

The **TV** *Jobbies*

written by

PAUL RITTS

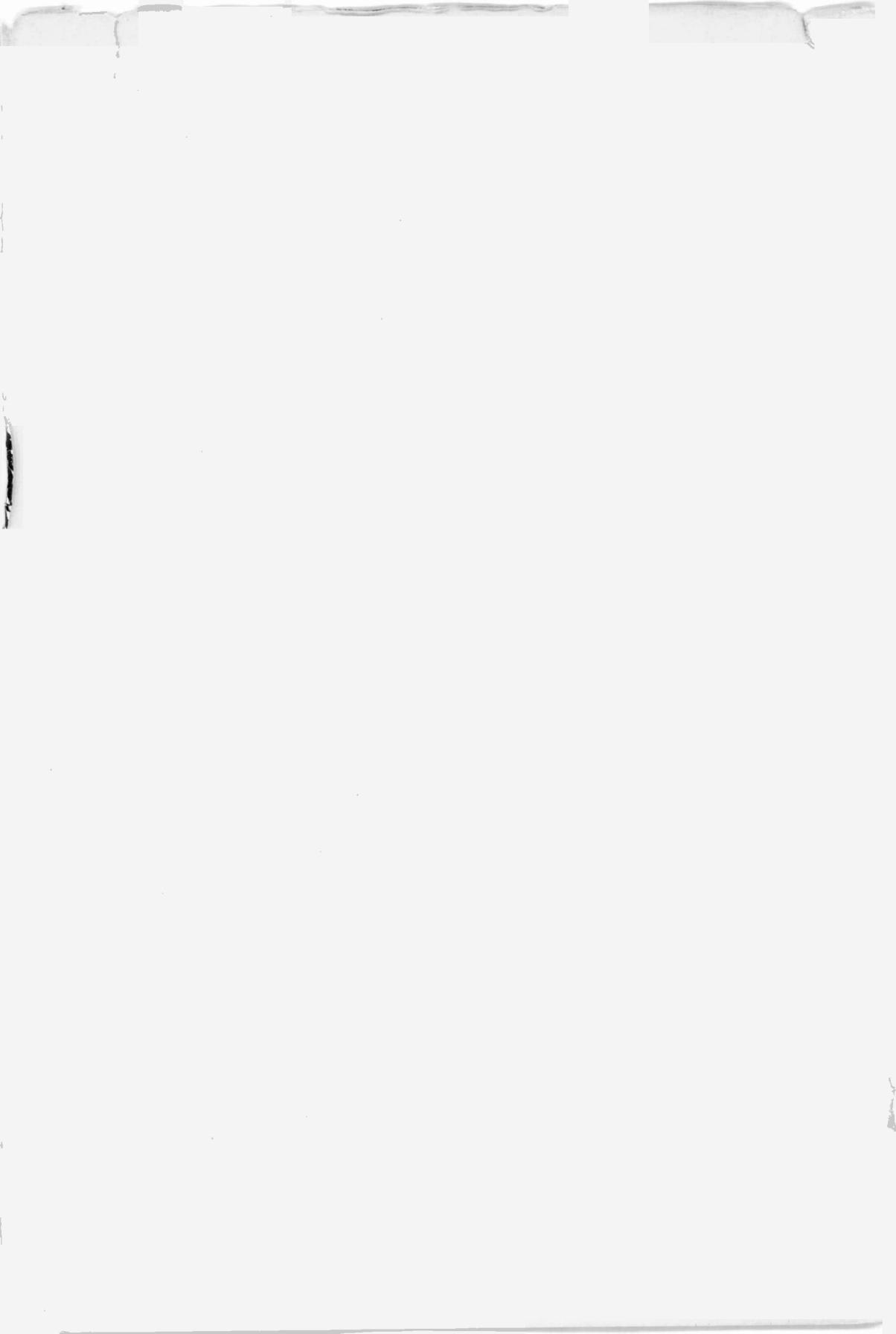
illustrated by

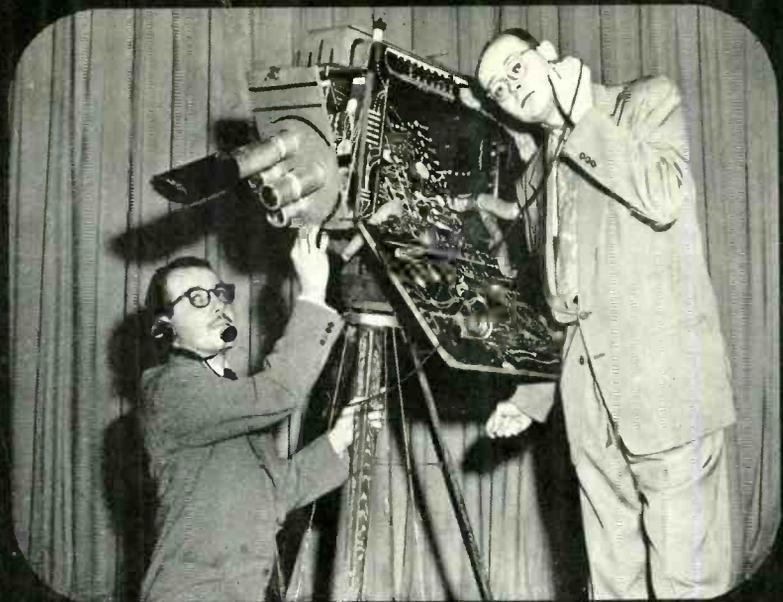
DICK STROME



FOREWORD BY

Ed Sullivan

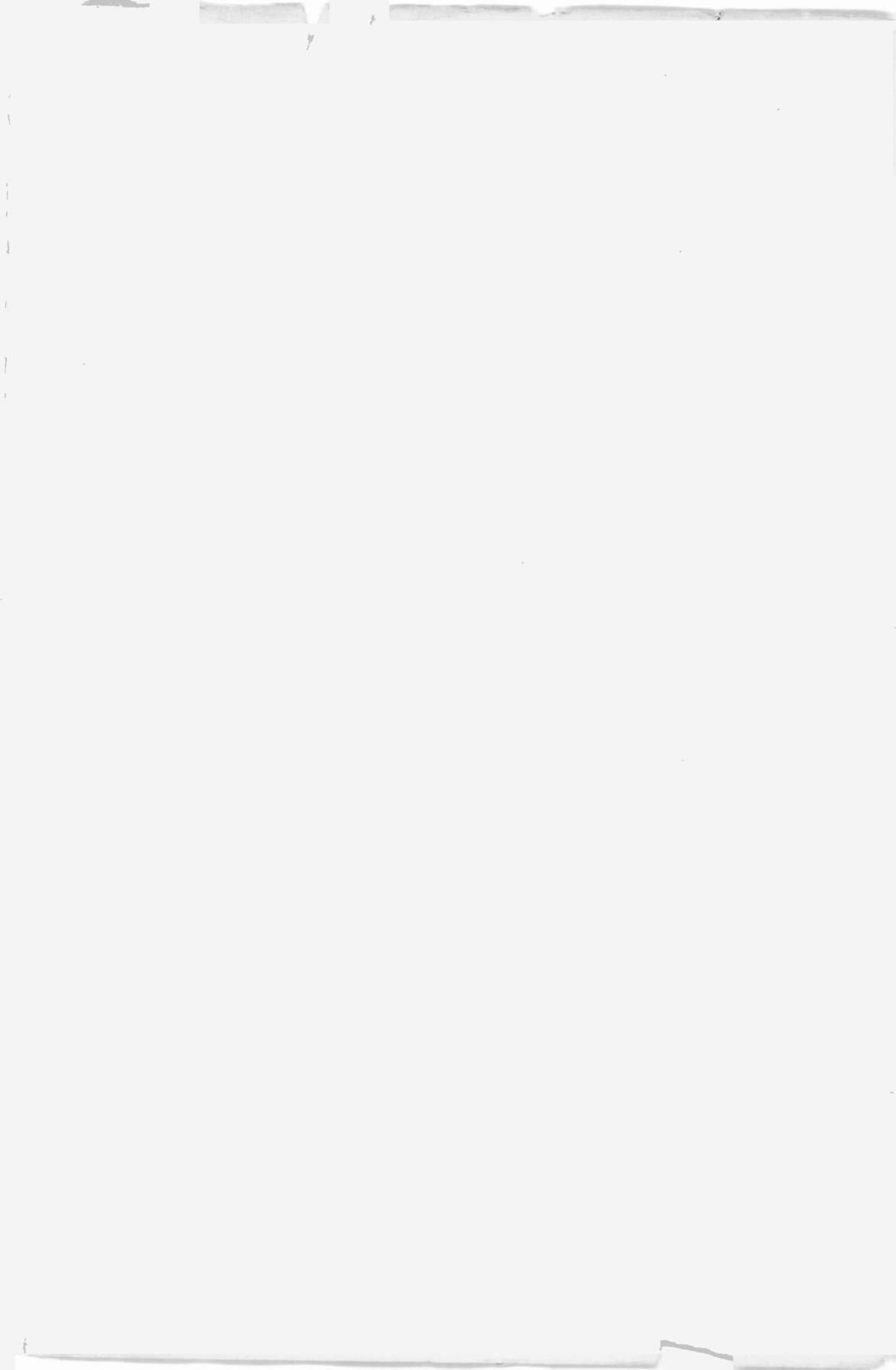




PAUL RITTS, on the left, 50% of the two-headed Muse that produced this book, first fell into the hands of radio when he began using spare moments at Michigan State College to announce and write for local stations. Radio, however, turned him over to the Army Air Corps. In 1946 Captain Ritts donned his civvies and bobbed up again in radio, this time in Philadelphia. It was his discovery of TV that plunged him into the madcap adventures set forth in this zany volume. Mr. Ritts landed on top, though. Today he's executive director-producer of WCAU-TV, responsible for shows like the Sealtest Big Top on CBS. He occasionally ventures out of TV land to write stories for *Collier's* and *Redbook* or to collaborate with the "other 50%" on a cartoon.

Two days before Paul Ritts arrived in this world in 1920, there appeared one RICHARD STROME (at the right), future head of the Committee for Having Groucho Marx's Head Carved on Mt. Rushmore Memorial. After he graduated from the Philadelphia Museum School of Art, with *Great and Serious Things* on his mind, Mr. Strome designed advertisements, cartoons for magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post*, and crammed his head full of facts about television and broadcasting. Today, as television consultant for Philadelphia agencies, he performs in front of the cameras when he isn't consulting. The success of his illustrations for TV JEEBIES, Mr. Strome says, he owes to the invention of coffee.





THE TV JEEBIES

By PAUL RITTS

Illustrated by Richard Strome

Today thousands of people suffer from a disease as infectious as the common cold. TV JEEBIES describes the symptoms of this disease and how to recognize them. Both the author and illustrator are prime examples of the fatal stages. The disease? THE JEEBIES...THE TV JEEBIES!

Are you too a victim of TV JEEBIES?



Lucky you—for in this small but dynamic volume you may read of your fellowmen and women. Does your home echo with the patter of small Hopalong Cassidy boots as your son's friends swarm in for the 5:00 o'clock Western? Does your family eat dinner on the run between the living room and the dining room? Would you recognize your friends if you saw them in the daylight?



Here, for your delight and comparison, are the faces, cameras, scripts, and schemes of TV Land exposed by two ruthless exponents of the "art." And the laugh is 50 per cent on them, as this tale of their surrender to television unfolds. Forsaken by radio and beleaguered by studio union rules, Mr. Ritts staggers through the television world tripping over stray wires, pushing wrong buttons and generally upsetting the industry. Likewise Mr. Strome skulks through the book, drawing from ambush pictures of cameramen, stars, engineers, plugs, wires and mikes.



To introduce a few of the characters: Martha LaMare and her Singing Vibraharp, a lady of abundant contours and poise to match



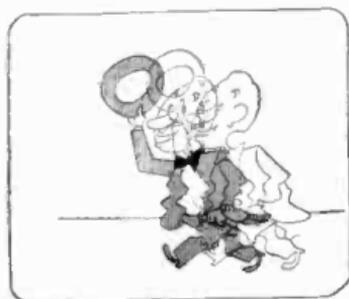
Otis MacIntosh and his Canine Capers



Marty, the TV wolf who led Red Riding Hood Ritts astray



"Mr. Morgan, Your *Friendly* Electric Appliance Dealer," who sent bills and excuses as long as the antenna;



and that whimsical individual, the Television Ghost! If you are new in TV Land, there is a glossary of technical terms translated into the comical. And if you are an old hand at adjusting

the antenna you will sympathize with this tale. For you will realize, along with the author and illustrator that there IS no cure for the TV JEEBIES, except the "eat-drink-and-be-merry-for-tomorrow-our-set-goes-back-to-the-store" philosophy!

THE JOHN C. WINSTON COMPANY
Philadelphia and Toronto



The **TV** *Jellies*

The

TV



Teebies

written by

PAUL RITTS

illustrated by

DICK STROME

FOREWORD BY ED SULLIVAN



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FIRST EDITION

Made in the United States of America

Any person or place
which thinks I have
written about him

or her or it in
this book would

be silly, now

wouldn't he?

or she?

or it?



*My sincere thanks to Paul Ritts
for his untiring assistance with
the illustrations.*

DICK STROME



Portions of this book appeared originally in *Collier's Magazine*.

Foreword

IN TELEVISION, unlike any other visual medium of entertainment, a performer gets only one chance. There are no re-takes. He either does it right the first time or the sponsor sees to it that the performer forever holds his peace. So television, by the very nature of it, becomes a balmy, fantastic, incredible and enchanting rat race.

Radio had some of TV's problems, but at least in radio, performers read their lines from scripts. Even with this manifest advantage, the sonorous David Ross once horrified his Blue Coal sponsors by thundering: "And now, Ladies and Gentlemen, we present the Blow Cool show." Even with a radio script in his hand, Harry Von Zell once startled a waiting nation by this clarion announcement: "I now take you to the White House and President Hobart Heever." In fact, Von Zell became so rattled at this fluff that he never was able to pronounce the name of Herbert Hoover. In desperation, a studio announcer pushed him aside from the microphone to frame the words. And it is reasonable to suppose that President Hoover always believed that this was a deep-laid and sinister plot of the Democrats.

So, as these things happened in radio despite scripts, you can imagine some of the incredible things that have happened in TV. Paul Ritts, of Philadelphia's Station WCAU, beating all other observers to the punch, has assembled some of the incredibly funny truths which have humored the newest medium. If you think that he is stretching the truth, or getting a little loose with the facts, you have my guarantee that these things have all happened.

Suppose, for instance, a Hollywood motion-picture producer called in his director and said, "J.B., I want you to shoot for me an hour-long musical show. I want a lot of top-drawer singing, dancing and comedy stuff. In this can you will find enough unexposed film to last exactly fifty-nine minutes and thirty seconds. That's all the film you get. Also, once you start shooting I don't want you to stop the camera until you run out of film. Oh, and by the way, I want the whole thing finished and on my desk by a week from today."

J.B. would then do one of two things. He would advise the producer to lie down until the psychiatrist arrived. Or, he would simply drape the film over the producer's head.

Yet, in television, that's how shows must be done.

In television you get just one chance.

It is not surprising that the TV Jeebies is an occupational disease that plagues everyone in the business. There are over a hundred people working behind and in front of the cameras every Sunday when "Toast of the Town" is on the air. Every one of them must do his job perfectly and at split-second timing or the whole show might become hopelessly fouled up. There are literally thousands of tubes, resistors, condensers and other strange devices in the maze of technical equipment that must not fail. (A tiny ten-cent resistor can go bad and throw a camera off the air for the entire show.) Even the performers can bring on a bad attack of the TV Jeebies with their strapless gowns slipping their moorings, ad libbed jokes that are a bit too salty for television, acts that run over their allotted time and a hundred other things that just couldn't happen but sometimes do.

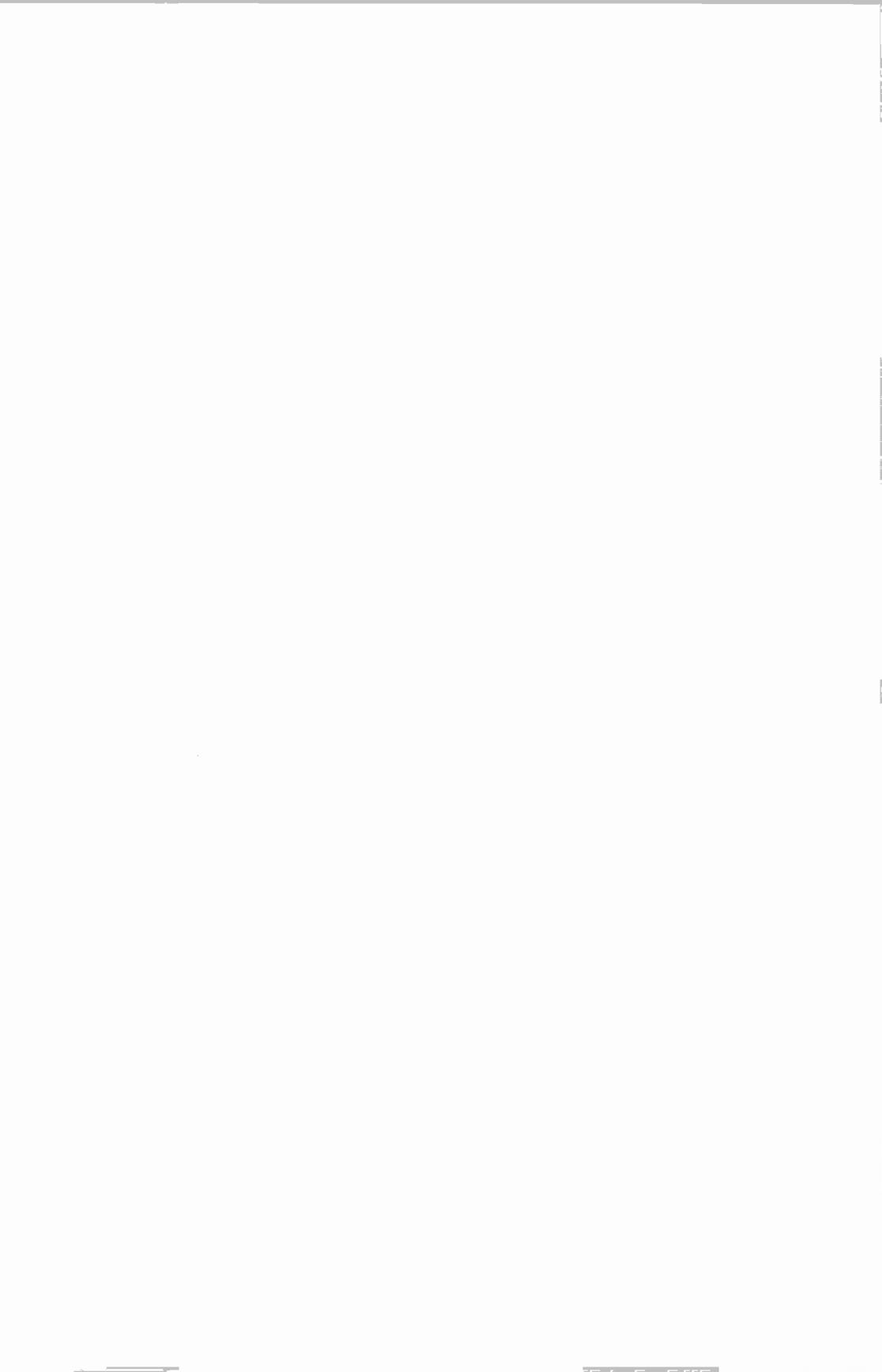
People often ask me why I don't smile more when I face the cameras on "Toast of the Town." From now on I will simply hand them a copy of this book.

Maybe they'll understand.

ED SULLIVAN

Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. Black Tuesday	1
2. There's a Knack to It	9
3. Putting on the Dog	29
4. Ladies and Gentlemen, There Is Nothing Wrong with Your Television Receiver	43
5. Sponsors Are People	61
6. Remote Possibility	76
7. The Viewing Public	93
8. A Boffo Show with Plenty of Yaks	108
9. Sales, Sinks and Last Straws	122
10. Fade to Black	139
A Happy Ending	144
A Glossary of TV Terms	145



Chapter 1

Black Tuesday

IT WAS TUESDAY ALL RIGHT. I remember it was Tuesday, because everything always happens to me on Tuesday. Why, I don't know. It just does. Maybe it's the position of the stars or something, being I'm a Taurus. But, like I said, everything always happens wrong on Tuesday. I was drafted on Tuesday, broke my collar bone on Tuesday, got fired by a certain Mr. Trilby on Tuesday. . . . Come to think of it, I was born on a Tuesday.

But this certain Tuesday I started to tell you about happened three years ago day after tomorrow. I was making love to Linda Something-or-Other. I forget her last name.

"Linda," I said, "I've always loved you. You must believe that. Even when Sandra and I . . ."

"Gregory, there is something . . ."

"Something?"

"I should have told you before."

"Before?"

"Yes, Gregory."

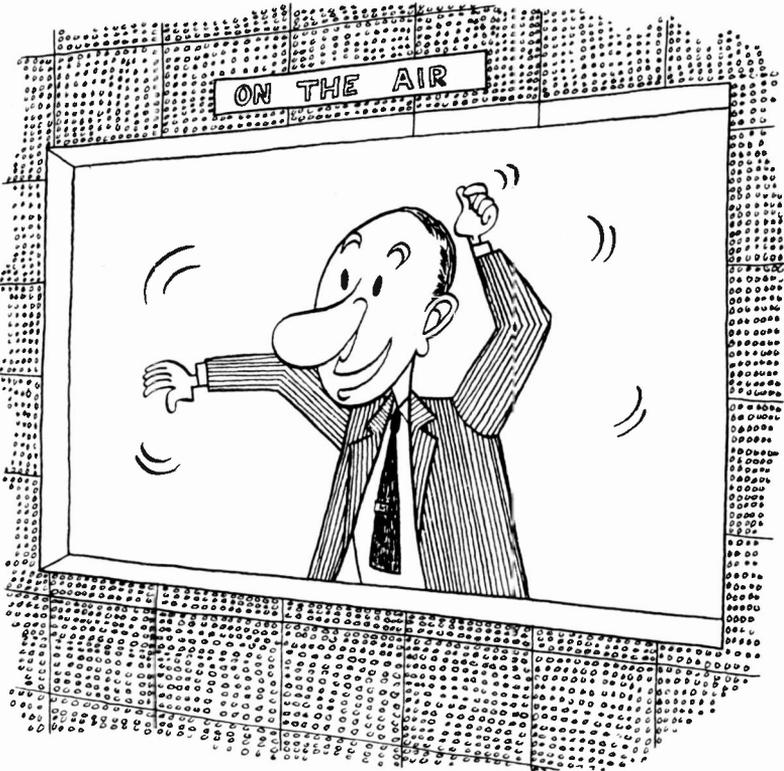
"Go on!"

"Poor Gregory."

"Linda . . . Linda, what is it?" I cried.

"Gregory . . . oh, Gregory, I am . . ."

It was then that Bob broke in. "Well-l-l-l," he said, "just when all seemed right again, this new evil casts its shadow across the lives of Linda and Gregory. Could it be young Dr. Johnson? Perhaps we'll find out *tomorrow!*"



But I wasn't listening any more. My old friend Marty was out in the hall making unintelligible Indian-sign language through the studio window. I sneaked through the double soundproof doors just as Bob was working himself into a lather over Fluff Flakes.

"Hi-ya, Mooseface," I said. "How about coffee?"

Marty clamped his big hands over my shoulders and gave me a wild stare. "What do you know about cameras?" he said mysteriously.

"Oh, just a little" I replied modestly, taking out my billfold and riffling through a stack of snapshots. "Now, here's a shot of my son Mark when he was a year and a half. His feet weren't really that big. He sort of moved when I took it."

"Great!" Marty enthused. "Simply great!"

"Here's a picture of my wife's family. I kind of missed Uncle Pete's head, but that actually improved the shot on account of Uncle Pete not being what you'd call photogenic. Now, this is a shot I got sort of accidentally. It's hard to make out at first, but it's a . . ."

"Wonderful, Paul!" Marty said, stuffing the pictures back into my billfold. "You've got talent, real talent! In fact, you're just the guy I've been looking for. Let's grab that coffee and I'll tell you about it."

"Now, look, Marty," I said, after Mabel plopped down our coffee, spilling it as usual. "I think you're an awfully nice guy and all that and I offer my congratulations on your being the program director of this new television station and I wish you all the luck you've got coming, but no soap. I do not want to be a television director and that's final."

"But think of the future television has!"

"That's the trouble. It's all in the future. It will be ten or fifteen years before people will watch the stuff."

"But radio's *dying*! You know that, Paul!"

"That's okay by me," I replied. "I'll make plenty of money sitting up with the corpse."

"Gimme a cigarette," Marty said, pawing through my pockets. "Now, look, Paul, you've got to be farsighted and visionary about these things. Television's coming as sure as tomorrow. Now, what's going to happen to you when they finally *bury* radio? Answer me that!"

"I'm doing all right acting in radio," I replied. "When that day comes, I'll just switch over."

"Got a match?" said Marty. "That's just it! On the radio you sound like a guy six feet, two inches tall with blond wavy hair and sad blue eyes."

"So?"

"Well . . . in television they've got cameras, you know."

"Obviously."

"Well . . . you're not . . . uh . . ."

"Not what?"

"You're . . . well, you're not quite that tall."

"I can get me some of those 'You-Can-Be-Taller-Than-She' shoes, can't I?"

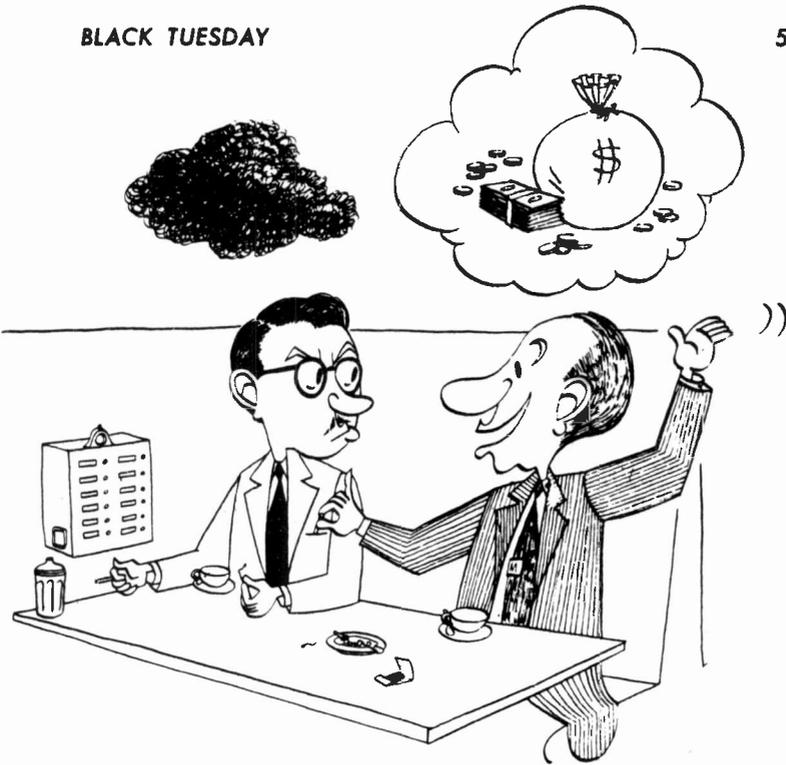
"But you don't have blond, curly hair either. You . . ."

"Let's keep my scalp out of this," I replied. "Besides, I can always play character parts."

"But that's not where the money's going to be, Paul," Marty replied, glancing about him as if he were in danger of being overheard. "The *producer-directors* are going to be the Mister Bigs of television. Mark my words!"

"Why pick on me?" said I. "You can go out there on the street, buttonhole the first guy you meet, and he'll know as much about television as I do."

"That's just it! Nobody knows anything about television. That's why this is such a great opportunity for you. Be smart! Get in on the ground floor!"



"Why don't you take a run out to Hollywood and get a couple of guys who know something about cameras?"

"Anybody who's any good in Hollywood is working. Why would they want to come East to a town like this? Nope, that won't work. Television has to train its own people. That's why I need you, Paul. At least, you know radio from stem to stern. You've acted, announced and directed all kinds of shows. It isn't much to start on, but at least it's something."

"Thanks."

"You could pick it up in no time."

"How? Autosuggestion or night classes at the Palace Moviehouse?"

"Sure, we'll have him over for dinner some night."

"And Pearl can cook her special fried chicken dinner," Mary gurgled. "He'd love it! He's a Southerner, isn't he?"

"Now, look, chick," I said, being extra patient. "I want no parts of this television toy. I told Marty 'no.' Plain, old, garden-variety 'no.'"

"Of course, it's your decision," she replied. "I want you to make up your own mind."

"Thank you."

"Marg says you'd be getting in on the . . ."

"Ground floor."

"That's right."

"If you ask me, it's more like the basement."

Pearl appeared in the dining-room doorway. "Sauerkraut and wieners!" she called. "Come and get it, Mr. Hitchcock!"

We sat down, and Pearl lighted the candles—a thing she hadn't been in the habit of bothering with since the first week she worked for us.

As she disappeared into the kitchen, Mary smiled triumphantly. "Pearl's simply thrilled," she said.

It was my decision.

Chapter 2

There's a Knack to It

MR. RITTS TO SEE MR. MARTIN," I told the girl behind the desk.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Ritts," she said. "We've been expecting you."

"You have? But, I didn't . . ."

She waved her hand at the rest of the room. "I hope you'll forgive the appearance of our offices. We're in the throes of remodeling the place. Are you married, Mr. Ritts?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Children?"

"One. A boy. Two years old."

She smiled sadly. It gave me the creeps. It was the same smile I used to get from the hostesses at the USO.

"Are you new to television too?" I said, just to change the subject.

"No," she replied with a little catch in her voice. "I was with a television station in New York. I quit."

"Uh-huh," I said, since there was nothing much else to say.

"I hoped somehow things would be different here."

It was my turn to smile sadly.

After an awkward moment of silence, she said, "Mr. Martin

will be in shortly. If you'd like to wait for him, his office is behind that pile of sync generators."

I stared about me for a minute or two. The place looked like a Railway Express baggage room on a rush day.

"Pardon me," I said finally, "but what would you say a sink generator looked like?"

"Right there," she said, pointing. "Those gray metal boxes with the knobs on them."

"Of course! How silly of me."

I skirted the generators, vaulted over a stack of stuff that looked like kiddie cars for adults (I later discovered they were camera dollies) and found myself in Marty's office. It was deserted except for a freckle-faced kid with peach fuzz on his chin where whiskers some day would be.

"Hi, kid," I said.

He looked up from a copy of something by Aldous Huxley. "How do you do," he replied so coldly it could have deep-frozen an elk.

That sort of took the edge off any possible conversation. If this kid is going to be one of my scene-shifters, I said to myself, I'm going to have to break him down. I decided to use the gentle, father-son approach.

"Well, school will be over in a month or so."

"Really?" he replied without looking up this time. "I'll bet you're getting anxious."

Things were slipping a little out of hand, and I was glad Marty squeezed into his office at that moment.

"Hi there, buddy boy!" he said, pounding me between the shoulder blades. "Glad you saw the light! Welcome to our happy little TV family!"

"Thanks."

"Paul," Marty continued, turning to the kid, "I want you to meet Stanley Shmock, author of *Inside Television*. I told you about him. Remember? He's on loan to us from New York for two weeks to help break in our new directors. Stanley, this is Paul Ritts."

We pumped each other's hand. Stanley gave me a stare that was a lot more critical than necessary.

"So you want to be a television director?" he said. "Well, I'll teach you all I can."

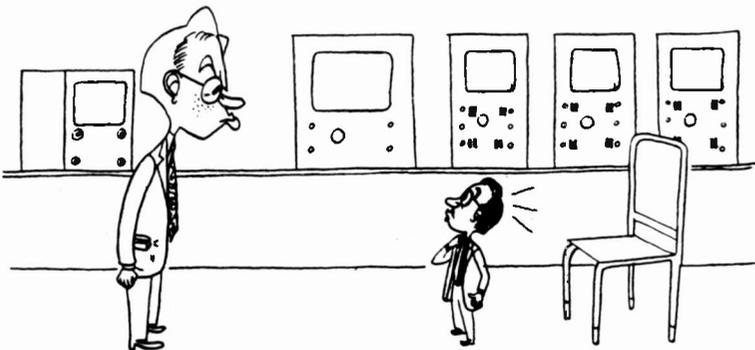
"I'd certainly appreciate that, Mr. Shmock," said I.

"That's okay, kid," he replied.

Later that day Stanley took me on a tour he chose to call "A Bird's-Eye View of TV"—the title of Chapter 1 in his book. We started with the control room.

"This is the nerve center of television," he said. "Here is where you will spend most of your time. You will sit here in front of this monitor, which is really nothing more than a television viewing screen. It shows you what is going out on the air."

I squinted at the monitor knowingly. "There doesn't seem to be any picture on it," I said.



Stanley looked down on me. He was shorter than I am, but somehow he managed it.

“That’s no doubt caused by the fact the cameras aren’t turned on.”

“Oh!”

“On the right you have three more monitors,” he continued, “which carry pictures of what each of the corresponding cameras are shooting in the studio.”

“You . . . you mean I have to watch *four* pictures at the same time?” I gulped.

“No,” he replied.

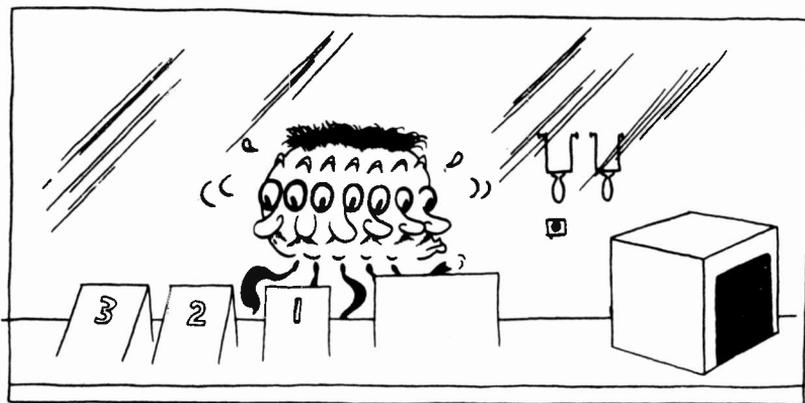
I felt relieved.

“Five.”

I steadied myself against a chair.

“The fifth monitor on the left tells you what is coming *back* from the air. In order to be sure the viewer at home is getting what you *think* you are sending out, you must keep your eye on the fifth monitor.”

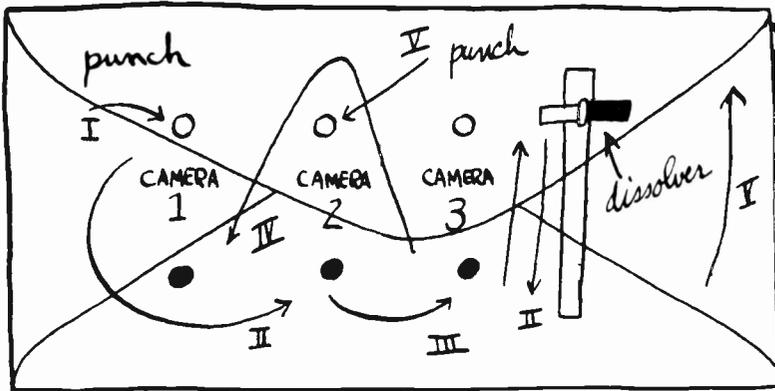
“Maybe you didn’t notice at first,” I said, “but I’m handicapped with only two eyes.”



"You'll get used to it," he said lightly.

I gave him a brave smile.

"Now, directly in front of you, below the first monitor, is a switching panel that you operate. You will notice there are six buttons and a sliding switch, called the 'dissolver.' I'll show you how it operates."



Stanley drew a sketch of the thing on the back of an envelope and then proceeded to mark it up with a tangle of arrows.

"Suppose you want to start the show with a shot on camera one. All you do is punch button one on the top row and slide the dissolver to the top position and there you have it. The monitor in front of you will show the same picture as the monitor for camera one on your right."

I nodded my head with more confidence than I felt.

"Next you want to dissolve to camera two."

"I do?"

"Yes."

"Dissolve?"

"Dissolve means one picture fades out at the same time another picture is fading in," Stanley said patiently.

"Uh-huh."

"Now, to dissolve from camera one to camera two, you simply punch button *two* on the *bottom* row and pull the dissolve switch back slowly until it is in the bottom position. Next, suppose you want to *snap* to camera three instead of dissolve. You punch button three on the *bottom* row because the dissolve switch is *down* and the bottom row of buttons is the only row that is activated. Understand?"

I smiled weakly.

"Now, camera one has a new shot on it that you want so you snap to camera one by punching *button one* on the *bottom* row. Get it? Now, what would you do if you wanted to *dissolve* to camera two again?"

"Push the dissolve switch up?"

"No, no!" he said. "Button one on the top row is still punched in. Remember? You'd be dissolving to the same picture and nothing would happen. You have to punch button *two* on the *top* row *first!*"

"I'm sorry," I said. "I could have sworn one of us had punched it."

"I'm sure *I* didn't," he said icily.

"If *you* didn't, then who *did?*" I replied.

"*Nobody* did! That's the trouble!" he shouted. "You have to punch button *one* on the bottom row before . . . I mean, you have to punch button *three* in the top. . . . Look here! Are you trying to confuse me?"

"*Me* confuse *you?*" I laughed a little hysterically. "Look who's talking!"

For a long moment Stanley just stood there staring off into space. His face was working, and I could tell he was fighting some inner battle.

Finally, he seemed to be at peace with himself. "You'll get the hang of it after a little practice," he said quietly. "It's really quite simple. You merely watch the five pictures and select the ones you want."

"Of course," I said, just to make him feel good.

"I think I can best describe the duties of the technicians under you by reading from *Inside Television*," he said, drawing two books from his side pocket. "I just happen to have a couple of copies on me."

He handed one to me.

"With my compliments," he said. "It's already auto-graphed."

"You shouldn't have done it," I replied.

"Shall we turn to page three of Chapter 1?" he said. "Third paragraph."

Then he began to read.

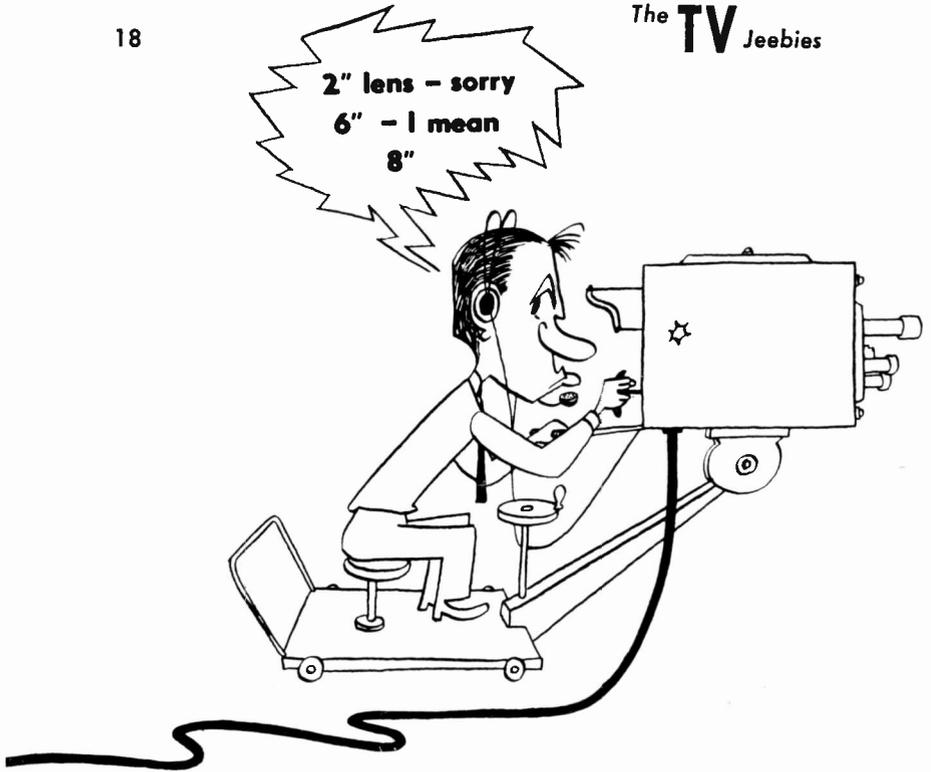




“The video man sits to the right of the director. He, as well as the rest of the technicians, is connected to the director by a set of earphones and a mouthpiece over which they communicate. The video man shades and adjusts each picture on the cameras before they are punched up by the director. He is kept rather busy because he has a total of thirty-nine control knobs to adjust constantly.’

“The audio man sits next to the video man. He controls the sound coming through the microphones, seeing that it is neither too loud nor too soft. The audio man is generally a former radio engineer and compared to the rest of the technicians has little to do.’





“‘Most cameramen in television have to be trained from the bottom up,’” Stanley continued reading, “‘since their previous experience with cameras is generally limited. They watch the picture through the viewer in back of the camera and focus it by turning a knob on the side of the camera. There is a revolving turret on the front of the camera which holds four different lenses for long shots, medium shots and close-ups.’”

“How does he know which one to use?” I interrupted.

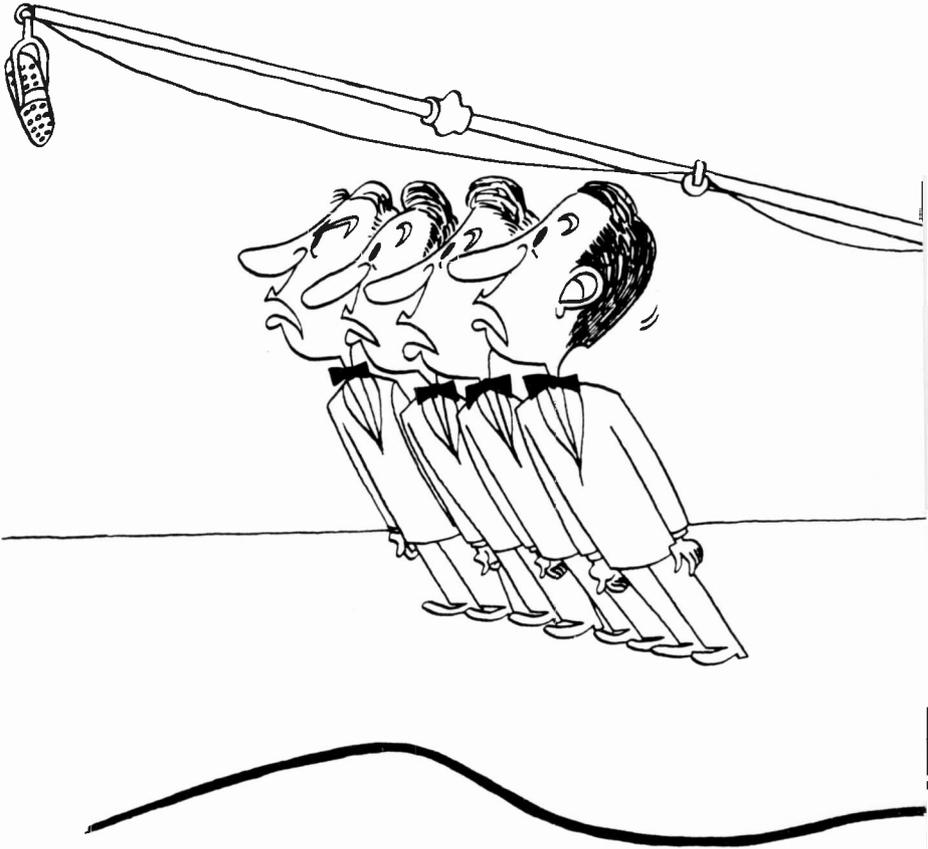
“You tell him.”

“Oh!”



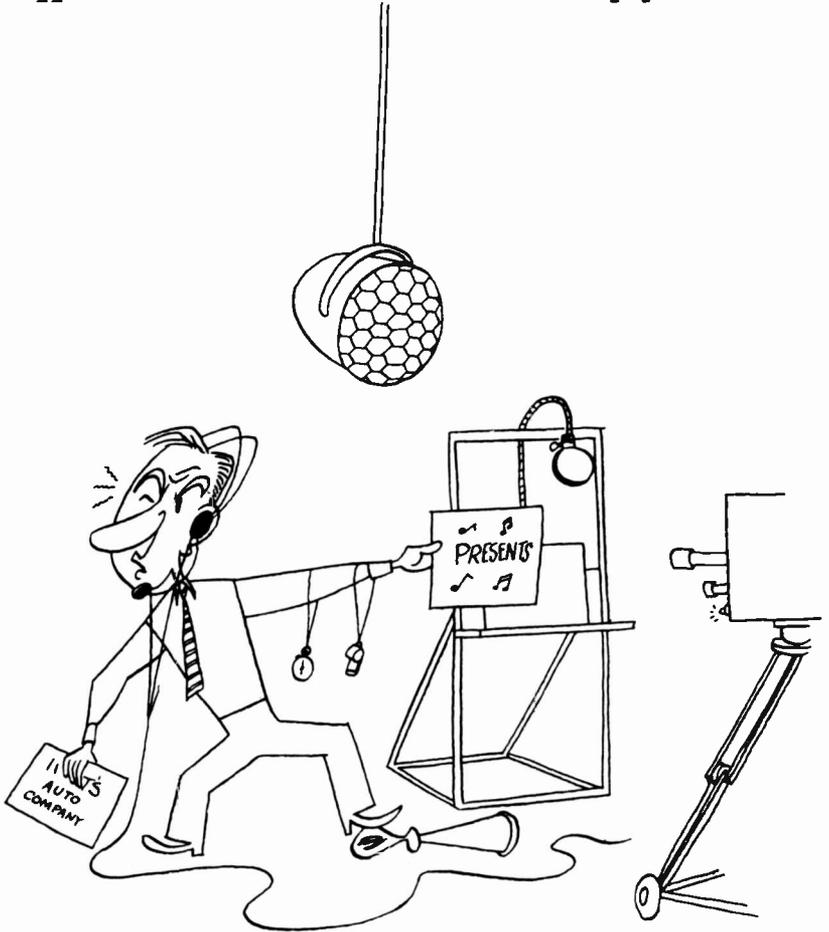
“‘Behind at least one of the cameras,’” Stanley read on, “‘is a man whose job is to dolly the cameraman. That is to say, he pushes the cameraman toward the scene he is shooting or pulls him away from it. This man should be physically strong, since the camera and dolly weigh several hundred pounds.’”

“The boom man stands on a movable platform and follows the performers with a microphone attached to the end of a long pole called the ‘boom.’ He can reach any part of the studio with his microphone by turning a crank which

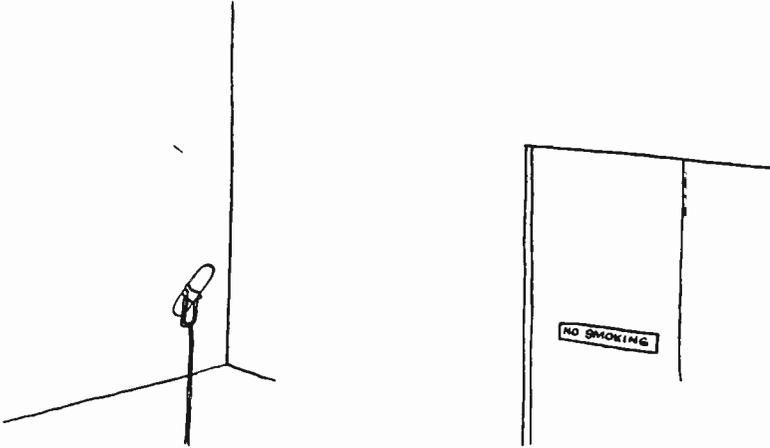
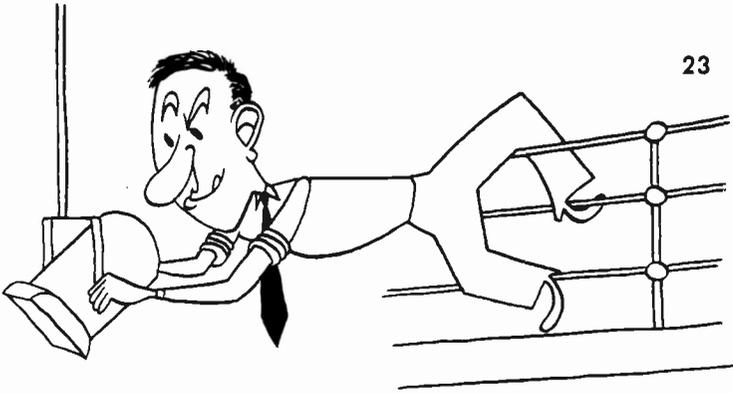


lengthens or shortens the boom much in the same manner a collapsible fish pole is extended or retracted. He must be very alert to every movement of the performer.'





“The floor man pushes scenery about and handles all title cards, still pictures and various props. He also cues the performers to start singing, talking or dancing. Generally speaking, he is the director’s right-hand man in the studio.”



Stanley turned to page four and continued reading.

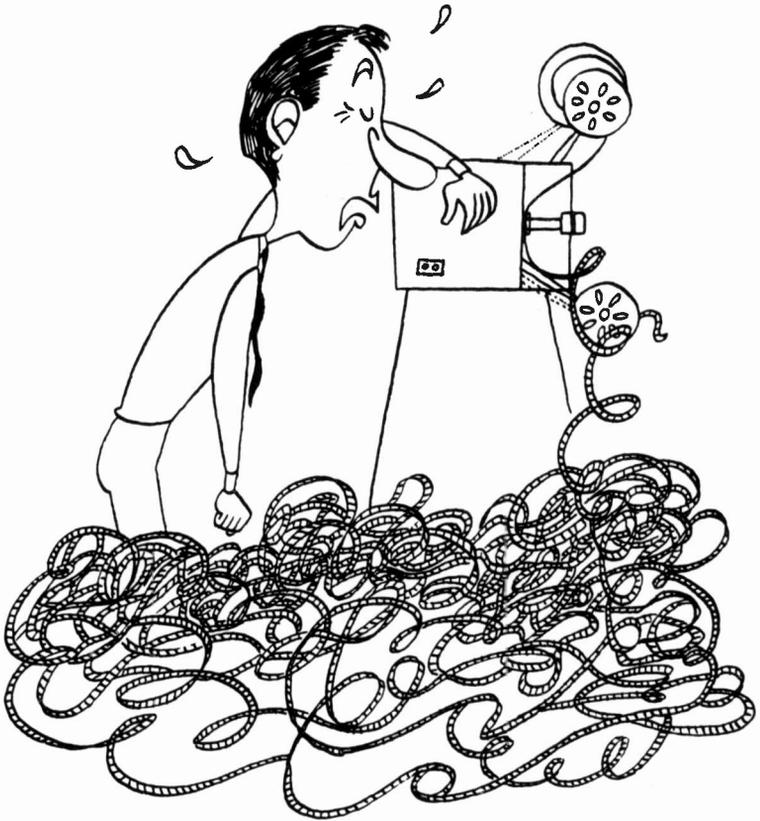
“The director is also connected through his earphones to a man who adjusts the lights.’”

Then he pointed through the control-room window and said, “There’s a lighting man up on the ramp now. He wasn’t satisfied with the looks of that young lady he is lighting, so he is going to hit her with a peanut.”

“Now just a darn minute!” I said. “She can’t help . . .”

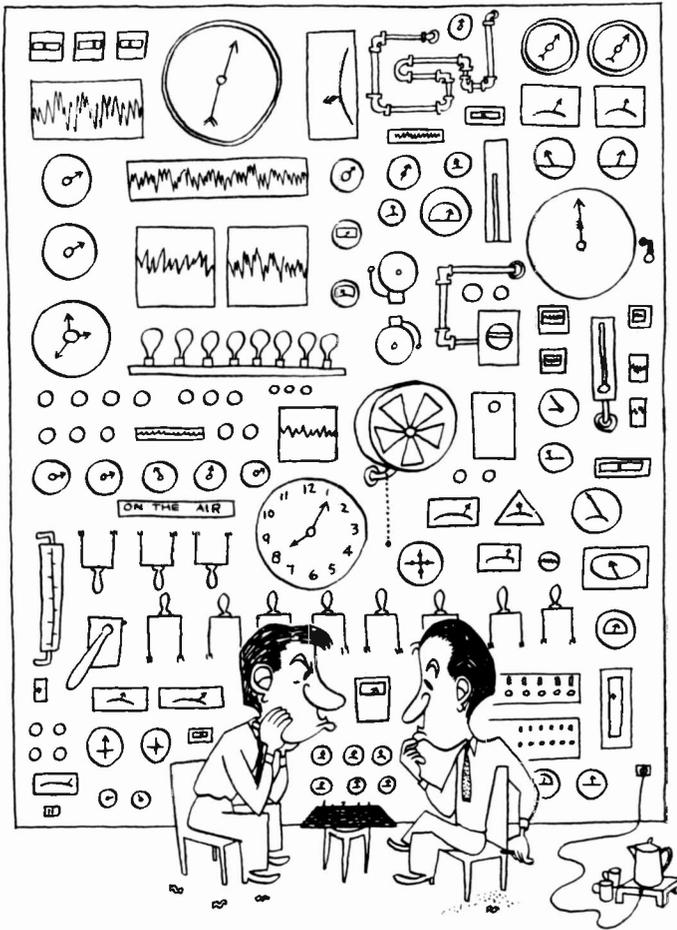
“A peanut is a small spot used for high-lighting.”

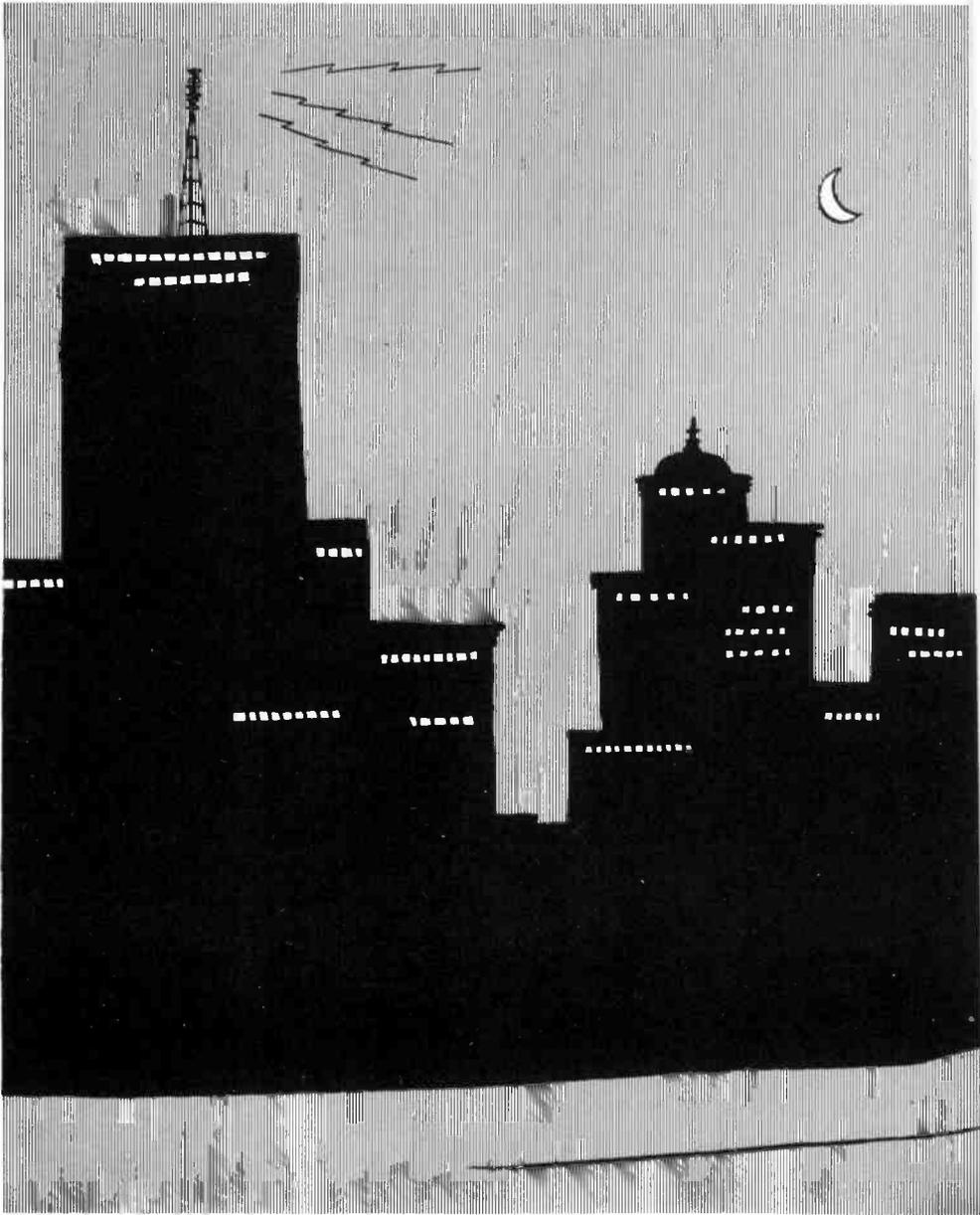
“Of course,” I replied.



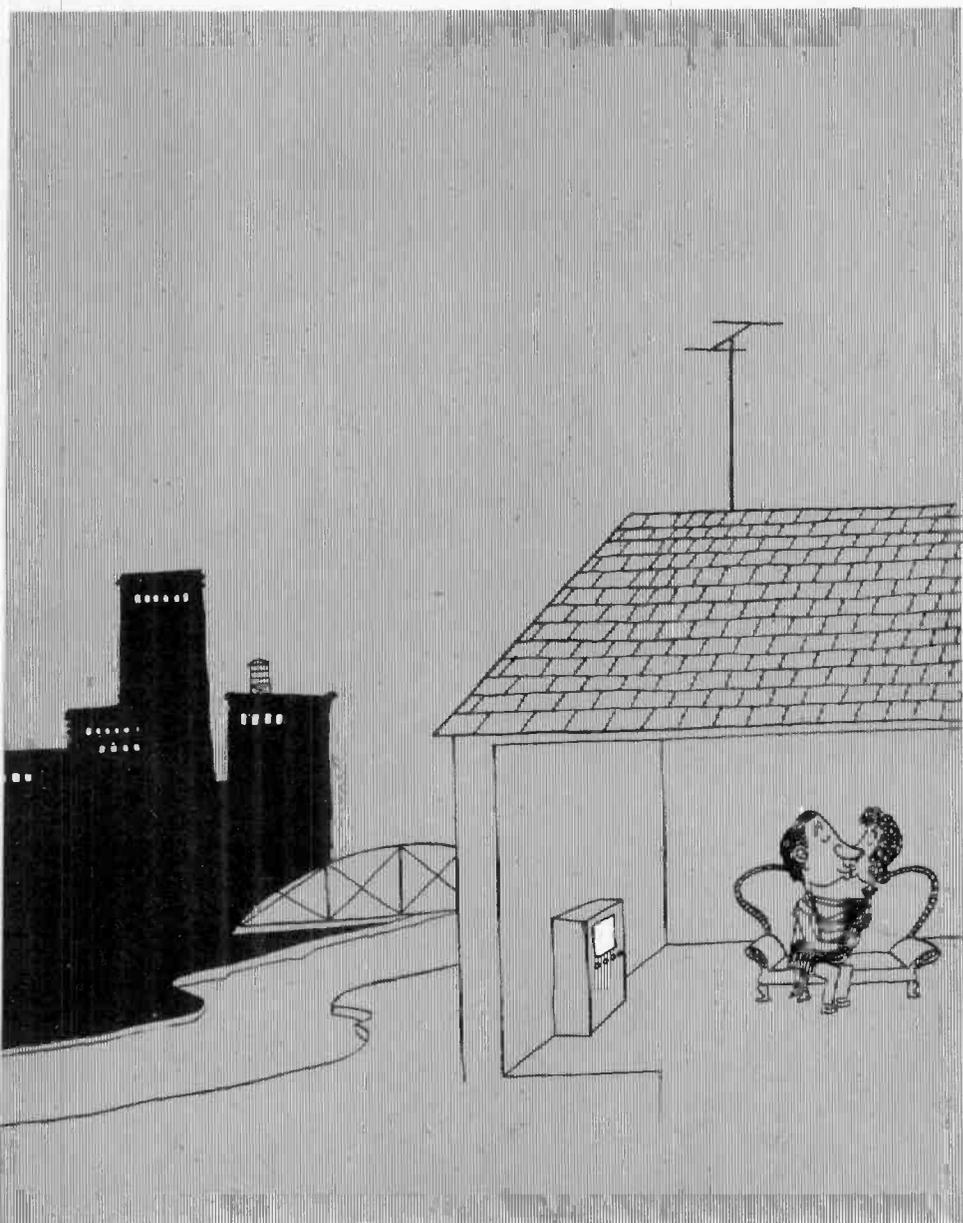
“‘In another studio,’” Stanley read on, “‘is a projectionist who runs the motion-picture film used on a television show. The projector throws the picture directly into a television camera especially built for that purpose. He must be careful the film doesn’t break while being shown on the air because it is difficult to rethread the film after it has broken.’”

“There are usually at least two men in the master control room who do the final adjusting on the picture and the sound coming from each of the studios. They have to be highly trained, alert engineers because there are many delicate instruments that must be watched constantly.’





“The picture and sound are then sent through a cable to the transmitter, where it is sent out on the air from a high antenna located on the tallest building in town.”



“‘Finally, the telecast is received by the viewer at home, who, of course, is glued to his television receiver, fascinated by this new miracle of science.’”

Stanley closed his book and said, "Well, there you have a bird's-eye view of tele . . . Say! What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," I replied with a glassy look in my eyes. "I was just thinking about good old radio. All we did was plug a microphone into the wall."

"Oh, you'll get used to television."

"Just one little microphone."

"I'll admit there's a knack to it."

"One mike . . . maybe two . . ."

"Well, see you later, kid."

"Just one . . ."

Then he left me alone with my thoughts.

Chapter 3

Putting on the Dog

I DIDN'T COMPLAIN ABOUT THE OFFICE THEY GAVE ME. After all, like Marty said, it was part of the "growing pains" of television. The new television station occupied the two top floors of the building owned by its sister radio station and things were a bit cramped here and there. When I would get an especially severe attack of claustrophobia, Marty would haul out the architect's drawing of something called THE NEW TELEVISION CENTER. It was a beautiful thing to see and for a while I'd feel better. But, somehow, the construction date for this TV Shangri La was always "a couple of months or so" hence.

But, like I said, I didn't complain. For myself I didn't mind. I soon caught on how to get into my office. I simply opened the door, squeezed in behind it, closed the door, pulled the chair out from behind the desk, slid behind the desk myself, pulled the chair in after me and sat down—sideways. For me that was easy. It was trying to explain to callers how to do it that was so heartbreaking and time-consuming.

The most difficult case by far was Mr. Otis C. Willoughby, President of the Atlantic Seaboard Dog Fanciers Club

Association. Mr. Willoughby was a man of heroic proportions, and I must say he made a very sportsmanlike try to fit himself into one end of my office. Finally, however, we both agreed it was futile and settled on conversing through the open doorway while he sat in the hall.



Mr. Willoughby was to act as a sort of master of ceremonies on my first television show called "Canine Capers." I had misgivings about the whole idea right from the start. In the first place, I never went for dogs and, in the second place, dogs always went for me—with their teeth bared. But Marty kept telling me it was a television natural.

"Who is man's best friend?" Marty had asked me.

"His mother?" I had replied.

"No, stupid, his dog! People are *nuts* about dogs. You take my next-door neighbor. Why, he treats his cocker spaniel better than he treats his wife."

"The dog."

"Take the movies!" Marty raved on. "What happens when Lassie comes on the screen? I ask you, what happens?"

"He barks?"

"No, no, I mean the people! They 'oh' and 'ah,' don't they? That's because they're nuts about dogs."

"Okay, so they're nuts."

"I tell you it's a natural. Besides, it's free. People will break their necks to be on the show."

"Okay, fine!" I had said. "I wish the show all the best luck in the world. As for me, dogs and I have nothing in common, and besides, I think the show will be a turkey and I want no parts of it. Get one of the other boys to direct it. Just count me out of the deal and that's final."

Well, like I said, Mr. Willoughby and I carried on our conversation through the doorway. From what he said I gathered he had made a potful of money in the tool and die game and now spent all his time breeding dogs on what he

called his "little place in the country." He was hard of hearing and, like most hard-of-hearing people, he thought I was hard of hearing too.

"AS I SEE THIS THING, MR. RITTS," he shouted, "WE HAVE HERE A GREAT AND SPLENDID OPPORTUNITY OF DOING A GRAND SERVICE FOR DOGS AND DOG LOVERS!"

"That's true," I said, "but let's get down to . . ."

"NOW, YOU TAKE CALCIUM," he roared on. "HOW MANY PEOPLE KNOW THE IMPORTANCE OF CALCIUM IN A DOG'S DIET?"

"Well, I . . ."

"ONLY 1.56 IN A HUNDRED! THAT'S HOW MANY! UNBELIEVABLE, EH? READ IT ONLY YESTERDAY IN THE MAGAZINE DOG FANCIER'S FOLIO. ONLY 1.56 IN A HUNDRED! NOW, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THAT?"

"Shocking," I said, "but let's . . ."

"BONE-BUILDER! THAT'S CALCIUM! I PREPARE MY OWN FEED OUT THERE ON MY LITTLE PLACE IN THE COUNTRY AND YOU CAN BET YOUR BOTTOM DOLLAR MY FEED IS RICH IN CALCIUM! BONE-BUILDER! YES, SIR, THAT'S CALCIUM!"

"Yes, but . . ."

"NOW, YOU TAKE WORMS! HOW MANY DOG OWNERS KNOW HOW TO TREAT WORMS?" said Mr. Willoughby, getting himself all worked up.

"1.89?" I replied, taking a wild guess.

"NOPE! WORSE THAN THAT!" he hollered. "ONLY 1.34 IN A HUNDRED! TURN THAT OVER IN YOUR MIND FOR A MINUTE! 1.34 IN A HUNDRED!"

Mr. Willoughby sat back and waited for me to look horrified.

I did my best.

"THIS IS A CHALLENGE, MR. RITTS!" he carried on. "A CHAL-

LENGE TO EVERY DECENT, DOG-LOVING MAN AND WOMAN! A CHALLENGE TO MAKE THIS GREAT COUNTRY OF OURS A HEALTHIER, HAPPIER PLACE FOR EACH AND EVERY DOG! I SAY, LET'S MEET THAT CHALLENGE!"

I had a sudden impulse to applaud, but somehow managed to suppress it. Besides, this was the opening I had been waiting for.

"About the first program," I said quickly. "What would you recommend we do? Personally, I think we ought to hold the calcium and worms for a later program."

"RIGHT YOU ARE!" said Mr. Willoughby. "WE DON'T WANT TO GO OVER THEIR HEADS! SEEMS TO ME WE OUGHT TO START OFF IN A BIG WAY! I ALWAYS SAY, IF YOU'RE GOING TO DO A THING, START IT OFF BIG! THEREFORE, I WOULD SUGGEST MASTIFFS! I'M A MASTIFF FANCIER MYSELF! FACT IS, I BREED MORE MASTIFFS THAN ANYBODY ELSE ON THE ATLANTIC SEABOARD!"

"THAT'S QUITE AN UNDERTAKING!" I shouted before I could check myself.

"IT'S NOT EASY!" he replied. "I WOULD SUGGEST WE HAVE TEN OR TWELVE ON THE SHOW JUST TO MAKE IT LOOK IMPRESSIVE! I CAN GET SEVERAL OF MY FRIENDS IN THE MONARCH MASTIFF KENNEL KLUB TO COME UP AND SHOW THEIR DOGS! NO, WE BETTER HAVE FOURTEEN OR FIFTEEN. MAKE IT EVEN MORE IMPRESSIVE!"

"That's fine," I said, jotting down "14 or 15 dogs."

"YES, INDEED," Mr. Willoughby bellowed, "MY FRIENDS WILL BE ONLY TOO HAPPY TO SHOW THEIR DOGS! FACT IS, I'LL BRING A COUPLE OF BITCHES MYSELF!"

"W-who?" I said.

"BITCHES!" he shouted even louder. "I'M PARTIAL TO BITCHES! PERSONALLY, I THINK THEY'RE PRETTIER THAN MALES!"

"Look, Mr. Willoughby," I said, "I don't think . . ."

Just then the telephone rang. It was Evelyn, the receptionist.

"I don't know who your friend is in the hall, Mr. Ritts," she said, "and I'm as broad-minded as the next one, but it seems to me the kind of language that's going on between you two isn't what you'd call gentlemanly."

"But, Evelyn, I . . ."

"After all," she rattled on, "this isn't a poker club and I'm not one to complain, but we girls feel we're not being paid to listen to that kind of talk. Frankly, Mr. Ritts, when you first came here, we girls all agreed you were the fine, home-loving type of individual and all that, but now I'm afraid we are being forced to alter our opinion, if you know what I mean."

"Look, Evelyn," I laughed, "you've got us all wrong! We were just talking about a couple of females."

There was a horrified gasp, a loud click and then all was silent. I hung up.

"Mr. Willoughby," I said, "I'll have to ask you to call . . . uh . . . bitches 'females' after this. The word 'bitch' is not allowed on the air."

"A BITCH IS A BITCH!" he shouted. "IT WOULDN'T BE PROFESSIONAL TO CALL A DOG A FEMALE!"

"But the Federal Communications Commission in Washington frowns on that kind of talk."

"WASHINGTON, EH? I MIGHT HAVE KNOWN! THERE'S ANOTHER CASE WHERE THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION IS . . ."

Mr. Willoughby launched into a blistering tirade against

“that other party,” covering in detail the theory of freedom of speech, the framing of the Constitution, farm subsidies and soil erosion. The effort left him quite limp when he was through, and I was able to finish our plans for the first show.

Plans? I planned every one of those thirteen shows and not one of them came out the way I had them on paper. They didn't even bear second-cousin resemblances. Why? Well, as I look back on it all, there were three reasons: (A) Dogs don't understand plans very well; (B) people aren't much better than dogs, and (C) I couldn't read my writing in the darkened control room. But that wasn't all. Take the first show, for instance. The trouble started even before I got into the studio.

The minute I stepped off the elevator I knew there was trouble. Standing in the hall, just outside the studio, were all the cameramen, floormen, dolly pushers, boom men and studio attendants. They were looking at me as if I had sold their sisters into white slavery—at a cheap price too.

“Hi-ya, fellas!” I said cheerfully. “Getting a little fresh air, huh?”

“That ain't all we're getting,” snarled one of the cameramen.

“No,” said another, nodding toward the studio door, “we're getting out of there.”

“What's the matter, fellas?” I said, wide-eyed.

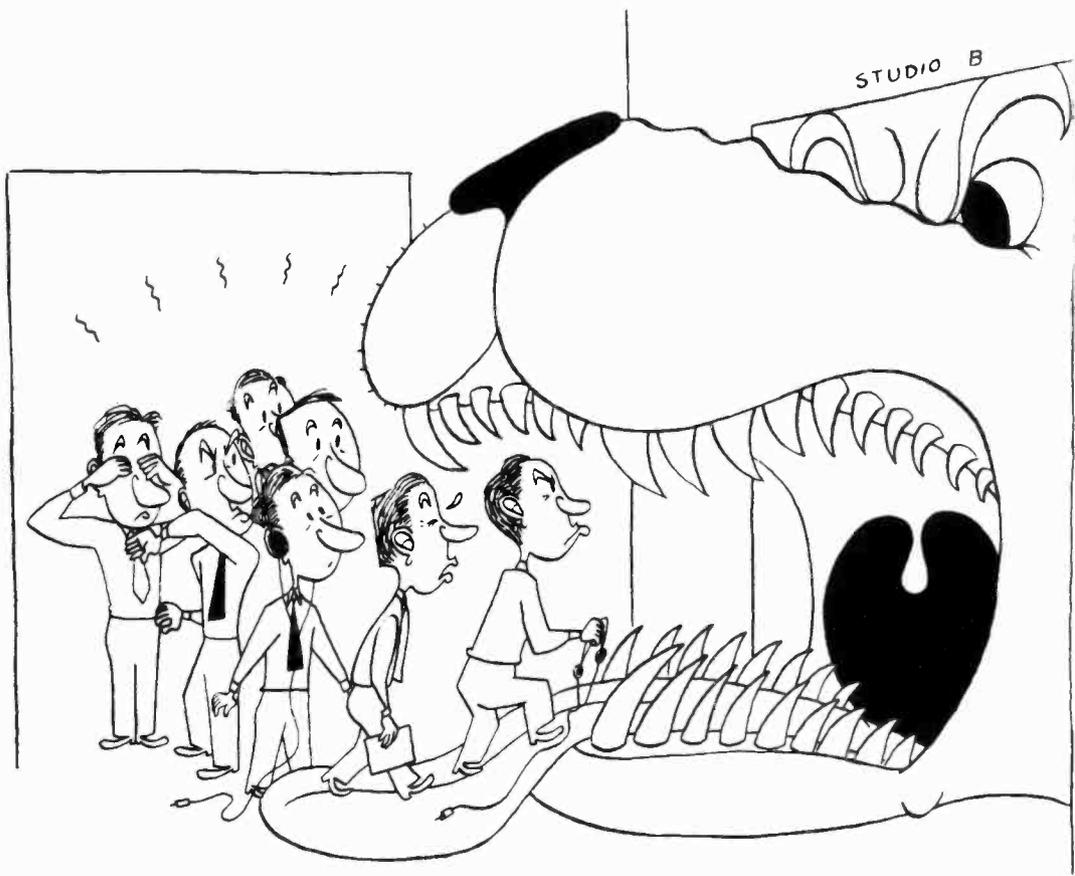
“What's the matter, he asks,” said one of them and they all laughed bitterly.

“Did the pups arrive yet?”

“*Pups*, he calls them,” said another and they all laughed again.

Feeling my prestige slipping a little with this kind of

STUDIO B



banter, I opened the studio door. An avalanche of yelping, yapping and snarling came rolling out of the place. Twenty-five or thirty huge dogs were lunging against their leashes, clawing the floor, growling at the cameras and snapping at everything within snapping range. Mr. Willoughby stood in the center of the *mêlée* trying to restore order.

"THE POOR THINGS ARE NERVOUS!" he yelled at me. "MUST BE THE LIGHTS! I BROUGHT A FEW MORE THAN WE PLANNED ON! MAKE IT MORE IMPRESSIVE, YOU KNOW!"

I shuddered a little and closed the door.

"How do you expect us to do a show with those animals crawling all over us?" said the boom man.

"I don't like the way they were eying me either," said the dolly pusher.

"Look, fellas," I replied. "Who is man's best friend?"

"Our union," replied the first cameraman, "and it says in Article VII, Paragraph 8, Sub-section C of our contract: 'No technician shall be required, ordered, coerced or cajoled into performing work of a degrading and/or dangerous nature.'"

"I'll admit Mr. Willoughby got a little too enthusiastic about the number of dogs," I smiled weakly, "but if you fellas will stick with me through this one, next week I promise we'll have Pekineses. Only three of them."

The boys mumbled a little union talk among themselves for a minute and finally gave in. I must say I was proud of them as they marched back into that snarling mess of mastiffs.

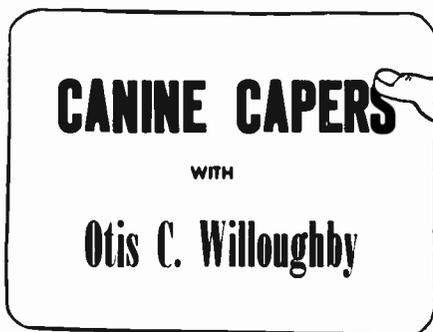
I entered the control room through the back door so as not to make the dogs any more nervous.

I was nervous too—about Mr. Willoughby. During the dry-run rehearsal (meaning the rehearsal without the dogs) Mr.

Willoughby had said "bitch" three times and "bit . . . female" twice. He promised not to do it on the show, but I didn't trust him.

One would think that with eight hundred thousand dollars' worth of delicate television equipment, the thing least likely to conk out on the air would be a set of earphones worth a buck and a half. One would be wrong. It happened.

The show got off to a beautiful start with the title-card well centered on camera one. The floor man had his thumb in the picture but that wasn't really noticeable. The title card read:

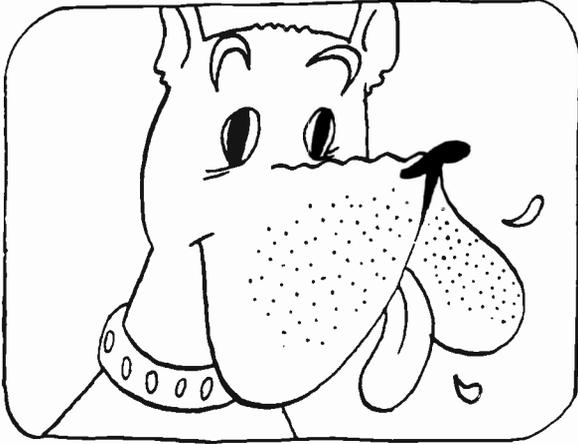


From that point on things got a little out of control. Mr. Willoughby shouted his opening remarks even louder than usual. The microphone wasn't really necessary. He could have been heard as far as the city limits without it.

"NOW, FOLKS, I'D LIKE YOU TO MEET A WOMAN WHO HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN THE DOG WORLD FOR YEARS! SHE BROUGHT UP TO THE STUDIO TONIGHT HER GRAND CHAMPION MASTIFF 'LADY GWENDOLYN III!'"

"Camera two get a close-up of the woman," I said into my mouthpiece.

“HERE SHE IS, FOLKS! MRS. SCHUYLER VAN KEMPT!”



I snapped to camera two and there, life-size, was “Lady Gwendolyn III” leering into the camera, drooling all over the place and panting like mad.

“You’ll have to forgive me if I seem a little upset,” came a lady’s voice, “but this is my first time on television and I’m nervous.”

“Camera two get on the woman!” I yelled into the mouthpiece. Nothing happened. “On the woman!” I shouted even louder. Still nothing. The dog stayed right where she was and stuck out her tongue. It was then that I discovered the cameraman’s earphones were dead.

“Eddie!” I hollered to the floor man over my mouthpiece. “Tell the guy on camera two to pan up to the woman! The *woman*, not the *dog*!”

Through the control-room window I saw Eddie race over to cameraman two and whisper into his ear. The cameraman shrugged his shoulders and panned slowly up to the woman

just as Mr. Willoughby was saying, "AND NOW, LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT MRS. VAN KEMPT'S WONDERFUL FEMALE CHAMPION 'LADY GWENDOLYN III!'"



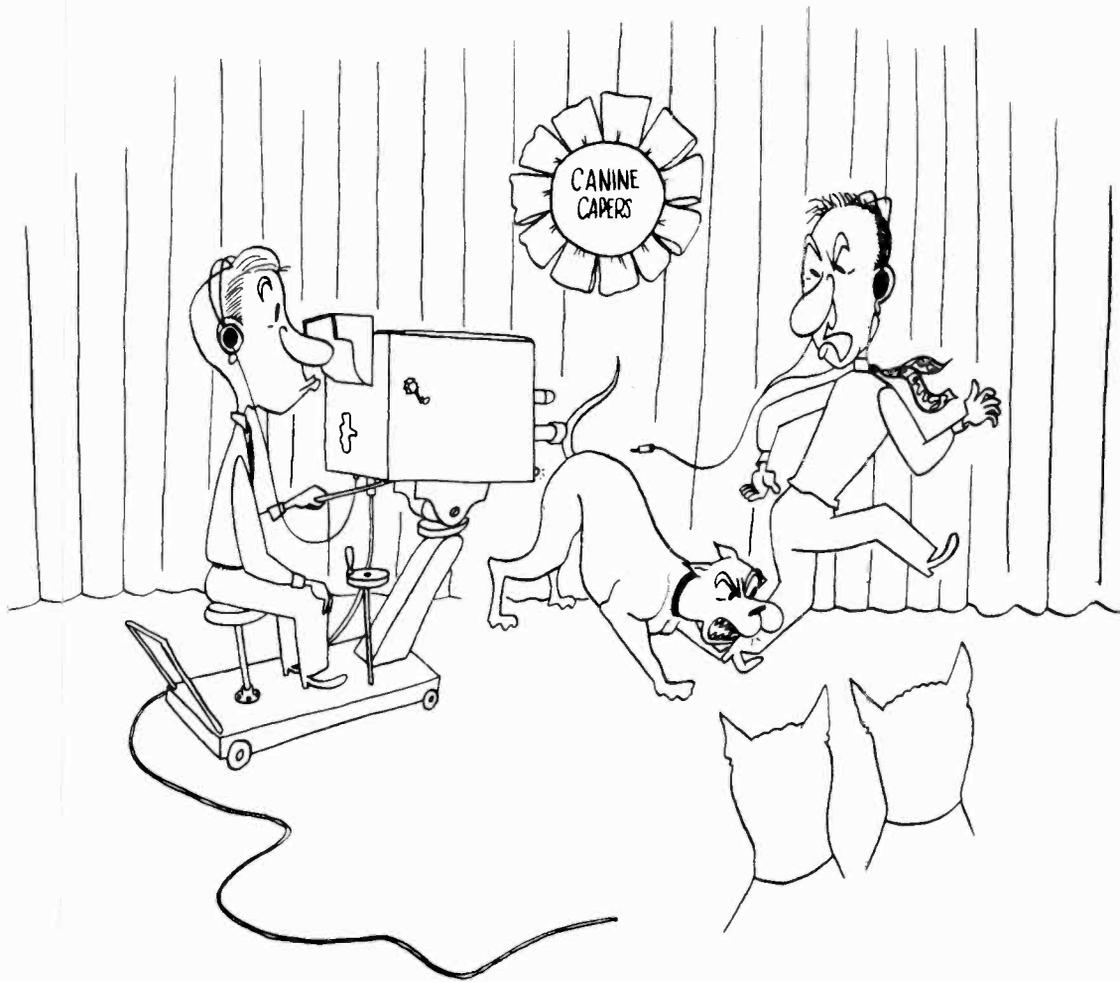
There on the screen was a beautiful close-up of Mrs. Schuyler Van Kempt. She was grinning stupidly, not realizing she was on the air. In struggling with the dog, several locks of hair had fallen over her face. Her upper teeth protruded unfortunately, and the television camera didn't do her sagging chin any good.

"ISN'T SHE A BEAUTY, FOLKS?" shouted Mr. Willoughby. "NOTICE THE GOOD STRONG SET OF TEETH. THEY COULD DO A LOT OF DAMAGE IF ANYBODY TRIED TO FOOL AROUND WITH HER, I'LL BET!"

"Eddie!" I moaned into the mouthpiece, "tell him to get on the dog! The dog!"

"NOTICE THE STRONG LINES AROUND HER JAW!" Mr. Willoughby carried on. "PLENTY OF CHARACTER THERE!"

Mrs. Van Kempt, still on the screen, nodded her head.



"I UNDERSTAND THAT SHE WAS Sired BY ONE OF THE GREAT-EST DOGS ON THE ATLANTIC SEABOARD! THE FAMOUS 'DAPPER DAN!'"

Mrs. Van Kempt grinned and nodded again.

By this time, camera one had a good, safe, wide-angle shot of the whole stage. I snapped on camera one and stuck with it for the rest of the show. In a way I wish I hadn't, because then I might have avoided putting on the air that final humiliation.

The show was almost over and I was very proud of Mr. Willoughby. Not once had he said the forbidden word—"bitch." Not even "bit . . . female." He was making a few final remarks about next week's show when I noticed one of the larger mastiffs making snarling passes at the man on camera two. The dog had been doing it all through the show and now he seemed to be taking an even greater interest in the man's anatomy. Suddenly, the mastiff made a powerful lunge, broke from his master and sank his teeth into the cameraman's left leg.

The next thing the viewers saw at home was a cameraman rushing across the stage, dragging a monstrous mastiff.

Marty said it was the hit of the show. But he has a twisted sense of humor.

The thing I couldn't live down was what the cameraman said.

At the top of his voice he yelled, "SON OF A -----."

The screen blacked out.

So did I.

Chapter 4

Ladies and Gentlemen, There Is Nothing Wrong with Your Television Receiver

I THINK IT'S PERFECTLY DREADFUL," said Mary, skidding a couple of breakfast eggs onto my plate. "Here you are a television director, and you don't even have a television set in your own home."

"That's just it," I replied, being very logical and reasonable about the whole thing. "All day I go cross-eyed looking at *five* television screens and now you want me to come home and look at it on my own time. I'll go blind."

She took the morning paper out of my hands, folded it neatly and sat on it. "Of course, darling," she cooed, "but think of me. I want to see what my clever director husband is directing, don't I?"

"No," I replied simply.

"Marg called last night and asked if I had seen your dog show. It was terribly embarrassing to tell her we didn't have a set. Darling, it must have been *very* funny, because she was laughing so hard she couldn't talk. I didn't know it was going to be a comedy show. What did you make the dogs do that was so amusing?"

"She . . . she didn't tell you what happened?"

"No, she thought it would be more fun if *you* told me."

"Oh-h-h-h-h, well," I said, chuckling a little, "it wasn't much. Really, it wouldn't be funny if I *told* you about it. It was . . . well, it was just the way I handled the cameras."

"That's just it. You have such a *wonderful* sense of humor, and now I can never see that show. Isn't that a *perfect* reason why we should have a set?" I crossed my fingers quietly under the table. "We could add a little to that \$300 you got from selling the old trailer and . . ."



"But that was going into a new workshop for me," I said indignantly. "You promised me that when we agreed to use the money we got from Uncle Edwin's will for redoing your kitchen. Don't tell me you've forgotten!"

"Of course, I haven't forgotten, honeyman!" she replied sweetly, handing back my morning paper. "It was merely a suggestion. You do what you want with the money. After all, it's your money and your decision."

"You're darn right it is," I replied firmly. "There'll be no television set for us now. Maybe later."

Later that day we dropped into Morgan's, Your *Friendly* Electric Appliance Dealer. Mr. Morgan himself waited on us, and I must say he *was* friendly. He kept putting his arms around both of us and calling us "Mary" and "Paul" and "chum" as if it weren't the first time we had met. Besides, he couldn't seem to talk without laughing at the same time.

"Well, well, well-l-l-l-l!" he chuckled, "so you good people are in the market for a television set! WELL!"

"That's right," I replied. "Perhaps some nice inexpensive model."

"My husband is a television director," said Mary.

"You don't say!" laughed Mr. Morgan, ruffling up my lapels in a very friendly way. "A real big-timer, eh? Well, well!"

"Something for around two hundred dollars maybe," I continued.

"I couldn't do that to you, chum," smiled Mr. Morgan. "You folks are my friends and I couldn't pull a trick like that on you. Sure, I have 'em in stock, but in no time at all you'd be dissatisfied with it and you'd blame me for not insisting on your buying a better model."



“No, we wouldn’t,” I said. “We’re not like that.”

“Get it good! That’s my motto! Now, you take this here model here,” laughed Mr. Morgan, pointing to a set that looked like something Louis XV would have given Madame Pompadour on Mother’s Day. “Fits into any kind of a room—modern, old-fashioned or period stuff. Now get this feature! This here looks like a row of books, doesn’t it?”

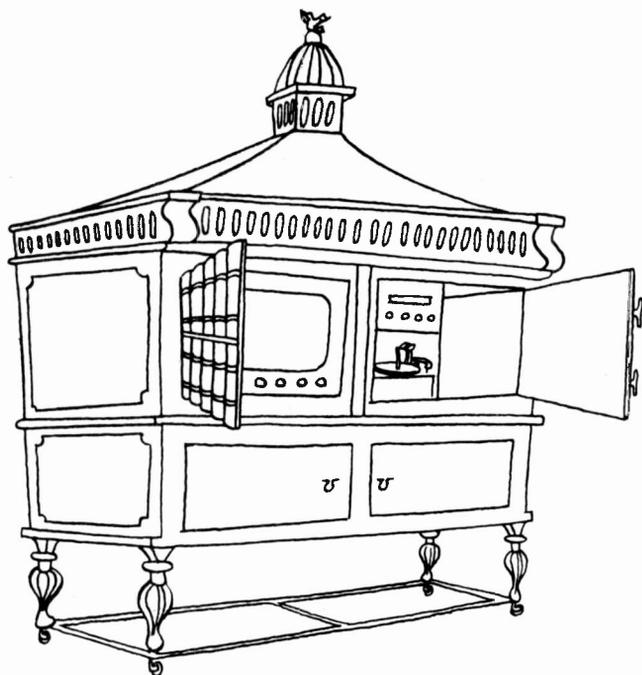
I nodded my head.

"It isn't, chum. Just pull this little doohickey on the end, the books swing aside and there's your television screen! Now, that's a feature I call a feature!" he chuckled.

"Uncanny," I said.

"Now, this here on the other side looks like a row of drawers, doesn't it?"

"It would be a good guess," I replied.



"You'd be guessin' wrong, chum. You just turn this knob that looks like a latch and you find what looked like drawers is really a *door* that swings open like this. And there inside is your radio and record player and a place to keep books

and games and stuff like that! How do you like that for modern design, chum?"

"What's that thing below that looks like a small cupboard?" I asked.

"It's a fake," laughed Mr. Morgan. "It doesn't open. Just for looks."

"Oh!"

"Get it good! That's the way to buy," Mr. Morgan continued, hooking his arm in mine. "For only \$785 you've got something you can point to with pride for years to come."

"It would match our furniture nicely," said Mary, "and tie in beautifully with our piano, but of course it's much too expensive. Uh . . . isn't it, darling?"

"You're darn right it . . ."

"Now, take that set there," broke in Mr. Morgan, pointing to a television set that looked exactly like a television set.

"Yes," I said, "I rather like . . ."

"That thing sells for \$350 and all you get is what you see there. No features to it at all!"

"Our radio is in bad shape," Mary said.

"The only reason I keep the thing on my shelves," Mr. Morgan went on, "is because some shortsighted people who don't know enough to get it good insist on buyin' it."

"And our record player never did work right," Mary mumbled.

"However, I can see you folks aren't that type at all," laughed Mr. Morgan.

"Having the radio, record player and television all together would save space too," said Mary.

"You aren't really *spending* money," Mr. Morgan laughed. "You're *investing* it in the future."

"It would fit beautifully between the bay window and the Chippendale chair," said Mary.

Mr. Morgan took out his sales book and leafed through the pages. "Just where do you folks live?" he chuckled.

"107 Veronica Road, Suburban Village," Mary replied.

The installer arrived the next day. He was a nice enough chap, although he wasn't much on conversation. For a long time he sat on the packing cases in the front yard and shook his head. Finally, I went out to him.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Bad neighborhood."

"Well," I replied, trying not to look hurt, "it's home to us."

"Don't like that hill there."

"It's not much to look at now," I said, "but it's pretty in the fall when the leaves turn."

"Give you ghosts sure."

"Ghosts?"

"Ghosts."

"That's all right," I laughed. "We don't believe in them."

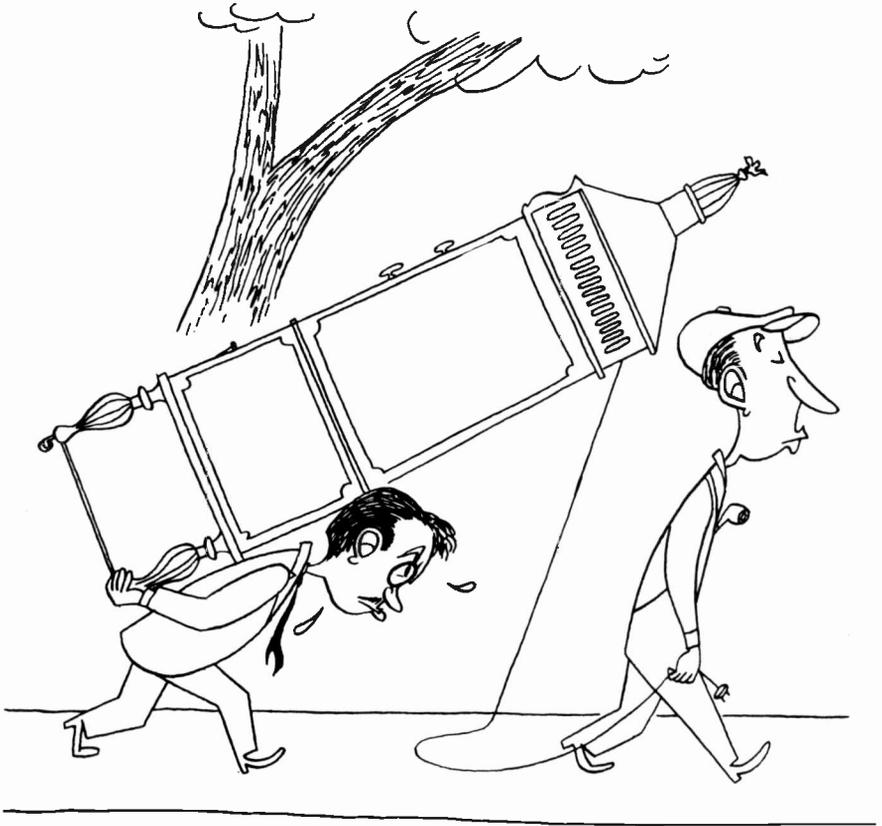
(Later, I found out he meant that the television waves would bounce off the hill and give us two pictures on our screen instead of one.)

"If *you* don't care, *I* don't," he said, emptying his pipe ashes on my hydrangeas. "Where you want the thing set?"

"Between the bay window and the Chippendale chair."

"Gimme a hand," he said. "The boy who helps me's sick."

"This is dreadful!" said Mary, when we finally got it inside. "It's much bigger than I thought it was going to be! It will have to go against that wall to counterbalance the piano."



"But the sofa's there," I replied.

"I know. You'll have to move the sofa between the Chippendale chair and the bay window and slide the desk into the opposite corner and move the piano a little more toward the dining-room door."

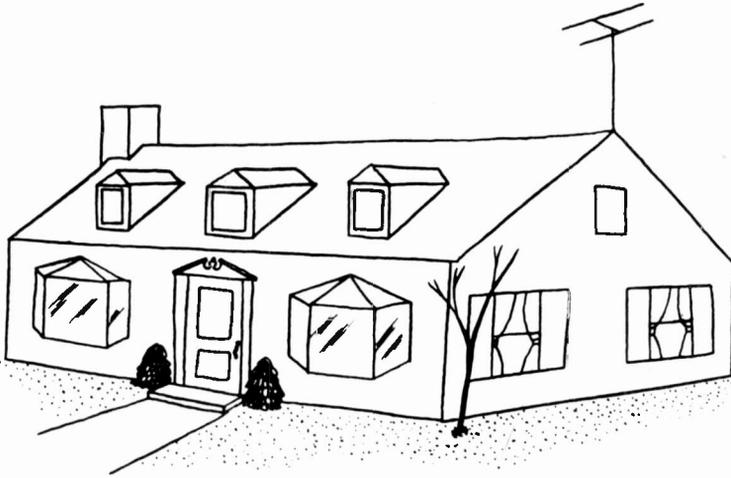
"Give me a hand," I said to the installer.

"Can't. Bad back," he replied, sitting down heavily on the Chippendale chair.

"Take the easy-chair. It's more comfortable," I said quickly, knowing Mary was having fits on account of the Chippendale chair not being meant to be sat on.

"This's fine," he replied, leaning back against the wall. "You go right ahead."

"Oh-h-h-h, it's simply dreadful!" moaned Mary, near to tears. "Dreadful, dreadful!"



We were out in the yard looking up at the antenna on the roof after the installer had left.

"You were the one who wanted television," I reminded her.

"But I had no idea they were going to put that monstrosity on the roof. It looks like . . . like one of those terrible radar things or whatever you call them like they have on battleships! Couldn't they have strung up some thin little wire or something?"

"Nope. You have to have a television antenna to get television."

"Well, we've just *got* to do something about it," she said firmly. "I will *not* have a thing like that on my roof. It just ruins the whole colonial atmosphere of the place."

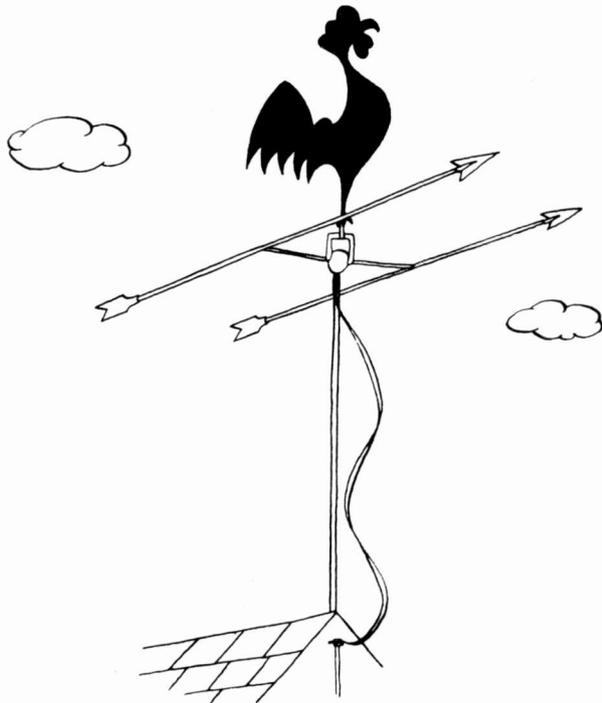
"I know!" I laughed. "We'll make it look like an Early American weather vane."

"Why, darling!" she gushed. "That's a *marvelous* idea!"

"I'm kidding," I said.

"I'm not," she replied.

It was a strange-looking weather vane, I must say, when I finally got it up. In the center of the two poles I attached a cast-iron rooster I picked up in an antique shop, and at



the ends of each pole I screwed on a set of cast-iron arrows and feathers. No matter which way the wind was blowing in our neighborhood, around our house it was always north by northeast. But it made Mary happy, and that's all that mattered.

Actually, the *real* trouble started that first night we tried out our new television set. I had my suspicions all was not well when the installer left that afternoon muttering something about "ghosts" again and saying, "That's as good as I can get it." Mary kept telling me I didn't know how to tune it in.

"Why don't you try turning *that* knob?" she said impatiently. "You haven't even touched it."

"My dear," I said with a great deal of self-control, "that knob doesn't do anything. It's just there for 'looks,' as Mr. Morgan would say."

She turned it anyway. The door that looked like drawers flew open, the phonograph shot out, dropped a record onto its turntable and started playing "The St. Louis Blues." Mary gave me a very superior look.

"Okay, so it isn't just for looks," I admitted. "That still doesn't get us a picture on the screen. Turn the darn thing off so I can concentrate."

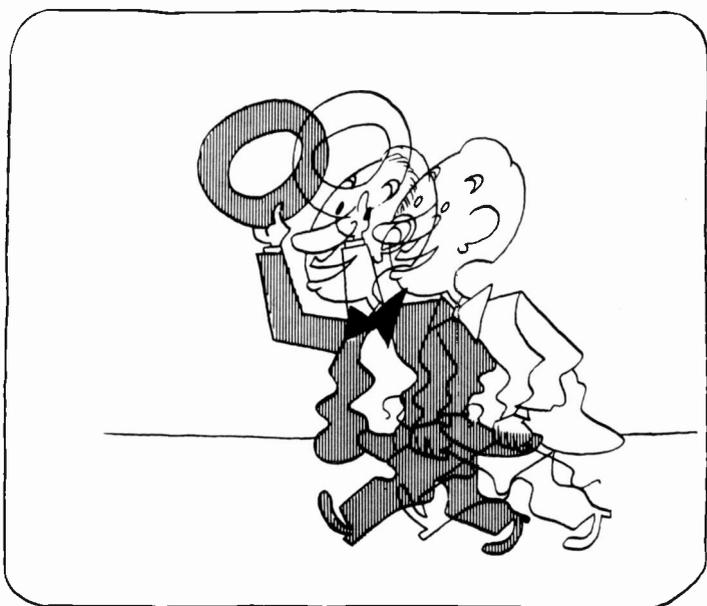
Mary turned the knob again, the machine clicked a couple of times and started to play the "St. Louis Blues" all over again. Through eight choruses of the song I pushed, pulled and twisted every knob on the set but nothing happened. Finally Mary shook her head and said, "You men are so helpless."

She reached down and gave the cabinet a solid whack

on its right side just below the middle. There was a whirring sound and then a gentle click. The phonograph stopped playing, slid back into its cabinet and closed its door.

"Okay, Mrs. Einstein," I said, "suppose *you* try to get a picture on the darn thing."

As a matter of fact, she did. We could get only one station and the pictures on that were so twisted it looked like one of those ripply mirrors on Coney Island. Besides, there were *two* pictures instead of one. Every time somebody walked onto the stage in a variety show we were watching, he was followed closely by his twin brother. By looking cross-eyed at the screen you could make things look normal, but that got a little tiresome after a while.



The next day I called Mr. Morgan.

"Look, laughing boy," I said, "I've got a \$785 turkey in my house and I don't like it. All I can get on it is one station and that comes in double."

"What are you complaining about?" he laughed. "That's two pictures for the price of one!" His little joke nearly killed him.

"Look here, Mr. Morgan," I said, "I want your friendly little store to send a guy out here who knows what he's doing and get this thing fixed."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I've been expecting to hear from you, chum," he chuckled. "My installer told me that he told you that you were going to get ghosts on account of the neighborhood you're living in and you said you didn't care."

"Let's keep Suburban Village out of this," I replied.

"You're down in a hole there and a hill is blocking the signal from the television stations. That's why you're getting two pictures," said Mr. Morgan. "Now, there are two things you can do—remove the hill or get a higher antenna."

"Get me a higher antenna," I said.

"You're sure that's what you want?"

"Sure I'm sure!" I said. "What else?"

"Well . . . okay," he replied. "It's your decision."

A few days later, Mary met me at the commuters' railroad station in tears.

"I nearly died," she sobbed. "I tell you I nearly died!"

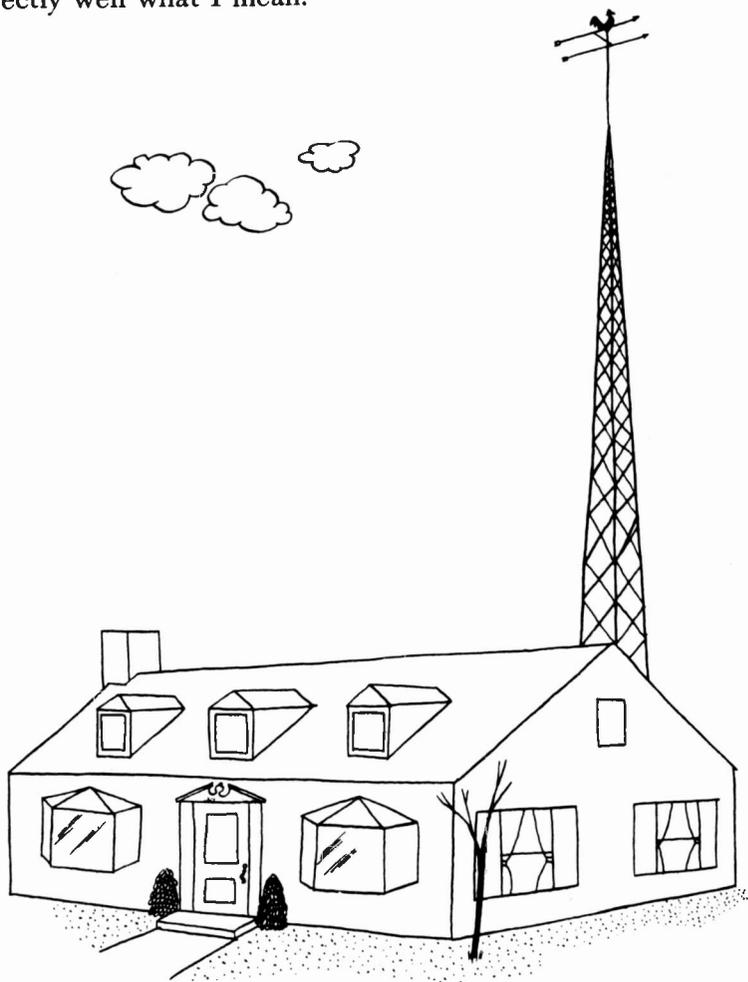
"W-what happened?" I stammered.

"How could you do this to me? The man said you told him to put it up there. I tell you, I nearly died! The girls

brought me home from the bridge club and when they saw that thing sitting up there they just roared laughing. I was so mortified I could have crawled into a mole hole.”

“Saw *what up where?*”

“Don’t try to act innocent,” she sniffled. “You know perfectly well what I mean.”



She wouldn't talk to me the rest of the way home. Finally, when we pulled into the driveway, the mystery solved itself. Sitting on our roof was the Eiffel Tower's younger brother holding aloft our antenna. I swear on a cloudy day you couldn't see the top of it. It was, without doubt, the highest fake weather vane in this part of the country.

I must say it took a lot of diplomacy to smooth things over. (A handwriting expert once said I had the "sign of diplomacy" on account of my letters "dwindle" when I write.) I pointed out to her that the willow tree at the corner of the house was doing nicely and in ten or twelve years it would hide most of the tower. Besides, it *did* make the television set work fine and, furthermore, people would now be able to find our house without any trouble because our weather vane could be seen for miles around.

After a while, Mary began to feel better about the whole thing and I began to feel worse. There were two letters waiting for me on the dining-room table when I went inside. The first one was from:

MORGAN'S

Your Friendly Electric Appliance Dealer

Marvel Television Combination Set...	\$ 785.00
Installation & 1 year guarantee.....	\$ 50.00
Slim Jim Super TV Tower.....	\$ 120.00
Installation of Slim Jim TV Tower...	\$ 24.75
Relocation of TV set.....	\$ 13.50
Re-relocation of TV set.....	\$ 13.50

TOTAL \$1006.75

"Why, that bloomin' bandit!" I sputtered. "I could start a television *station* for that kind of dough! And what's he mean by this 'relocation of TV set' and 're-relocation?' That's ridiculous!"

"Of course it's ridiculous," said Mary.

"That set is right where we put it!"

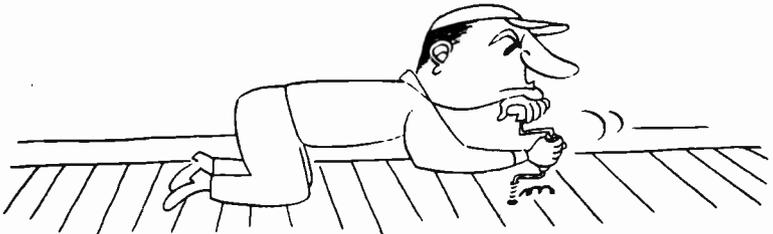
"Of course it is," she replied.

"Wait till I call that happy hyena!"

"It was . . . such a . . . *small* thing to ask in the first place. Marg was here the other day and *she* thought the room would look more balanced if the television set were between the sideboard and the love-seat, and the piano were moved between the bay window and the Chippendale chair. So, I called Morgan's and . . ."

"You called what?"

"Mr. *Morgan*. And he sent out that silly little man and he moved the set next to the sideboard. He had to drill a couple of holes and change the cable or whatever he called it. Anyway, to make a long story short, when he got through moving it, we *both* agreed it didn't look well at all because the piano made the front end of the room look too heavy and besides the Chippendale chair looked simply *lost* beside the piano. The whole thing was *Marg's* idea. Anyway, we had the man move the set back where it was and you wouldn't believe what a big improvement it was. And to have Mr. *Morgan charge* us for it when we *actually* didn't make any *real* change is silly. I mean, it's downright *dishonest!*"



The second letter was from:

THE SUBURBAN VILLAGE CIVIC ASSOCIATION

Dear Neighbor:

We were all sorry you were not present at the monthly meeting of the Suburban Village Civic Association last Monday night so that you might have been able to, shall we say, "defend" yourself and present your side of the case. The discussion, of course, was on a very friendly, neighborly basis, but several of our members felt that your new television tower does not contribute much to the beauty and appearance of our lovely little community. A few of them maintained it constituted a public menace in case a wind storm of the proportions of the "1922 Big Blow" (which several of our "old-timers" recalled vividly) happened to occur again.

Needless to say, we do not intend to take legal action, since we feel we can solve this little problem in a cooperative, neighborly manner. Perhaps you will find that a television antenna of more modest proportions will meet your needs just as well. I have appointed a committee to look into the matter with Mr. Ralph Nixon (who happens to be a lawyer) as its chairman. He will drop around in a few days to see what action you have taken.

Here's hoping we have the pleasure of your presence at our meetings in the future.

Sincerely,
Robert C. Stanford
President

Just then I heard the announcer say over the television set in the living room, "The video portion of this telecast has been temporarily interrupted. We just want you to know, ladies and gentlemen, *there is nothing wrong with your television receiver.*"

Mary says I became hysterical for the next few minutes, but she tends to exaggerate things sometimes.



Chapter 5

Sponsors Are People

A SQUARE DEAL WITH HANK SCHMIEL!" said Marty, making like an announcer. "How do you like it?"

"It has a rather touching quality," I muttered.

"This is going to be a milestone in the station's career!" he raved on.

"Sounds more like a headstone, if you ask me."

"We've got to do a socko selling job on account of this being our first commercial show and besides this Hank Schmiel has a lot of important connections." Marty looked around him and whispered confidentially, "He's president of the Metropolitan Merchants Association."

"No kiddin'!" I whispered back.

"A good word from him can mean a lot to us."

"Just what kind of show does he want?" I asked recklessly.

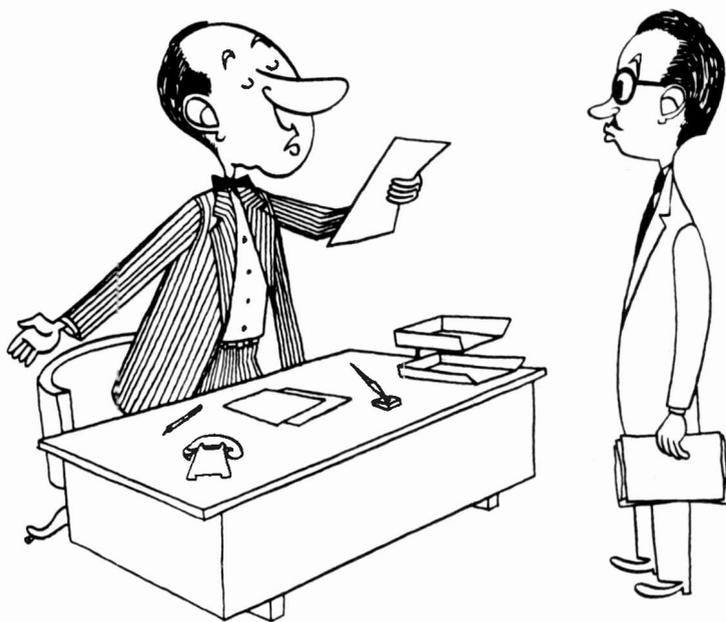
"Well, it's going to be a sort of musical show featuring Martha La Mare and Her Singing Vibraharp."

"Is she any good?"

"You're darn right she is!"

"Then you've heard her."

"Well, no . . . not exactly," said Marty. "But Mr. Schmiel says she's sensational."



"Yeah?"

"La Mare isn't her real name."

"I never guessed."

"It's Schmiel."

"Schmiel?"

"They're related."

"Oh?"

"She's . . . uh . . . his daughter."

"Oh, oh!"

"Now, don't jump to any snap conclusions," Marty said hurriedly. "Give the girl a break! Mr. Schmiel showed me

her picture and she isn't bad looking at all. With the proper kind of lighting she ought to show up fine! Take Hollywood, for instance. Everybody knows those glamour girls are homely as mud in real life. It's the lighting that counts."

"Sure," I said. "All I'll have to do is keep the lights off her face."

"I tell you she's not bad looking," Marty replied. "The only problem is she's a little on the chubby side and I've got that fixed."

"Good for you!"

"The engineers tell me you can stretch the picture wider or taller by just turning the horizontal or vertical control knobs on the cameras. Now, when you do her show, just see that the vertical knob is turned up and she'll be taller and skinnier."

"Say, that's great," I replied. "This will be the first time on television a tall, skinny girl has played a tall, skinny vibraharp."

"I made a date for you to go out to Mr. Schmiel's house and rough out the first program," Marty went on. "There's nothing like the personal touch, you know."

"Look, Marty," I said with a great deal of restraint. "I'm sorry I wasn't consulted on the show before this. I'm not one to be uncoöperative but I have a certain amount of professional pride, you know. It's embarrassing for me to take a stand on this matter, and although I wish the show the best luck in the world and all that, it's going to be a turkey. As for me, I want no parts of it. Get one of the other boys to direct it. Just leave me out of it and that's final."

Mr. Schmiel's house was an Italian villa sort of place with a small rustic sign out front that said simply—"Schmiel." I

pulled at the knocker, which turned out to be an electric doorbell, and in the distance chimes rang out the first four bars of the "Bells of St. Mary's." The maid opened the door. I figured she was the cook too, because she was wiping flour off her hands onto her apron.

"Yes?" she said, giving the portfolio I was carrying a highly suspicious look.



"I'm from WKBK television," I said, "and I . . ."

"Solicitors at the rear only," she snapped and closed the door.

I had a hard time finding the back door because it was hidden behind a grove of small pine trees. But I finally located it and knocked on the door.

The maid opened it and said, "We already got one of those television things."

"Look, sweetheart," I replied, "I'm Paul Ritts from WKBK-TV and I have an appointment with Mr. Schmiel. Now, I don't care how I get in. You can bring me through the cellar if you want to, but I've got to see Schmiel."

"Humph!" she apologized and led me through the kitchen and down a long corridor to a room she called the "library," although there wasn't much in it in the way of books—just an old set of encyclopedias and something called *Eat Your Way to Lovelier Slimness*.

After a few minutes, Mr. Schmiel sneaked in. I say "sneaked," because when he walked he gave one the impression he was trying to get away from something. He was



a nice little guy with large eyes that made him look perpetually startled—like a rabbit. He even had a way of twitching his mouth like a rabbit. It made his tiny mustache wriggle.

“I don’t like it, Mr. Ritts, I don’t like it,” he squeaked, throwing a quick glance over his shoulder. “Before she gets here I just want you to know *I* don’t like it. How do you do?”

“Glad to know you, Mr. Schmiel,” I said. “What don’t you like and who is ‘she’?”

“The whole idea and Myrna.”

“I thought it was ‘Martha.’”

“Martha is my daughter,” he whispered. “My wife’s name is Myrna.”

“That’s a pretty name,” I said.

“No matter what happens, it was *her* idea. I just want you to know that, man to man. But please don’t tell *her* what I told you, Mr. Ritts.”

“You can trust me, old man,” I said.

Just then Mrs. Schmiel sailed into the room. She looked like a Wagnerian soprano in street clothes. She talked like one too.

“*Heavens, Henry!*” she cried. “Why didn’t you ask Mr. Ritts to *SIT DOWN?*”

Her voice was so commanding, I suddenly found myself seated. But I got up quickly and she wrung my hand.

“How *do* you *do*, Mr. Ritts!” she said. “It’s terribly, terribly exciting having a person from show business in my home!”

“That’s nice,” I said.

“Meet my daughter Martha.”



Mrs. Schmiel stepped aside and there indeed was Martha. She was a carbon copy of her mother when it came to proportions. Viewed from the south, it would be difficult to tell them apart. I made a hasty calculation and figured I would have to stretch her two and a half feet taller on the cameras in order to whittle her down to size horizontally.

“Television’s *newest* star!” Mrs. Schmiel added.

“Oh, *Mother!*” said Martha.

“Martha has *always* had her eyes on show business,” Mrs. Schmiel gurgled. “She used to make up little compositions on the piano long before she could reach the pedals. Martha, tell Mr. Ritts what your school paper said about your performance on the vibraharp at last year’s ‘Fun Night.’”

“Oh, *Mother!*” said Martha.

"They said it was 'most unusual,'" Mrs. Schmiel continued. "Those were the exact words—'most unusual.'"

"It sure was," Henry muttered.

"Although I *am* her mother," Mrs. Schmiel went on, "I've always been her severest critic as well as encourager. Martha gets her talent from my side of the family. I used to play the mandolin and sing with a group of girls back in Haddonville. We called ourselves 'The Flappers Four.' I must say we certainly were kept *busy!*"

"Would you like a drink, Mr. Ritts?" Henry said miserably.

"Well, no, I guess . . ."

"Of *course*, Henry!" said Mrs. Schmiel. "All people in show business *drink!* The port wine is behind the oatmeal box in the pantry. Have Matilda serve it nicely."

Henry slunk out of the room.

"Now, then, Mr. Ritts," she said, settling her hulk on the divan, "how do you think Martha will televise? She always takes a *lovely* snapshot, don't you, darling?"

"Oh, *Mother!*" said Martha.

"Well," I said, "I don't think there's any doubt she'll show up on the screen."

"Oh, grand! Now, I thought we might entitle our little program 'A Trip Into Fancy'! Don't you think that's catchy?"

"Yes," I agreed. "In fact, from the very beginning I've felt the show has, you might say, a catch to it."

"That's sweet of you to say so," she said. "I think it's such a *splendid* opportunity for Martha. You know, Mr. Ritts, I've often felt that I was terribly wrong in not choosing a theatrical career. As you might have guessed, I married very, *very* young and I didn't realize at the time that I didn't *own* my talent. I always say that people with talent don't *own* it.

It belongs to the world. That's why I want Martha to give herself to the world!"

"Oh, *Mother!*" said Martha.

Just then, Henry padded back into the room followed closely by Matilda, the maid, who was carrying a large brass tray which held a tiny glass of port wine.

"I hope you chilled Mr. Ritts's wine, Matilda," said Mrs. Schmiel.

"He wants it *chilled* yet?" sniffed Matilda.



"Oh, that's all right," I said quickly. "I like it warm. It's getting nippy out, you know. About the commercials, Mr. Schmiel. Just what does the Schmiel Products Company manufacture?"

“Baloney,” he said.

“I beg your pardon?”

“Baloney and liverwurst.”

“Henry!” said Mrs. Schmiel firmly, “I will not have baloney and liverwurst mentioned on the same program with our daughter!”

“But, blossom,” he said, “that’s why I’m paying for the show—to sell baloney and liverwurst. How can I sell baloney and liverwurst if we don’t . . .”

“I’ve already figured that out,” interrupted Mrs. Schmiel. “We’ll call it ‘fancy cold cuts,’ and some nice-looking young man with a good background can read the announcement while Martha plays ‘The Blue Danube Waltz’ quietly. I want the whole thing to have a dignified air about it.”

“What’s dignified about a wiener?” said Henry.

Mrs. Schmiel gave Henry a look that could have chilled my wine rather nicely if it had been in the way.

“And when you refer to Mr. Schmiel in the commercial talks,” she carried on, “I want you to call him a ‘victualer.’”

“Victualer?”

“Yes. I don’t want people to think of him as a butcher.”

“You can trust us to keep the whole thing quiet,” I said.

“I think it would be very sweet if Martha would play something for us,” said Mrs. Schmiel. “I know Mr. Ritts is anxious to hear her.”

“Now don’t put yourself out for me,” I said quickly.

“Perhaps our little girl will *sing* too,” she said, patting her daughter’s hand. “Martha doesn’t feel that she is ready to sing in *public* yet, but I keep telling her she just lacks confidence. Her voice has a *lovely* birdlike quality about it. She just needs the teeny-weeniest bit of courage.”

"Oh, *Mother!*" said Martha.

"Play for Mr. Ritts that little song you composed. You know, the one called 'Dancing Through the Daffodils.'"

Martha stomped reluctantly to the far end of the room where a chromium-plated vibraharp stood. On the front of it hung a gilt-edged velvet banner with the words "Martha La Mare and Her Singing Vibraharp" glittering in letters of gold. When she started to play, it occurred to me the act



should have been billed "Vibrating Martha and Her Harp." She held four hammers in her pudgy hands, and it was difficult to tell whether *she* was shaking the hammers or the hammers were shaking *her*. I could see right off that her image on the cameras would be nothing but a blur. But after seeing Martha in repose I felt that wouldn't hurt the act any.

Martha "danced through the daffodills" so long I was sure none of them could have lived. But at last she reached a quivering crescendo.

"Bravo!" shouted Mrs. Schmiel, whopping her hands together. "Bravo, la Martha!"

My wife tells me I'm probably the most unsuccessful liar she has ever met. (By that I don't mean she thinks of me as a liar. It's just that when I *try* to lie, I'm not very convincing.) For that reason, I confined my comments on Martha's musical prowess to, "Well!" Right away I could tell Mrs. Schmiel wasn't satisfied with my reaction, so I added for emphasis, "Well, well!"

"That should sell a lot of it," said Henry.

"A lot of what?" I asked.

"Baloney," said Henry.

"Cold cuts!" said Mrs. Schmiel.

"Oh, *Mother!*" said Martha.

Looking back on it all now, I figure there were three main reasons the show folded after the first program. None of them could rightly be laid at my doorstep, yet there they were, sitting as pretty as three milk bottles. Not to mention any names, but how anyone can hold a person responsible for a show when that person had warned him it was going

to be a turkey is difficult to understand, and that's putting it mildly.

In the first place, how could I be held responsible for Martha's strapless evening gown? She hadn't worn it during the rehearsal and when she showed up in it ten minutes before the program I knew there was going to be trouble. One can't say I didn't try to warn her.

"Martha," I said, being very tactful, "that's a pretty dress you have on."

She giggled.

"We men often wonder how you girls manage to hold it up."

She giggled again.

"I don't want to pry into something I shouldn't," I went on, "but I want to make sure there won't be any slips and . . ."

Martha let out a little squeal and ran to her mother. It wouldn't have been so bad if Mary hadn't come up to the studio to see the show that night, because Mrs. Schmiel came storming over to me and said, "Mr. Ritts, I know how frightfully blasé you show people are about *life*, but I'll have you know my daughter has been untouched by the world and I intend she stay that way! Furthermore, Martha has enough talent to reach the pinnacles of success without allowing herself to become the . . . the *toy* of every director she works for!"

Mary was standing near by and heard the whole thing. To this day I'm not sure I've explained the matter to her complete satisfaction.

As I feared, whatever was holding up Martha's dress couldn't stand the stress and strain of the "Poet and Peasant Overture." If Martha hadn't carried the melody with her



right hand and her modesty with her left, we might have had another “first” in television.

The second thing that didn’t come off was Marty’s idea about turning up the vertical control knob on the cameras to make Martha look taller and skinnier. In all fairness to Marty, it did work fine on Martha. She was no Hedy Lamarr but she could have been a distant relative. But when the cameras swung around on a plate of wieners for the commercial announcement, they looked like a bunch of meat balls strung together. For weeks Mr. Schmiel was deluged with calls from people wanting “those cute little round hot dogs.”

The final blow, however, came from *Variety* magazine, the guide book of show business. I can't say they weren't fair in their review of the show. In fact, I admire them for their restraint. There was so much they could have said but didn't. I only wish they hadn't printed my name in such black, bold, capital letters. *That* I felt was somewhat unnecessary.

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Television Reviews

"Martha La Mare and Her
Singing Vibraharp"
Station—WKBK-TV
Time—8:00-8:15
Director—PAUL RITTS

We can sum up our opinion of
this show in just two words:

Oh, NO!

* * *

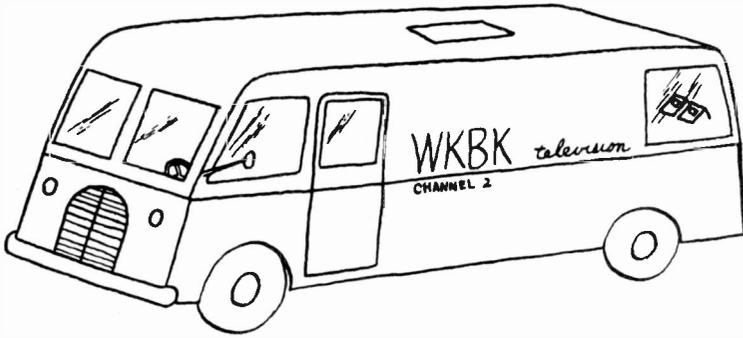
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Chapter 6

Remote Possibility

A REMOTE, ACCORDING TO *Inside Television*, is a "program that originates outside the studios from some predetermined location from which a 'signal' is beamed back to the transmitter whence it is rebroadcast and beamed to the viewer at home." A *possibility* for a remote is, generally speaking, a silly idea dreamed up by a program director just to use the *remote truck* which cost \$50,000 and whose existence is hard to explain to the guy who owns the station if it sits in the garage week on end. Therefore, since A equals B and B equals C, C must then equal A or in other words, except for baseball, football and fights, a possibility for a good remote program is generally considered by television directors as a remote possibility.

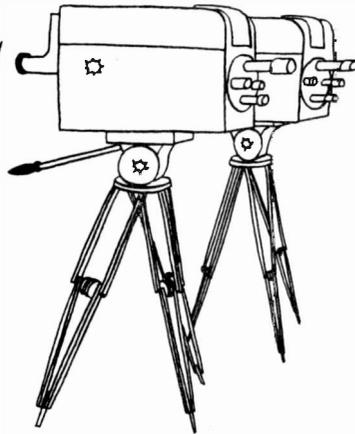
To do a remote program one needs:



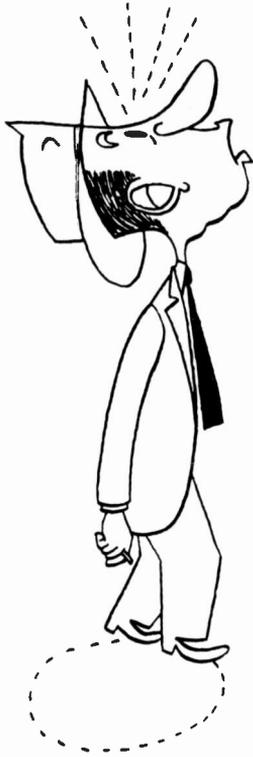
A specially designed remote truck



Two cameramen

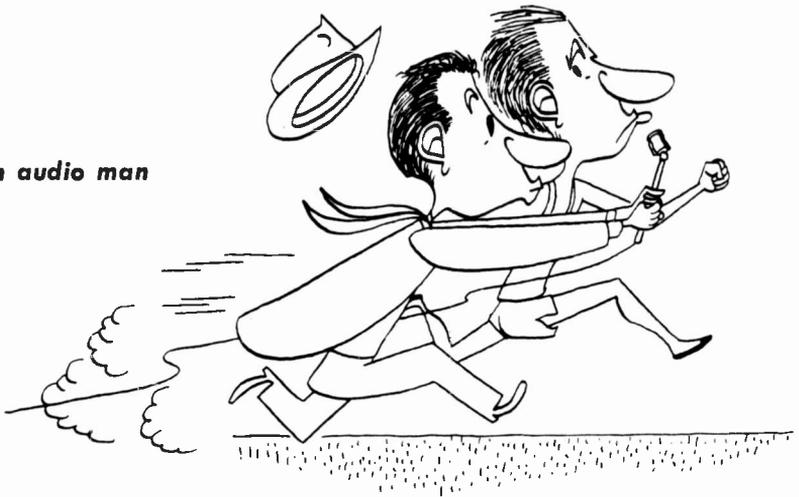


Two cameras



A video man

An audio man



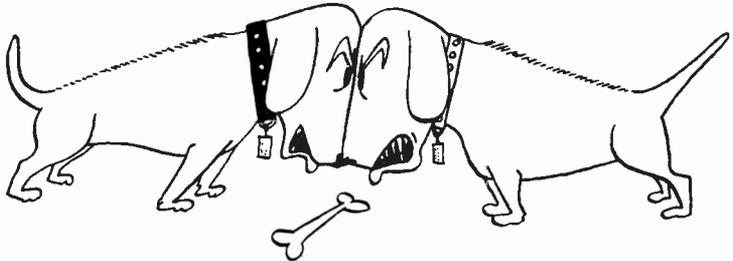


A floor man



A truck driver

A director



And something happening.

The "something happening" is the most important part. That's why I told Marty, "Who gives a hoot in Haiti about the Sons of the Green Shamrock Annual New Year's Day Parade? Not that I have anything against the Irish. They're fine people. But all they've got is one band, a drum and bugle corps and a bunch of guys in green hats marching down the middle of the street. What's so fascinating about that?"

"Everybody loves a parade," Marty said blandly.

"Name me three guys," I replied.

"I do, my wife does and so does Mr. O'Riley."

"Who's O'Riley?"

"Grand Master of the Sons of the Green Shamrock."

"Okay, name me *four* guys," I replied.

"Look, Paul," Marty said, "I know this won't be any great shakes as a parade, but this fella O'Riley owns the controlling interest in the Boxing Arena and if we can get exclusive rights to televise all the boxing bouts, we'll sure be sitting pretty."

"That's all very well," I replied, "and I wish whoever directs the parade all the best luck in the world but as for me, I don't want any . . ."

But I could see he wasn't listening.

It was six o'clock in the morning when we started to set up for the remote. The parade wasn't supposed to start until ten o'clock, but it takes two hours to set up the cameras and get them working and another couple of hours to get a signal back to the transmitter. The trouble started about ten minutes after six, which is standard procedure on a remote telecast.

I was sitting in Alex's Diner trying to wake myself up with a third cup of black coffee when Joe, the crew chief, came in and said, "We got trouble."



"You interest me," I yawned. "Go on."

"The boys refuse to climb the flagpole across the street."

"How silly of them," I mumbled. "They may never get a chance like that again."

"But this is serious," he replied.

"Why don't you get them to climb something easier?"

"Nothing else around here is *high* enough."

"Forgive me for asking what might seem to be a silly question, Joe," I said, "but exactly *why* do you want them to climb the flagpole?"

"I want to put a dish up there."

I motioned to Alex who ran the diner. "Alex," I said gently, "my friend Joe here would like a nice hot cup of black coffee."

"Hitting the ol' bottle, eh?" laughed Alex. "I had a brother-in-law once like that. He was a dipso. Couldn't let the stuff alone. He finally wound up in a . . ."

"I'm *not* drunk," Joe shouted. "I've got to get a dish on top of the flagpole or there won't be any telecast."

"Just where are you going to get this dish, Joe?" I said quietly, trying to humor him.

"It's out in the truck," he replied.

"That's nice," I said. "What color is it?"

"Who cares what c-c-color it is?" he stammered.

"If *you* don't care, *I* certainly don't," I replied.

"Look," Joe cried, "a *dish* is an electronic thingamajig that beams the signal back to the transmitter."

"Oh—*that* kind of dish."

"You've gotta have it on top of the flagpole or there won't be any telecast."

"Why don't you just set it on the sidewalk like a good fella," I said. "Nobody's going to run off with a little old dish."

"That's not the trouble," said Joe. "In television you've got to beam the signal back to the transmitter on a direct line of sight. If I put it on the sidewalk, the buildings would be in the way and there wouldn't be any signal."

"There's a lot of sense in what you say, Joe," I replied thoughtfully. "All right, go ahead and put it on the flagpole."

"But that's what I keep telling you! The boys refuse to climb the pole! It says in Article VII, Paragraph 8, subsection C of their contract that . . ."

“. . . no technician shall be required, ordered, coerced or cajoled into performing work of a degrading and/or dangerous nature,” I said.

“How did you know?” said Joe.

“I’ve been around,” I replied. “Well, in that case, I guess the only thing for you to do is . . .”

“I’m too old.”

“Oh!”

“It takes a young man to do that kind of work,” said Joe, giving me the eye.

“I’ll talk to them,” I said quickly, finishing off my coffee.

I talked to them all right. I talked for ten minutes. It was a beautiful speech, if I do say so myself, full of understanding, encouragement and humorous anecdotes. Bob, the audio man, was the first to speak. I’ll never forget him.

“Why don’t you put the bloomin’ thing up there yourself?” he said.

“Well, I’d like to, boys,” I said, thinking fast, “but I’ve got to check the final details of the parade with this man O’Riley.”

“O’Riley was here ten minutes ago looking for you,” said Bob. “He told me he’d be back in an hour.”

“An . . . hour?” I said. “Well, I guess I’ll just have to sit here and wait for him.”

They all just stood there staring at me.

“Wouldn’t want to miss him again, you know,” I added.

Nobody can stare like an engineer.

“Well, well,” I said.

Bob spoke up again. (Personally, I like the quiet, introverted type of engineer best.) “You’re not scared to do anything you ask us to do, are you?”

"Certainly not!" I said before I could stop myself.

"Well?" said Bob.

What else could I do? A director must never lose the respect of his crew. "Sure," I replied recklessly. "Bring out your little ol' dish. I'll put it up there."

They all shook hands with me solemnly and brought out the dish. I was glad I was seated at the time. The "little ol' dish" measured four feet in diameter and looked like it weighed at least a ton!



engineers arguing about electronics is like listening to two Lithuanians discussing Lithuania in Lithuanian.

"Now, look," said Joe to Frank, the video man, "we checked the by-pass voltage on the grid leak circuit and found it two microamps low on the input push-pull amplification, didn't we?" (That may not have been *exactly* what he said, but it's as close as I can remember.)

"Sure!" Frank replied. "But you still have a six meg-amp overload on the co-ax leading from the modulator stage to the 6L6's feeding your final plate inductance which is throwing cross talk into the sync and detuning the filament resistance in the cro sweep."

"There's something to be said for that," I commented. (Frankly, I didn't know what they were talking about, but engineers have more respect for directors who have a smattering of knowledge in electronics.)

"Correct!" Joe went on. "But the oscilloscope shows a two-volt drop in the blanking stage and the horizontal linearity is out of phase two megs."

"Maybe a fuse is blown," I offered.

"And if the *vertical* linearity is three volts down on the . . . What did you say?" asked Joe.

"I said, 'maybe a fuse is blown,' " I replied.

Joe gave me a startled look and turned to Frank. "Did you check the fuse on the sync generator to see if it was blown?" he asked.

"Well . . . no," said Frank.

They checked it, it was and we got on the air. To be perfectly honest, it was just a wild guess. But the funny thing is, they never asked me to climb a flagpole again.

In a way, I wish I hadn't mentioned the fuse because

then we might have been spared what followed. To begin with, there were the people. Now, I'll be the first to admit that people are wonderful—when they come in groups of three or maybe four. But when they get together in groups of three or four *thousand*, people begin to act like people. Personally, I'd rather be knee-deep in sheep. At least sheep stay put once you get them corralled—if that's what you do with sheep. But the trouble was, the people were more interested in the television cameras than they were in the parade. Every time the cameras would swing right the crowd would swing right too and jump up and down and wave their hands and yell, "Here I am, Mother!"

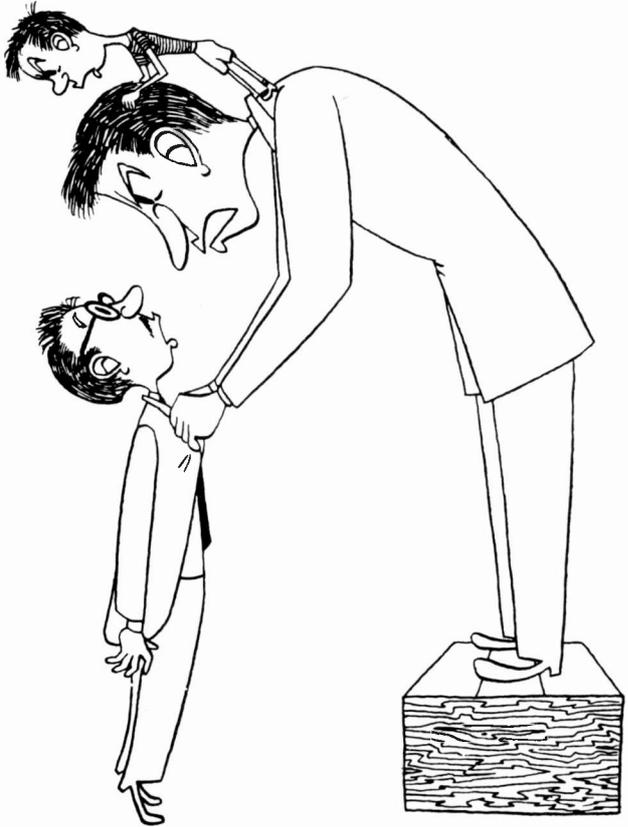
There was one man who was especially annoying. He was six and a half feet tall if he was an inch. He was the tallest *one* man I had ever laid eyes on. Besides that, he brought along a box to stand on. As if that wasn't *enough*, he had his boy with him, and every once in a while he would lift the kid up in the air to see the cameras. Since he was standing right in front of camera one, which was mounted on top of the truck, every three minutes this kid's face would fill the screen. Now, I wouldn't have minded so much if he had been a nice kid. It might have made a fine "human-interest" shot. But this kid had adenoids and his mouth hung open, and every time his father lifted him up he would screw up his face and stick out his tongue. The first time it happened we all laughed, but round about the seventeenth time the joke was beginning to wear a little thin. Finally, in desperation, I turned the show over to the floor man and pushed my way through the crowd.

"Look, mister," I said to him, "I'm the director of this

telecast and I wish you wouldn't lift your kid up because you're blocking our camera's view."

"See here, wise guy," he said, grabbing my lapels, "my kid's gotta right to a edjication, ain't he? He's gotta see what them television cameras look like, ain't he? Well, ain't he?"

"I hadn't thought of it in quite that light," I replied.



I decided not to argue with him. My suit had just been freshly pressed, and besides he *did* have a point about his kid's education.

The band and the bugle corps didn't help matters any either. We could hear them coming two blocks away playing "The Stars and Stripes Forever" at full tilt. But when they finally reached the spot where our cameras stood, they were taking a breather and except for the man with the snare drum beating out the rhythm there wasn't a peep out of them.

The rain gave us a rather interesting effect. It didn't come down hard—just enough to get the cameras wet and run down over the lenses, which made it look as if we were shooting the parade under water. If that had been the effect we were *trying* to get, I must say it certainly would have been effective.

When it was all over, I dropped into the Broadway Bar across the street to call Marty and see how he liked the show.

"Got a couple of nickels for a dime?" I asked the bartender.

"Sure," he said. "You're one of them television people, ain'tcha, Mac?"

"That's right," I said.

"Say, when is that Martha La Mare going to be on again, huh? The boys here sure loved it! That's the first time any of us has ever seen a stripper play a vibraharp. Sure was a novelty, as they say in show business, huh?"

"Her program has been canceled," I replied.

"Too hot to handle, huh?" he said. "Don't blame ya, Mac. 'Fraid she might go too far, huh? That's the trouble with strippers. You never can trust 'em. I used to hire one when I had a little place on the pike called 'Wander Inn.' Name

was Bubbles. When she had a good audience, she'd just get carried away with herself. I remember one New Year's Eve, when we had what you call in show business a *swell house*, Bubbles got so wound up on account of the way her act was going over so big that we all landed in the cooler. That Bubbles sure was a trooper!"

"Where's the phone?" I asked.

"Over behind the juke box, Mac."

"Thanks."

"And say, Mac," he called after me, "if that Martha La Mare is *at liberty*, like they say in show business, tell her to give me a buzz and I can put her wise to a couple of night spots where she can pick up some loose change. She sure has a great act, huh?"

When I finally got Marty on the phone, I said, "Well, how did you like it?"

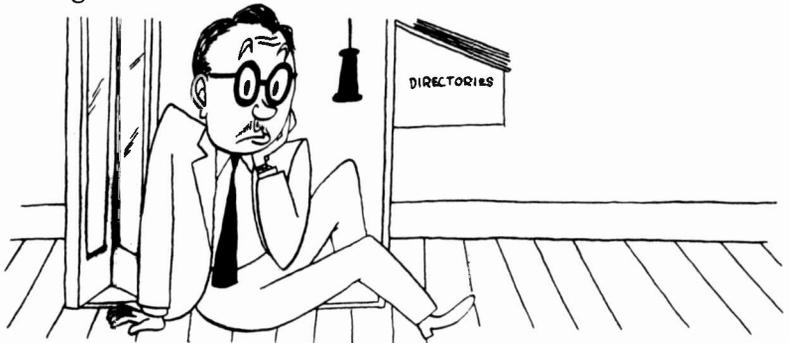
"To tell the truth," said Marty, "I didn't see it because I was tied up in a meeting. But the boys here at the studio say it wasn't bad."

"We got by, I guess," I said modestly.

"Too bad about the transmitter, though."

"The transmitter?" I asked. "What about the transmitter?"

"Oh, didn't they tell you? It conked out here at the studio just before you were supposed to go on the air. We still haven't got it fixed."



Chapter 7

The Viewing Public

THE HOUSE WAS DARK when I went home that night. The house was *always* dark. Ever since we got the television set, which we now affectionately referred to as “the monster,” our lighting bill was infinitesimal. In fact, there are two ways to tell whether a family has a television set. One is the ridiculous antenna perched on the roof. The other is that they apparently go to bed every night at six o’clock. They are not sleeping. They are sitting in the inky blackness of their living room staring at a flickering screen. To bend a phrase coined by Winston Churchill, “The lights are going out all over America.”

But, as I was saying, I stumbled into the pitch blackness of my living room and the first thing that greeted me was a small, strange voice saying, “Get off my foot, you big lug!”

This, of course, is not the way a devoted father, home from a trying day at work, likes to be greeted. I cautiously lighted a match and found my house brimful of a host of little people. There were enough children draped over the chairs, tables and sofas and sprawled on the floor to fill a good-sized orphanage.

“Kill that light!” piped one of them.



“But see here,” I replied, “this is my house and I . . .”

“Duck that match!” they shouted in soprano chorus.

I blew it out. If there’s one thing I don’t like to do, it’s to argue with children. Besides, I read some place that it’s bad for them. Gives them a persecution complex or something. So I picked my way gingerly to the kitchen, where I found Mary preparing a platter lunch for me.

(A “platter lunch” is what people with television sets eat for dinner. Since some of the best programs come on around dinner time and since the traffic gets pretty heavy between the dining room and the living room as the members of the family race back and forth between mouthfuls,

the obvious solution is the platter lunch. Now most TV families eat with their plates balanced on one knee and the coffee safely out of the way under the chair. This can be verified by examining the condition of the living-room rug in any television home.)

"Hi, cute stuff," I said to Mary, kissing her on the back of the neck. "I suppose my son Mark is tangled up some place in that little mass of extroverts."

"Uh-huh," she replied, "they're watching a Wild West movie."

"How is the little fella?" I said. (The question wasn't asked to make conversation. I really wanted to know. I hadn't seen him in the light of day for a week.)

"He's fine," said Mary, "except I couldn't get him to eat his pudding tonight. He really *should* eat his pudding because it has calcium and carbohydrates in it."

Just then an ear-splitting war whoop went up from the living room, mixed in with shouts of "Kill 'em dead, Tex!" "Look out, Tex, he's going for his gun!" and "You winged him, Tex!"

"Well," said Mary, "I see Tex got the fellow who was robbing the Wells Fargo stage."

"Good for him!" I replied.

"I knew it was that man Blackwell right from the very start," she commented.

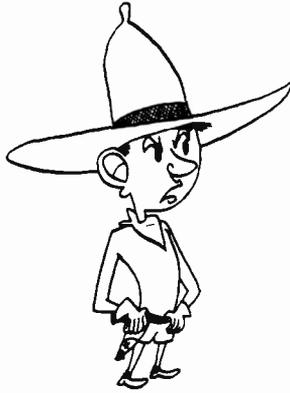
Shortly after that the movie ended, followed by a major stampede as the little moppets dashed home for late suppers. The quiet that followed was deafening. Markie entered the kitchen blinking his eyes in the strange light. It was good to see him again.

"My, how he's grown!" I said.

Mary motioned toward a dish of pudding still sitting on the table.

“Markie,” I said, “how about finishing up your pudding like a good boy? Okay?”

“Ain’t hankerin’ fer no puddin’, podnar,” he said and left the room.



We were alone again. It seemed strange. Ever since we had “the monster” installed, being alone was something of a rarity. Having a television set, one automatically becomes the proprietor of a free theater, free snack bar and public lounge. Nobody in the neighborhood is just a casual acquaintance. They are all *friends*—the “just-thought-I’d-drop-in” variety. People who merely nodded to me on the street before now made it a point to wave cheerily and shout, “Hello, *neighbor!*” They were especially friendly just before big football games, boxing matches and vaudeville reviews.

“We’re alone,” I said to Mary. “Great, huh?”

“Uh-huh.”

"I know what let's do! Let's turn all the lights on in the living room—just like old times! We'll get some nice music on the radio and read a good book. We'll pretend 'the monster' isn't there at all! Maybe we can even play a game of hearts or something! That would be great, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"I've almost forgotten how to play hearts. Do you deal out five cards or seven?"

"I think it's seven but we can't."

"Can't what?" I said.

"Play hearts, honey," she replied.

"Why not?"

"On account of Maxie Mauler."

"What's Maxie Mauler got to do with hearts?"

"He's fighting tonight."

"Okay, let him fight. Why should I get mixed up in it? I'll read about it in the paper tomorrow."

"But, darling," Mary explained patiently, "the Maloneys are coming over tonight. Remember, you invited them last week to see the fight? Well, the Maloneys called yesterday and said the Wardens called *them* and asked if they might come along and I said, 'Sure,' and then the Cornells called the Wardens to ask the Maloneys if they thought we'd mind if they came along with the Wardens and besides, if the Maloneys didn't mind, their neighbors, the Henrys, would also like to see the fight on account of they have no television set and neither of them drink so they couldn't go to a bar, especially with their two children who are minors, of course, and they couldn't get baby-sitters at this late date anyway."

Fortunately, the telephone rang. It was a "neighbor" on the next block.

"Hi-ya, neighbor!" he said. "This is Pete Willis over on Strathmore Road. Now I don't want to put you folks out or anything like that, but if you're watching the fight tonight I wonder if the missus and I could sort of drop around and see it?"

"Sure," I said with as much enthusiasm as I could muster.

"Say, that's swell, neighbor!" he went on. "Oughta be some fight, eh? And by the way, we have some awful nice people next door here—the Schaeffers. You oughta meet them! You'd sure get a bang out of Hank Schaeffer. He's a real card, that guy is! You wouldn't mind if I sort of brought them along, would you? They've got some friends visiting them from Idaho and they've never even *seen* television, and I thought it sure would be a treat for them if they could sort of come along with Hank and Lil. Lil is Hank's wife, you know."

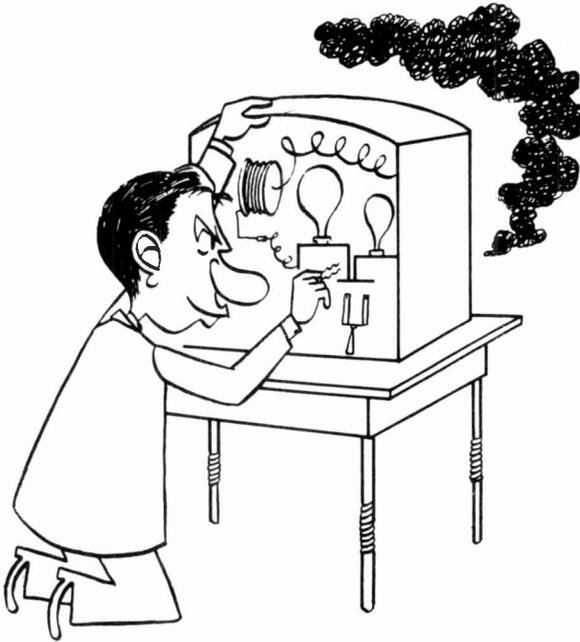
"Sure, sure!" I shouted a little hysterically. "Bring them all along! We'll have a peachy time!"

"Say, that's swell, neighbor!" he shouted back. "You'll sure get a kick out of Hank Schaeffer! That guy's a real card! Well, so long, neighbor!"

Later that night, the beams under our living room groaned with the weight of half the neighborhood population. Besides the Maloneys, the Wardens, the Cornells, the Henrys, the Willises, the Schaeffers, the couple from Idaho and the Henrys two minors, several other people "just thought they'd drop in to say 'hello'" and were "certainly surprised the fight was *tonight*." One couple I never did meet. I still don't know who they were. Neither did anybody else. When I'd ask him his name, he'd say, "Just call me Sandy," and his wife would nod pleasantly. How they got in I'll never know.

It was a representative group. We had at least one typical

example of each of the seven general classifications under which the viewing public falls. Some people belong to only one group. These can be tolerated. Others belong to several. These, Congress should pass laws to prevent or eliminate. It would take an act of Congress to pry them loose from one's television receiver. First, we have:

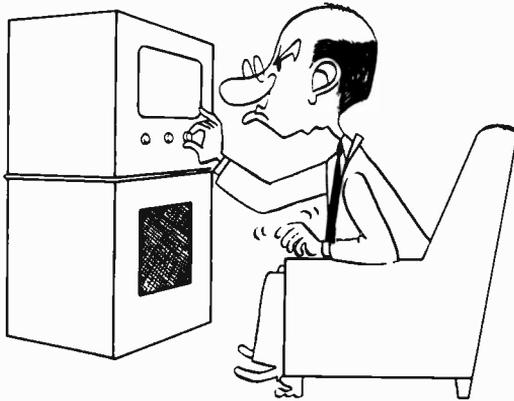


THE AMATEUR ENGINEER

He is the fellow who probably flunked high-school algebra, but nevertheless fancies himself to be a brother-under-the-skin to Mr. Oppenheimer. One can spot him easily by the way he tosses around technical TV terms without regard to their meaning or definition.

As he enters the living room, he generally says, "Well, chum, it's a good thing I dropped over tonight! Your set there seems to be a little out of adjustment. In the first place, you are **OVERSCANNING** the tube, and I think your **HORIZONTAL CENTERING** is a little off on account of the **LINEARITY** not getting enough juice. It isn't serious though. I can fix it in a minute. Lend me a hairpin a minute, honey."

He'll fix it all right. When he gets through, the people on the screen will look like fat midgets and their heads will be floating disconcertingly in space, while their bodies will be walking around as if nothing had happened.



THE STATION SWITCHER

He is the restless type who sits in front of the television receiver with his hand constantly on the automatic station switch. One is watching the climax of a mystery show. Inspector Dix is talking.

"All right now. You've all had your say. The killer made one slip and that slip is going to cost him his life. That person is . . ."

CLICK!

Suddenly, you are watching a grinning master of ceremonies who is saying, "And now, folks, our surprise of the evening! For the first time on television, here is that famous star of stage, screen and radio . . . none other than . . ."

CLICK!

A night baseball game. The announcer is shouting, "Fans, it's all tied up here in the last half of the ninth, Brissie has two strikes on him with two outs and . . . Wow! Look at that line drive out into left field! It looks like . . ."

CLICK!



THE CONVERSATIONALIST

This type is generally a member of the female sex, bless them. One is watching one's favorite comedian who is saying, "That reminds me of the fireman who thought he'd visit his cousin in Peoria, so he . . ."

**THE MOOCHER**

This is the fellow who picks his seat next to the tea table where the refreshments reside, and never leaves it. He is generally full of apologies.

“Say!” he mumbles in the middle of a mouthful, “I sure am ashamed of myself! I guess you folks think I’m a regular pig or something but the fact is I had to work late at the office tonight and I came right over here without any time at all for dinner. Had a light lunch too and believe you me, I certainly was starved. But even if I weren’t hungry, these here little tea sandwiches you make are sure out of this world! I don’t know what you put in them but they sure taste good! I guess you folks think I don’t have any manners at all, but I just can’t resist the eats you folks spread out here! I’m just going to have to call a halt, that’s all! That is, after I sample a small piece of that chocolate layer cake, if you don’t mind . . .”



THE IDEAL VIEWER

They say there is a type of individual called "the ideal viewer." This person always insists on taking a back seat and off to the side and says he can see just fine. When the program is funny, he laughs quietly and sincerely. When it is sad, he chokes back a sob discreetly. He speaks only during station breaks. When offered more sandwiches or another drink, he says, "No, thank you, I've had plenty." He manages somehow to make himself very small when seated in front of somebody else. He always waits to be invited to watch your television set and then he has to be coaxed a little. He comes after dinner is over and leaves early. He says that's the best television receiver he's ever seen and wishes he had one just like it.

They say he really exists.

I wish I knew him.

I remember when "Laughing" Bill Morgan sold me "the monster" he said, "Why, chum, this television set will actually *pay* for itself in one year! You just sit down and figure up all the money you spend on movies and baseball games and other types of entertainment during the year. It mounts up! Now, with this television set you can see all that right in your

own home for free! Fact of the matter is, you can't afford *not* to have a television set in your home!"

I sat down and figured it up all right. In one year, I shelled out \$235 for food and drink, \$149.98 for a new living-room rug, \$35 to replace a lamp one of Markie's friends broke while trying to rescue Tex from a tight spot and \$1.10 in telephone calls to "Laughing" Bill Morgan to come out and fix the set again. That totals \$421.08. When this is added to the initial cost of the set, plus "moderate installation fee," I frankly don't know what it totals. I've never had the nerve to add it up.

Finally, a television receiver in one's home can be dangerous. I remember one morning when we were opening the mail Mary broke the news, "Well, Aunt Sarah is coming here for a little visit next Thursday!"

"Oh, no!" I groaned.

"Now, darling, Aunt Sarah isn't so bad if you'll just make the *effort* to like her."

"A little visit, she says! Last year the old crab apple stayed two months!"

"She *likes* it here," Mary countered, "and besides, she doesn't *mean* to be disagreeable. It's just her way. You really *must* be nice to her."

"I can't lock her out of the house," I said, "but there's no law that says I have to honey up to the old witch. I don't care if she *does* have a thousand shares of GM stock."

I left in something of a huff.

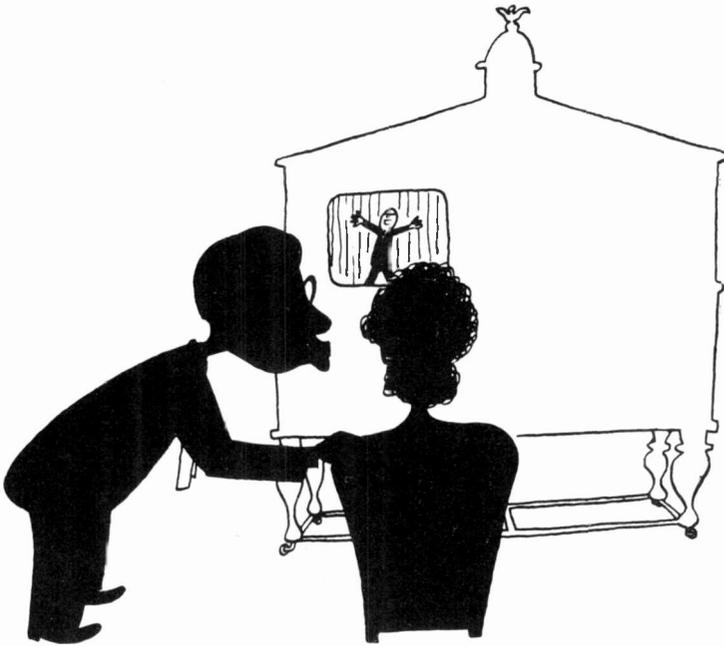
That night when I came home, I was feeling pretty shabby about the way I had acted. I found Mary sitting in the darkened living room silhouetted against the glow of the television set. I leaned down and kissed the back of her

neck tenderly. Then—WHOP! I caught a glancing blow on my left cheek.

“That’s a fine thing!” I said. “Here I was going to apologize for the way I acted this morning and tell you I’d be nice to your old aunt even if I *do* think she’s a witch and you treat me like this. Fine thing!”

I stomped out to the kitchen, and there was Mary preparing three platter lunches.

“Aunt Sarah decided to come early,” she said. “I *do* hope you were nice to her.”



Chapter 8

A Boffo Show with Plenty of Yaks

IT WASN'T ANYTHING they *said* exactly or even anything they *did*. It was just a feeling I got every time I went into Kapp's Kitchen. Kapp's was a little coffee shop behind the radio station where we radio people used to spend some of the most pleasant stolen hours on the company's time. After the Homemaker's House radio show, we'd all gather at the counter to swill down coffee and exaggerate our experiences in radio. Those were great times.

But, for me, all that was gone. I had deserted to the enemy camp—TV. I knew for a fact they called me “little Cecil B.” behind my back. I was no longer a member in good standing of the radio coffee club. They would be laughing and poking each other and spilling their coffee as I entered Kapp's each morning, but when I approached, a morbid pall would fall over the group as if a sponsor had just died. “Hi-ya, fellas!” I would say cheerfully and they would reply, “Oh, hi,” as if I had a good stiff case of a South African skin disease. It got awfully lonesome down there at the far end of the counter. Even Mabel, the waitress, sensed the difference. Every morning she'd put two teaspoons of sugar in my coffee. I'm

not accusing her of anything but she knows darn well I don't like sugar in my coffee.

Radio people, I found, referred to television as "TV"—pronounced with the lips curled in a nasty sneer. In return, television people no longer called radio by its rightful name—"radio." It was now "A-M." (Meaning "Amplitude Modulation," which has something to do with oscilloscope, I think.)



"A-M" was pronounced by television people with the face frozen in a tolerant smile, such as one might wear when speaking of a retarded brother-in-law serving time for drunken and disorderly conduct.

To radio people, television was a squalling baby sister who was getting more attention than she deserved. To television people, radio was a tottering old uncle who had outlived his usefulness and was not long for this world anyway.

Me, I didn't care. How a man earns his living is his own business, so long as it's honest. But the thing that ostracized me completely was the time I tried my hand in *front* of the cameras. I didn't *want* to do it. Like I told Marty, "Why should I make a fool of myself with this master-of-ceremonies

stuff? I'm not the type, and besides, working eighty hours a week as a director doesn't leave me time to eat and sleep, which are two things I used to be fond of doing. Or, to phrase it differently, old man, no sale!"

"I'm surprised you're taking it this way," said Marty, looking crushed. "I thought you were a man with vision."

"I can see through your little schemes, if that's what you mean," I replied.

"Look, Paul," Marty whispered in his confidential, off-the-record voice, "the *real* dough in television is in *front* of the cameras. The 'Mister Bigs' in this business are going to be the performers, not us poor suckers *behind* the cameras. Why I can think of a dozen guys in town who would jump at a chance like this."

"I can't hear you," I said.

"There's a fee in it."

"I can hear you a little better now," I replied. "How much?"

"Ten bucks," said Marty.

"We got cut off again," I replied.

"Well, maybe I can get you fifteen."

"Your voice is still very faint."

Marty came over and sat on the arm of my chair and offered me a cigarette. I didn't like it. Marty was not one to be loose with his cigarettes and I knew he was up to no good.



"Now as I visualize this thing," he said, "you'll be dressed up like a . . ."

"Why don't you hire one of those twelve jack rabbits who want to jump at the chance?" I asked.

"They don't have any *vision*, Paul," he said sadly.

"You mean they won't work that cheap."

Marty threw back his head and let out a Grade "A" sponsor's laugh. (A "sponsor's laugh" in television is a loud burst of noise that passes for a laugh—so called because it is used most often following a joke told by a sponsor.) "Say, that's terrific!" he chuckled. "Like I told the boss, if there's one guy who fractures me it's that man Ritts! You sure have a sensational sense of humor, son! You'd make a great M.C."

"If I said anything funny," I replied, "I wasn't aware of it and I'm sorry."

"Now as I visualize this thing," he said quickly, "you are dressed up like a professor. Get it? We'll call you 'Doctor Quest Chun Mark' or some other cute name like that. You'll be on the stage in a schoolroom setting and the pupils will be contestants we pick right out of the audience. Are you beginning to get the drift?"

"I'm snowed under already."

"Only the questions you ask won't be the regular type, like how many colors are in the American flag. They'll be gagged up, see? They'll be real funny, you know, like . . . uh . . . well, you know, gagged up! What we want is a boffo show with plenty of yaks!"*

"Who's going to write these convulsing questions?" I asked foolishly.

* boffo—(bof'o) adj., terrific, sensational, simply great.
yaks—(yaks) n., laughs, chuckles, jolly snickers.

“Well, that’s another thing,” said Marty. “The boss and I were talking over that very problem just this morning and I said if there’s one guy who really fractures me it’s that guy Ritts, and he agreed right away. I sure gave you a big build-up, buddy boy! And then the boss got the idea that since you’ll be doing the show, you’d be just the guy to write it. That way, the jokes would sort of have your touch, you understand, and you could have more fun with it.”

“What would the writing fee amount to?” I asked just to see how he would squirm out of it.

“Well, that’s why I’m sure I can get you fifteen bucks,” he said without flinching. “You deserve that extra five bucks and I’m going to see you get it or else!”

“Now, don’t go and put yourself out just on my account,” I said.

“Don’t you worry, chum! No one can ever say old Marty didn’t go to bat for his boys!”

That was true, but I never could figure out which team he was playing on because he always struck out.

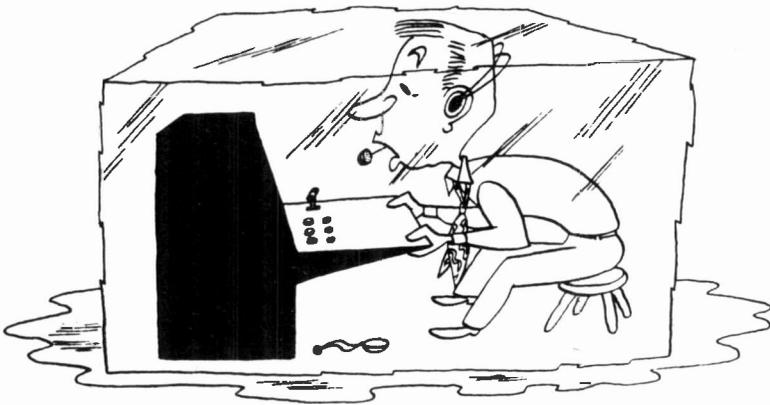
The title for the show they finally settled on was “Kwiz Kollege with Professor Knowledge.” I think even Marty knew it was on the golden bantam side, but the boss’s wife dreamed it up so he was all for it. It seems the boss’s wife first used it as a “stunt” at her Tuesday Afternoon Get-to-Gether Club and everybody thought it was “just too cute and clever” and “how did she ever think of it?”

The show’s sponsor was the Dillie Dairy Company, Maker’s of Dillie Milk—“Babies Bawl for Dillie’s.” They were really very nice about the whole thing after we insisted that the broadcasters’ code didn’t *allow* six commercials in a half-hour show. Just three commercials was fine by them, they finally

agreed, if before each question I said, "This next one, madam, is a dilly—spelled D-I-L-L-I-E!" If the contestant answered the question correctly, I was to say, "Madam, that's absolutely correct and I'll grade you 'A'—just as *all* Dillie's milk is Grade A!" The grand prize was to be ten silver dollars and a year's supply of Dillie's cottage cheese. But, win or lose, each contestant was to receive a bottle of Dillie's buttermilk, which the company was interested in pushing.

Since I was working in front of the cameras, the directing chore fell to a youngster by the name of Rudolph Fleming. He was a nice enough chap and in all fairness to him I must say he tried anyway. Marty found Rudolph at a local dramatic circle called the Mask and Grease-Paint Players. Marty saw one of the shows that Rudolph directed, and he was much impressed because not one of the actors forgot his lines. "The guy's *thorough!*" Marty told me.

Rudolph had just one bad trait though. The minute something went wrong during a television show he was directing, he would freeze at the controls like a pilot whose nerves were shot. Rudolph would just sit there and stare wildly at the monitor and turn different colors, like a chameleon. It was interesting to watch.



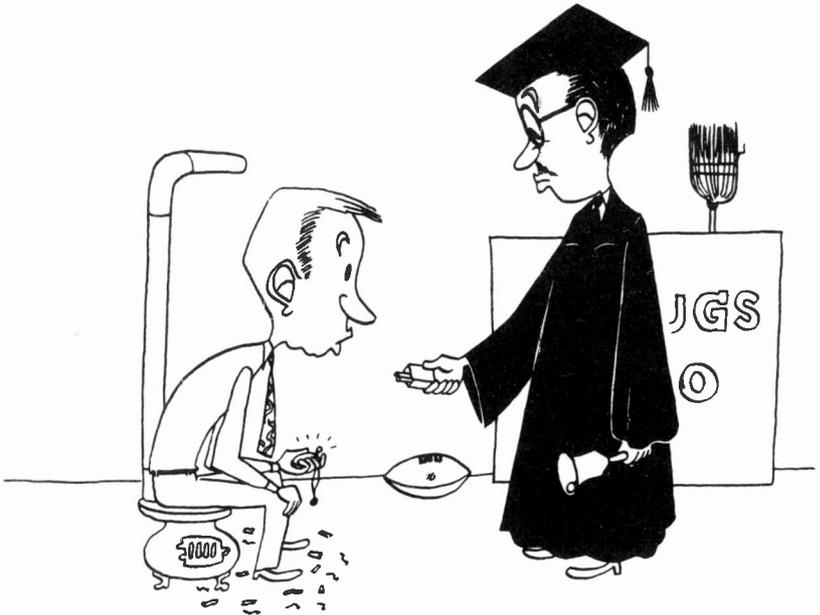
The thing that worried me especially the night of the first show was that "Kwiz Kollege" would be the first program that Rudolph had actually directed on the air. Up to that time he had handled only off-the-air dry-runs. About a half-hour before the show I walked into the control room and said, "Where's Rudolph?"

"He left a half-hour ago, Prof," replied Joe, the crew chief. "Say, you actually look intelligent in that cap and gown get-up."

"Where to?" I said, ignoring the compliment.

"I don't know. One of the boys was telling him about all the things that can go wrong on a television show and he turned chartreuse and left."

It took a long time, but I finally found Rudolph sitting on a fake pot-bellied stove in the prop room. The floor was littered with cigarette butts and used matches. A heavy, blue smog hung in the air. Rudolph wasn't changing color now. His complexion was a steady chalk white. I could see he



needed encouragement, and even though I wasn't feeling exactly chipper about the show myself I did what I could to cheer him up.

"Cigarette?" I said.

Rudolph's trembling hand fumbled in the pack. He finally withdrew one, spilling the rest on the floor.

"Th-thanks," he said.

"Match?"

"Y-yeah."

I remember thinking how strange his voice sounded. High-pitched and boyish. In the faint light of the prop room his face looked young, almost childlike, but there was a drawn look about his eyes that made him seem aged before his time.

"Nerves?" I said.

"Yeah."

"Thought so."

"You too?"

"Yeah."

"But, I thought . . ."

"We all get that way," I muttered, taking a deep drag on my cigarette. "You don't get over it."

For a long time neither of us spoke. The prop room was as quiet as a tomb except for the steady ticking of Rudolph's new stop watch. I remembered that Rudolph had told me his sweetheart gave it to him with something nice engraved on the back.

"How much t-time we got?" he said finally.

"Twenty-two minutes, ten seconds," I replied.

"That's funny," he said with a hollow laugh.

"Funny?"

"Yeah. I thought it was much . . ."

"Later?"

"Yeah. How did you know?"

"It's always like this."

"Yeah?"

"Sure."

Another long silence. I tried to think of something to get his mind off it but nothing came to me. Finally, I blurted out, "I hear the Dodgers won today."

"Yeah?"

"Seven to five."

"Yeah?"

"That's what I hear."

"I never followed sports much," he muttered.

Another long silence. Rudolph's stop watch stopped ticking. It had probably just run down, but I didn't like the sound of it. Finally, I ground out my cigarette slowly, turned to Rudolph and put my hand on his shoulder.

"Well, kid," I smiled. "This is it."

"Yeah," he laughed. "That is it!"

"Don't worry, kid. You'll make it all right."

"It's funny," he laughed again, a little too loudly. "I'm not scared any more."

"Of course you're not scared," I said.

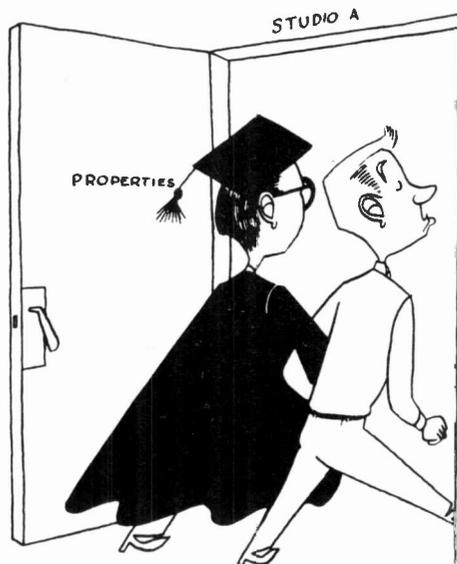
"It's going to be all right!" he laughed. "I'm going to come through this fine!"

"Sure, kid," I said. "Sure you are."

Together, arm in arm, we marched out of the prop room.

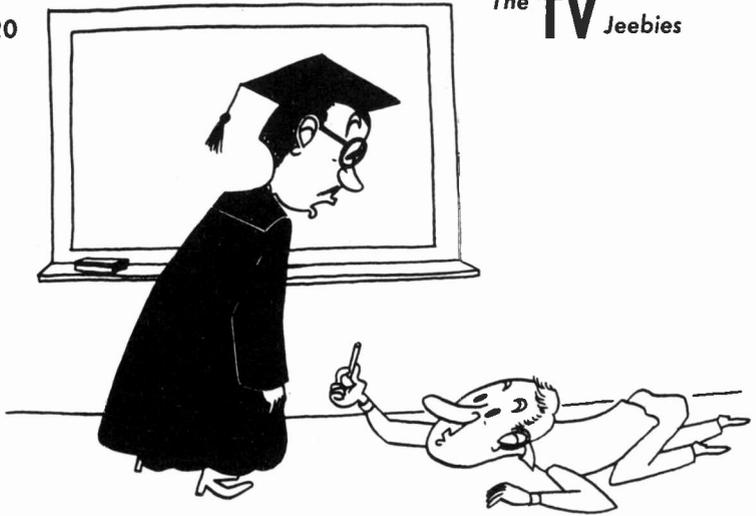
That was the last I saw of Rudolph that night. After the show was over, he couldn't be found anywhere. I don't blame him.

To begin with, the show wasn't rehearsed. It couldn't be.



Since the contestants were picked from the audience, there was no way of telling what they would do. On radio they brag about it. The announcer says proudly, "This show is unrehearsed and entirely spontaneous!" But when it comes to television, the announcer *ought* to say, "This show is entirely unrehearsed and will no doubt look it."

As I said, the stage was made up to look like a classroom with a big blackboard on the back wall, a teacher's desk on a raised platform and a row of pupils' desks for the contestants. In the corner was a dunce's cap and stool for the "pupil" who missed the most questions. During the show the contestant with the highest score was supposed to occupy the front seat, and it would have worked out fine if Mrs. Donald R. Dugan of Wynnewood (a contestant of no mean proportions) hadn't gotten herself stuck in the front seat and couldn't exchange places with Mrs. Walter Spalding Jr. of Somerset Hills when Mrs. Spalding's score exceeded Mrs. Dugan's. It caused no end of ill feeling between the two of them because Mrs. Spalding was *sure* Mrs. Dugan really *could* get up if "she'd just push a little harder" and "be a good sport



them and was stalling for time by pretending to fumble with the chalk. I knew they couldn't have guessed yet that the chalk was missing. Then, above the roar, I heard a hissing sound come floating up from the floor. I glanced down at my feet and there was Ted, the floor man, crawling on his stomach and holding aloft a piece of chalk. I took it, thanked him and he crawled on by.

The show sort of fell to pieces after that.

Later, Ted told me he discovered that the chalk was missing shortly after the show got under way and he figured he could sneak it to me when Rudolph had me on a close-up shot. However, Rudolph got panicky, cut to a long shot and froze on it for the entire "crawling episode." We got a lot of letters from viewers saying the show gave *them* the creeps too.

The next day when I ambled into Kapp's Kitchen, I noticed the radio coffee club didn't even say, "Oh, hi," as usual. They all just "happened" to be looking the other way as I passed.

When the club finally broke up, Fred Buell sort of hung back until the others had left. Fred was the program director of a local radio station I had worked for some years back.

Finally, he walked over to me and laid his hand gently on my shoulder.

“Paul,” he said, “I caught your show last night.”

“Did you, Fred?” I replied. “Sure was nice of you to take the time to look at it.”

“That’s okay, Paul,” he said.

I waited for him to say something more, but he just stood there.

Finally, I said, “Well . . . uh . . . how did you like it?”

“Paul,” he replied with quiet sincerity, “I just want you to know that I’m one guy who’s willing to take you back into radio when you’re ready to come.”

Chapter 9

Sales, Sinks and Last Straws

I DON'T KNOW. Maybe it was because it all happened in one day. Maybe if things had sort of spread themselves out a little, it might have been different. Maybe it was what Fred Buell said the day before. Then again, maybe it was just because it was Tuesday.

The day started out just great. I had forgotten to set the alarm the night before and I would have overslept very nicely if thirty-five pounds of son Mark hadn't landed on my chest solidly with a cheery, "Mornin', Daddy! Let's play horsie!" But I don't blame the kid. He has a right to a little fatherly companionship, and besides I was able to breathe again after fifteen minutes or so. But the thing that irked me was a letter from Laughing Boy Morgan that was propped against my coffee cup at the breakfast table. It said:

Dear Customer:

The following is a statement of parts and service charges made on your television set on April 4:

Kinescope tube.....	\$ 56.30
Installation of tube.....	3.00
Adjustments.....	8.35
	<hr/>
TOTAL	\$ 67.65

Please remit by check or money order.

Bill Morgan

Your Friendly Electric Appliance
Dealer

"Look, happy boy!" I said after I got Morgan on the phone. "There seems to be a small oversight on your part in sending me this ridiculous bill for fixing my television set. You seem to forget that I paid good money for your One Year Owner's Guarantee Policy. That little piece of paper says that *you* pay for parts and service, not me!"

"Well, chum, I'm afraid that you're overlooking one little thing," laughed Mr. Morgan. "According to my records, you bought your set on April *second* of last year and your main kinescope tube blew out on April *fourth* of this year. It's a doggone shame, chum, but your policy is dead."

"Dead?"

"Deader than a mackerel, chum," Mr. Morgan chuckled. "Yep, it's a doggone shame! But, that's life for you, ain't it? You've just got to take things like that psychologically."

When I arrived at the office later that morning, the first thing to greet me on my desk calendar was:

10:00 A.M.	<i>Talent Audition</i>
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Anybody who has ever been told, “Gee, kid, you’ve got talent!” wants to get into television. The type of person who used to dream of running off with the circus or being the main attraction in a traveling vaudeville show is now bent over a talent application blank in television stations across the country. The “talent” files bulge with bird imitators, tumblers, jugglers, blues singers, magicians, cartoonists, impressionists, actors and assorted hoofers. Unfortunately, almost all of them have one thing in common. No talent.

Since one out of a thousand of these hopefuls might have something, talent auditions are necessary. It is also necessary that someone from the station’s staff watch them. As Marty said, “Paul, we all feel that you’re the man for the job because you have a natural sympathy for amateur talent.”

I still don’t know how he meant that.

Anyway, every Tuesday morning at ten o’clock I sat through the worst variety show in history. The engineers didn’t seem to mind it at all, and this puzzled me until I discovered they were sitting there with their earphones turned off.

The most grueling part of the whole thing was the audition “aftermath.” Evidently some of them had read in a movie magazine that all the big stars got where they are by being aggressive. These few weren’t satisfied with, “We’ll keep your application on file and call you if we need your type of act.”

On some clever pretext they'd try to get into my office after the audition to sell their act.

That day I had the most trouble with a female character who answered to the name of Millie. During the audition she did a wiggly tap dance to the accompaniment of the "Hawaiian War Chant." As a dancer she was from hunger, but I must admit in all fairness to her that she was grouped rather well. The boys in the control room made several comments about her as I remember.

Anyway, I was sitting in my office after the audition when I heard a voice coo, "Peekaboo!"

I looked up and there was Millie blinking her false eye-lashes at me.

"Can Millie see the busy, busy director for a teeny, weeny minute?" she gurgled.

"Well . . . I was just leaving and I really . . ."

"Pretty please?" she said, sliding into my office and sitting on my desk.

I'll admit the office was too small for another chair and the desk was the only place to sit but I still didn't like it. Besides, she was wearing a light raincoat over her flimsy dancing costume, and when she crossed her legs the effect was rather startling.

"Silly me made a mistake on my application blank," she said, running her hand through her hair like Bette Davis. "I gave you my *old* address."

I found her application blank and said, "All right, I'll correct it. What is your address?"

"440 North Elm."

"Telephone?"

"Hillside 6587."

Just then a voice said, "Your wife is here to see you, Mr. Ritts."

I looked up and there were the receptionist and Mary looking shocked and indignant respectively. Mary glanced down at Millie's legs and said, "I see dresses are getting shorter again."



Soon after that an office memo from the boss came out saying:

"In order to relieve Mr. Ritts of some of his pressing responsibilities, Mr. Rudolph Fleming will handle talent auditions from now on."

The next item on my calendar was :

11:00 A.M.	<i>Check Cyril on Sink</i>
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Cyril created our sets. I say "created" because that's the word he always used. Even when asked to construct a set

as common as a kitchen, he would half-close his eyes and say, "I'll see what I can create for you." When he first came to the station, we gave him a large workshop next to the boiler room, but he refused to do a lick of work on the sets until he had painted the walls a deep coral and had hung some abstracts. He said he couldn't create unless the mood and atmosphere of the surroundings beckoned the Muse. Some of his stuff was fine, but he needed guidance.

That morning I picked my way through Cyril's cluttered den of inspiration and found him on top of a ladder, slapping paint on a papier-mâché statue for my new musical show that night.

"That looks great, Cyril," I said. "A little sexy though, don't you think?"

"Heavens!" he said. "I didn't think you were a *prude!* Especially after some of the things I've been hearing about you. Why, just this morning . . ."

"Did the sink arrive for the kitchen show next week?" I asked quickly.

"Yes, but I was frightfully disappointed in it."

"Why?"

"The spigot was simply atrocious!"

"Didn't it work?"

"Oh, it worked all right. But the *lines* of it! Whoever designed that spigot was no artist. If I were creating a spigot, its line, mass and form would suggest the flow of water. However, you'll simply fall in love with the set I've created for it."

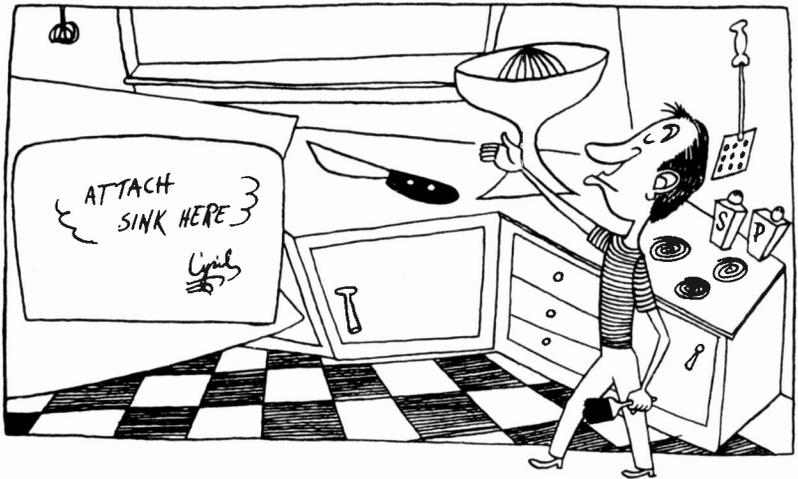
Cyril showed it to me. It might have been a dressing room in the Taj Mahal or even a set for a burlesque show, but it was no kitchen.

"In creating this set," Cyril said in reverent tones, "I tried

to capture the mood and tempo of a kitchen rather than approach it from the conventional point of view. Looking at it, can't you just smell the odor of food being prepared?"

"I smell something," I replied.

"I knew you would!" said Cyril. "You are a true artist!"



12:00 P.M.

Lunch with Dracula

His name wasn't really Dracula, of course. We just called him that around the station because he was a member of that peculiar species who live off other people. His real name was Barney Benson. Mr. Benson was an advertising agent.

If there's anything a television director hates worse than an advertising agent, it's an advertising agent's son. Mr. Benson had one. His name was Herbert. There was nothing wrong with Herbert that a good shellacking and the elimination of his yellow convertible wouldn't fix.

Whenever Mr. Benson was especially displeased with one of his client's shows, he would invite the director to lunch and tear him apart between the soup and the dessert. This was my day.

I met them in the Hunting Room of the Plaza Hotel. Mr. Benson was grinning from ear to ear and I knew I was in for a bad time. His son Herbert sat next to him wearing his perpetual expression of one about to give birth to a silly suggestion.

Right off Mr. Benson insisted I order the special filet mignon. I didn't like it. I felt as if I were being fattened up for the kill. He finally got down to business just as I was applying the Worcester sauce.

"By the way," he chuckled, "my client's show last week was rather interesting I thought."

"Did you really?" I said, walking right into it.

"Yes, I thought it was in a sense a textbook on television. It demonstrated all the things that shouldn't happen on a television show."

"You didn't like it then?" I asked.

"Oh, I wouldn't say I didn't *like* it," he laughed. "It just stunk, that's all. In the first place, the lighting was all wrong, the pacing was slow, the announcer fluffed twice in the commercials, he read them too fast, the camera work was ragged and the picture was fuzzy. In the second place . . ."

Mr. Benson wound up his little critique just as I was dobbing up the last bite of my strawberry shortcake. I hadn't said a word. To an advertising agent a TV director is a self-assured, confident, cocky little guy with the artistic sense of an Australian Fuzzy-Wuzzy.



To himself, a television director is something else again.



"In other words," said Mr. Benson in conclusion, "this week's show had better be right or my client will drop the program. I know your boss is especially anxious to keep this account and for your sake I hope you don't muff it." Mr. Benson laughed and gave me a friendly poke. "You might have to go back to radio, you know."

I laughed good-naturedly and resisted an impulse to poke him back.

"I'll make a point of it to monitor the show this week," said his son Herbert. "I think I can come up with some suggestions that will put a little show biz into it." (Herbert's knowledge of television was limited to a back issue of *Variety* magazine he had once picked up and he liked to throw around an assortment of show business expressions he had gleaned from it. For instance, he had found out that in television one sometimes calls watching a show "monitoring a show." From then on, the word "monitor" took an awful beating.

"Did you see the show last week, Herbert?" I asked.

"Sure, I monitored it!" he said. "The only way an advertising agent can tell whether a show is box office is just get in there and monitor it. Besides, Dad was out of town last week and I had to monitor it for him."

"You mean you didn't actually see the show?" I said, turning to Mr. Benson.

"Well . . . no," he replied. "Like Herb says, I had to be out of town. But I always trust Herb's judgment."

"Funny thing was," said Herbert, "I thought the program was at *seven* o'clock and it wasn't aired till *nine*. I was monitoring the show at the Tropic Bar and I had to nurse along five Martinis before it came on."

At least I knew then why the picture was fuzzy.

2:00 P.M.	<i>Dead Man's Gulch</i>
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Among other things, I had to get Trigger Tex in Dead Man's Gulch that afternoon. That is, I had to make arrangements to rent the film since I was also in charge of film procurement for the station. It was a thankless job.

In the first place, Hollywood strongly suspects that if a person sees Betty Grable's latest picture on his television set, he isn't going to see it all over again at his neighborhood theater. That's sound reasoning. And if he doesn't pay his eighty-five cents at the theater, Betty won't get paid and neither will the five thousand other people who worked on the film. This, naturally, would take all the fun out of filming motion pictures and would make running a movie theater a very lonely business. Therefore, Hollywood is somewhat cagey about letting television stations use their pictures.

The only films "available" are such epics as "Smokin' Pistols" and "I Was a Flapper." At first, the pictures went over great because everybody got a bang out of laughing at the "old-time movies," but when the novelty started to wear off, the calls started to come in.



"What do you think you're running?" they would say to me. "A television station or a nickelodeon? I paid good money for my television set and I didn't buy it to see the kind of stuff you've got on the air. Even *I* don't remember the movie you have on tonight and I've got two grandchildren!"

Even after I explained the economics of the situation, they still weren't satisfied. I remember one who said in parting, "What do you have on next week? 'East Lynn'?"

"No," I replied, "that will be released *two* weeks from tonight."

It was too.

3:00 P.M.	<i>Open House</i>
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A mountain of paper sat on my desk. It stayed there month in and month out. Unlike the mountain they moved to Mahomet, mine never budged. Every afternoon at three I started in on it with good intentions, but I never could whittle it down more than an inch. The rest of the staff soon got wise to the fact that this was the only time I was able to spend in my closet office and they were always laying for me.

Reggie, our salesman, was first in line that day. He had an open, boyish face with pink cheeks and could tell a sponsor a whopping lie with his face wreathed in the angelic smile of a saint. Every show or spot announcement he sold was another Waterloo for the directors and he sold like mad.

That day he came bursting into my office, shouting gleefully, "I sold another spot, Ritts!"

"Oh, joy," I replied.



From four to six that afternoon, according to the program log, we were supposed to rehearse the new musical show called "Rhapsody in Rhythm," our most ambitious television show up to that time, featuring an orchestra, chorus and ballet group. I say "supposed to" because, as it turned out, it wasn't really a rehearsal for the following reasons:

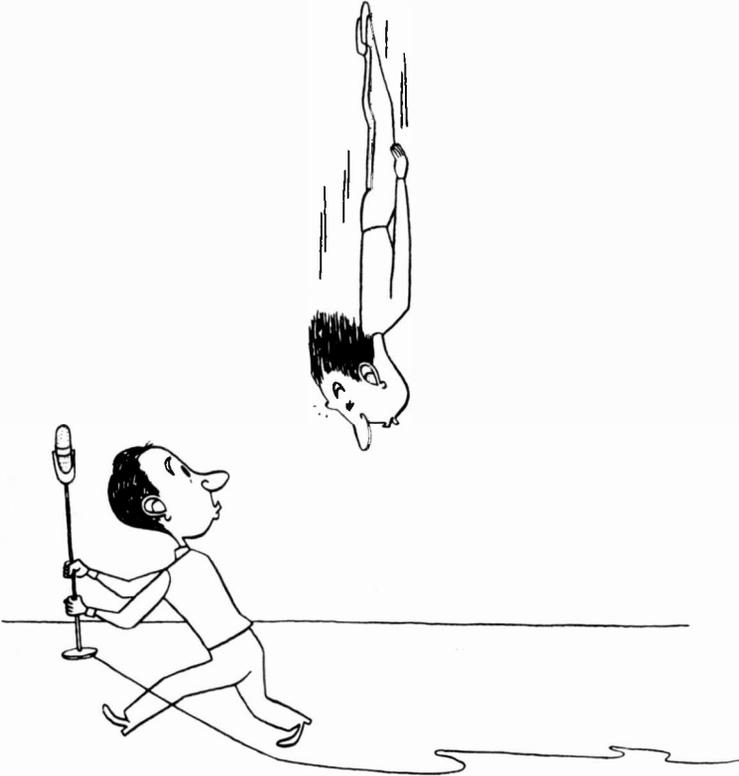
A. First off, camera three died a horrible death on the studio floor, belching a pungent cloud of black smoke. The



engineers said it was an alignment coil that burned out but, personally, I think it wanted to die after all it had seen in its short life.

B. The Hillside College Chorus showed up sixty strong and found they all couldn't get into the studio without leaving the cameras outside. Some nasty comments were muttered as twenty of them were eliminated.

C. One of the members of the ballet group did a practice leap and hit his head on the overhead lights. However, we didn't have room for him anyway.



D. Finally, they found that the piano had dropped a full half-tone overnight because of the air conditioning, which made the orchestra sound like a Hong Kong octet. A piano tuner had to be called in hurriedly to pull it up. By then we had time for only one run-through before going on the air with my daily news, weather and sports shows, followed by Mr. Willoughby's dogs, who were still with us.

I still can't understand it, but somehow in spite of the rehearsal—or rather the lack of it—"Rhapsody in Rhythm" came off great on the air. The cameramen did a superb job, the lighting flattered everybody, the pan and dolly shots were smooth as nylon, and the performers did themselves up brown. After the show everybody said it was wonderful. Even Joe, the crew chief, shook my hand and mumbled, "Maybe there's hope for television after all." Coming from Joe, that was the absolute tops in compliments.

I went down to my office, crumbled into a chair and tried to accumulate enough energy to go home. I sat there thinking that maybe—just maybe—it was all worth it.

Then the telephone jangled. It was the boss.

"Saw Rhapsody, Ritts," he said.

"Glad you caught it, boss," I replied.

"Noticed the THE END title card was a little crooked. Try to watch it after this. Those things are important, you know. Well, good night."

That did it.

I typed a short memo to the boss with a carbon copy for Marty and went home.



Chapter 10

Fade to Black

THE COFFEE FLOWED LIKE WATER at Kapp's Kitchen the next morning. Everybody had at least two cups and Fred Buell had three on account of he thought he had a lot to do with what happened. I guess he did at that. I was not only a member in good standing of the Radio Coffee Club once more, I was a member *cum laude*. My back received so many congratulatory slaps it felt like a masseur had been working on it. Somebody kept shoving a fresh cup of coffee in front of me and Mabel, the waitress, suddenly remembered again that I didn't take sugar in it. There was even a plate of doughnuts set out for me—the chocolate-covered kind.

Like the Prodigal Son returned, a certain amount of rejoicing seemed to be in order. The lost goat had returned to the fold. It felt good to be back.

"Well, Paul, old man," said Fred Buell, giving my back another whack, "where do you go from here? We're auditioning for a new disk jockey at the station next week. I think you might stand a good chance of getting it."

"Fluff Flakes are starting a new soap opera soon," said another. "They're looking for a romantic lead. Good fee too!"



“Well, fellas,” I replied, “I may try to get back into radio and then again, I may write a book.”

We all laughed at that.

“Gee, Mr. Ritts,” said Mabel, “I hope you take up actin’ again. When you played young Dr. Winters, you used to make me cry.”

“Oh, now, he wasn’t *that* bad,” said one of the boys and we all laughed again.

Yes, it sure was good to be back.

When I strolled up my front walk that night, I wasn’t at all sure how things would be at home. I had told Mary about my quitting television that morning and all she said was, “Whatever you want, I want. You know best, honey.”

The only trouble was, she said it twice, as if she were trying to convince herself. The lines were right but the delivery was wrong. Mary never was what one would call a natural-born actress.

That’s why I was a bit surprised when she met me at the door and greeted me like a bride of two weeks.

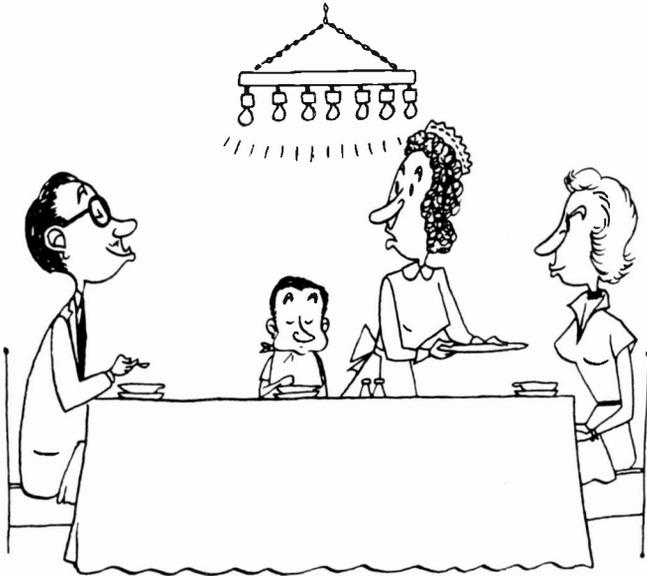
"Boston baked beans, tonight," she said huskily, running her hand through my hair. "Your favorite."

"That's wonderful, chick," I replied in my young Dr. Winters' voice, which she was very fond of, "but you shouldn't have bothered."

"Molasses," she replied, "and brown bread."

The lights were on all over the house, and it seemed strange but wonderful. Not once did I bump my shins that evening. It was quiet too. Mark was with his gang across the street at Jim's house. I had sold my television set to Jim that morning for half price. He thought he had gotten a bargain since the main tube was brand-new, but I never let him know I would have sold it for much less than *that* if he had haggled over the price a little.

The Boston baked beans tasted especially good that night. To tell the truth, it was probably because I ate them sitting at my own dining-room table with the lights turned on. As



Pearl, our cook, said, "I reckon I'll have to start fussin' from now on if you folks are goin' to be *lookin'* at my cookin' again."

Dinner over, I carried in some wood from the garage and lighted a fire in the fireplace. It really wasn't cold enough for a fire, but it had been over a year since I had enjoyed one on account of the television set. The fire caused reflections in the screen.

That done, I peered out the window at Jim's house across the street. It was as black as a bank on Sunday night. A whole fleet of cars was parked on his driveway, his lawn and the street. Then I remembered there was another championship fight that night. I grinned wickedly in spite of myself. I never liked Jim much since the time he borrowed my lawn mower and broke the blade and never offered to fix it.

Then I slumped into my easy-chair, which had learned after years of training to fit my particular anatomy, slipped off my shoes and lighted my favorite pipe, which I had picked up at a sale for only a dollar. I found an unsponsored program of recorded music on the radio and turned it down low. Our dog, Scamp, lay at my feet and sniffled in his sleep. It was the first time Scamp had been in the living room for months. He had gotten into the habit of sleeping in the cellar because he had been stepped on so often in the dark when the television set was with us. It was good to have him back.

I had just turned to chapter one of a book I had been intending to read for almost two years when Mary came into the room. She sat on the arm of my chair and ran her hand through my hair again.

"Comfy?" she cooed.

"Ummmm," I replied.

"That's good," she said, and added, "Oh, my goodness!"

"Oh my goodness what?" I asked.

"I forgot to give it to you!"

"That's a serious oversight," I replied. "What are you talking about?"

"The telegram!" she said, taking it off the mantel. "I opened it because I thought it might be important. But . . . it wasn't. Not . . . really."

I didn't like the way she was delivering her lines again.

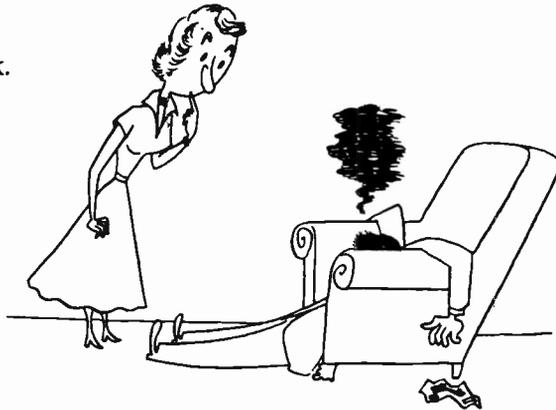
The telegram was from Bob Fielding, an old radio friend of mine whom I hadn't seen in years. It said:

HEARD YOU QUIT WKBK-TV. AM GETTING NBS NETWORK TELEVISION STATION ON AIR SOON HERE IN HOLLYWOOD. NEED EXPERIENCED TV DIRECTOR BADLY. BRILLIANT FUTURE. HOLLYWOOD SOON TO BE TV MECCA. CALL ME COLLECT AT ONCE.

BOB FIELDING

When I had finished reading it, Mary said, "Now, darling, I know how you feel about television and I just want you to understand one thing as far as I'm concerned. It's *your* decision."

Fade to black.

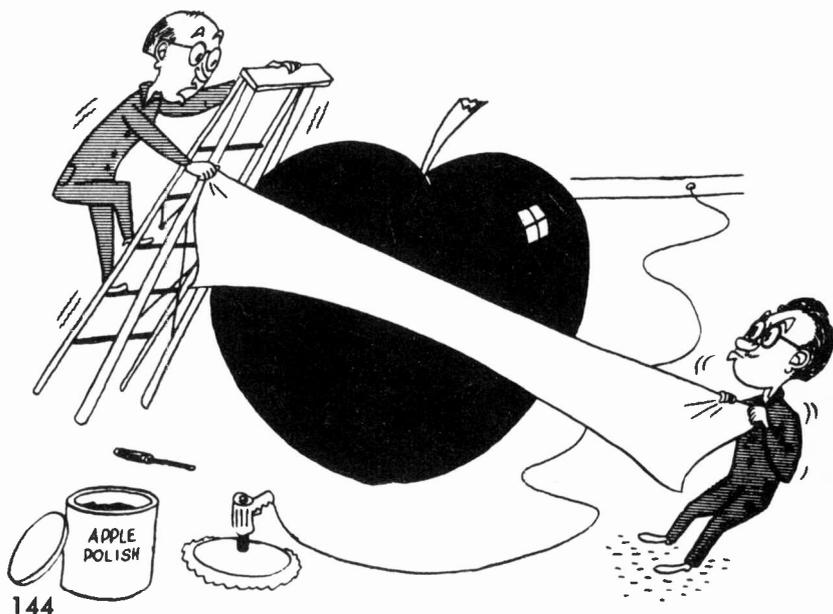


A Happy Ending

For those readers who prefer a happy ending to this tragic autobiography, may I report that I have at last found a cozy spot as executive producer-director at WCAU-TV in Philadelphia. (*I did* go to Hollywood and lasted six months. Remind me to tell you about it sometime.)

My boss is a fellow by the name of Charles Vanda, and my boss's boss is Donald W. Thornburgh. In spite of the fact that they are both brilliant radio and television executives, they bear close resemblances to human beings—an unceasing source of amazement to me.

And if anybody thinks I am saying these things in print just to get a raise . . . well . . . I'm nobody's fool.



A Glossary of TV Terms

(NOTE: A careful study of this glossary will make you an expert on television techniques. With this new-found knowledge, you will be able to add immeasurably to TV parties by explaining how the shows are put on while the programs are in progress. Do not mind those stony stares your friends may give you. They are just jealous!)

- PRODUCER** An idea man with one or more fall guys working for him.
- DIRECTOR** A fall guy.
- ASSISTANT DIRECTOR** A director's fall guy.
- FLOOR MAN** An assistant director's fall guy.
- TALENT** A catch-all name given to people who appear in front of the cameras. Not to be confused with its usual definition.
- SPONSOR** A man who believes in television and is willing to spend money to see that it gets ahead. He generally doesn't mind too much if you interrupt his commercials to throw in a little entertainment.
- NETWORK** More often called "net." A group of individual television stations banded together in a conspiracy to catch fish—the green, folding kind.
- NETWORK SHOW** A program broadcast over a network of stations. Network performers gen-

erally do not speak to local performers. They may, however, nod to one another in the elevator.

SUSTAINER

This is a misnomer. There is nothing at all sustaining about it — especially to the performers. A “sustainer” is a program without a sponsor.

POTENTIALLY NETWORK SHOW

A local, sustaining show that is not doing too well.

FILM PRESENTATION

A motion picture that even Hollywood thinks is something less than colossal.

SPOT ANNOUNCEMENT

A 10, 20 or 60 second announcement a sponsor gets on the air without furnishing a program to go with it. These parasites were spawned in radio, inhabit station breaks and feed off the gullible viewing public.

AUDITION

A program the viewing public is spared. It is put on for one man only —the potential sponsor.

POTENTIAL SPONSOR

Any businessman with vision, imagination, foresight and lots of dough.

AD LIB

From an old Latin expression, meaning—“We didn’t have time to put any thought into this show, so we are just going to get out in front of those cameras and be real casual and sincere and entertaining as all-get-out!”

TURKEY

A show that has just laid a very large egg. Generally of the ad-lib type just mentioned. However, sometimes a great deal of time, effort and money is put into a show that hatches out a "turkey." In this case, the fault lies with the performers (according to the director), or the director (according to the producer), or the producer (according to the performers).

RATING

Every show on television has a rating which indicates the number of people watching the program. Statisticians arrive at this "rating" by calling a few dozen people and asking them point-blank what show they are watching and then multiplying or dividing that figure by a mysterious number. It is all very scientific. The process is similar to the one used in predicting the presidential election results of 1948.

SYSTEM CUE

This is the slide that comes at the end of a network show identifying which broadcasting system was responsible for it. (The law says they have to.) It is also the cue for everyone on the show to let down. Sometimes the girls in the cast cry a little. Sometimes the audience does too.

KINESCOPE RECORDING

A film recording of a television show. The results vary from fuzzy to indistinguishable, accounting for the sudden boom in the optical supplies game.

SUPERIMPOSITION

To sound more professional, call it a "superimp." This is a simple TV trick accomplished by turning on two or more cameras at the same time. The effect is seeing two or more pictures on the screen at the same time, one over the other. Young directors consider this to be the height of artistic achievement. "Did you catch my show last night?" they will say. "I had Mabel's face superimped over a picture of the Taj Mahal as she was singing 'Song of India.' It was so beautiful I could have cried!"

MONITOR

A special television set that shows the performer what he looks like while on the air. This will explain those sly, admiring glances to the side which you have no doubt noticed.

TURRET

A revolving gizmo on the front of the TV camera with four lenses mounted in it for close-ups, medium shots and wide ones. There is a 50 millimeter lens, sometimes called a "two inch"; a 90 millimeter, called a "four inch lens," which it really isn't; a 135 millimeter, often referred to as a "six incher," though it isn't that long; an 8 inch lens which is really 8½ inches; and sometimes a 13 inch lens that . . . Oh, well. Skip it.

VIEW FINDER

Another gizmo on the *back* of a camera that shows the cameraman what

he is shooting. He sometimes looks into it if the show gets interesting.

TALLY LIGHTS

Little red lights mounted on the cameras to show the performer which camera is on the air at any particular time. Now you know what makes their necks swivel like that!

IMAGE ORTHICON

The main tube in a television camera on which the picture is focused. They cost in the neighborhood of \$1,300. If a technician drops one, he merely puts on his hat and walks quietly through the nearest exit.

BURN IN

If a camera is left focused on a title card for too long a time, the letters "burn" into the face of the image orthicon tube. The letters will then appear on anything the camera shoots for the next few minutes. This can make for some interesting effects, such as the time the words "The World's Greatest Ham" were plastered over the face of a famous comedian.

CUE CARDS

A sneaky device to aid performers with poor memories. Usually, they are huge cards with the entire script of the show written in inch-high letters and held by a floor man standing next to the camera. Some performers are even sneakier, and write the script on the back of fans, on shirt cuffs and in the palm of the hand. The system was

developed by a young genius in New York who was expelled from P. S. 48 for some reason or other. It just goes to prove that education isn't everything.

PLUG

An unpaid-for mention of a product by a performer. That is, the station doesn't get paid but the performer receives a case of the stuff in the next mail.

ON THE NOSE

A program that runs neither too long nor too short. This is a source of great pride among directors. Ask one of them how his show went and he will usually reply, "Great, man! Simply great! We got off the air right, smack-dab *on the nose!*"

PUBLIC SERVICE PROGRAM

A program put on the air in the public interest at the station's expense with little or no hope for sponsoring it. There are precious few of these but they are notable—the United Nations meetings of the Security Council, special sessions of the Congress of the United States, Congressional Committee hearings of unusual importance or interest, national political conventions and a few others.

Few though they may be, they make the miracle of television a miracle indeed and somehow worth it all.