

Scene 3

The Golden Bay Bugle – a very SMALL daily newspaper. The office consists of a bay window that looks out onto the street, a front door with a bell, and a single desk with a typewriter. There is also a hat rack and a trash basket overflowing with crumpled pages. Over the door is a sign that reads: “the truth will prevail!”

Preston Pentegast is working furiously at a story. His uncle, Alexander Pentegast, is also working furiously at his latest invention.

PRESTON

Uncle Alex, please stop waving that infernal butterfly net in front of my face.

PENTEGAST

This is no ordinary net, my boy. It’s my latest invention: the Felonious Apprehendus Collecti.

PRESTON

The what?

PENTEGAST

Felonious Apprehendus Collecti. A marvelously nonviolent method of subduing criminals. I have great hopes that it will someday replace the revolver.

PRESTON

Another of your hair-brained schemes, Uncle Alex. It will never work.

PENTEGAST

Never say never, my boy. But why so touchy, Preston?

PRESTON

Why? Because I’m overworked and underpaid. Do you think it’s easy to run a daily newspaper entirely single-handed?

PENTEGAST

Tut, tut, my boy. You know perfectly well that you can give yourself a raise anytime you wish. And when I gave you the Bugle for your last birthday, Preston, I strongly suggested that you hire yourself another reporter.

PRESTON

A lot of good that's done me! I hired a reporter from St. Louis six weeks ago and he still hasn't arrived. What was his name? (he finds a letter buried beneath everything else on his desk) Oh, yes. CW Walker.

PENTEGAST

Speaking of arrivals, your cousin Cristabelle is due any day now.

PRESTON

And that's another thing! I never even KNEW I had a second cousin until three weeks ago. Now all of a sudden, Miss Second Cousin Calloway arrives out of the blue to be welcomed into the bosom of her family. I don't like it, I tell you.

PENTEGAST

No one asked you to like it, my boy. I have always regretted the day that I cut her poor mother off without a cent, just because she ran off with that second-rate wild west impresario.

PRESTON

Sorry, Uncle Alex. It just doesn't make sense. You open your arms to a perfect stranger who suddenly becomes the richest young woman in San Francisco. You don't even know what she looks like!

PENTEGAST

I trust that I will know my own grandchild when I see her.

PRESTON

Hah! For all you know, Lucretia Borgia could walk in and you'd welcome HER as your long-lost granddaughter.

Clementine enters. Mr. Pentegast rushes to greet her.

PENTEGAST

Granddaughter!

CLEMENTINE

I beg your pardon.

PRESTON

Miss Borgia, I presume.

CLEMENTINE

I must be in the wrong place. I'm looking for the offices of the Golden Bay Bugle.

PRESTON

You're not Cristabelle Calloway, I take it.

CLEMENTINE

No, I'm –

PRESTON

Bravo, Uncle Alex. You certainly know a granddaughter when you see one.

PENTEGAST

A simple faux pas, my boy. I beg your pardon, Miss. (he laughs) But of course! Cristabelle wouldn't be arriving at the Bugle at all! She would come straight to the mansion!

PRESTON

Perhaps you had better be there when she arrives, Uncle Alex.

PENTEGAST

Quite right, my boy. Jeeves!

Jeeves immediately appears.

JEEVES

Yes, sir?

PENTEGAST

My hat! My coat!

Jeeves finds them and helps Pentegast to dress.

PENTEGAST

Jeeves, you and I have been appointed as the official welcoming committee for the loveliest young lady in San Francisco. My granddaughter!

JEEVES

As you say, sir.

They exit.

PRESTON

Now, how may I help you?

CLEMENTINE

I'm looking for a Mr. Preston Pentegast, editor of the Golden Bay Bugle.

PRESTON

At your service, Miss. Please take a seat. Now, is this concerning an item for Thursday's society page?

CLEMENTINE

Well, no actually –

PRESTON

Oh. Well, perhaps a want ad?

CLEMENTINE

No, no. I –

PRESTON

Oh. I AM sorry. How very tragic for you. Was it your husband?

CLEMENTINE

What husband?

PRESTON

Or perhaps one of your parents –

CLEMENTINE

What are you talking about?!?

PRESTON

An obituary notice. I just thought –

CLEMENTINE

No, no, no! Let's start all over again. Good day, Mr. Pentegast. My name is Clementine Walker.

She offers her hand. He does not take it.

PRESTON

Yes?

CLEMENTINE

Clementine Walker. From St. Louis. I received your wire notifying me that I'd been hired as a reporter for the Golden Bay Bugle.

PRESTON

There must be some mistake. I hired no Clementine Walker.

CLEMENTINE

But I –

PRESTON

I did, however, hire a CW Walker, reporter. A man reporter.

CLEMENTINE

A man reporter? Just where in your letter did you specify a MAN reporter, Mr. Pentegast?

She shakes the letter at him.

PRESTON

I didn't have to write it out. Everyone knows that no newspaper editor in his right mind would ever hire a female reporter. It's a contradiction in terms. There ARE no female reporters. A simple misunderstanding. I'm sure you understand.

CLEMENTINE

Understand what?

PRESTON

Miss Walker, you are making this very difficult for me.

CLEMENTINE

Mr. Pentegast, are you saying that you're going to fire me without even giving me a chance?

PRESTON

No.

CLEMENTINE

Good.

PRESTON

I am saying that I never hired you to begin with!

CLEMENTINE

Mr. Pentegast! Did you or did you not hire CW Walker as staff reporter for the Golden Bay Bugle? And did you or did you not send THIS telegram to notify CW Walker that she had been hired by that same newspaper? Did you specify IN ANY WAY in said telegram that should the CW Walker just HAPPEN to be female, her services would not be required? No? Well then, it appears that Clementine Walker, aka CW Walker, has been hired as staff reporter for the Bugle. I rest my case.

PRESTON (sighs)

All right, Miss Walker. It appears that I have been DUPED into hiring you. I trust that the clippings you sent to me are, in fact, your writings?

CLEMENTINE

Every period and semicolon.

PRESTON

Then it appears that I have hired myself a girl reporter.

CLEMENTINE

Woman reporter.

PRESTON

As you wish. All right, "CW", here's your first assignment.

He hands her a stack of papers.

CLEMENTINE

Obituary notices! Mr. Pentegast, I am a reporter, not a copyboy.

PRESTON

You are a reporter for the Golden Bay Bugle. That means simply that you will write obituary notices, or set type, or sell newspapers on the street corner if I so decide. Because you see, Miss Walker, I am the editor of the Bugle. The editor. Your boss, madam. Unless of course, you would like to terminate your employment here before you even begin.

CLEMENTINE

Obituary notices. Mr. Pentegast, be prepared to print the finest death notices in the city!

PRESTON

Wonderful. And when you're finished with those, you can start filling up the classified pages. We need at least 12 more ads before we go to press.

He tosses another stack of papers at her.

CLEMENTINE

Anything else?

PRESTON

Well, you might retype Thursday's editorials.

Clementine snatches them from Preston's hands.

CLEMENTINE

And what, may I ask, does the editor-in-chief have planned for this afternoon?

PRESTON

The editor-in-chief happens to be in the middle of some very important investigative reporting.

CLEMENTINE

Hmm.

PRESTON

Yes, Miss Walker? Miss CW Walker, reporter at large?

CLEMENTINE

No comment.