constituent sent it to me. It's on my desk now, but I haven't got around to reading it.

JOHN Well, I did read it. (*He pauses*)

HAMILTON Go on, is it any good ? What's it say ?

JOHN It just gave me a whole set of new ideas, Mr. Hamilton. I spent most of the night lying awake thinking out how to start putting things right in the world.

HAMILTON Thank God, I didn't read it ! I spend all day and every day in and out of Cabinet discussing how to put the world right. I don't want to sit up half the night doing it, too.

JOHN But I saw that I'd got to start with myself. One of the first things I did when I got to the office this morning was to tell Mac that I cheated over winning " The Daily Flash " prize. I never wrote that story at all. My father wrote it for me.

HAMILTON What on earth did Mac say ?

FISH He just roared with laughter. You know Mac, Eric. He thought it was one of the smartest things he'd ever heard of.

HAMILTON Mac certainly is a tough character. Yes, I suppose that's exactly how he would react. (*Turning to John*) Well, young fellow, you've got pluck—and you've got luck, too. You'll need 'em both in this profession. (*As John says nothing and goes on looking at him, rather amusedly he says*) There's no need to go on staring at me like that, you know. I did not cheat to win "The Daily Flash" prize. I did it all by myself, and it's one of the things in my career I'm really proud of.

FISH Just the same, this is where you came into the story, Eric. You'll need a bit of pluck and luck yourself, I think.

HAMILTON I don't know what you're talking about.

FISH Tell him, John.

JOHN After Mac had finished roaring with laughter, he told me to write this story of the Government crisis. I refused. I said I couldn't do it.

HAMILTON I'll give you all the facts you need. It won't take many minutes.

JOHN It wasn't that. I told Mac I just didn't feel the thing was honest.

HAMILTON Not honest ? What do you mean ?

JOHN I didn't think it was straight, Mr. Hamilton, to print a Cabinet secret, given to me by a member of the Cabinet, with the object of pulling down the Government. I still don't think so.

HAMILTON By God, you've got a nerve ! What the devil do you mean ? How dare you speak to me like that ? I'm amazed Mac didn't kick you out of the office straight away.

FISH That's exactly what he did.

JOHN I was almost out of the door when Simon Slade stopped me.

HAMILTON Simon Slade ? What did he have to do with all this ?

JOHN He put it into Mac's head that either I would write this story, or tomorrow "The Flash" will print the facts about how my father cheated with me to win "The Flash" prize. If that happens, it will just about finish my father.

HAMILTON So you decided in spite of your scruples to write it. Fine. I'm not a bit concerned with your moral principles, Brook. I am concerned with getting this story into the paper in time. I suggest we stop this conversation and we go to work, Fish.

FISH It's not as simple as that, Eric. In some ways I wish it was.

JOHN Mac told Fish to help me with the story. I told Fish I wasn't going to do the story. Fish asked me exactly what I did propose to do.

FISH John said he didn't know.

HAMILTON Well, I don't know. The sooner Mac gets back the better. He'll have to work this out.

JOHN I told Fish about guidance—something it told about in

that speech I read last night. How if you listen, adequate, accurate, definite information can come from the mind of God to the mind of man.

FISH And we tried it together.

HAMILTON Fish, have you gone crazy ?

FISH I don't think so. I feel all right. Never felt more sane, as a matter of fact. No, Eric ; you see the interesting thing is that when we tried guidance together, it worked.

HAMILTON What do you mean, *worked* ?

FISH We both were quiet. We both wrote down our thoughts. We both had much the same thought.

JOHN Yes. And there wasn't any cheating this time, Fish, was there ?

HAMILTON What was the thought ?

FISH Here, take a look at mine.

*(Pulls out a bit of paper from his pocket and hands it to Hamilton)*

HAMILTON *(Reading aloud)* " It will work out all right. Stand by John. Don't give way to Mac this time. Don't do the story. Old Eric Hamilton will help. He is not as hopeless as he sounds."

*(Throwing down the paper)*

Damn it, Fish ! I didn't come here to be insulted by you.

FISH That's not an insult, Eric. It's guidance. Listen to what John had.

JOHN *(Reading from his bit of paper)* " Hamilton will help. Stand firm. Don't do the story. It will be a turning point for Hamilton."



HAMILTON Do you mean to say that, without comparing notes, you wrote down those things ?

FISH Yes, we did. After a quarter of a century of Mac, I thought I was past all surprises in this office—but all this has certainly surprised me.

HAMILTON (*To John*) What did you mean—a turning point for Hamilton ?

JOHN I guess it means that this whole business may be the start of something new for you, Mr. Hamilton. You remember, "The New Statesmanship to End Confusion". You may give something new to the whole nation.

HAMILTON I just don't know what you're talking about. I can understand a young man like Brook getting worked up like this. But as for you, Fish, I'm amazed at a man as experienced, as—as . . . (*As he hesitates for the word*)

FISH As hardboiled as me ? You're right, Eric. I'm pretty amazed myself.

HAMILTON What are you doing it for ?

FISH Look here, Eric ! You know me. I know you. I can give you facts. Mac faced that young fellow with a real decision this morning. He stood up to it. He refused to do what he felt was wrong, no matter how much Mac threatened and roared. To tell you the truth, it made me feel more ashamed of myself than I've felt for years.

HAMILTON What have you done to be ashamed of ?

FISH Plenty. I've waded through mud and dirt to get where I am. You know that. I've fed the public anything they fancy, whether it's been good for them or not. And most

of the things the great public seem to want to read about nowadays are the wrong things. I've thought of nothing for years but how to keep my job and get more pay. I've done both, while the country's slipping to hell fast. This fellow, John, suddenly made me sick of the whole rotten business.

HAMILTON You wouldn't get far in politics if you were as squeamish as that.

FISH I'm not in politics, thank God ! But that's not the point. I began to see what this thing in me had done, Eric. Why, millions of people for years have been fed the wrong thinking from this office, just because my own thinking was wrong. I've thought of myself as a tough guy. I thought it was great stuff to fight like hell for my own corner. I see that for all these years I've been nothing but a coward.

JOHN He's no coward, Mr. Hamilton. You should have seen the way he stood up to Mac this morning.

FISH The question is, who's going to stand up to Mac this afternoon ? Mac will be in here any moment now. He's expecting to publish this story of the Cabinet crisis. John here's not going to write it. I'm not going to write it. What are you going to do, Eric ?

HAMILTON I don't know what you want me to say. Mac and I have done business like this for years. It's been for the good of the country.

JOHN Is that really true, Mr. Hamilton ? It seems to me, if you

get Mac to print this story it will be mostly for the good of yourself.

*(Enter Simon Slade. He checks when he sees Hamilton, then comes bustling forward)*

SIMON Good afternoon, gentlemen. Is the story in order, Mr. Hamilton ?

HAMILTON They've not done the story.

SIMON Not done the story ? That's a pity. A great pity. Mr. MacFarlane won't like that. It will make him very angry. He may blame you, Mr. Hamilton.

HAMILTON He can't blame me, surely !

SIMON You know what he's like when he's in a temper. If I were you, Mr. Hamilton, I'd persuade your friends here to write that story, and write it fast. If not, I'd write it yourself. It will be the worse for everybody if it's not written. Especially it will be the worse for you.

*(Exit Simon into Mac's office)*

FISH By God, Eric ! why in the world do you let him talk to you like that ?

JOHN I've never heard Simon Slade talk like that to anyone before.

HAMILTON *(Staring at the door through which Simon has gone)*  
By God, he's never going to talk like that to me again.  
*(Enter Mac, full of beans and fuss)*

MAC Hullo, boys ! Hullo, Eric ! Good of you to look in. Is the story all right ? Where is it ?

FISH There's no story.

MAC What the hell do you mean ! no story ?

FISH I just mean there is no story. John hasn't written it.

MAC (*To John*) Why not ?

JOHN I told you this morning I wasn't going to write it, Mac.

MAC Fish, I gave you instructions to get that story written.

If Brook wouldn't do it you should have done it yourself.

Now get busy.

FISH Sorry, Mac, can't be done.

MAC What do you mean—can't be done ?

FISH You see, I feel the same way about it as young Brook.

MAC (*Not fully grasping the point*) I don't give a damn what you feel ! Go out and get a drink after you've written it—  
or whatever else you do when you're not feeling right  
—but let's get that story written.

HAMILTON They won't do it, Mac.

MAC Yes, they will.

HAMILTON No, they won't. They've been explaining it all before you came in.

MAC I wish to God someone would explain it to me, then.

HAMILTON These men were told to write about a Cabinet secret that I brought to your office. The object is to pull down the Government and make me Prime Minister.

MAC That's it. It's a whale of a story !

HAMILTON It's a whale that's shrunk to a minnow, Mac. It's a story that has not happened. They won't write the story, because both Brook and Fish think it is not an honest thing to do.

MAC Oh, to hell with that ! (*As Miss So-and-So enters through the door*) Here's Miss So-and-So. Come on, Eric, I'll do the story myself. We'll do it together and talk to these men afterwards. Get ready to take copy, Miss So-and-So.

HAMILTON No, Mac, I'm not going through with it.

MAC You must go through with it. You can't back out now ; anyway you'll ruin our front page if you don't.

HAMILTON You see, I think Fish and Brook are right. Of course it isn't honest. It's a plain trick to make me Prime Minister.

(*Enter Simon from Mac's room*)

MAC Thank God, you're here, Simon ! The very man we need. Hamilton here says we cannot print the story about the Cabinet crisis.

SIMON I think Mr. Hamilton will realise that it's too late for him to change his mind.

MAC That's right. By God, Eric, you can't back down now !

SIMON After all, there is such a thing as the freedom of the Press to print the facts as we know them.

FISH What do you know or care about freedom, Simon ?

SIMON It is quite obvious that Mr. Hamilton has been under some pressure. I think if I could have a word with him . . .

HAMILTON You're right. I have been under pressure—for a long time, too. I don't think I'm going to stay that way any more.

FISH Good for you, Eric ! My God, I knew you had it in you !

MAC What the hell is all this ?

SIMON All I would say, sir, is that Hamilton has gone too far to draw back—much too far. (*To Hamilton*) I think you understand the position.

HAMILTON I do. But something has happened in this room that you don't understand. "The Truth shall make you free."

SIMON You fool, you've ruined everything.

HAMILTON No, Simon. You're the one who ruined it.

MAC What in the world has Simon got to do with all this ?

HAMILTON Just before you came in here, Mac, this man (*Pointing at Simon*) threatened me. It was a surprise to Fish and Brook. It was no surprise to me.

SIMON Shut up ! You've said too much already.

HAMILTON No, I haven't. Last night when you all ran downstairs and the machines stopped, Simon told me certain facts. He said that if I became Prime Minister tomorrow, I would have to do what he and his friends told me. You see, Mac, I've been taking money from Simon, and fellows like him who want to destroy the freedom of this nation, for nearly twenty-five years. They've given me money. I've given them help. It all began, Mac, when I was on this very paper.

MAC Do you mean to say it's been going on under my nose ?

HAMILTON Plenty of things were going on under your nose, and under the nose of the people in this country, that you and a lot of people don't know anything about at all.

FISH So that's the game ! I've been wondering about your Simon Slade for a long time, Mac. He's an agent.

SIMON (*To Hamilton*) Do you think we'll let you get away with this ? We'll smash you into bits.

HAMILTON No, you won't. I've wanted to make a break clear from you and your lot for a long time, Simon. But my ambition was too strong for me. I wanted to be Prime Minister more than I wanted to lose your help in my career. Well, I'm through with you.

SIMON We're not through with you, though.

HAMILTON We'll see. You've not heard what I'm going to do.

JOHN What *are* you going to do, Mr. Hamilton ?

HAMILTON When Fish was talking here about the way he's lived and what he's seen, I realised all I had cost my country. It's the selfishness that sacrifices a nation. Mac, have you got some notepaper ?

MAC (*Automatically*) Miss So-and-So, give Mr. Hamilton some notepaper. (*As Miss So-and-So does it*) What the hell do you want it for ?

HAMILTON I'm going to send my resignation to the Prime Minister on "The Daily Flash" notepaper, Mac. It's as good as any other paper, and it will make a better story for you. I'm going to resign right now, and I'm going to tell the Prime Minister everything. All the things I've just been telling you. I'm going to clean my hands, if it's the last thing I do.

FISH Well, I'll be damned !

MAC Don't waste time talking, Fish. Don't you realise we'll scoop the world on this ? Boy, boy ! (*Enter copy boy*) Tell the stone to hold the edition. Hold everything, even if it makes us late. Get going now ! Get out ! (*Exit boy at the run*) John, write that story. Just the facts. Mr. Hamilton resigns. Play down the corruption angle, but tell the public why he's going. Reproduce the letter to the Prime Minister in facsimile in the late edition. We must have photographs. Boy ! (*Another boy rushes in*) Get a photographer. Get him quick. (*Exit boy*)

SIMON (*Steps forward and dominates the stage*) Just a minute, Mr. Macfarlane. If you want to give the story, give the real story. The truth shall make you free. Well, tell the truth ; but let it be the whole truth. And you still don't know it.

MAC Shut up, Simon ! No time for explanations now.

SIMON Explanations ! You poor, blind fool. You are just as blind as you were the day I first set foot in your office. You thought you were training me. Training me ! (*He laughs*) Why, I had years and years of training before I was trusted with this job of using you. What do you think I came in here for ? Why, every story you have written, every leader in your paper for years, has had my mark upon it. I have fed the line into you, and you have never known it. (*Turns to Hamilton*) And as for you—you poor, ambitious little man ! If you knew how often I have wanted to laugh at you, seeing you strutting and posing and wangling your



way up the ladder ! And all the time I and my friends were using you. Why, I don't even hate you. (*Turns back to Mac*) Nor you, either. I just despise you both.

HAMILTON I'm not afraid of you any more. You can't touch me. I'm out of a job and out of your power for ever. It is a wonderful feeling to be free, to have nothing to hide. (*Enter the photographer*)

PHOTOGRAPHER Photographs, Mr. Fish ?

SIMON (*wheels around upon Mac*) Yes, pose your picture. But if you want the real story, put yourself in the middle of it. All your talk of liberty and patriotism ! I got sick of the phrases I gave you. And as long as I could get you another drink or find you another woman, you would go blindly along, and think you were in the lead. I know all about you, just as I know all about him.

MAC You're nothing but a spy. Get out !

SIMON No need to tell me to get out. My job here is done. But don't forget, when you print the story, to give them all the truth. Your public would enjoy it, Mr. MacFarlane. (*Simon turns and goes*)

PHOTOGRAPHER Excuse me, Mr. Fish. Someone said I had to take a photograph.

FISH Come on, Eric, come on, John. I guess you and I had better be in this. (*They stand side by side, stage right, and are photographed together*) Old stuff for you, Eric.

HAMILTON No, never like this, Fish.

FISH First time News Editor appeared on front page.

PHOTOGRAPHER I'll have one more, gentlemen.

FISH Right, make it fast.

HAMILTON Have you got that notepaper ?

MAC (*Mac holds out his hand to Miss So-and-So who hands him two sheets of paper, which he gives to Hamilton*) Tell me, Fish. Was that the truth, the things he said to me, I mean ? (*Hamilton in the meantime crosses and enters Mac's office*)

FISH There may be enough of the truth in it to set us all free, Mac. For the first time in my life I have really begun to see what a newspaper *can* be and *can* do. That's it, Mac. We can start tonight to tell a story that is the greatest story in the world, and it will last a life-time. The story of a new world order, where men like you and me and John, here, begin to change, and learn to give millions the clarity that comes from change.

JOHN And Mac, that speech says we newspaper men are to be the heralds of a new world order.

FISH That's right. Why, Eric—he's not finished ! He's only just begun. A man with the courage to do what he's just done will have the courage to take on the whole world and change it. (*As Fish says this, Mac begins to look more like a man again, though he still says nothing. Enter boy*)

BOY Ten minutes more, sir. Stone says they are waiting for your editorial. (*Mac says nothing*) Can I go, sir ? You never said "Get out". (*Exit*) (*Mac begins to laugh, in spite of himself*)

MAC I never said "Get out"—but by God, we must begin

to get cracking, or there's not going to be a paper tomorrow ! John, have you got that story finished ? It's not much use being a herald of the new world order if you miss the edition.

*(Enter Connie at full speed, followed by Robin, more leisurely)*

CONNIE Miss the edition ? I can't have ! Fish, Fish, this really is it ! It is the greatest story I ever wrote.

FISH My God, and we are short of copy, too !

ROBIN I must say this for Connie, she is a real sticker. She gets more atmosphere out of a dog show than any other woman in newspapers.

FISH Copy down, boy. *(Enter copy boy)* Tell them twelve inches on page one. *(As boy rushes out)* And tell them to put "Constance Latterley" at the bottom of it. We will really do you proud today, Connie. *(To Mac)* Connie has not had that much space in the paper for ten years.

ROBIN And her name on the bottom of it, too ! My dear, this calls for a real celebration. *(Making for the door)*

CONNIE Oh, no you don't ! *(Pulling him back)*  
*(Boy comes in again)*

BOY Six minutes to deadline, sir. They are still asking for the editorial.

MAC Get out ! *(Boy looks relieved that all is well)*

BOY Thank you, sir. *(Rushes off)*

MAC What on earth are we going to tell the public tomorrow ? I was all set with a great piece about the Cabinet crisis as we arranged. But that is all over now. What shall

we say ? (*There is a moment of silence*) (*Hamilton comes slowly out of Mac's room*) Look here, Eric, have you finished the letter yet ?

HAMILTON Yes. Here it is, ready for the Prime Minister.  
(*Hands it to him. Mac reads the letter.*)

MAC You will be wanting a job now, Eric. You had better do the editorial then, and do it fast. Get ready to take it, Miss So-and-So. (*Hamilton steps forward*)

HAMILTON Well, John, what do we say ?

JOHN (*Slowly*) I—think—we—might—call it “The New Statesmanship to End Confusion”. (*He picks up the speech, and moves towards Miss So-and-So's desk, as the curtain falls*)

CURTAIN