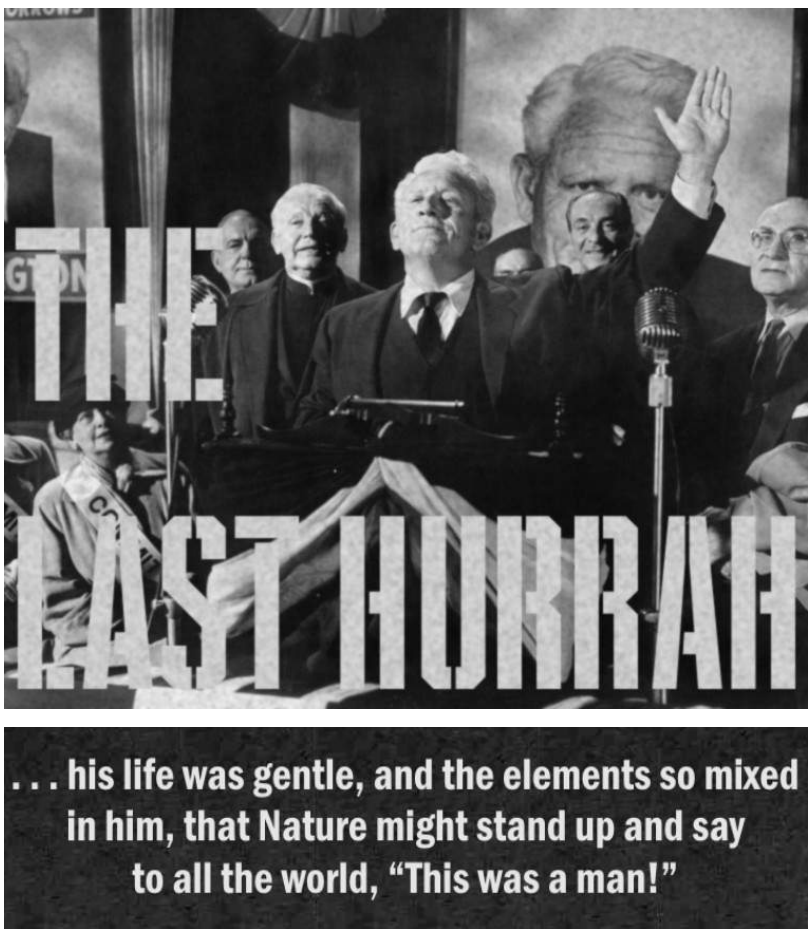
Spencer Tracy in



• A bomb hitting the city would have raised less dust than my Uncle Frank Skeffington's speech, that night on television. Not a set in town wasn't tuned in on his oratory accepting the nomination.

"I'd hoped at the end of my current term to retire and rest," Uncle Frank piously told the city. "But one look at the names of those who've declared themselves candidates has forced me to change my decision."

Over at the sedate Plymouth Club, where eminent men sat listening, several heart attacks threatened from sheer fury. Men like Amos Force, who published the *Herald* and therefore is my boss. Like banker Norman Cass. And Episcopal Bishop Nathaniel Gardiner.

And in the living room of my father-in-law, Roger Sugrue, where we went each Thursday for a stuffy dinner, the air was chill. My beautiful Maeve kept fluttering about her ogre of a father, trying to comfort him. I sat on the sidelines with a suppressed grin, watching Daddy stew.

And over at the cathedral, old Cardinal Burke, arthritic and as proud as Lucifer, tapped his cane and snarled at poor Monsignor Killian: "War, murder, and now Skeffington!" Undoubtedly, Skeffington was the worst.

"And so, dutifully if reluctantly, I again submit my name to you," Uncle Frank's speech ended.

Adam and Maeve (Jeffrey Hunter and Dianne Foster) were as happy as could be—until Adam got involved in Uncle Frank's political campaign.

At the big political dinner, flanking the veteran candidate, his two chief advisers nodded as he sat down. John Gorman flicked a glance at small Sam Weinberg,

and then turned his gaze to his cigar.

Twice governor, four times mayor, he'd never known defeat … until now!

And in the various districts where ward heelers hang out, political small fry like Charlie Hennessey and ex-Mayor Festus Garvey tried to figure out ways to beat the unbeatable Skeffington at the polls.

I guess one of the few sets of ears in town that didn't hear the speech belonged to my cousin. Frank, Junior, wasn't what you'd call a deep thinker. The night his father was electrifying the public, Junior was out at a night club with two pretty blondes doing an expert mambo.

Uncle Frank went home from his fireworks to the town house where a portrait of my dead Aunt Kate hung at the stair landing. The single rose he always kept there sat in its vase underneath. The big house was empty except for his bustling housekeeper, old Ellen. Empty.

That's why Uncle Frank called me, I suppose.

When the phone rang, Maeve and I just had gotten back from her father's mansion to our own converted basement. She was worrying that I might get mixed up in the coming campaign, though Uncle Frank and I never had been close. The other times he'd run, I'd been away at college or war. But *this* time—

"Why does he have to run again?" Maeve pouted. "Daddy says—"

"What difference to us if he runs for Mayor or doesn't run? Honey, I'm a sportswriter, not a politician. I'm not interested."

Then the phone jangled. "Adam? Your Uncle Frank. You weren't asleep? . . . Could you find time tomorrow morning, Adam? At City Hall? . . ."

Just for the record, I'm Adam Caulfield. I write a sports column for the *Herald.* Luckily, it's been syndicated and makes money for the paper, so Amos Force doesn't dare fire me. My mother was Frank Skeffington's only sister. But Junior and I haven't much in common. And Uncle Frank was always busy; twice Governor of the state, four times Mayor of the city. And as I've said, I was away a lot and we weren't too close.

The *Herald,* that next morning, came out with a black mourning band around its front-page story that Mayor Skeffington would run again. I imagined my Uncle chortling over it as he breakfasted and made ready to see the line of favor-seekers who queued up every morning on his doorstep.

But it wasn't all merriment in the Skeffington camp, that day. When I got down to City Hall, the silence outside the Mayor's office was the kind you run into only at executions. The corpse passed me, in fact, on the stairs. He was one of our city councilmen, Johnny Byrne. I found out later what had been happening.

Uncle Frank had discovered that Johnny was about to be divorced for running around with a girl in Baltimore, and a divorced man on his ticket could have cost him his office. Johnny had just been dropped from the slate into oblivion.

Yet when his secretary announced me, Uncle Frank didn't look much like a headchopper. "Adam!" he greeted me. "I asked you over today because I have a little proposition for you. You've never been interested in politics?"

"Politics, no. But I've a rooting interest where you're concerned, sir."

"Have you?" He looked surprised at that. And pleased. "I'm grateful. Now, Adam, you're a sportswriter. What would you say is the greatest spectator sport in the country? I'll tell you. *Politics*. Millions of people follow it in the newspapers, on radio, on TV. They wouldn't get in the game themselves, but they know the names and numbers of all the players."

"You're inviting me to take a seat in the stands, Uncle Frank?"

"Better than that. Not the stands or the sidelines, but on the inside—a view most people don't get. I'm not suggesting you get involved, now. You're free to approach this any way you like. But, Adam, this will be my last campaign. My last hurrah. So it may be your last chance to catch the act. Understand, there's nothing compulsory. Just drop in whenever you feel like it. Or I'll give you a call if something comes up."

I grinned. "Fair enough. Amos—the *Herald's* publisher—asked me to convey his worst."

"Better than his best. Bad to be endorsed by a former Klansman. I've always suspected Amos Force quit the KKK because he had to buy his own sheet. It's little things like that drive a man to tolerance."

"Could a spectator ask why Force dislikes you so much?"

Uncle Frank told Adam, "This will be my last campaign—my last hurrah. I'd like you to come along for the ride." He was a lonely man, bidding for company.

The devil stirred in Frank Skeffington's eyes. "It dates back to the fact that my mother—your grandmother—was once a maid in his father's house. Old Caleb, Amos's father, fired her for stealing."

"Grandmother? What did she do about

it? Even in those days—"

"Ah, but she was guilty. Our people were immigrants. The Irish hired out for wages next to nothing. A bit of left-over food—everybody took it. Common practice. Their families were hungry. But when Caleb Force apprehended your grandmother taking two over-ripe bananas and a small apple—"

"No!" I breathed, not able to believe it even of a Force.

"Yes. Amos never has forgotten my mother's crime, nor that her son became in time Mayor of the city and Governor of the state."

• All right, so I'm a coward. But I didn't tell my wife Maeve of my Uncle's little proposition. Anyway, I hadn't heard from him and it was already Thursday, the night of his big opening rally and of our weekly dinner with Daddy Sugrue.

The rally was going strong when Daddy tuned it in on television. All those people waiting to hear Uncle Frank got Maeve's sire riled; he was still spluttering when I sneaked out.

I wanted to see for myself. I wanted to watch the great Frank Skeffington in action. So I went to the rally. And it was a master performance. Uncle Frank had everything. He made them laugh. He made them cry. He lifted the hide off his opponents as deftly as a taxidermist—especially young Kevin McCluskey, whom the Good Government League and the *Herald* were supporting.

But on the long walk home, I got to wondering. It was only a performance I'd witnessed; nothing more. Had I a right to make Maeve as unhappy as my leaving her father's house that evening had made her? When I got home, the bedroom door was locked. A frozen, small voice addressed me from behind it.

"You can sleep on the couch, Adam Caulfield!"

That's when I decided to call it off. At the office the next morning, I even put in my phone call. But while I waited for Uncle Frank to come to the phone, Amos Force brought his new candidate into my cubbyhole. He was showing Kevin McCluskey around the shop.

That toothpaste smile was all I needed. McCluskey was so sincere it made me sick. I didn't tell Uncle Frank what I'd called to tell him.

"What are you doing tonight?" he asked. "Around seven-thirty?"

Maeve wasn't expecting me for dinner, that was for sure. So Uncle Frank picked me up in his limousine at the appointed hour.

I was curious. "You haven't told me where we're going," I reminded him.

"Actually, we're going to a wake. Knocko Minihan's."

"An *Irish* wake? This Minihan was a —a friend of yours, sir?"

"I couldn't stand the sight of him. Few could. He married a grand woman, though. Gert O'Dair. A close friend of my wife's.…"

The words don't exist to make you see

Knocko Minihan's wake the way it really was. When the Mayor's limousine pulled up at the shabby house, neighbors gasped, *"It's Himself!"* As if by magic, the district's firemen and police began to pour in to pay respects to the dead, whom they'd all been ignoring. Uncle Frank sent his driver to buy half a dozen boxes of cigars, and these circulated freely among the menfolk present.

Names I'd never heard of seemed to remember my mother. I was led in for a view of the corpse in his handsome casket. A cackling, old woman whom Uncle Frank greeted as Delia Boylan, took charge of me and pointed out our family's old friends among the so-called mourners.

Once Uncle Frank was back from a visit with Gert Minihan in her kitchen—where, as I afterwards learned, he'd coaxed her into accepting a thousand dollars on the fictitious claim that it was a deathbed gift left to her by my Aunt Kate—the wake became more like a political rally.

One of Uncle Frank's many legmen, Cuke Gillen, had fetched orderlies and food from the City Hospital. A buffet was set up in the meager dining room—sandwiches, turkey, ham, cold roast beef. The place was packed now. Laughter mingled with the hum of voices. Uncle Frank was definitely the host, and they crowded around him like a human sea. They wanted to talk politics, and he obliged.

Ditto Boland—who was my Uncle's shadow, even trying to dress like him—passed near me in the press and gave me a kingsized wink. "A grand evening!" he called. "A good time had by one and all!"

"With the possible exception of Knocko Minihan," I offered drily. And, almost sickened, I pressed through the mob to the doorway.

Only outside did I realize that John Gorman, Uncle Frank's chief adviser, had quietly followed me.

"None of my business, boy, but ye'd make a mistake to run off like this," he said.

"You mean it's disrespectful to the deceased?" I glared. "Knocko at least should be mentioned. If he was so unpopular, why the turnout?"

"They're here, most of them, for the same reason as yourself. Frank Skeffington. He's not doing this for votes. There's not a soul in that house whose vote hasn't been in his pocket the last twenty years."

"If that's true," I muttered, "then—*why?"*

"He came to bring a crowd to Knocko's wake so the widow'd feel a bit better, thinking of all the friends Knocko had. In a little while now, they'll be offering prayers for the dead. Ten times more people will be praying than without your uncle. Shall we go back inside now?"

I felt ashamed of myself as I turned meekly to follow him.

• In the limousine on the way home, that night, Uncle Frank explained to me something I hadn't thought about before. To thousands like the people we'd been with tonight, he wasn't just an elected official of the city. He was a tribal chieftain as well—the tribe being the Irish.

"And so I'm expected to abide by the tribal customs—among them being wakes. It's disappearing, like the derby hat, but I've always thought I'd be disappointed not to have a wake of my own," he said.

"With everyone talking politics?" I ventured.

"Naturally. What else would you expect the Irish to talk about?"

He left me on my doorstep—to face a locked bedroom door again—and drove off to his lonely town house, where the fresh rose always bloomed in front of Aunt Kate's portrait and where Junior constantly played his witless rhumba music. . . .

His one-man war with the city's banking tycoons started the very morning after Knocko Minihan was laid to rest. I heard about much of the first battle from the lips of his worshipful shadow, Ditto Boland.

It seems the voters in Ward Nine had been promised a slum-clearance housing development. But the bankers, headed by cold-eyed Norman Cass, all hated Frank Skeffington's bones. Meeting in the Plymouth Club, where they could breathe the very same air their ancestors had brought over in the Mayflower, the financial tsars of the city had refused the city a loan to begin the development. Further study was needed, they had said.

Uncle Frank found out that a mess of them was lunching together in the Cotton Mather Room at the sacred club—where the by-laws, passed in 1795, decreed that "Members whilst at sup shall not suffer interruption for any matter save of gravest import, such as flood, piracy or Indian attack." That didn't bother Uncle Frank. He just grabbed his hat and headed downtown.

• Leaving the ever-present Ditto and his secretary in the club's lobby, Uncle Frank swept up to the private dining room like a one-headed Indian attack. Of those at the table, only the tolerant Bishop Gardiner smiled faintly at his intrusion. The others, led by Cass, reddened in angry resentment.

"Gentlemen," Uncle Frank boomed. "I bring alarming news! The Redcoats are coming!" Not a change of expression. So he went on. "I'm after what your Pilgrim Fathers sought when they came to these shores: Better living conditions. In Ward Nine."

"You've had your answer," Cass retorted.

"I came in the hope of changing your minds," Frank Skeffington answered.

"No. The banks do not consider this city a good financial risk under your administration. We prefer to wait until

the municipal situation—"

"Has changed to the extent of a new Mayor? Is that it? Gentlemen, I beg you not to use this housing project as a political football." And he meant it, every word. "No day passes without a kid being run over in the streets because there's no place else to play. Do you know how many pneumonia cases we dragged out of those cold-water flats last winter? There's nothing wrong with this city's credit—and you all know it!"

"On that, sir," Cass hissed, "we differ."

"It all boils down to one thing, doesn't it?" Uncle Frank asked slowly. Then: "This isn't *your* city any more. It's ours. You have this musty shrine, but *my* people have City Hall. And that's what you can't swallow! Well, that housing development is going up as scheduled. Now I bid you good day."

He was getting his hat at the rack downstairs, when he noted a yachting cap in among the homburgs. An abashed attendant informed him it belonged to Mr. Norman Cass, Jr., the Commodore. Uncle Frank sent out scouts to round up the younger Cass. Then he headed directly back to his office.

An hour later, the Commodore was seated in the Mayor's sanctum, somewhat bewildered. But being bewildered was a normal state with the junior Mr. Cass. He had a distressing lisp and blinked when spoken to.

• When I heard about how Uncle Frank had handled things, I wanted to laugh. But I wanted to cry, too, because I knew that he'd learned how to handle these featherbrained playboys at the cost of heartache.

"Do you know what interested me most about your winning the sloop race last Sunday, Mr. Cass?" he inquired, all admiration. "That it was won by a banker! We think of bankers as staid, indoors men. Then you prove a banker can be a man of action and daring, quick to chart his course, bold to hold it. This city *needs* those qualities."

"That's generous of you, Mister Mayor."

"I'll come to the point. I've discussed this with the best minds in the city. We want you to be our Fire Commissioner."

"Fire Commissioner?" young Cass shrieked.

"The position has disadvantages." But Uncle Frank was picking up a speaking trumpet and a big white helmet off his desk. Cass stared at them, fascinated. "You'd have to attend all the big fires. In this helmet and a white uniform, shouting orders to your men, I'm afraid you'd be the center of attention. Then you'd have to use the Commissioner's big red car equipped with siren, and when that siren sounded every car on the road would have to move over. Now, I've prepared a letter of acceptance—"

After a dazed Norman had signed the letter and been photographed in helmet and asinine grin, he was allowed to depart.

Next morning, the elder Cass, breathing fire, strode into the office. As he came, he roared, "This nonsense about my son—"

"You don't consider it laudable that your son would like to serve his city?" Uncle Frank held out a print of the picture of Norman in heroic pose. "What the well-dressed Commissioner will wear! It should look well on the front pages. Well, Cass, when do I announce the appointment?"

"You can't bluff me! You have no intention of appointing him!"

"On the contrary, I have every intention of appointing him—and then leaving him strictly on his own. How long before I'll have to step in to save the idiot boy—and whatever's left of your family name?"

"I consider this blackmail! Cheap and —"

"Don't pull that on me. I know *your* record and I wouldn't touch it with a garbageman's glove. Well? I'm waiting."

"We will grant the loan," Cass grated. "I'll want the negative and the letter he signed. And now may I use your telephone?"

The number he called was Amos Force's at the *Herald.* Glaring at Uncle Frank, he spoke very distinctly into the mouthpiece. "Amos? That candidate of yours, McCluskey—count me in. I shall back him to whatever extent is necessary. You'll have a blank check." He hung up. "You'll regret this victory, Skeffington!"

"At my age, one more regret won't make much difference," my uncle said….

Frank didn't look like a dying man, watching TV and planning strategy with Gillen and Gorman, with Weinberg on the end and Ditto behind. He fooled them all.

In the weeks that immediately followed, he didn't have much time for regrets. The campaign got underway with the heavy artillery of the McCluskey forces booming. I still wish I knew how much it cost Cass to put the toothpaste-ad face on every billboard in the city. Amos Force forbade the name of Skeffington even to be mentioned in the *Herald.* We ran McCluskey's alleged life story in installments; it was warm, appealing and inspirational, made so by orders from on high. Radio, television, sound trucks — you couldn't breathe without inhaling the name McCluskey.

The only thing was, their candidate himself rarely appeared in public. He couldn't think on his feet, and not much with his head, either. Instead, there were regular televised visits to the house of the Good Government League's white knight. They rented him an Irish setter

and his baby and wife were on camera *ad nauseum,* while he mouthed the harmless platitudes his backers had framed. Oh, Kevin McCluskey was quite a fellow!

• A certain number of Uncle Frank's long-time enemies were confounded by those chintzy evenings at home with the clean-living McCluskeys. Bishop Gardiner flatly rejected Cass's plea to come out in support of the boy. Cardinal Burke made bitter comments to Monsignor Killian about the devil's choice between a Skeffington and this mush with a hired dog at its knee. The small-fry politician Charlie Hennessey, staging an also-ran campaign for Mayor himself, derided the television programs bitterly from his soap box in the park.

Whether Cass and Amos Force and the rest of their kind were happy with the toothsome candidate, those days, I couldn't have guessed. But for sure they weren't happy whenever they encountered a torchlight parade of the Ninth Ward Marching and Chowder Corps, singing as they strode the grand old Skeffington campaign song that had made him Mayor and Governor.

Uncle Frank was putting on the fight of his life. He went everywhere—and the crowds loved him. There wasn't a trick he didn't know, and he used them all. Uptown, he spoke with a broad A. Downtown, he had a fine brogue on him. In the Italian district, he managed to look like a dashing operatic tenor. Only in his bare campaign headquarters was he himself.

One thing about being a sportswriter; you can tell a champ when you see one. Uncle Frank made them look like amateurs.

Finally we got to the last night before Election Day. It was time for me to go home and try to pick up the pieces of my private life. Talk about cold wars! Maeve and I had been having a dilly!

• I guess the really high spot of the whole magnificent Skeffington show, for me, was the way the old charmer handled Maeve.

Dropping me off at the apartment, that last evening, he noted that our lights were still on and ventured a guess that my wife would be glad to have me to herself. My answer must have given him a hint that something was out of kilter. Anyhow, he suddenly realized he hadn't eaten a mouthful since noon and asked if he might come in for a glass of milk. How could I refuse? But I was nervous as a cat, letting us in to what seemed to be an empty room—until we spotted Maeve fallen asleep in her chair.

When I awakened her gingerly, explaining that we had company, she did her best. But the face she turned to Uncle Frank was dismayed, despite her pretense. He was the only one at ease, smiling over her limp hand.

"We're starved," I managed. "Any chance of something to eat?"

"Of course." She edged toward the

kitchen. "I'll see what—"

But Uncle Frank still held her hand. "No rush. We're not *that* starved. Here's something I'd like to examine at closer range." He'd spotted the double-framed picture on her piano. "Your parents. Taken on the old Day-liner on July Fourth, Nineteen Twenty-seven. I took it myself, and my wife had it enlarged and gave it to your mother for a birthday present."

Maeve stared at him. "I never realized you knew my mother!"

"Very well indeed. She had a way of laughing—a funny little chuckle. You don't remember her at all? It's not an easy laugh to describe, but I recall always having some joke to tell her, just to hear her laugh."

The old charmer won Maeve's heart by inviting himself to supper and reminiscing about her mother. Then he explained why her daddy hated him so much.

So I was the one who scrambled the eggs, while Maeve sat delighted beside him at the piano and they sang together the Irish tunes that he said had been her mother's favorites. When we'd finished eating, he let her get around to talking politics—all vivid interest, under his spell. He explained to her, as if her opinion were the most important one in the city, how he tried to keep everyone happy with the compromises her father so often had scoffed. When he rose to go, she urged him to come back soon.

I thanked him, out at the car, for what he had done.

He smiled at me sentimentally. "I've never enjoyed any campaign quite so much, Adam," he said, "thanks to having you for an audience. I'd missed that, you know."

When I went inside again, Maeve was waiting to embrace me. For the first time in weeks, the bedroom door wasn't locked that night. Close in my arms, she breathed, "Daddy can go jump in the river! . . ."

We voted early, next morning. We were early enough to catch the exchange that almost induced an attack of apoplexy in Daddy Sugrue when he happened to encounter Uncle Frank at the polls, and Uncle Frank blithely remarked that with his own vote he'd just cancelled out Maeve's father's. We were early enough to be ahead of the first of the crippled and lamed whom Ditto and the other Skeffington boys were transporting to the polling booths. We were early enough to pass, on our way home, the pet shop truck that was taking back McCluskey's hired setter.

Junior—perhaps not to Uncle Frank's

surprise—could not vote for his father because he had forgotten to register. But most of the rest of the city was queued up outside one voting booth or another. It was an exceptionally heavy turn-out in a local year. . . .

I got down to Skeffington Headquarters about a quarter-hour after the polls closed. It was early even for scattered returns, but I wanted to see the whole finale of what Uncle Frank had called his last hurrah.

The barn-like room was crowded. At long trestle tables against the wall, under the big blackboards, workers manned the tally sheets and the already-pealing bank of telephones. The radio was vamping until there were figures to report. I wandered about through a clatter of confident voices, all jabbering.

When Uncle Frank arrived, there was a big bustle of greeting. "I want to thank you all," he told them, "for your enthusiasm, your confidence and your support. After the returns are in, we'll celebrate."

His chief advisers, Gorman and Weinberg, were there, wearing the smiles of victory. Ditto was there, strutting like a rooster. Everybody on the team was there, predicting a plurality of eighty thousand.

As the first scattered reports began to come in on the telephones, I kept gulping butterflies. Uncle Frank was the calmest man among us. Precinct by precinct, the figures were chalked up on the board. A trickle, at first. Then a flood.

I don't know just when it was that the exhilarated mood in the big room began to change. But suddenly, incredibly, I was staring at the current total on the boards, and it read: Skeffington 18,777; McCluskey, 24,315; Hennessey 101. The report from Little Italy, where Uncle Frank had always been idolized, was just coming in. He had 268 votes to McCluskey's 219.

I saw his confident smile fade, then. "Check that! Are you *sure?"*

The figures kept coming. As of the early returns, Frank Skeffington was incredibly taking a beating. He put through calls to his ward captains to find what was going on.

Ditto bumbled in to say that the Fife and Drum Corps was outside, ready to start the victory parade. Uncle Frank could sense panic among his workers, so he spoke with a calm smile.

"Tell them it's early. I'll let you know."

Weinberg had been making a check on his own. "We got trouble, Frank," he said. "The kid's begun to pull in about thirty precincts. He's begun to snowball. Frank, we got a battle! Let's get busy!"

Uncle Frank chuckled. "What do you propose to do? Blow up the polls? The vote's in. It's over. We can only wait."

Junior turned up briefly, in evening clothes and with a blonde, already celebrating. The figures on the boards didn't seem to get through to him. He breezed out, on his way to night clubs, confident as a jay bird.

For one awful instant, I saw the loneliness stark and naked in Uncle Frank's eyes. But it was gone in a flash. He was being cheerful for all of us.

• On toward midnight, the radio announcers began relaying what was already obvious. ". . . *long reign ended in a stunning upset. In what appears to be the greatest election surprise in years, the career of Frank Skeffington . . .*"

They brought in the lights and the TV cameras, despite Ditto's wild efforts to close the doors against the press. Reporters milled through the hall, past the stricken campaign workers who had been flushed with happiness mere hours ago. Some were weeping as we got the sign that we were on the air.

But not Uncle Frank. Not he. He faced the mikes like a Roman.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it appears from partial returns that Mr. McCluskey has won and will be your next Mayor. I congratulate him and wish him luck. To each of you kind enough to vote for me today, thank you."

An eager reporter thrust into the scene. "Mister Mayor, just one question. Just one! Have you made any plans for the future?"

"Yes," Uncle Frank said, confidently and clearly. "Yes, I have. I am going to run for Governor of the State. I expect to win!"

• He said good night to each one of his workers with a personal handshake, before we left the headquarters. Driving me home, though, he let the mask slip. He looked twenty years older, and tired —bone-tired.

Still, he was Frank Skeffington. He had his chauffeur take a new route—straight past the Plymouth Club, with his official siren wailing, to let whoever sat inside know that Skeffington was still in town. Not that they'd be apt to be relishing their victory, what with that announcement that he meant to run for Governor!

We drew up in a slum section so clotted with wash lines and garbage cans, that it made Knocko Minihan's neighborhood look plush. He got out and looked about. I followed, braced against the ugly smells.

"Lovely, isn't it?" he said softly. "But I was born here, Adam. And on the first floor lived Martin Burke—now the Cardinal. We all grew up together, he and Roger Sugrue and I. We went such different ways! Not much to start from."

"I thought these places had been torn down years ago!"

"I tried. This is one of my failures. Norman Cass owns most of this. Chasing him through the courts is like chasing a cat through these alleys."

At the next corner, the street was wide and well lighted. There was a playground, and the buildings looked clean.

"I did this my second term as Mayor, Adam," he went on. "They said it cost

too much. Maybe it did. They said I awarded the contracts to friends. That's true. But only the Bible favors rewarding one's enemies." He led me to the car and told his chauffeur, "City Hospital, Charlie."

His driver took us there. Lights shone from its thousand windows as the car slowed.

"When I took over," Uncle Frank said, "it was just that middle building. Wing by wing, annex by annex, the best staff in the country—and it's all free, regardless of race, creed, color *or* politics." He sighed. "And I could show you the Midcity Tunnel. Skeffington's Folly, they called it, to pad the payrolls. Now Amos Force says it should have four traffic lanes instead of two, proving my lack of foresight."

I realized he was speaking almost with a compulsion to get things said. When we reached my house, I begged, "Come in, Uncle Frank. Have a cup of coffee."

"It's a kind offer, Adam. But not tonight. I keep wondering how and why it happened. McCluskey! That boob! If it had been anyone else!" He sighed. "I admit I haven't had much practice in losing."

"What you need is a good night's sleep, Uncle Frank," I told him as I turned. I watched the dark limousine roll away through the drizzle that had begun to fall, and then I went inside. But part of me rode on homeward with him, to the big, empty house where he'd have to tell the portrait of Aunt Kate. *Why McCluskey?* Uncle would be thinking. For he literally had been beaten by a nobody, a nonentity. *But I'll show them. I'll put on a campaign for Governor like nothing they've ever seen!* he'd be telling himself.

It was next morning that Uncle Frank's housekeeper Ellen called us, sobbing, to report that he'd had a heart attack and the doctor said he was dying. . . .

The doctor, the nurse in white—they seemed almost like intruders in my Uncle's house, when Maeve and I got there. But they'd known what we hadn't—that Uncle Frank had suffered another coronary three years earlier—a warning, which he'd never seen fit to make public. Now he had to have absolute rest and no visitors. The street had to be closed to traffic.

I hesitated. "You don't think I could see him, just for a minute?"

"Matter of fact, he's asked for you. But don't let him talk much."

Gorman and Weinberg were taking care of everything officially. So I went right upstairs to the big bedroom where he lay under sedation, propped up by pillows. When the nurse let me in, he managed the old smile.

He was aseleep when I came down again, to find the housekeeper Ellen in a dither in the hall. The policeman on duty at the door was

having his troubles, it seemed. Outside on the walk, a crowd had begun to line up. They'd heard the news by radio and they'd come from everywhere—the same people who'd waited here, other mornings, to seek their favors of His Honor. But this day it was different; they had come with flowers, with fruit, with jars of jelly, with home-baked bread—the rich and the poor, the great and the small.

Gert Minihan had brought roses. "They were Kate's favorites, Adam," she told me, "so I knew they'd be his, too. It's just that we want him to know how we feel about him—and always will, God bless and keep him!"

• By evening, the gifts ranged about the entrance hall were enough to block house traffic. Every figure pausing at the door had a prayer to offer before he turned quietly away so as not to disturb Himself. I just didn't get it. Thousands of telegrams had swamped City Hall. No such outpouring would have greeted Kevin McCluskey's illness. Yet Skeffington had lost his race by a hundred thousand votes! *Where were they then, those who had voted against him!*

I had it all explained to me afterward: How the new generation didn't go for the kind of politician their folks had supported. How the day of the old-time boss was over. How the Federal Government's absorption of local powers had quietly made Uncle Frank and the men like him into dinosaurs—extinct. What had broken Uncle Frank's heart was the thought that his people had turned against him. But *his* people never had.

Junior went out that evening as usual. Uncle Frank seemed a lot better, with more color in his cheeks, and Junior was full of bumbling plans to stop by some travel agency and plan a nice, restful cruise for Dad. He had no idea, really, what was happening. But then, when had he ever?

Maeve was at her father's, but I was still waiting when the doctor called again. Uncle Frank was set for him, ready to do battle.

"Dan," he said, "it's a bit dull for a man like me just to lie here. I was thinking I'd like to have some of the boys in this evening."

"Not a chance! You run the city, Frank. Leave your health to me."

"Short-term employment for both of us! Don't kid me, Dan. How much longer could you keep me alive if I *don't* see these people? I just want to say goodbye to a few old friends. What's the harm in that?"

I never knew anybody who could stand up to him—not even the doctor. In the end he gave his consent. Gorman and Weinberg were told to call the people, they'd know who.

A couple of hours later, the clan started gathering: Ditto, Cuke Gillen, Hennessey, even ex-Mayor Festus Garvey. Monsignor Killian was on his way, too, I knew. I met them at the door and led them upstairs.

Uncle Frank sat in his bed and beamed upon them. "Good of you to come, gentlemen," he said. It was the old, firm Skeffington voice. "And now let's talk about my running for Governor. The next campaign. You're all supposed to be experts. Well, who've we got to beat?"

At first, they faltered. But the old charm swept them up, and after a little they bit at the bait. You'd have thought the bedroom was Headquarters, from the seething of political opinion and strategy and counter-strategy that whirled around it as the arguments grew warmer. Just outside the hall door, listening to the argument and laughter, I had to fight a hot stinging in my eyes.

• When the doctor came and firmly issued orders for their departure, they still were planning extravagantly. I heard Uncle Frank take leave of each one of them—but blithely, as if he'd been seeing them again tomorrow—and then the Monsignor came. But with the Monsignor was His Eminence, Cardinal Burke—his enemy through life, but not now any more. And Uncle Frank's voice was as firm, joking with him, as it had been earlier.

His Eminence was just departing when Maeve arrived. Her father had insisted upon escorting her, and now he stood in the house of the man he had hated so long. Glowering disapproval at his daughter's being here, he made no secret of being appalled to recognize the Cardinal in what he called *this sinful house.*

When Monsignor Killian came to see him, just a few hours later, he caught Frank napping. And into the relaxed face had crept the aspect of death.

"A Prince of the Church?" he blustered. "I can't believe my eyes!"

The Cardinal's own eyes snapped. "A man is dying, Roger Sugrue."

Junior burst in just in time to hear him say it. I saw the soft, dull face crumple as—at last—my cousin understood. I saw the handful of gay travel folders scatter on the floor. I saw Junior bolt past us up the wide stairs, sobbing *"Dad!"* like a child lost.

The Monsignor just had finished hearing Uncle Frank's confession. At his

sign, we tiptoed into the bedroom. Junior knelt forlornly by the bed, but except for his sobs there wasn't a sound in the place. Then Sugrue spoke smugly.

"Well, at least he's made his peace with God. No doubt if he had it all to do over again, he'd do it very, very differently."

"Daddy!" Maeve gasped in revulsion.

I was ready to hit the pompous idiot. But from the bed came his real answer—the one he'll remember.

Uncle Frank breathed deeply and opened his eyes for a last moment and spoke his piece, loud and clear. *"Like hell I would!"*

THE END

Adapted from the JOHN FORD Production—Released through COLUMBIA PICTURES—Directed by JOHN FORD—Produced by JOHN FORD—Screenplay by FRANK NUGENT—Based on the novel THE LAST HURRAH by EDWIN O'CONNOR—Adapted for SCREEN STORIES by JEAN FRANCIS WEBB

THE CAST

Frank Skeffington ..... **Spencer Tracy**
Adam Caulfield ..... **Jeffrey Hunter**
Maeve Caulfield ..... **Dianne Foster**
John Gorman ..... **Pat O'Brien**
Norman Cass, Sr. ..... **Basil Rathbone**
Cardinal Burke ..... **Donald Crisp**
Cuke Gillen ..... **James Gleason**
Ditto Boland ..... **Edward Brophy**
Amos Force ..... **John Carradine**
Roger Sugrue ..... **Willis Bouchey**
Bishop Gardiner ..... **Basil Ruysdael**
Sam Weinberg ..... **Ricardo Cortez**
Hennessey ..... **Wallace Ford**
Festus Garvey ..... **Frank McHugh**
Mr. Winslow ..... **Carleton Young**
Jack Mangan ..... **Frank Albertson**
Degnan ..... **Bob Sweeney**
Johnny Byrne ..... **Edmund Lowe**
Dan Herlihy ..... **William Leslie**
Gert ..... **Anna Lee**
Monsignor Killian ..... **Ken Curtis**
Delia ..... **Jane Darwell**
Norman Cass, Jr. ..... **O.Z. Whitehead**
Frank Skeffington, Jr. ..... **Arthur Walsh**