

BERT  
JEFFERSON 1/2

(John at L. C., crosses to exit L.)

WHITESIDE. I will not have a lot of mildewed pus-bags rushing in and out of this house while I am—

(He stops as the voice of John is heard at front door. "Oh, good morning, Mr. Jefferson." The answering voice of Jefferson: "Good morning, John." Maggie rises, crosses to up L.)

BERT

START

(Roaring—) There's nobody home! The Stanleys have been arrested for white-slavery! Go away!

(But the visitor, meanwhile, has already appeared in the archway, L. Jefferson is an interesting-looking young man in his early thirties.)

JEFFERSON. Good morning, Mr. Whiteside. I'm Jefferson, of the *Mesalia Journal*.

WHITESIDE. (*Sotto voce, to Maggie.*) Get rid of him.

MAGGIE. (*Brusquely.*) I'm sorry—Mr. Whiteside is seeing no one.

JEFFERSON. Really?

MAGGIE. So will you please excuse us? Good day.

JEFFERSON. (*Not giving up.*) Mr. Whiteside seems to be sitting up and taking notice.

MAGGIE. I'm afraid he's not taking notice of the *Mesalia Journal*. Do you mind?

JEFFERSON. (*Sizing up Maggie.*) You know, if I'm going to be insulted I'd like it to be by Mr. Whiteside himself. I never did like carbon copies.

WHITESIDE. (*Looking around; interested.*) M-m, touché, if I ever heard one. And in *Mesalia* too, Maggie dear.

MAGGIE. (*Still on the job.*) Will you please leave?

JEFFERSON. (*Ignoring her. Crosses to C. Maggie crosses to R. C.*) How about an interview, Mr. Whiteside?

WHITESIDE. I never give them. Go away.

JEFFERSON. Mr. Whiteside, if I don't get this interview, I lose my job.

WHITESIDE. That would be quite all right with me.

JEFFERSON. Now you don't mean that, Mr. Whiteside. You used to be a newspaper man yourself. You know what editors are like. Well, mine's the toughest one that ever lived.

WHITESIDE. You won't get around me that way. If you don't like him, get off the paper.

JEFFERSON. Yes, but I happen to think it's a good paper. William Allen White could have got out of Emporia, but he didn't.

WHITESIDE. You have the effrontery, in my presence, to compare yourself with William Allen White?

JEFFERSON. Only in the sense that White stayed in Emporia, and I want to stay here and say what I want to say.

WHITESIDE. Such as what?

JEFFERSON. (*Crossing to below couch L.*) Well, I can't put it into words, Mr. Whiteside—it'd sound like an awful lot of hooey. But the *Journal* was my father's paper. It's kind of a sentimental point with me, the paper. I'd like to carry on where he left off.

WHITESIDE. Ah—ahh. So you own the paper, eh?

JEFFERSON. That's right.

WHITESIDE. Then this terrifying editor, this dread journalistic Apocalypse is—you yourself?

JEFFERSON. In a word, yes.

END

WHITESIDE. (*Chuckles with appreciation.*) I see.

MAGGIE. (*Annoyed, starts off R.*) In the future, Sherry, let me know when you don't want to talk to people, I'll usher them right in. (*She goes into library D. R.*)

WHITESIDE. Young man... Come over here. I suppose you've written that novel?

JEFFERSON. (*Eases R.*) No. I've written that play.

WHITESIDE. Well, I don't want to read it. Ah, do these old eyes see a box of goodies over there? Hand them to me, will you?

JEFFERSON. (*Crossing D. R. to small desk table.*) The trouble is, Mr. Whiteside, that your being in this town comes under the heading of news. Practically the biggest news since the depression. So I just got to get a story. (*Crossing to L. of Whiteside as he passes candy.*)

WHITESIDE. (*Examining candy.*) M-m, pecan butternut fudge.

(*Miss Preen, on her way from library R. to kitchen with empty plate*)