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No. 367

DO MEN GOSSIP?

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

BY

ORRIN A. BREIBY

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DO MEN GOSSIP?

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

COLE *A Clubman*
CARR *A Clubman*
JENKINS *A Clubman (stout)*
NEWTON *Known as the "Clam"*
REED *Jenkin's Junior Partner*
GLADYS WYNN *Reed's Fiancée*

PLACE: *Men's Club on Ladies' Day.*

TIME: *An Afternoon.*



DO MEN GOSSIP?

SCENE: *Double arch entrance in rear wall off right, French windows in rear wall off left. Fireplace in left wall at front stage. A door in right wall front stage. Armchairs, etc., before fireplace. Table and chair in center of room. A chair in upper right hand corner. A Japanese silk folding screen is at front stage near fireplace, placed poorly.*

DISCOVERED: *COLE seated before fireplace reading a magazine. CARR hobbles in from the right door and hops to a chair.*

CARR. Confound these ladies' days.

COLE. What's up?

CARR. Forgot. Come out of the gymnasium half dressed and bumped into the president's wife.

COLE. (*Laughs*) Displaying your camouflaged shape in padded form on the coat, eh? Tough luck.

CARR. And so excited that I put on my shoe with something in it. (*Yanks off shoe and pulls out a shoe horn. His toes are seen sticking out of several holes in his sock*) Look what was in my shoe.

COLE. (*Glances at sock*) I see you've got something in your sock also.

CARR. Humph. (*Displays toes*) Doesn't your wife knit for the soldiers?

COLE. Does she? (*Crosses to CARR and shows*

him his trousers being held up by suspenders to which are attached safety pins and nails instead of buttons)

CARR. You ought to see Jenkins. His underwear looks as if a lown mower ran through it. His shirt has but one button. The top—sewed it on himself.

COLE. Nothing on me. Look. (COLE allows CARR to look down his vest) War sure is hell. (Or “Sherman said a mouthfull.”)

CARR. I wish it were over. (As he puts on shoe) I understand Jenkins beats his wife.

COLE. Smith told me he was henpecked.

CARR. Jones said by the looks of things he wouldn't be surprised if Jenkins got divorced soon.—But I don't think he beats his wife, do you?

COLE. Naw. The only thing he beats in that house is the carpets.

CARR. Poor Jenkins.

(JENKINS enters brusquely.)

JENKINS. What's the matter with Jenkins?

CARR and COLE. (Confused) Oh, ah—hello Jenkins.

COLE. We a were just saying—

JENKINS. Bah! Idle gossip—You know what gossip did to the First National Bank, don't you?

COLE. Started a run on it. Went under, didn't it?

JENKINS. Yes. Gossip is like a tornado. It materializes quickly and destroys whatever it hits. That's why I never let it bother me.

COLE. Rather unusual for you to be here this time of the day, Jenkins, isn't it?

CARR. Ladies' day, Cole.

JENKINS. (To CARR) Rats. (To COLE) Yes, it is unusual and here's the reason. Come closer

you two town criers and get this straight. This morning I was telling Reed, my junior partner, what big gossips women were—my wife in particular; when in comes Gladys Wynn, his fiancée, and says that men gossip as much as women.

CARR and COLE. (*Greatly surprised*) What?

JENKINS. Fact. Well, that started an argument. Now Gladys Wynn is on the local Red Cross Committee out to raise fifty thousand dollars. She tried to get me for a big sum but I told her that if she could prove that men gossiped as much as women I would double the amount she herself collected for the Red Cross.

COLE. How can she prove it?

JENKINS. She's over at the woman's club now hiding behind a screen and taking down notes as the women talk. She's due here in (*Looks at watch*) ten minutes and will take down what we say from behind that screen which will be placed over there. (*Upper right hand corner*) Then she'll compare the gossip heard at the woman's club with the talk heard here and if our talk equals the ladies I'll be out anywhere from two thousand to ten thousand.

COLE. And we men will have gained a reputation.

JENKINS. Exactly and a nice reputation, too. Men gossip—whew—it'll be a calamity.

COLE. My wife would never give me a minute's peace.

CARR. Nor mine.

JENKINS. I'd rather be dead.

COLE. But how can we tell whether Gladys Wynn will play fair?

JENKINS. Arthur Reed is hiding behind the screen at the woman's club with her and when she comes here he will join us as if nothing were happening. So for heaven's sake keep your traps shut when he comes in. Talk business but let your

neighbor's alone.

COLE. But I say, old man, you're not quite playing fair to her by warning us, are you?

JENKINS. Everything's fair where a reputation is concerned.

COLE. Or one's money. Eh?

JENKINS. (*With an angry glance at COLE*) Of course I wasn't to have warned you, but I know what kind of talk floats around men's clubs and candidly I don't relish losing all that money. Of course I'll donate a small sum but——

COLE. Yes, I hear you are pretty close fisted Jenkins.

JENKINS. If you were only one-half as close mouthed as you think I am close fisted, I wouldn't be worrying about my money.

CARR. That's one on you Cole.

JENKINS. That applies to you, too. (*CARR is squelched*) But we're losing time. Gladys and young Reed were a little afraid that I *would* warn you duffers, and were for my hiding behind the screen at the woman's club with them.

COLE. You got out of it.

JENKINS. Told them I had to get a shave and a turkish bath and advised them to call up the barber if they didn't believe me.

COLE. What if they should?

JENKINS. The barber is a member of this club.

COLE. Yes, we get most of our gossip from him.

JENKINS. He's promised to tell them that I was in the turkish bath.

COLE. But aren't you—?

JENKINS. (*Pulls out bottle marked bay rum*) No, I'm not. This bay rum will be enough. (*Pours some on hair*) Doesn't that smell barbary?

COLE. (*Smells*) Yes, and rummy, too. You sure know how to guard your money.

JENKINS. Even as I hope you'll guard your tongue. (*Looks out window*) When I see them coming I'll sneak down the backway.

COLE. But what about fixing the screen for the girl to hide behind.

JENKINS. Reed will attend to that. You know he's kind of artistic and on the excuse that that screen doesn't look good over there he's going to place it over there. (*Upper right corner*) Then, by waving his handkerchief Gladys Wynn will know when to enter. Savy? (*Both nod*) By George, here comes Charles Newton. We won't have time to put him wise. (*Bus.*) Good-bye my money.

COLE. (*Crosses to window*) So it is. But you don't have to worry about Newton Jenkins.

JENKINS. No?

COLE. Newton never gossips. Has been a stenographer so long he doesn't know what his mouth is meant for.

JENKINS. Very encouraging.

COLE. He's been nicknamed the "clam" because he seldom opens his mouth outside of saying "How do you do," and "good-night." But gossip? Never. He usually spends his time reading or writing.

JENKINS. More and more encouraging.

(*NEWTON enters.*)

NEWTON. How do you do, gentlemen.

COLE and CARR. Hello, Clam.

(*NEWTON crosses to center table.*)

JENKINS. Nice day, Newton.

NEWTON. Is it? (*He sits down—procures paper and pen and starts to write.* JENKINS decides to test him again)

JENKINS. I understand Felix Hanson wears thin underwear all the wear round Newton.

NEWTON. Not interested.

JENKINS. (*With a sigh of relief—aside to CARR and COLE*) I'm sure safe from him.

COLE. Told you so.—By the way, Jenkins, the fellows in the club are anxious to know if your daughter is going in the movies.

JENKINS. You didn't tell them did you?

COLE. No, I said you wanted to announce it yourself.

CARR. Jenkins, I hear Fred Jones is after your daughter's hand. Do you like him?

JENKINS. No, I hear that he's capable of doing nothing.

COLE. But have you any objections to Billy Simpson?

JENKINS. Yes, I understand that he's capable of doing anything. Speaking of Billy, I understand old man Simpson can't put up with his wife.

COLE. Put up—Oh you mean can?

JENKINS. No, that's what he wants to do, smarty. But say, if you fellows promise not to tell anyone I'll tell you something that old man Simpson told me about Charley Murphy. He got it straight from Hank Mitchell who told him not to let it go any further.

COLE. Shoot.

JENKINS. Well, Charley Murphy only gets a salary of eighteen bucks a week.

CARR. But he keeps a car.

JENKINS. I know. How does he do it?

COLE. Bluff. Nerve. The family's full of it. I know because I played poker there recently.

CARR. Maybe his wife has a private income.

JENKINS. Never thought of that. Maybe she has. I'll ask Simpson to try and find out. (*Looks out window*) Here comes Gladys Wynn and

Arthur Reed now. (*Crosses to door*) Now for Pete's sake cut out the gossip. Get me?

COLE. Silence will be golden for you today.

JENKINS. Good. Ta ta. — See you later. (*Glances at NEWTON—then departs*)

COLE. The old geeser gossips worse than any of us.

CARR. He sure is afraid of his money.

COLE. Yes, he's so tight that he took out his telephone when a neighbor had one installed.

(REED enters.)

REED. Hello, boys.

COLE and CARR. 'Lo, Reed.

REED. (*Slaps NEWTON on back*) I said, "hello," you clam.

NEWTON. (*Doesn't bother looking up*) How do.

REED. (*Laughs*) When you die Newton it will be with a paper and pencil in your hand. Stenographer's force of habit.

COLE. And a check for funeral expenses in the other hand. They say you've got a good bit saved up, Newton.

NEWTON. Maybe. But rather a check than all the bills I know someone's family will have to pay, when *that* someone dies.

CARR. Ha, that's one more on you, Cole.

NEWTON. (*To CARR*) I meant you. Now let me alone. I'm busy.

REED. (*Looks at screen*) That Japanese screen gets my goat over there.

COLE. (*Jabs CARR*) That so. What's the matter with it?

REED. Do you call that artistic?

COLE. Sure. Why not? (*Jabs CARR again. Harder*)

REED. I don't. I think it will look much better over there. No harm trying.

COLE. No, of course not. No harm, eh, Carr?
(*Jabs him very hard*)

CARR. Certainly not. Try it Reed.

(*REED takes screen to right. Bus. of bumping into NEWTON and also stumbling can be done if desired. He arranged screen at upper right hand corner so that GLADYS WYNN can enter from archway and sit in chair in full view of the audience but unseen by those on the stage. REED stands off and eyes the screen over.*)

REED. There, I think that's much better.

COLE. Never knew you were so artistic Reed.

REED. No? Funny, that was once the subject of gossip around here. (*Looks at screen*) I don't quite like it yet. (*Crosses to arch*)

COLE. Oh, don't be so particular. (*He tries to jab CARR again, but CARR is on his guard and quickly picks up a book or a derby and holds it so that COLE jabs same instead—to his discomfort*)

REED. Can't help it. (*Takes out handkerchief as if to blow nose and waves same slyly out archway as a signal*)

COLE. Do you flag a train every time you blow your nose Reed? (*This time he looks at CARR before jabbing him*)

REED. Flag a train? (*Looks at handkerchief—laughs*) Oh, I see. The handkerchief was creased together. (*GLADYS enters from archway and hurries behind screen. She has a note-book and pencil in her hand. Is dressed in coat and hat. REED turns the rear of the screen to right wall that those entering archway do not see GLADYS. He does this as though he were a painter touching up a scene, then stands off and eyes it over*) There, I guess that's about right. Ey, boys? Nifty, isn't it?

COLE. (*Rises and starts to cross to screen*) Yes,

but I think if you were to turn the screen this way——

REED. (*Holds him back*) Sit down. What does a plumber know about interior decorations?

COLE. (*Protesting*) But let me just show you.

REED. (*Pushes him into chair*) Sit down.

COLE. But, I say——

REED. Shut up. If you don't like it change it when I'm gone.

COLE. (*Makes one more effort to arise*) But, can't you just——

REED. (*Pushes him back*) No, I can't.

CARR. (*Takes cue from COLE, rises*) I think it will look better——

REED. (*Surprised—then jumps at CARR*) Back in your box, you jumping jackass.

COLE. (*Seizes opportunity, rises again*) Bu., listen, Reed——

REED. (*Dives at him from CARR and tackles him back into chair*) Two down—five yards to go. (*He jumps up and stands in front of screen in boxing position*) Now—the first German that hops out of his trench—beware of Uncle Sam.

(JENKINS enters.)

JENKINS. Hello, boys. (*Sees REED*) What's the idea?

COLE and CARR. Hello, old top.

CARR. Where have you been?

JENKINS. Just came from the barber.

REED. Yes, I called up there a little while ago. He said you were having a Turkish bath after getting shaved.

JENKINS. Righto. (*Sits down*) Well, boys—what's what?

REED. (*Sniffs air—then smells JENKINS' hair*) Jenkins, the barber has cheated you. (*JENKINS looks up*) Very strong on the bay rum, but mighty

weak on the hair comb. (*He runs his hand over JENKINS' cheeks*) And as short on the shave as your whiskers are long.—Market it, man—market it. You'll make a fortune.

JENKINS. Market what?

REED. That stuff you use to make your hair grow so quickly. (*Takes JENKINS' hand and forces a hand shake*) Congratulations, old man—a real hair restorer found at last. (*Sits down*) But come, boys, loosen up—what's the gossip?

CARR. Gossip? We never gossip?

COLE. I should say not. Do we Jenkins?

JENKINS. (*Triumphantly*) Of course not. I've always maintained that men never gossip.

REED. (*Surprised*) I thought you fellows knew everybody's business?

NEWTON. (*Finishes writing*) There, that letter's done. (*Places letter in envelope, seals it, then sticks a stamp on same. Crosses to arch and calls boy*) Oh, boy. (*A boy enters*) Mail this letter at once. (*Gives boy letter and tip—boy departs—NEWTON turns to others*) Well, gentlemen—anything new in the gossip line to-day? (*JENKINS looks at him aghast—CARR and COLE surprised—while GLADYS gets ready to jot down notes*) Didn't you hear me?

JENKINS. (*Perplexed*) Ah, yes, yes, yes. No, there's nothing new.

NEWTON. Funny, every other day gossip flies as thick around here as Jersey mosquitos. What's the idea of putting the damper on it now.

JENKINS. Men never gossip.

NEWTON. No?—I'll swear I heard some not a little while ago when you and—

COLE. (*Quickly*) Your dreaming. You were busy writing.

NEWTON. (*After a pause*) Say, did you fellows hear about John Scott?

JENKINS. Not interested. (*Turns his back*)

COLE. Nor me.

CARR. Ditto here.

NEWTON. (*To REED*) What about you?

REED. Neutral.

NEWTON. Well he's sueing local papers. Want to know why?

JENKINS, CARR and COLE. (*Turn about and shout*) No.

NEWTON. Do you?

REED. Still neutral.

NEWTON. Well, when Scott got married, the newspapers published it under the column headed, "Odd News Of The Day." (*Pause*) I hear that he and his neighbor are on the outs owing to a scrap between their dogs.

REED. You don't say.

NEWTON. Fact. Their butler told the grocer boy who told our janitor who told his wife, who told my wife, who told me.—And, oh, I hear Jack Martin only pays his wife twelve dollars a week alimony. Jones just told me so in the bar room.

JENKINS. Say, you old hen, if you want to cackle go out in the barnyard. We men aren't interested in your gossip.

NEWTON. But, when *you* open your mug, every jackass here pricks up his ears—don't they? (*To COLE and CARR*) Say, boys—speaking of the phone—Jenkins took it out of his house when a neighbor had one installed. (*Bus. here of JENKINS eyeing COLE and CARR*) Did you know that Phil Logan had a phone installed on his roof?

REED. But, he can't use it there.

NEWTON. Neither can his neighbors.

JENKINS. Say—who the Honolulu nicknamed you "The Clam?"

NEWTON. Oh, I've been known as that for years and years.

JENKINS. Then you big lumbering victrola, why don't you live up to your name?

NEWTON. Because the silence that is golden for others has made me unpopular. I came here day after day, never opening my mouth while everyone of you fellows gossiped like washwomen. That seems to be the popular thing in men's clubs so I've decided to go to it—strong.

JENKINS. I'd like to go to you. (*Clenches fist*) Men never gossip—you know that.

NEWTON. Your right. When men gossip they call it topics.—And that reminds me, want to hear the latest topic that's going the rounds? It's about Gladys Wynn.

(*COLE and CARR whistle in surprise—GLADYS behind screen is astonished—JENKINS and REED rise.*)

JENKINS. If you tell it, I'll break your neck.

REED. (*Pushes JENKINS aside*) And if you don't—I'll break your neck. What about Gladys Wynn?

NEWTON. Why—ah—nothing.

JENKINS. Of course not.

REED. What topic is going the rounds about Gladys Wynn?

JENKINS. Let him alone, Reed.

REED. You shut up. This is my affair. (*Takes NEWTON by coat collar*) Now tell me.

NEWTON. (*Yanks himself free*) You big simp, I know you are engaged to that doll-faced ninny—but I'm not afraid of you. Believe me if the gossip I hear is true I'd be ashamed to admit that I went with her.

REED. (*Rushes at NEWTON but is held back by CARR and COLE*) Apologies at once or I'll—

NEWTON. Bah! I'll meet you to-morrow in the gymnasium, but I think you'll thank me instead when I tell you that she was seen coming out of a restaurant at two in the morning, with a man.

REED. (*Makes a rush for him—but is held back*)
You big——

(GLADYS utters a scream, knocks down screen and confronts the men.)

GLADYS. Arthur don't touch him. It's true.

REED. (*Falls back horrified*) What? Good God——

GLADYS. The man I was seen coming out of a restaurant at two in the morning with was——

REED. Her father.

(*All are amazed. GLADYS takes REED's and NEWTON's hands and joins them.*)

GLADYS. Don't you understand, dear? The story was made up between Mr. Newton and myself as a joke. He never gossips. You know that.

JENKINS. He doesn't gossip? Why he's worse than a washwoman, a maid, a butler and——

NEWTON. Yourself combined, eh?—That gossip of mine was also a joke.

JENKINS. (*After recovering from his great surprise*) Well, this is great. So I don't lose. (*To GLADYS*) Did you hear any gossip at the woman's club?

GLADYS. Yes. a great deal. (*Gets note-book*)

JENKINS. But the only gossip you heard here was what Newton said and that you know was faked? (*GLADYS nods*) Ahem—then I don't have to double the amount you collected for the Red Cross?

GLADYS. Apparently not.

JENKINS. I told you we men never gossiped. (*Pulls out check-book—sits at table while NEWTON crosses to rear arch*) But of course I'll give you a good-sized check, anyway.

NEWTON. (*To boy off-stage*) Oh, boy. (*Boy enters*) Give me that letter I told you to mail a little while ago. (*Boy gives him letter—exits*)

JENKINS. (*As he starts to write*) How will five hundred do?

GLADYS. Why—thank you, I guess—

JENKINS. Fine. Five hundred then. (*Starts to write*)

NEWTON. One minute, Jenkins. (*JENKINS looks up*) Before Miss Wynn and Reed came in, you three fellows held a mighty interesting conversation while I was writing this letter. (*Tears it open*) I'll read it to you. (*Reads*) "I understand Billy Simpson can't put up with his wife." "You mean can?" "No, that's what he wants to do, smarty." (*The three men are dumfounded*) "I understand Felix Hanson wears thin underwear all the year round." (*NEWTON glances at them to see effect then resumes*) "If you fellows promise not to tell anyone, I'll tell you something that old man Simpson told me about Charley Murphy who got it straight from Hank Hitchell, that Charley Murphy only gets a salary of eighteen dollars a week." "But he keeps a car." "I played poker there once and know how he can bluff." (*To JENKINS*) Want to hear any more of the *Gossip* I took down? (*JENKINS boils in rage*)

GLADYS. Why, that's exactly what your wife was talking about at the woman's club. (*Opens notebook*) Want to hear it?

JENKINS. (*Roars*) No. (*To NEWTON*) You villain.

NEWTON. No, not a villain. Just chairman of

the local Red Cross Society out to raise the fifty thousand. (*Pats JENKINS on his back*) Now, be a good sport and make out your check.—How much is it, Miss Wynn?

GLADYS. I collected four thousand. That makes eight thousand dollars.

NEWTON. Thank you. (*To JENKINS*) Did you hear. Eight thousand. Not five hundred.

JENKINS. Bah! (*Writes check rapidly and gives it to GLADYS*)

GLADYS. Oh, thank you very, very much. That makes a total of seventy-two thousand so far. Twenty-two thousand above expectations. Aren't you glad?

(JENKINS *grunts.*)

JENKINS. (*Rises—takes GLADYS' hands*) Yes, I am glad. It's for a good cause. I—ah—played a little unfair and I guess I got what was coming to me. I certainly don't begrudge it.

GLADYS. So we thought. You know all is fair in love, war and charity.

NEWTON. Oh, Jenkins, before I forget it, let me tell you that the barber you went to is vice-president of the local Red Cross, while Mr. Cole over there is the treasurer and Mr. Carr the secretary. (*They all laugh at JENKINS who is flabbergasted. NEWTON sits at table*) Now, please let me alone while I write to the Syracuse Red Cross at once and tell them that the scheme worked great. They're the ones who put us wise, Jenkins.—(*Smiles*) Men do gossip, don't they, Jenkins.

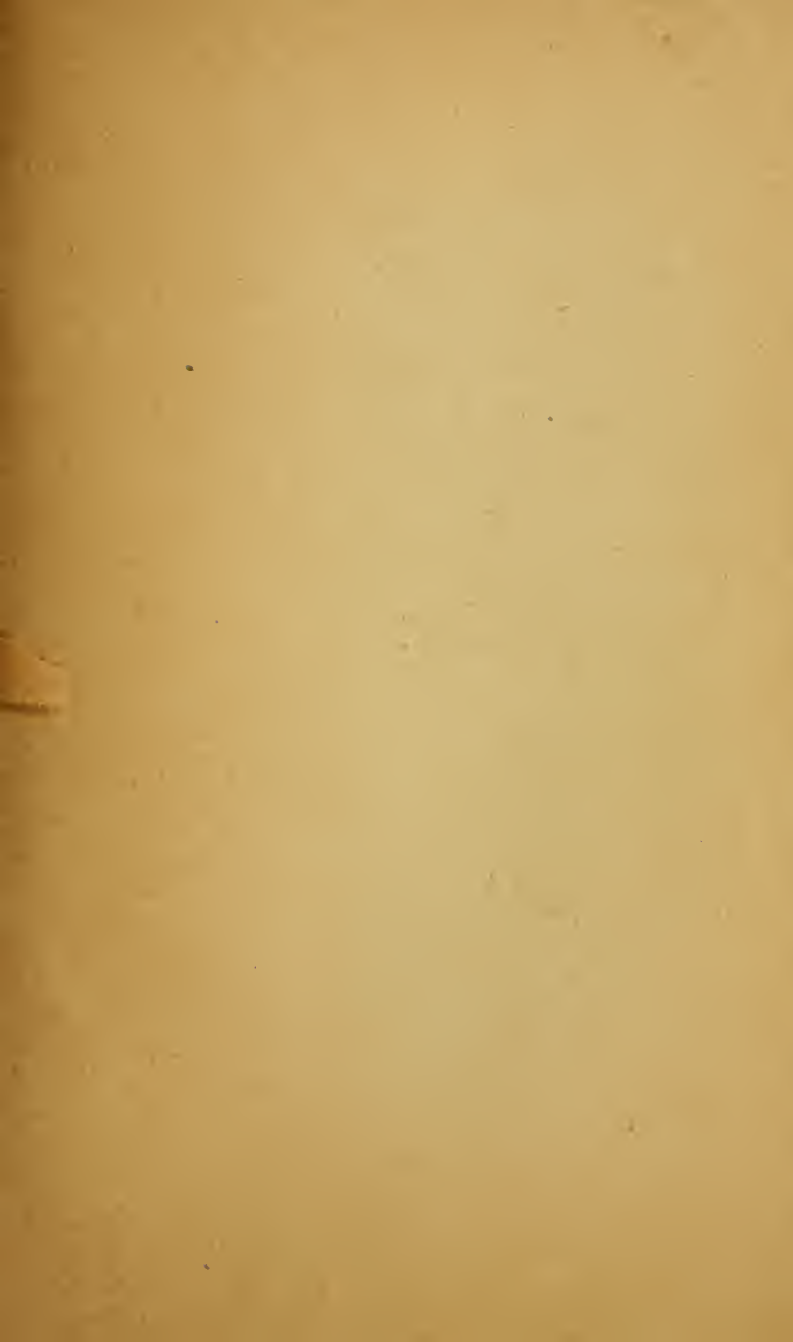
JENKINS. It cost me eight thousand to be convinced.

NEWTON. Yes—and it's going to cost some other chaps a great deal more. (*To GLADYS*) Miss

Wynn, the next ones I want you to get into an argument with are the two wealthiest members of the Elks Club and the Masons. We ought to get more than eight thousand out of each, don't you think? (*Substitute Elks and Masons with the leading men's club in city where playlet is booked.*)

Curtain.







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