

ACT ONE

The CURTAIN rises on a dark stage. A SPOTLIGHT appears on a pretty, wry-looking, smirking young woman with bobbed hair and an ironic manner - DOROTHY PARKER. She is aged about 20-30 and dressed simply but cleanly in 1920's fashion. ACTORS are arranged around HER - sitting, kneeling, standing - in the shadows.

With a flail of HER arms, DOROTHY steps forward and speaks to us - completely taking charge of the stage:

DOROTHY

All the world's a stage! - and we? We are but the actors and actresses upon that stage. Then there are the people who glare sullenly from the audience. They're the critics - the ones who write obituaries or paeans of glory. They are judges, sitting atop a pedestal, dispensing verdicts like gods. Look high enough and you even may see me sitting up there. My name is Dorothy Parker and this is a play about me.

(Indicating the set.)

This - this is the set. It will turn into many times and many places. That's because, in real life, I walked.

(Indicating the actors.)

These - these are the actors. They will play varying parts in my life. That's because, in real life, I'm cheap.

DOROTHY moves closer and smiles at us.

DOROTHY

I should mention, too, that you'll love my play. I know, because I've already written the review of it. I'm a critic, remember - or, at least, will be soon. It's the Year of Our Lord, 1918, and I'm about to bullshit my way into a new job.

The ACTORS have wheeled in a desk. We have been transported to the offices of the magazine *Vanity Fair*. A wiry, cultured, schoolmarm-looking man in his 50's sits behind the desk - FRANK CROWNINSHIELD. HE is the Editor of *Vanity Fair*.

DOROTHY

I began my writing career a few years ago penning captions for pictures at *Vogue* magazine. The work is boring - I miss my paragraphs - and my boss is a walking advertisement for manslaughter. So, needless to say, when a job opportunity arose at our sister publication, *Vanity Fair*, I couldn't resist pleading my case with Editor Frank Crowninshield. He was a gay old soul - literally. He was 50, he smelled like a shoe, and he was gay.

CROWNINSHIELD has been watching DOROTHY through the last bit of her monologue. DOROTHY turns to HIM expectantly with a hopeful smile on HER face.

CROWNINSHIELD

You make a persuasive case, Miss Parker.

DOROTHY

Mrs. Parker. I'm married.

CROWNINSHIELD

I didn't know. I'm sorry.

DOROTHY

Don't be. I'm the one who's married.

CROWNINSHIELD smiles wryly.

CROWNINSHIELD

I don't believe I've ever met your husband.

DOROTHY

He's currently away on vacation... in France.

CROWNINSHIELD

How lovely. Tout arrive en France. Where is he vacationing?

DOROTHY

Thirty-third Ambulance Corps, Fourth Division.

CROWNINSHIELD

(Understanding.)

One of our brave men overseas - very admirable.

DOROTHY

(A little tense.)

Yes. Very.

(A beat.)

Did I just lose the job?

CROWNINSHIELD

Why do you ask?

DOROTHY

Because I'm not just looking for a job to bide my time until my husband comes back home. I want a job - any job - with your magazine and I want to stay in the job.

CROWNINSHIELD

What if I said we needed a janitor?

DOROTHY

Then I'd be certain to find you one.

CROWNINSHIELD smiles benignly.

CROWNINSHIELD

You know, Mrs. Parker, I can never tell when you're joking and when you're serious - although I take it you're always somewhere, somehow in-between. I do acknowledge, though, that your poetic submissions to my office have been read with interest - all one hundred and two of them.

DOROTHY

Six. One hundred and six.

CROWNINSHIELD

Indeed, yes, from those submissions and from your successful sojourn with our friends at *Vogue*, I know that you are most certainly serious about your literary career. There is just some lingering concern that your writing may be controversial to an indeterminate portion of our readership.

DOROTHY

Controversial?

CROWNINSHIELD picks up a piece of paper on his desk and holds it in front of DOROTHY. It is a page from a magazine with a large picture of female underwear and a caption under it.

CROWNINSHIELD

"Brevity is the soul of lingerie?"

DOROTHY

(Simply.)  
Isn't it?

CROWNINSHIELD smiles, puts down the paper, and begins to circle the stage.

CROWNINSHIELD

Well, Mrs. Parker, it just so happens that our own Mr. Wodehouse - you know Mr. Wodehouse? - is taking a leave of absence to work on his playwriting career.

DOROTHY

(Of course she has.)  
I hadn't heard.

CROWNINSHIELD

I'm afraid that leaves *Vanity Fair* without a drama critic.

DOROTHY

I can be very critical.

CROWNINSHIELD

I don't doubt that.

DOROTHY

I can be very dramatic, too.

CROWNINSHIELD smiles and considers DOROTHY for a moment. A long pause. CROWNINSHIELD then smiles tauntingly and picks up the lingerie picture again to read the caption underneath it. We sense HE is weighing in his mind the step HE is about to take. DOROTHY senses a chance escaping and loses her reserve long enough to succumb to a little desperation:

DOROTHY

Look, Mr. Crowninshield, I know that I'm only a syllable in this massive ticker-tape called Conde Nast Publications and that there are a million other critics in this city who are more qualified for your position - and I know that all those other critics are men, who know other men, who know other-other men, who know other-other-other men's wives - but I promise you that, if you hire me... you'll regret it.

CROWNINSHIELD thinks for a moment and then smiles at DOROTHY. HE carefully picks up the phone on the desk.

CROWNINSHIELD

(Into the phone.)  
This is Frank Crowninshield. Please put Edna Chase on the line.  
(To DOROTHY.)  
Would Monday morning work for you?

DOROTHY nods eagerly.

CROWNINSHIELD

(Into the phone.)  
Good afternoon, Miss Chase. I am calling to let you know that Mr. Nast has decided to appoint Dorothy Parker as the new drama critic at *Vanity Fair*. Mrs. Parker will be starting with me on

CROWNINSHIELD (CONT)

Monday. I trust you will manage her transition with all due diligence.

(A beat.)

Very good. Thank you very much.

CROWNINSHIELD hangs up the phone and smiles at DOROTHY. SHE smiles back at HIM - then more urgently:

DOROTHY

I won't let you down, Mr. Crowninshield.

CROWNINSHIELD

I'd be shocked if you did, Mrs. Parker.

DOROTHY

So would I.

DOROTHY rises and makes to leave, when:

CROWNINSHIELD

You mentioned your husband is serving overseas?

DOROTHY turns and nods.

CROWNINSHIELD

He might want to inquire with us about a job when he returns from the war. Mr. Nast loves veterans almost as much he loves subscriptions.

(A beat.)

Almost.

DOROTHY

Thank you, but Eddie has a job lined up.

CROWNINSHIELD

I'm glad to hear it.

DOROTHY

He'll be working at Paine Webber & Company.

CROWNINSHIELD

Ah, yes - the stockbrokers.

DOROTHY

He worked there before the war.

(To us.)

The war. It's like BC and AD. Everything either occurred before it or after it... and a hell of a lot occurred during it.

LOUD PARTY MUSIC rudely blares onstage like an unwelcome overture to some grandiloquent musical. The LIGHTS dim

to suggest intimacy in an overdone ballroom. We have been transported to a ritzy hotel in Branford. PARTY-GOERS dance in from the wings. It seems that everyone is managing to dance with some sort of drink in their hand. DOROTHY appears to be like a schoolgirl in a brothel amidst all the glitz and the glamor. We have the distinct sense that SHE is still in the "innocent waif" phase. SHE watches the display for a moment and then turns to us:

DOROTHY

It was 1916 and I was visiting Branford, Connecticut for a vacation from... everything. My father had died, money was tight, and my poems were being rejected from the Bronx to the Battery. I didn't have much going for me other than the fact that I wasn't dead - which wasn't half bad. The Great War was raging in Europe, but my little island was safe and serene. I didn't know at the time it was about to get a visitor.

A PARTY-GOER\* charges forward and shouts at the CROWD:

PARTY-GOER

Ladies and gentleman! May I have your attention? I think it is only fair to raise our glasses to the man who's allowed us all to be here today - each and every one - from the Yale men to the Harvard men... to the Vassar women.

The MALES in the CROWD cheer.

PARTY-GOER

I don't mean we should thank our parents, although they helped... or God, although He's great... but a certain someone else who needs our help.

(Leaning forward.)

You know it's an election year, right?

The CROWD cheers.

PARTY-GOER

Good - so let's give him some help in November!

The CROWD cheers.

PARTY-GOER

(Raising his glass.)

To President Woodrow Wilson, who kept us out of war!

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\* Played by the actor playing Crowninshield.

The CROWD applauds widely. The MUSIC grows ever louder and the PARTY-GOERS resume dancing. A young man - tall, slender, blond, and good-looking - emerges from the crowd: EDWIN POND PARKER ('EDDIE'). HE is a rebellious youth brimming with a confidence that is both attractive and somewhat worrisome. HE brings a friend with HIM - SAM.

SAM

Eddie! For God's sake, slow down. You've drunk half of Scotland. How many whiskeys have you had?

EDDIE

The question is "how many whiskeys have had me?"

SAM

Four. Five. Seven. I stopped counting at eight.

EDDIE

That's funny - I started counting at nine.

SAM

Hey, look, Eddie, let's get you back to the room. You know what happens when you start drinking - you keep drinking. We need to go.

EDDIE

You're right, Sam - damn right. Let's go - you and me. Let's get up and go someplace. To hell with the stocks. To hell with the Ponds. And the Parkers? Fuck them, too! No one else is going to do it for them. I want to burn down some houses and blow up some graves. I want to ditch this dive and see some sites. New York. Chicago. Paris. London. Florence.

EDDIE trips and stumbles. SAM quickly catches HIM.

SAM

At this rate, you'll be lucky to get to Providence.

EDDIE looks at SAM queerly.

EDDIE

Is that supposed to be a spiritual statement?

SAM

No, Eddie, Providence - the city.

EDDIE

On a hill.

SAM

In Rhode Island.

EDDIE

On a hill in Rhode Island?

SAM

Eddie, you're goddamn drunk.

EDDIE spies DOROTHY in the distance.

EDDIE

You're right - I'm starting to see things.

SAM

I knew it - like what?

EDDIE

Like a girl - in the corner of the room, all alone.

SAM

Without a man?

EDDIE

Without a drink.

SAM

Sounds like a keeper.

EDDIE

Sounds like a sleeper.

SAM

Yeah, well, speaking of rest...

EDDIE

(Pointing dramatically at DOROTHY.)  
Rest? Never! Not with a woman in need!

SAM

Don't, Eddie - isn't one black eye enough?

EDDIE stalks robustly and rather amusingly over to the isolated figure of DOROTHY. HE stops in front of HER, serious-looking, swaying slightly, utterly determined. DOROTHY turns and stares at HIM for a moment. A long pause just hangs in the air. EDDIE shakingly points to one of the chairs. The drink disrupts his vision and ends with HIM pointing at DOROTHY's chair rather than the empty one.



EDDIE

Is this seat taken, miss?

DOROTHY looks at HIM for a moment and looks at the empty chair. SHE then rises, sits in the empty chair, and turns back to EDDIE.

DOROTHY

No. It isn't.

EDDIE

Thank you!

EDDIE plops himself down - rather inelegantly - in the now-empty chair that DOROTHY just vacated.

EDDIE

I have come here on a holy mission.

DOROTHY

You won't get very far - I'm Jewish.

EDDIE

(Pointing to Heaven.)

I won't tell Him if you won't.

DOROTHY

My father tried that, but it didn't work. He even sent me to a Catholic girl's school. God wasn't fooled and neither was I - but my father sure was.

EDDIE

Well, Miss Jew, I don't care - so take that. You're Jewish - so you say. I'm Presbyterian - so I'm told. Hallelujah and what's it to yuh? Let me tell you something... There is no God - none. Just look at how screwed up this world is. Do you think a perfect being made this blue-green beach ball? I'd definitely want a return policy. If God exists, He's an idiot... but He doesn't, so He isn't... I know, because I've asked.

(To Heaven.)

Hey! Are you up there?

A stage light falls and smashes on the ground. EDDIE doesn't flinch.

EDDIE

You see? Nothing. I should know - trust me. I come from a long line of preachers. My grandfather was a preacher. His father was a preacher. His father's father was a preacher. You get the idea. They burned lots of witches. They banned lots of books. They washed their hands before they went to the bathroom. You

EDDIE (CONT)

understand? Sanctity damn near runs in my family. I have a whole lot of holiness to make up for.

(Taking DOROTHY by the hand - like a marriage proposal.)

Let me ask you, miss...

(A beat.)

What's your name again?

DOROTHY

(Overawed by his sheer energy.)

It's Dorothy. I never gave it to you the first time.

(A beat.)

There was a reason for that.

EDDIE

Dorothy what?

DOROTHY

Rothschild.

EDDIE

Well, Miss Dorothy Jewish Rothschild, would you mind possibly joining me in my great journey and making up for my family holiness with me - possibly forever?

DOROTHY

Are you proposing?

EDDIE

Are you denying?

DOROTHY

I think you're drunk.

EDDIE

Of course I am! Do you think I'd say all that if I wasn't?

DOROTHY

Yes, well... I don't drink.

EDDIE

What - anything?

DOROTHY

No - I don't drink alcohol.

EDDIE

What else is there?

DOROTHY

I drink water, thank you.

EDDIE

What are you - a gardenia?

DOROTHY

No. A sober person. I don't understand why people drink.

EDDIE

Because it's fun - so why not? I'm going to be drunk as a monk later anyway. I'm just cutting out the middleman. That's ironic, too - because I'm a stockbroker. I don't worship God, so I worship the next best thing. Trouble is, I'm bored as hell... Principal. Interest. Buy low. Sell high. The only thing I want to be high is me. Does that sound crazy? Well, it isn't. Try being a stockbroker. You'll need a good drink. Try being a Parker. You'll need a double.

(A beat - extending HIS hand.)

That's my name. I'm Eddie Parker.

DOROTHY just stares at the hand as if it had a mouth with fangs on the end of it. EDDIE shrugs and suddenly kisses DOROTHY instead.

DOROTHY

(Flabbergasted - first time SHE has been kissed?)

You... you kissed me!

EDDIE

You refused the other option.

DOROTHY can't decide whether SHE should be angry or delighted. EDDIE takes out a flask from his breast pocket, chugs it, smacks his lips, and turns to DOROTHY. SHE is looking at HIM with half-disgust, half-awe, but more awe and even some admiration. EDDIE notices this reaction, smiles, and extends the flask in DOROTHY's direction. SHE shakes HER head.

EDDIE

Suit yourself... You're missing all the fun. You know what they call life without fun? Death. Sobriety takes all the fun out of life. I'd much rather be drunk and seeing double right now.

(Leaning into HER - "a secret.")

Do you know why?

DOROTHY shakes HER head. EDDIE smiles and takes HER hand in HIS.

EDDIE

Because, that way, I could see your pretty face twice in one glance.

DOROTHY smiles, touched, quite charmed.

Hey, Eddie! Eddie!

YOUNG GIRL

A YOUNG GIRL named LIZ dashes onstage. SHE sees EDDIE and dashes towards HIM. There is clearly more than an acquaintanceship between HER and EDDIE.

EDDIE

(Nervously.)  
Hey, Liz.

DOROTHY

(Tensing up.)  
Who is Liz?

LIZ

(Same cadence as DOROTHY.)  
I am Liz.

EDDIE

(To DOROTHY, sotto voce.)  
She's my sister.

LIZ

Who are you?

DOROTHY

Not his sister.  
(To EDDIE.)  
Is there something between you two?

EDDIE

Not very often.  
(To DOROTHY.)  
Where do you live?

DOROTHY

Excuse me?

LIZ

Excuse me?!

EDDIE

I live in New York. I work for Paine Webber & Company.  
(A pause.)  
You live in New York, too.

DOROTHY looks at HIM queerly.

EDDIE

I can smell the smog.

DOROTHY smiles lightly. EDDIE repays her in kind. LIZ slaps EDDIE across the face, grabs HIM by the hand, and begins to pull HIM towards the exit.

EDDIE

I'll be in touch!

EDDIE is dragged offstage by LIZ. DOROTHY stares after HIM with cherubic wonder on her face and then turns to us:

DOROTHY

I was twenty-three - twenty-three and smitten. I had never fallen in love with anyone before. He was funny, exciting, energetic - and experienced. Somehow the fact that he already had a girlfriend made him even more exciting. My heart was as naïve as it was eager and my life was ready for someone to fill its emptiness. That was before I coated myself in enamel and learned how to hate with such style.

The LIGHTS rise again on *Vanity Fair*. We find a desk with a chair behind it towards the back of the stage. Self-important OFFICE ASSISTANTS walk back and forth in general busy-ness. CROWNINSHIELD enters with a self-important jauntiness in his step.

CROWNINSHIELD

Good morning, Mrs. Parker.

DOROTHY

Good morning, Mr. Crowninshield.

CROWNINSHIELD

Are you still with us?

DOROTHY

Tired, that's all.

CROWNINSHIELD

Tired, did you say?

DOROTHY

It's a big building.

CROWNINSHIELD

It's a big magazine.

DOROTHY

I've been trying my best to keep up. I feel like Cinderella chasing after the carriage.

DOROTHY (CONT)

(To us.)  
My first day at *Vanity Fair*.

CROWNINSHIELD

I trust Mr. Jones introduced you to all the major personnel. I will take you around to meet Mr. Jenkins and Miss Culpepper tomorrow. They are both out sick today.

DOROTHY

What about Mr. Nast?

CROWNINSHIELD

(Raising an eyebrow.)  
Mr. Nast? Mrs. Parker, no one sees Mr. Nast. Even I hardly see Mr. Nast. I just know he exists.

DOROTHY

Sounds a bit like God.

CROWNINSHIELD

God doesn't own *Vanity Fair*.

DOROTHY

No - just the *New York Times*.

CROWNINSHIELD gives a glum look and then circles around to the desk.  
DOROTHY follows HIM.

CROWNINSHIELD

We shall conclude your tour of our offices with this last, most relevant addition...

(Gesturing to the desk.)  
Your office.

DOROTHY smiles wildly at the desk - but not for long. OFFICE ASSISTANTS abruptly role in another desk and put it next to Dorothy's. DOROTHY stares blankly at the new desk for a moment and then turns to CROWNINSHIELD:

DOROTHY

Do I get two desks?

CROWNINSHIELD

No - one desk per person.

DOROTHY thinks a moment.

DOROTHY

I thought Mr. Wodehouse had his own office.

CROWNINSHIELD

(Pointedly.)  
Mr. Wodehouse did, yes.

DOROTHY

(Understanding.)  
And Mrs. Parker?

The OFFICE ASSISTANTS role in a chair  
and put it behind the new desk.

CROWNINSHIELD

(Gesturing to the chair.)  
Mrs. Parker will be sharing Mr. Wodehouse's office with our new  
Managing Editor - Robert Benchley.

DOROTHY stares at the empty chair for a  
moment.

DOROTHY

He's very small.

CROWNINSHIELD

He's very late.

DOROTHY

Hopefully, he'll stay that way.

CROWNINSHIELD indicates a chair.

CROWNINSHIELD

This is your desk, Mrs. Parker.

DOROTHY goes to her desk and sits in  
the chair. SHE then turns to face the  
empty chair behind the other desk.

CROWNINSHIELD

I trust you are comfortable?

DOROTHY

Definitely, yes - just like home.

CROWNINSHIELD

(Looking offstage.)  
Here comes Mr. Benchley now.

A plain-looking man (about 30) rushes  
in wearing a coat and a hectic  
expression - ROBERT BENCHLEY. HE  
appears an inch away from looking  
debonair (especially thanks to a wispy  
mustache) if not for the fact that a  
certain banal dorkiness gets in the

way. DOROTHY notices HIM enter and watches with interest as:

BENCHLEY

(With exaggerated cheer.)  
Good morning, Mr. Crowninshield!

CROWNINSHIELD

(Pointedly.)  
Good afternoon, Mr. Benchley.

BENCHLEY

I sincerely hope I'm not late.

CROWNINSHIELD

You are.

BENCHLEY

Well... we can all hope, can't we?

CROWNINSHIELD sighs and removes a pad and pencil from his pocket.

CROWNINSHIELD

What excuse is it this time?

BENCHLEY

Well, you see, my neighbor's cat...

CROWNINSHIELD

That was yesterday.

BENCHLEY

Ah, then, my cousin's wife...

CROWNINSHIELD

The day before that.

BENCHLEY

I didn't mention anything about my sister, did I?

CROWNINSHIELD

You don't have one.

BENCHLEY

That's probably why.

CROWNINSHIELD

I'm sorry, Mr. Benchley. I'm afraid I have no choice but to report you to Mr. Nast. He has instituted a new tardy policy and requires a full explanation of all late arrivals. I therefore ask you - why are you late?



BENCHLEY

You wouldn't believe me.

CROWNINSHIELD

I don't need to believe - merely record.

BENCHLEY

Well, you see, I was busy saving New York City from a major marine disaster.

CROWNINSHIELD

(Skeptically.)

A major marine disaster?

BENCHLEY

Yes - and, in fact, I would have been eleven minutes early, if not for the elephants.

CROWNINSHIELD

"Elephants?"

BENCHLEY

Yes! Elephants. Many, many elephants - pouring down the street and sticking their snouts in unsightly places. I asked a few passersby and learned that they had escaped from the Hippodrome.

(To DOROTHY.)

The elephants, that is. The passersby escaped from Macy's.

(To CROWNINSHIELD.)

Fearful - nay, terrified - that the city which I love would be trampled into dust - or, worse, Cleveland - I acted quickly and volunteered my services to the police. I chased the elephants down Seventy-Second Street and across West End Avenue. I chased them down the Battery and up near Astor's Place. The Hudson River neared and then... egad! They made to board a passenger ship leaving for Fall River. I couldn't let those poor people suffer anymore - not after Lizzie Borden. I thus jumped in front of the elephants and did my best impersonation of a mouse. This disarmed them entirely. Then with the help of some nearby women at the docks - whose intentions were momentarily honorable - I herded them back to the Hippodrome.

(To DOROTHY.)

The elephants, that is. The women I took out to tea.

(To CROWNINSHIELD - grandly.)

That, Mr. Crowninshield, is why I am late.

CROWNINSHIELD just stares at HIM.

BENCHLEY

Would you like me to write it down for you?

CROWNINSHIELD sighs and puts his pad and pencil away.

CROWNINSHIELD

Get to work, Mr. Benchley.

CROWNINSHIELD exits. BENCHLEY smiles in magnificent self-satisfaction. DOROTHY can't help but register a certain wry admiration. BENCHLEY turns towards DOROTHY - but SHE quickly turns away and starts typing aimlessly on her typewriter. The only problem is that there isn't any paper in it. BENCHLEY watches DOROTHY type a moment. SHE eventually looks up at HIM.

BENCHLEY

Hello.

DOROTHY

Goodbye.

DOROTHY smiles and returns to typing.

BENCHLEY

I hope to God you're lost.

(A beat.)

What are you doing in my office?

DOROTHY

Ask me when I'm in there.

BENCHLEY

Mr. Wodehouse had his own office.

DOROTHY

Mr. Wodehouse did, yes - but Mr. Robert Benchley is sharing the office with Mrs. Dorothy Parker.

BENCHLEY watches DOROTHY for a moment.

BENCHLEY

What exactly do you do?

DOROTHY

I am the new drama critic.

BENCHLEY

You'd have a better result if you had paper.

DOROTHY

Not necessarily - my spelling is bad.

BENCHLEY smiles a little - but then remembers HE's annoyed with HER.

BENCHLEY

Well, I can't stand around here talking all day.

DOROTHY

Try sitting, then.

BENCHLEY

Thank you - I will.

BENCHLEY sits behind his desk and tries to type something on the typewriter. It doesn't seem that HE is at all inspired. The tap-tap-tapping of DOROTHY is getting on his nerves.

BENCHLEY

Shouldn't you be married and raising children someplace?

DOROTHY

I don't have any children.

BENCHLEY

I have a child - a son - and I'm expecting another.

DOROTHY

(Discretely glancing at HIS stomach.)  
It shows.

BENCHLEY

(Trying to ignore HER retort.)  
My wife is due next year.

DOROTHY

Congratulations.

BENCHLEY

Thank you.

A beat.

DOROTHY

So who's the father?

BENCHLEY

With any luck, J. P. Morgan.

DOROTHY subtly smiles and starts to tap even louder. BENCHLEY attempts to work again - but still no luck.

BENCHLEY

I don't suppose you'd be interested in quitting?

DOROTHY

I just started.

BENCHLEY

Exactly.

DOROTHY

Shouldn't you be the one quitting? You're old hat by now. I was hired a few days ago. When were you hired?

BENCHLEY

Nine days ago.

DOROTHY

Don't you want to move on with your life?

BENCHLEY

I've always believed in "ladies first."

DOROTHY and BENCHLEY stare at each other for a second. DOROTHY suddenly registers something in HER face.

DOROTHY

You're the one who wrote those ludicrous columns for the *Tribune* a few years back.

(A beat.)

They were wonderful.

BENCHLEY smiles warmly and nods in acknowledgement. DOROTHY smiles back at HIM. Another pause ensues - détente, perhaps? - then:

BENCHLEY

Well, Mrs. Parker, since it appears you have no intention of vacating my office, I suppose we should learn a little something about each other...

BENCHLEY rises and proceeds to orate dramatically.

BENCHLEY

I was born in Worcester, Massachusetts. My father was a drunk. My mother had a direct line to God. My brother was killed in the Spanish-American War. My mother wishes it had been me. I went to Harvard because nowhere else would accept me. I've written columns for newspapers and press releases for government war bonds. I have a wife, Gertrude, and I live outside the city. I am a brilliant man whose contribution to the literary annals of America is unsurpassed in the early Twentieth Century.

(A beat.)

That last part I wrote for my epitaph. I thought I'd try it out.

BENCHLEY (CONT)

(A beat.)  
And you?

DOROTHY

(Uncomfortable with the intimacy.)  
I'm the daughter of a clothing store magnate. I was born and bred in New York City. My mother died when I was five. I went to a Catholic girl's school, even though I'm Jewish, and I spent some time playing piano for a dance studio. I worked at *Vogue* as a caption writer before applying for this job.

BENCHLEY

How long have you been writing drama criticism?

DOROTHY

Ask me tomorrow when I come to work.

BENCHLEY

What would the answer be then?

DOROTHY

One day.

BENCHLEY

What about your husband?

DOROTHY

How did you know I'm married?

BENCHLEY

You're a misses, aren't you?

DOROTHY

I could be widowed.

BENCHLEY

You don't look happy enough to be widowed.

DOROTHY

(Wanting to get it over with.)  
I surrender then. I'm married. My husband's name is Eddie. He's returning from the war next month. Before that, he was a stockbroker.

BENCHLEY

Don't tell me - you were the innocent young investor and he beguiled you with his bond options.

DOROTHY

Actually, it was the size of his trust fund.

BENCHLEY

So where did you meet Mr. Parker?

DOROTHY

In Connecticut, a few years ago.

BENCHLEY

And you lived happily ever after.

DOROTHY

The End.

BENCHLEY

Hopefully, they'll be saying the same about us.

DOROTHY

Well, since you have no intention of leaving my office, I guess we don't have much of a choice... do you?

DOROTHY gives BENCHLEY a Cheshire Cat smile. BENCHLEY looks at HER intently for a moment.

BENCHLEY

I might just be able to stand you.

DOROTHY

I bet you say that to all the girls.

BENCHLEY

So we're agreed! It's a match made in Purgatory.

DOROTHY smiles wryly to herself.

DOROTHY

Yes, I know all about those.

(To us.)

Too much.

EDDIE

How do I look?

The LIGHTS shift ambiguously. EDDIE has entered dressed in a simple soldier's uniform. HE resembles the young, optimistic man we saw earlier in the play - but his bearing betrays a certain rigid determination. It is clear we are transported to another time and place in DOROTHY's mind. DOROTHY turns to EDDIE with clear worry and concern and unusual vulnerability.

DOROTHY

Oh. Eddie. You look so... so...

EDDIE

Don't bother. I know. You hate it.

DOROTHY

I do. I do. I hate the whole damn thing.

EDDIE

If every wife said that, you'd be speaking German in a year.

DOROTHY

Not if every wife said it.

EDDIE sighs and moves closer to HER.

EDDIE

That's just great... You want to be married to a stockbroker? Is that what you want? A suit-and-tie life? Dinner at five? Two kids and a dog? A white picket fence?

DOROTHY

No, Eddie. I don't want any fence. I want the city. I want the noise, the clutter, the smell, the smoke.

(A beat.)

I want you.

EDDIE

You have me.

DOROTHY

For a week.

EDDIE

Uncle Sam needs me.

DOROTHY

I hope you two will be very happy together.

EDDIE

I don't understand you. What do you want me to do? You want me to close my eyes and plug my ears and ignore everything that's going on in the world - except you?

DOROTHY

Yes. I do. So what? What are you proving?

EDDIE

Besides myself? Something is happening, Dorothy - something big. I need to be a part of it. We'll have children one day - a son maybe. He'll look at me after history class and ask "What did you do?" What am I going to tell him?

DOROTHY

Say that you were busy making him. That'll shut him up.

EDDIE sighs weightily.

EDDIE

You don't understand. I'm a playboy. I've always been a playboy. I've put more thought into my gin and tonics than I've put into my goddamn life. And my work? Big deal! All I do is sit in an office all day and play with other people's money. You know how they got that money? They worked. They did something. I want to do something. I want to have a purpose.

DOROTHY

Don't I give you a purpose?

EDDIE

Yes - but you're not the only thing.

A tense pause. EDDIE and DOROTHY stare at EACH OTHER. EDDIE takes a flask out of his breast pocket and begins to drink it.

DOROTHY

Stop, Eddie; you know I hate when you drink.

EDDIE

Well, I hate it when you don't, so we're even.

DOROTHY is about to protest again - but what's the use? EDDIE is about to take another drink, but HE freezes. HE smiles and extends the flask to DOROTHY. SHE considers it for a moment and then drinks - barely. We see her shiver slightly at the bitterness of the alcohol. DOROTHY pauses a moment in thought, drinks some more, and hands back the flask.

EDDIE

I need your blessing.

DOROTHY

I'm not the Pope.

EDDIE

You know what I mean.

DOROTHY

I don't think I can do it.

EDDIE

Yes, you can - because you love me.



DOROTHY smiles lightly. EDDIE smiles back at HER. A long pause greets this weak cease fire - then:

DOROTHY

Eddie... why?

EDDIE

Why what?

DOROTHY

Why me? Why, Eddie? I'm not beautiful. I'm not rich. I'm not popular like you. I don't even know where I'm going in life or what the hell I'll be when I get there. What can you possibly see in me that I haven't found yet? I've looked for a long time and I haven't found a damn thing worth writing about. I'm like a book full of ugly, blank pages.

EDDIE

There are worse things to be. Everyone else just has bullshit written on their pages anyway. The world is full of fakes and liars and frauds and cheats. No one in this goddamn world is anything that he seems - including me. You're different. You don't put on an act for anybody. You are who you are and you don't try to be any different.

DOROTHY laughs sadly.

DOROTHY

How can I? I'm not even sure who I am yet.

EDDIE

Neither am I. That's why I need to find out.

EDDIE puts HIS hand on DOROTHY's cheek. DOROTHY reacts tenderly and needingly to his touch.

DOROTHY

I love you for a different reason.

EDDIE

Because my dad is filthy rich?

DOROTHY

Because you're so... alive.

EDDIE

So far.

EDDIE laughs lightly and pauses - not the best joke. DOROTHY frowns and thinks for a moment. An uncomfortable pause descends. EDDIE breaks it by

extending DOROTHY the flask. SHE takes a longer sip this time and hands it back to HIM.

DOROTHY

I was five when my mother died. I loved her very much. It helped that I hardly knew her. People are easier to love when you can envision what they may have been like. My father remarried soon afterwards, but I hated my stepmother. She kept wanting me to call her "mother," but I refused. I called her "The Housekeeper" - and even that she didn't do well. The house became ugly and silent and angry. No love. No excitement. No warmth. Just gray... everywhere and all the time.

DOROTHY thinks for a moment, then turns urgently to EDDIE:

DOROTHY

I hate silence, Eddie - it scares me. I love you so much because you're everything that house wasn't. I never want to live again in that cold, gray house.

EDDIE

(Amused - not taking it seriously)  
With me? Are you kidding? You won't ever get me to shut up.  
(Taking HER hands.)  
You can trust me.

EDDIE kisses HER on the head.

DOROTHY

I know.

EDDIE winks and starts to walk out.

DOROTHY

I think.

EDDIE has exited by now. DOROTHY is still staring after HIM. SHE sighs and turns to us:

DOROTHY

It was another two years before I saw him again, with only an occasional message in-between. It seemed, back then, that Eddie was the only one who knew I existed. Then came *Vanity Fair* and everything changed. A few well-placed zingers quickly drew attention to my drama criticism and earned me a growing readership. I figured, if a play were boring as hell, the least I could do is make the review interesting.

The LIGHTS rise on *Vanity Fair*. The desks of Dorothy and Benchley are now positioned right next to each other. On

the left is Dorothy's. On the right is Benchley's. Her desk has a sign on it that reads "PARK." His desk has a juxtaposed sign that reads "BENCH." Together - "PARK BENCH." BENCHLEY enters whistling to himself and carrying an umbrella. HE takes off HIS coat and leans his umbrella against his desk.

BENCHLEY

Well, well. Is that the famous Mrs. Parker?

DOROTHY

Hello, Bench. I forgot you hadn't been fired yet.

BENCHLEY

I thought you'd still be gorging on the carcass of your latest theatrical kill - but alas no. Dare I suggest you might have actually liked the show last night?

DOROTHY

Have I ever found a show I do like?

BENCHLEY

I believe I can count them on one hand.

DOROTHY

Sure - if you have no fingers.

BENCHLEY

Who was the unlucky victim last night?

DOROTHY

This time it was John Curtis - the newest *King Lear* - either that or the theater's janitor got lost. Halfway through the play I was rooting for Macbeth.

BENCHLEY

John Curtis - the one and only?

DOROTHY

I certainly hope so.

BENCHLEY

I'm starting to think people only want plays to open on Broadway so that you can pan them.

DOROTHY

Well, then, that makes two of us.

BENCHLEY

You didn't like "Cyrano" either.

DOROTHY

(Quoting from her review.)

"Sad when an actor's biggest part is his nose."

BENCHLEY

Or "Lady Windermere's Fan."

DOROTHY

(Ditto.)

"It's lucky to know she at least has one of them."

BENCHLEY

Or, if I recall, "Hamlet."

DOROTHY

(Ditto.)

"Emphasis on the "ham.""

BENCHLEY

Tell me, Dorothy, are you like this at home, too?

DOROTHY

Like what?

BENCHLEY

Brutal.

DOROTHY

Am I "brutal?"

BENCHLEY

Just a tad.

DOROTHY

I call it "honesty."

BENCHLEY

So are you this "honest" at home?

DOROTHY

You're barking up the wrong fire hydrant.

BENCHLEY

Fair enough! I'm just glad that I'm a man and not a play. That means the worst thing you could possibly do is marry me.

DOROTHY glares at BENCHLEY for a moment. The moment is interrupted as OFFICE ASSISTANTS enter and roll in a new desk and a new chair. DOROTHY and BENCHLEY watch THEM in dreaded silence.

BENCHLEY

You know, Thomas Malthus wrote a book on this.