

Rappaccini's Daughter
The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg
Bartleby the Scrivener
A Christmas Carol
Then Again!
theBOX

RADIO CLASSICS

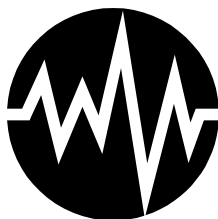


Six radio plays written and adapted by
JOE DORAN

High

Window

Media



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The Taconic Weekend

About the Author



JOE DORAN is a noted writer, musician and actor. His plays have aired on Western Public Radio and on the Armed Forces Radio Network in Europe, and have been

performed by theatre groups across the country.

Joe has worked with Pulitzer and Tony Award winning playwright/screenwriters Frank D. Gilroy (*The Subject Was Roses*) and David Rabe (*Hurlyburly*, *The Firm*, *Streamers*). He directed a production of Mr. Rabe's unpublished play *Cosmologies* at the Julien J. Studley Theatre in New Paltz, NY.

Joe produced and directed staged readings for the 1996 and 1997 Hudson Valley Film Festivals, featuring Dennis Farina, Charles Durning, Joanna Kerns, Dan Lauria and other actors. A 1991 Vassar College Powerhouse alumnus, where he studied with Jon Robin Baitz, Joe went on to co-found two highly regarded theatre companies, High Window and Passionplace.

More recently, Joe has recorded a CD of original songs, *This Wind Does Not Leave Anything*. His explorations on guitar have also produced original concepts detailed in his instruction book, *The SeeDEGA Method*.

Joe lives in Rhinebeck, NY with his partner Amy Byrne, and their children, Strachan and Maeve. He also has two other beautiful children, Hailey and Kane Doran.

RADIO CLASSICS

*SIX RADIO PLAYS
WRITTEN AND ADAPTED*

BY

JOE DORAN

High

Window

Media



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For Father Michael Dibble

Acknowledgements

More than once, I've found myself backstage before the final performance of a show, staring at a gelled light, fighting disorientation and sadness. Having just spent a good deal of energy contributing to and investing in the reality of a play, accepting that it would all be gone when the lights went to black could itself turn into a bit of a trick.

More difficult is accepting that people move on. One of the reasons I've enjoyed writing and producing these radio plays, is that it allowed me to work with a great group of people. I want to especially thank Brett Owen, Amy Byrne, Renee DePietro, Victor Small, Debbie and Anthony Puccio, Christa O'Neill, Anthony Sucato, Steven Brinckerhoff, Sergio Levitas, Andy Champ-Doran, and J.P. Ferraro, owner of "the Best Station in the Nation", WHVW 950 AM (Hyde Park, NY).

I also want to thank my mother, Johanna Traina, for always valuing creativity, Sydna Byrne, for co-adapting *Bartleby*, and Monica Sullivan at Shoestring Radio Theatre, for producing several of my plays via Western Public Radio.



High Window members (L to R): Reed Buderis, Anthony Sucato, Anthony Puccio (kneeling), Christa O'Neill, Brett Owen, Debbie Puccio, Stephen Brinckerhoff, Joe Doran, Amy Byrne (front), Renee DePietro and JP Ferraro (WHVW owner).

Introduction

From the late 1960's into the '90's, there was a special place at Our Lady Of Lourdes High School in Poughkeepsie, New York. The room was known simply by its number, G03. The place was special because of the man who taught there, Father Michael Dibble.

An English teacher on heart medication, thinly built, with wet-sand colored hair, Father Dibble's personal manner was unassuming, to say the least. He presided over the Drama Club. But there was nothing at all dramatic or theatrical about the man himself. His manner was mild. Not that he was overly serious—far from it. He laughed often, and one of his characteristic expressions was an almost impish grin (with eyes just a bit too sparkling wise to belong to an imp). But his humor, like so much else, was understated. Not requiring setups, or punch lines. Neither caustic nor nostalgic, but in the way of wry observation. Father Dibble in any way a character? No. That would be Father Corrigan, destined to be principle. A former Korean vet, his anecdotes had salt and pizzazz, and the cigar he liked to chomp on was a helluva prop...

Father Dibble could be pretty demonstrative with a piece of chalk. He'd sketch a lantern-jawed hero or curvy damsel to lighten the portent of some doomed 19th-century love ballad to teenagers in the throes of doomed crushes. The artistic talent he picked up from his father, a comic strip illustrator of the 1920's, of whom he was quite proud. But even here, in his classroom, Father Dibble was not inclined to "strut upon the stage". Yes, he did a bit of shtick sometimes. And he certainly had presence. But ultimately, it was on the level of being a wise presence, instructing in marvelous ways, with salient insights and a warm sensibility.

At the time I came to know him, in the late '70's, Father Dibble was in the habit setting his alarm for 3 a.m. to catch a double re-run of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* on channel 4.

As much as anything, except possibly the fact that he was a priest, this defined the man in my eyes. Mary had warmth and class. Girl-next-door, but regal somehow...not classically beautiful, but in a class by herself. Perfect for Father Dibble. Except—he was a priest. Heck. I set *my* alarm to three a.m. to watch Mary (though probably up to 25-percent of my motivation was laugh at Ted). Even factoring in Ted, it was pretty odd for a fifteen-year-old. Our mutual habit informed my own take on, or understanding of, or affinity for Father Dibble. I felt a little sad thinking he'd never get to be with someone like Mary Tyler Moore. There was even an episode where she dated a man of the cloth re-considering his calling. How tough must that have been to watch? Meanwhile, being only fifteen, I might well expect that I'd have plenty of chances to land a girl like Mary, at some point in my life. But no. In my own way, I felt as forlorn as I imagined Father Dibble did between 3 and 4 every morning. Because for my part, I didn't want someone *like* Mary. I had a thing specifically for *her*...

In the same way it was hard to reconcile Father Dibble as an authentic, wise and unassuming man, with his position heading a group of brash pretenders ill at ease in their own skins, it was hard to mesh his personal style of simplicity and lack of fashion with the eclectic artifacts in G03. A former lab/lecture room from its public school days, the room contained plenty of space to situate, pile and hang things. Objects ebbed and flowed. At high tide, the place looked like attic, crowded with old furniture, area rugs, clothes, books, framed prints, kitchenware, etc. Inevitably, even Father Dibble would grow a bit alarmed and muster a “clean-up”—basically a re-arrangement of old furniture, area rugs, clothes, books, framed prints, kitchenware, etc.

There were several classes of objects. Things left over from plays staged there. Things of doubtful theatrical value, left behind by students who'd passed through, but kept, since anything theoretically might be of use in some future production. Legitimate teaching related items and books.

These included a free-standing chalk board (which, draped, frequently served as a flat) and a lectern. A claw-legged, walnut teaching desk Father Dibble used was more imposing than one might imagine him wanting. But he looked comfortable enough sitting at it, with his reading glasses on, eating a forbidden cheeseburger during lunch period.

There were other objects, outside the categories mentioned, which reflected something of the man who presided. Tomes by Sartre and O'Neill, *Waiting For Godot*—all lurking in a space where Neil Simon productions were almost perpetually in rehearsal. *The ScrewTape Letters* and *Mere Christianity*—works of Christian, but not officially Catholic apologetics. Quite a few art prints. Dali's sagging clocks and futuristically crucified Christ. *Christina's World*. Empty-feeling Edward Hopper images.

One of the most unsettling pictures was a "portrait" of several smiling clowns that looked sadder and more disturbing every time you looked at it. No doubt about it: there was a melancholy side to Father Dibble. Despite almost never having a moment alone, he could seem lonely. I don't remember anything maudlin about it, even factoring in his own admission that one of his favorite songs was "Send in the Clowns"...

That title was appropriate enough, I suppose, when my best friend Eddie McLoughlin pulled me into G03 one day during freshman year to try out for Drama Club. I stuck around because of the pretty girls. But I ended up loving theatre and appreciating the arts (not to mention fearing God and sustaining hope for humanity) because of Father Dibble.

The club at OLL in those days was integrated into the curriculum of all the English classes taught at the school. Plays weren't performed just once or twice. Each grade level had four classes. With extra chairs set-up, two classes worth of students could fit into G03. So we'd end up performing an act or the first half of a play to eight different groups of students. Several weeks later, we'd follow up with the rest of the play. This was certainly more intensive than most drama

clubs at non-arts specialized high schools. And there were few of those, anyway, in the 1970's.

Father Dibble mostly directed the plays, wearing his reading spectacles so he could jot down notes. His style was spare, rational, and always in service of the work being presented. I learned a lot about the craft from those notes.

And of course, there were the plays themselves. *The Odd Couple* and *Come Blow Your Horn* and *Barefoot*, which were a lot of fun—but Moliere and Kaufman as well. And scenes from Shakespeare and Sophocles and Shaw. Plays by Williams (with some slight editing), and even Albee.

There was a copy of Grotowski laying around the G03 “dressing room”—a little side room with the requisite musty sofa, cracked mirror and smelly costume rack—but I'm not sure I ever opened it. I *did* soak in Father Dibble's attention to the essentials of theatre. Not props, not sets, and definitely not egos. After landing leads in *Simon*, I figured I was a shoe-in for *Scapin the Scamp*. Instead I got cast as his pompous master Geronte. In one scene, Scapin offers to hide Geronte in a sack to escape assailants, then pretends to be various assailants kicking his master's backside. I learned more with that role, than with larger ones I had.

Father Dibble was a giving man. He obviously gave a huge amount of his time to teaching, to the drama club, and even Adult Ed Film classes. He used to write reviews for a Catholic weekly in the 60's, and he was quite a movie buff. One of my favorite memories is going with Eddie to NYC to visit Father Dibble (he often stayed weekends at Cathedral Prep) and taking in a late night double bill of Charlie Chan and *A Night At The Opera*. I remember he did a class that featured Hitchcock movies, and being a technophobe, he was very grateful to me for coming in a couple nights a month to thread and run the projector.

Incredibly, his work as a teacher was not even the primary way he was known in much of his community. That came with the baptisms and weddings and funerals, the daily masses, and—not a little—as a result of the masterful Sunday

sermons he delivered at Saint Mary's Church in Poughkeepsie. Sermons are one of the least important components of the Catholic Mass. But Father Dibble, after reading scripture from the New Testament, without artifice of any kind, provided a ready bridge to the light of the Word of the Lord. Father Dibble was a friend and mentor to Bill C. Davis, an OLL graduate who had a great success with his play *Mass Appeal* around this time. Some people speculated that Bill in some part based the "showman" priest in the play on Father Dibble. Not even remotely. Father Dibble wasn't a subject of the work—he was a guiding influence in the creation of it.

In one way or another, Father Dibble supported and bolstered the spirits of most everyone he came into contact with. And, to this day, I think his toughest assignment was dealing with the endless tribulations of teenagers. He worried about us the same way he used to worry as a kid about his younger brother hanging out with that wild friend of his, George Carlin. In my later time at Lourdes, when I was given over to carousing with buddies and engaging in stupid acts of local mayhem, I'm certain he personally interceded so that I wasn't thrown out of school. He cared about me; he cared about people. Specifically cared about them. And to them he ministered different gifts of himself, depending on what (to paraphrase one of his favorite writers, C. S. Lewis) was needed for the arc of their souls, to rise finally in life, rather than fall. And that, in the end, is why so many people remember him well, and in so many different ways.

I'm sure Michael Dibble would not say these gifts were of himself, ultimately. That being the case, he was a finely wrought vessel of the Good. He imparted a gentle wisdom still in my memory. I have turned to it in my own better moments ever since knowing him, and it is to him I dedicate these adaptations and plays.

Joe Doran, June 2006

Rappaccini's Daughter

A radio play adaptation of

the short story by

Nathaniel Hawthorne

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by

Joe Doran

Produced by High Window RadioClassics Theatre. Presented on October 27th, 2001, at Barnes&Noble, Poughkeepsie, NY. Broadcast on WHVW 950 AM (Hyde Park, NY).

CAST

Giovanni Guasconti Anthony Sucato
Baglioni Brett Owen
Beatrice Lisa Tassone
Dame Lisabetta Renee DePietro
Rappaccini Anthony Puccio

(A radio station; intro music.)

BAGLIONI. His name was Giovanni Guasconti. He was the son of an ancient friend...

(Sound of a broom sweeping stones.)

DAME LISABETTA. You. Away from the building entry! There's no loitering here.

GIOVANNI. Wha? No, I beg your pardon, Signora, I wasn't loitering...

DAME LISABETTA. You were snoozing. Too much vino last night? Well, you couldn't convince a bar maid to take you in, you won't convince Dame Lisabetta! I am responsible for these premises! Which have not yet sunk so low as to accommodate street bums!

GIOVANNI. Signora, I'm not a street... I was only in a reverie just now, studying that fine Coat of Arms above your door there.

DAME LISABETTA. Hmmpfh! Well this was once the home of a Paduan Noble!

GIOVANNI. No doubt. I recollect an ancestor of that family was worthy of mention by our great poet Dante in his masterwork.

DAME LISABETTA. Is that so?

GIOVANNI. Perhaps the man was once an occupant of this very mansion.

DAME LISABETTA. Well. I can see you'd be in a bar maid's bed, if that was your object.

GIOVANNI. Actually, I wouldn't mind staying awhile in this fine edifice, Signora...if there were a suitable room.

DAME LISABETTA. And what would be suitable for you?

GIOVANNI. I confess I don't have a pocketful of gold ducats. I'm a student. From the south.

DAME LISABETTA. The south, eh? *(beat)* There's a room. I suppose you'll tell me this...ancestor...was described with the poet's Lady, in Heaven?

GIOVANNI. No. I'm afraid he was a partaker of immortal agonies in...the other place.

BAGLIONI. A cunning boy, Giovanni. But not insincere. He was endeavoring to study at the University of Padua, where I taught medicine. But the room he took in that old mansion held other interests...

(Door opening. Dame Lisabetta humming.)

DAME LISABETTA. Oh! Good afternoon, Signor Guasconti. I didn't see you by the window there! I thought I'd freshen your room while you were at classes.

GIOVANNI. The garden down there is amazing. Does it belong to the house, Dame Lisabetta?

DAME LISABETTA. Heaven forbid! Unless it were fruitful of better pot herbs than grow there now. No, that garden is cultivated by Giacomo Rappaccini, the famous doctor.

(Bed sheet shaking out, pillow being plumped, etc.)

GIOVANNI. I've heard of him. I think.

DAME LISABETTA. It's said he distils those plants into

medicines that are as potent as a charm.

GIOVANNI. I was watching him just now. Doesn't look like an ordinary gardener.

DAME LISABETTA. No.

GIOVANNI. In his scholar's garb, black among all the colors... That one shrub there. With the purple blossoms. Do you notice it? Every other plant seems to be situated around it. It's magnificent.

DAME LISABETTA. Hmm. *(beat)* I thought, when I came in, that you were spying at his daughter.

GIOVANNI. Dr. Rappaccini has a daughter?

DAME LISABETTA. Oh yes. Good afternoon, Signor. *(Door closing.)*

GIOVANNI. *(to himself:)* Hmm. The doctor's garden must have been quite a pleasure-place. That ruin of a marble fountain in the center there...it's sculptured with rare art. And that purple bush! It could light the whole garden without sunshine... *(beat)* Wait! There he is again! The Signor! Tending paradise, with his thick gloves.

(Scissors snipping leaves.)

GIOVANNI (CONT'D). Ah! Now he comes to the magnificent plant next to the fountain. *(beat)* Why is he taking out a mask to cover his—

RAPPACCINI. Beatrice! *(coughs)* Beatrice!

BEATRICE. Yes father?

RAPPACCINI. Come out here!

GIOVANNI. Holy Virgin...

BEATRICE. Here I am, father. What would you?

RAPPACCINI. Beatrice, you see how much needs to be done to our chief treasure, here. But I can no longer approach it. I fear this plant must be consigned to your sole charge.

BEATRICE. And gladly will I undertake it. I will nurse you, my sister, and thou shalt reward Beatrice with your perfumed breath...the breath of life...

GIOVANNI. Rappaccini's daughter! She's as beautiful as the very garden of paradise...

(Window shutter flapping.)

GIOVANNI (CONT'D). Damned window shutter!

RAPPACCINI. Beatrice?

BEATRICE. What, father?

RAPPACCINI. Come. Time to go in.

BEATRICE. What's the matter?

GIOVANNI. He has her by the arm. Why is he taking her away? Did he see me? *(beat)* It appears the Doctor is very protective of his flowers...

BAGLIONI. Soon enough Giovanni came to University to pay his respects to me...

GIOVANNI. Doctor Baglioni? I come with a letter of introduction from your ancient friend, my father.

BAGLIONI. The young signor's interest soon turned to my "famous" colleague, Rappaccini. But. The boy brought Tuscan wine, and soon enough I was talking...saying such as might even have inadvertently encouraged his interest. *(to GIOVANNI:)* Rappaccini is a man who would sacrifice anything for the sake of adding so much as a grain of mustard seed to the great heap of his accumulated knowledge.

GIOVANNI. An awful trait, yes. *(beat)* Though I suppose few others are capable of so...spiritual a love of science.

BAGLIONI. God forbid. Unless they take sounder views of the healing art. His theory...is that all medicinal virtues are comprised within those substances which we term vegetable poisons. These he cultivates with his own hands.

GIOVANNI. That explains the gloves.

BAGLIONI. He is said to have produced poisons worse than Nature, that without him, would never have existed.

GIOVANNI. Has he ever caused any harm?

BAGLIONI. That the signor doctor does less mischief than he otherwise might with such dangerous substances is...undeniable.

GIOVANNI. Has he done any good?

BAGLIONI. Good!?

GIOVANNI. More wine from the flask, Signor?

BAGLIONI. Thank you.

(Sound of wine pouring, etc.)

BAGLIONI. Now and then it must be owned, Rappaccini has effected, or seemed to effect, a marvelous cure of some ailment or other. But to tell you my private mind, Signor Giovanni, he should receive little credit for such successes, but should be held strictly accountable for his failures, which may justly be considered his own work!

GIOVANNI. Hmm. But surely, Signor Baglioni, there is one object more dear to Doctor Rappaccini than his art.

BAGLIONI. And what would that be?

GIOVANNI. His daughter.

BAGLIONI. Ahh! So you've heard of this daughter of Signor Rappaccini. *(beat)* Many have.

GIOVANNI. She's an incomparable beauty.

BAGLIONI. You've seen her with your own eyes?

GIOVANNI. Yes.

BAGLIONI. There are far fewer who can claim that. *(beat)* As I had nothing more to offer on the subject of the lady, my meeting with the young signor was ended. I'm sure now that he supposed I was merely jealous of my rival. *(beat)* Who knows? He may even have done some research into certain black-letter tracts preserved in the medical department of the University of Padua, detailing the professional warfare between us...in which it was estimated, that the famous Doctor Rappaccini had gained the advantage.

(Transition music.)

BAGLIONI (CONT'D). Many things diminish on second look. But from the shadow of his window, Giovanni Guasconti could attest that Signor Rappaccini's daughter was not such a case...

BEATRICE. Give me thy breath, my sister, for I am faint with common air.

GIOVANNI. There she is again, at the purple shrub! And more stunning...and simple and sweet than I had formerly imagined.

BEATRICE. And give me this flower, which I will separate with gentlest fingers from the stem...and place close beside my heart.

GIOVANNI. I can only imagine what those gentle fingers... wait. Why is that little orange lizard at her feet contorting so violently? *(beat)* It's dead. *(beat)* She crosses herself. What is this being? Beautiful shall I call her, or inexpressibly terrible?

(beat) She moves this way. *(beat)* Signora! There, I throw down to you pure and healthful flowers. Wear them for the sake of Giovanni Guasconti.

BEATRICE. Thank you, signor. I...accept your gift.

GIOVANNI. Excellent. They will go well with the captivating purple flower you wear already.

BEATRICE. Yes. *(beat)* I would fain recompense you with it for your generosity. But if I toss it into the air it will not reach you. So Signor Guasconti must content himself with my thanks.

GIOVANNI. By all means. *(beat)* Umm...you may gather them up if you wish.

BEATRICE. Hmm?

GIOVANNI. The flowers.

BEATRICE. Oh. Yes.

BAGLIONI. Giovanni Guasconti could not help but notice how the young woman hesitated to pick up his bouquet. *(beat)* Maidenly reserve, perhaps? Though that would hardly explain the bouquet seeming to wilt in her hand as she vanished into the house of her father. *(beat)* For days the signor avoided the window that looked into Dr. Rappaccini's garden. Nothing to spoil his feverish dreams. Instead he burned and shivered with a kind of madness for this spirit, which he fancied to be some wild offspring of both love and horror.

(Footsteps, growing faster.)

BAGLIONI (CONT'D). He took to the streets of Padua, his footsteps keeping time to the throbbing in his brain, till his walk accelerated to a race. That is when I happened to meet and stop him one afternoon.

(Street ambience.)

GIOVANNI. Off of my arm, old fool!

BAGLIONI. Signor Guasconti! Stay, my young friend! Have you forgotten me? That might well be the case if I were as much altered as yourself.

GIOVANNI. Huh? Yes, I'm Giovanni Guasconti. And you are...Baglioni. Professor Baglioni. Now let me pass.

BAGLIONI. Not yet, Signor. What, did I grow up side by side with the father, that the son should pass like a stranger? No, I would have a word with you.

GIOVANNI. Speedily then, worshipful professor. Does not your worship see that I am in haste?

BAGLIONI. Yes. I can. (*beat*) And so can our friend Rappaccini across the street there.

GIOVANNI. Who?

BAGLIONI. Doctor Rappaccini. Ah! He recognizes me. That cold nod of his.

GIOVANNI. That...that was him? Just disappeared around the corner? (*beat*) Odd coincidence.

BAGLIONI. No. Not coincidence. He's making a study of you.

GIOVANNI. What do you mean? You believe he was following me?

BAGLIONI. I know that look of his. It is the same that coldly illuminates his face as he bends over a bird, or a butterfly, before he kills it by the perfume of a flower. Signor Giovanni, I will stake my life upon it, you are the subject of one of Rappaccini's experiments.

GIOVANNI. (*derisive laugh*) Will you make a fool of me? That, professor, were an untoward experiment.

BAGLIONI. Patience! Patience! I tell thee, my poor Giovanni, thou hast fallen into fearful hands! And the Signora Beatrice—what part does she act in this mystery?

GIOVANNI. Good afternoon, professor.
(*Footsteps storming off.*)

BAGLIONI. The youth broke away from me before I could seize his arm again. (*beat*) Well. We will see who better knows the arcana of medical science, most learned Rappaccini. You and your infernal daughter! Perchance I

may foil you where you little dream of it!

(Transition music. A heavy door opening and closing.)

LISABETTA. Signor Giovanni! Good afternoon! Did you enjoy your walk?

(Footsteps up stairs.)

LISABETTA (CONT'D). What, up to your room so soon?

GIOVANNI. Yes. You need not attend me this evening, Dame Lisabetta.

LISABETTA. Signor! Listen, signor! There is a private entrance into the garden.

GIOVANNI. What do you say?

(Footsteps slowly down stairs.)

GIOVANNI. There's a private entrance to Rappaccini's garden?

LISABETTA. Hush! Not so loud, signor. Yes. Into the worshipful doctor's garden. Where you may see all his fine shrubbery. Many a young man in Padua would give gold to be admitted among those fine flowers.

(Coins jingling from a pouch.)

GIOVANNI. All right. Here's your piece, then. Now show me.

LISABETTA. Yes! Come, signor Giovanni. This door here.

(Footsteps. Voices in tunnel now:)

LISABETTA (CONT'D): Step carefully, signor. The passage is dark.

GIOVANNI. Yes, it is. And what is your real part in this, I wonder?

LISABETTA. What, signor?

GIOVANNI. Keep going! *(to himself:)* It makes no difference. I must approach her... *(breathing heavy)* Wait, this impulse is not of the heart. This is a fantasy of the brain!

LISABETTA. What's the matter, signor? You wish to turn back?

GIOVANNI. Yes!

LISABETTA. Ah, but do you feel that breeze? The sunlight is just around the corner there! Are you sure you

would not continue?

GIOVANNI. All right! Move out of my way! (*Tunnel sound ends*) Here I am. In the open! Below my own apartment window.

BAGLIONI. How often is it the case that, when dreams have condensed into reality, we find ourselves calm, even coldly self-possessed. So it was now with young Giovanni, in the garden of Doctor Rappaccini.

GIOVANNI. This vegetation...such commixture of species! These are not of God's making. This is depraved fancy...this is mockery of beauty...

BEATRICE. You are a connoisseur in flowers, signor. (*beat*) It's no marvel therefore, if the sight of my father's rare collection has tempted you to take a nearer view.

GIOVANNI. I... Hello, Signora.

BEATRICE. If he were here, he could tell you many strange and interesting facts about them. He has spent a lifetime in such studies. This garden is...his world.

GIOVANNI. I have heard you are as deeply skilled in the virtues indicated by these blossoms, my lady.

BEATRICE. Are there such idle rumors? What a jest is there! No. Though I have grown among these flowers, I know no more of them than their hues and perfumes. Sometimes methinks I would fain rid myself of even that small knowledge. There are many, and those not the least brilliant, that shock and offend me when they meet my eye. (*beat*) But pray, signor, do not believe these stories about my science. Believe nothing of me save what you see with your own eyes.

GIOVANNI. I...might rather you ask that I believe nothing save what comes from your own lips, signora.

BEATRICE. I do so bid you. Forget whatever you may have fancied in regard to me. If true to the outward senses, still it may be false in its essence. But the words of Beatrice Rappaccini's lips are true from the depths of the heart outward.

BAGLIONI. The glow of Rappaccini's daughter was

breathtaking. And yet Giovanni was reluctant for other reasons to draw her rich fragrance into his lungs. Then he gazed past her eyes into her soul, and felt no more doubt or fear. *(beat)* She talked about matters as simple as the daylight or summer clouds. And now about the city, and Giovanni's own distant home.

BEATRICE. You have sisters?

GIOVANNI. Brothers too.

BEATRICE. And do you have many friends?

GIOVANNI. Yes, plenty of friends. Though none of special consequence. *(beat)* I have heard tell that Padua cannot contain your admirers, Lady.

BEATRICE. My admirers? That could not be so.

GIOVANNI. It could only be so. Why should you think otherwise?

BEATRICE. How could they know me when I do not know them?

GIOVANNI. Do you not? Not even one or two?

(Fountain bubbling.)

BEATRICE. I have known this garden, signor. That is all.

GIOVANNI. Ah! We come to the fountain! I've admired its ruins from my window. And the purple shrub you care for. Its fragrance smells like...it smells like you, Lady.

BEATRICE. My sister! For the first time in my life, I had forgotten thee.

GIOVANNI. I remember, signora, that you once promised to reward me with one of these blossoms for the bouquet I had the happy boldness to fling at your feet. Permit me now to pluck it as a memorial of this interview—

BEATRICE. NO! Touch it not!

GIOVANNI. Very well. I no longer have desire to, since you replace it with your hand.

BEATRICE. It...is fatal.

GIOVANNI. Fatal? *(beat)* Wait! Why do you run away? *(beat)* She's disappeared beyond the entrance. And look who's there, watching in the shadows! Dr. Rappaccini...

BAGLIONI. That night in his chamber, the young signor

woke with his hand burning in pain.

GIOVANNI. Aaaaaaahhhh!!!! A purple print like four small fingers...where she touched me!

BAGLIONI. Such a token might be considered further proof of a frightful peculiarity in the Signora's physical and moral system. But. By the subtle sophistry of passion, Giovanni's mind soon turned it into a golden crown of enchantment...

GIOVANNI. She's entirely unique...unlike any creature I've ever met...

BAGLIONI. After the first interview, there was a second, and a third, in the inevitable course of what we call fate. A meeting with Beatrice in the garden was no longer an incident in the daily life of Giovanni, but the whole space in which he might be said to live. (*beat*) And if by some chance he failed to come at the appointed moment, the signora stood beneath his window, her sweet fragrance floating up and around him...

BEATRICE. Giovanni! Giovanni! Why tarriest thou? Come down!

BAGLIONI. But for all the words of love now being spoken in that Eden of poisonous flowers, there yet had been no seal of lips, no clasp of hands. Young Giovanni had never touched a ringlet of the Signora's hair. Her garment—so marked was the physical barrier between them—had never been waved against him by a breeze.

GIOVANNI. Beatrice, why do you grow so sad? I only wanted to hold your...to...caress...to feel...

(*Sound of footsteps pacing around apartment.*)

GIOVANNI. ...to close this...this desolate separation!... (*Knocking at a door; door opening.*)

BAGLIONI. Ah, good morning, Signor Guasconti! I happened to passing by on my way to University.

GIOVANNI. Really? I did not understand this dwelling to be situated between the University of Padua and your own home, Professor, Baglioni.

BAGLIONI. Oh. Well, perhaps my route was not entirely direct. And how are your studies, Signor?

GIOVANNI. Studies? (*derisive laugh*) They are completely absorbing, I assure you.

BAGLIONI. Yes. Methinks I overheard one of your recitals, just now, as I approached your door. (*beat*) I've been reading a classic author lately. The story of an Indian prince who sent a beautiful woman as a present to Alexander the Great. Do you recall it?

GIOVANNI. The gift was poisonous. A child's fable.

BAGLIONI. Hmm. Yes. When it was written, perhaps. (*beat*) What is this fragrance in your apartment, signor? Faint, but delicious...and yet, after all, by no means agreeable. Were I to breathe it long, it would make me ill.

GIOVANNI. There is no fragrance. Except in your worship's imagination.

BAGLIONI. No, I doubt that. Were I to fancy an odor, it would be some humble apothecary drug, wherewith my fingers are likely enough to be imbued. Our friend Rappaccini I have heard tinctures his medicaments with odors richer than Araby. His daughter likely has similar talent—

GIOVANNI. Signor professor, you were my father's friend. I would fain feel nothing toward you save respect and deference. But I pray you to observe, signor, that there is one subject on which we must not speak. You know not the Signora Beatrice—

BAGLIONI. My poor Giovanni—

GIOVANNI. You do not know and therefore cannot estimate the wrong—the blasphemy—that is offered to her character by a light or injurious word!

BAGLIONI. Young man, I know this wretched girl far better than yourself. Her father was not restrained by family affection from offering her up as a victim of his insane zeal for science. He has made her deadly! Do you understand? What then will be your fate?

GIOVANNI. This is a phantasm. (*beat*) But if so, at least her poison has not yet insinuated itself into my system. Apparently I am no flower to perish in her grasp.

BAGLIONI. Yes, be of good cheer you still breathe. Do

you see this little silver vase in my hand?

GIOVANNI. What of it?

BAGLIONI. It was wrought by the hands of the renowned Benvenuto Cellini. Well worthy to be a love gift to the fairest dame in the city. But its contents are invaluable. One sip would have rendered the most virulent poisons of the Borgias innocuous. *(beat)* Take this to your Beatrice.

GIOVANNI. You say this will cure her?

BAGLIONI. Possibly we may succeed in bringing her back within the limits of ordinary nature, from which her father's madness has estranged her.

GIOVANNI. I... Thank you, professor Baglioni. I will deliver it with haste.

(Footsteps heading off.)

BAGLIONI. Yes, do so, son of my ancient friend. We will thwart Rappaccini yet.

(Transition music; a fountain bubbling.)

GIOVANNI. The garden of Dr. Rappaccini. Even the spiders have to be careful here. Look. It falls at my feet, as though I were poisonous.

BEATRICE. Giovanni. Here you are at the fountain. I was waiting beneath your window.

GIOVANNI. Beatrice, whence came this shrub?

BEATRICE. My father created it.

GIOVANNI. Your father created it. What does that mean?

BEATRICE. He is a man fearfully acquainted with the secrets of Nature. At the hour when I first drew breath, this plant sprang from the soil. I was nourished with its breath. It was my sister. *(beat)* Giovanni, approach it not!

GIOVANNI. Why not?

BEATRICE. Hast thou not suspected it? There were an awful doom, the effect of my father's fatal love of science, which...has estranged me from all society of my kind. Until Heaven sent thee, Giovanni.

GIOVANNI. Another one...

BEATRICE. What?

GIOVANNI. Another insect falls at my breath. *(beat)*

Accursed one! Thou hast filled my veins with poison! I am made as hateful, as ugly a creature as thyself!

BEATRICE. Holy Virgin pity me! Why dost thou join thyself with me thus in those terrible words?

GIOVANNI. Dost thou pretend ignorance?

(A swarm of insects.)

GIOVANNI. Behold! this power over nature's creatures I have gained from the pure daughter of Rappaccini!

(Breath blowing. The swarming sound dies away.)

BEATRICE. I see it. I am the horrible thing thou namest me, Giovanni! But this was not I! I dreamed only to love thee for a little time, to gain an image in my heart before sending thee away. For though my body be nourished with poison, my spirit is God's creature.

GIOVANNI. Some part of me apprehended this...

BEATRICE. I would that thou would kill me. What is death after such words as thine.

GIOVANNI. Some part knew that I should choose to be estranged from all else rather than be separate from thee.

(beat) But it may not be necessary. Beatrice, behold this vase.

BEATRICE. It's...it's beautiful.

GIOVANNI. A wise physician has assured me it contains ingredients most opposite to those by which thy awful father has brought this calamity upon thee and me. It is distilled of blessed herbs. Let us drink it together and thus be purified of evil.

BEATRICE. Give it to me. I will drink.

RAPPACCINI. I see thou art no longer lonely in the world.

BEATRICE. Father!

GIOVANNI. Rappaccini...

RAPPACCINI. Go ahead, daughter. Pluck one of those precious gems from thy sister shrub and bid thy bridegroom wear it in his bosom. It will not harm him now. My science and the sympathy between thee and him have so wrought within his system that he now stands apart from common men.

BEATRICE. (*weakly*) My father...wherefore didst thou inflict this miserable doom upon thy child?

RAPPACCINI. Miserable! What mean you, foolish girl? Dost thou deem it misery to be endowed with marvelous gifts against which no power could avail an enemy? Would thou have preferred the condition of a weak woman, exposed to all evil and capable of none?

BEATRICE. I would fain have been loved, not feared. But it matters not. I am going, father, where the evil which thou hast striven to mingle with my being will pass away like a dream...

GIOVANNI. Beatrice!

RAPPACCINI. What's the matter? Why does my daughter faint?

GIOVANNI. The antidote I bid her drink...it was supposed to save her...

BEATRICE. Farewell, Giovanni! Thy words of hatred are like lead within my heart; but they too will fall away as I ascend. Oh, was there not, from the first, more poison in thy nature than in mine?

BAGLIONI. There could be no salvation for such a one, so radically altered. As poison had been life to Rappaccini's daughter, so the antidote I provided was death. Of course I had no idea the doctor meant to engineer—with respect to Giovanni—an act of solace for his daughter. I did not think him capable. (*beat*) On the balcony of Giovanni's room, I saw the son of my ancient friend doomed now to exist in that garden of evil. Even as the doctor watched the child of his flesh slip beyond all the power of his science. Thus we both witnessed the fatality that attends all efforts of perverted wisdom. (*beat*) Rappaccini! Rappaccini! And this is the upshot of your experiment?

(*End of show music.*)

The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg

A radio play adaptation of
the short story by

Mark Twain

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by

Joe Doran

Produced by High Window RadioClassics Theatre. Presented on July 25th, 1999 at The Cubbyhole Coffeehouse, Poughkeepsie, NY. Broadcast live on WHVW 950 AM (Hyde Park, NY).

CAST

Stranger/Rev. Burgess..... Brett Owen
Mrs. Billson/Mother..... Amy Byrne
Mrs. Richards..... Renee DePietro
Richards..... Victor Small
Cox..... Anthony Puccio
Mrs. Cox..... Debbie Puccio
Billson/Tanner..... Stephen Brinckerhoff
Attorney Wilson..... Andy Champ-Doran
Announcer..... Joe Doran

(FADE IN: Radio station. Intro music.)

ANNOUNCER. It was many years ago. And for generations, the town of Hadleyburg was the most honest and upright around. And people there were proud of it.

BOY. Look, mama!

MOTHER. What is it, son?

BOY. I found a nickel on the sidewalk!

ANNOUNCER. Now, the average boy in the average town would've taken that nickel and negotiated with his mother for a candy cane or a stick of gum. But not a boy from

Hadleyburg. There, the principles of honest dealing were taught to babes in the cradle.

BOY. Mama, can I take this nickel...and knock on every door in town to see who lost it, so I can give it back?

MOTHER. Yes, son!

STRANGER. Wait? What's that? A coin, your boy found? That nickel was mine. My last one...

MOTHER. Get away, you beggar! Out here in broad daylight! You're obviously not from these parts! This is an honest town!

ANNOUNCER. Yes, the citizens of Hadleyburg were honest. Some sneered at Hadleyburg's pride and said it was vanity. But, just the same, they were obliged to admit that the town was incorruptible. That is, until one day when Hadleyburg had the ill luck to offend a passing stranger. For a whole year that bitter man kept his injury in mind, scheming for a revenge. Something that would comprehend the entire town, and not let a single person escape unhurt. At last, the stranger had an idea. It lit up his brain with an evil joy:

STRANGER. Yes, that is the thing to do—I will corrupt the entire town...

ANNOUNCER. And so it was, that one night, the stranger appeared at the door of the town's bank cashier...

(Knocking on a door.)

MRS. RICHARDS. Come in!

STRANGER. Good evening madam. Is your husband home?

MRS. RICHARD. No. He's gone to Brixton.

STRANGER. Please, keep your seat. I don't mean to disturb you.

MRS. RICHARD. I...was just doing some reading by lamplight.

STRANGER. Hmm. The Missionary Herald. Fine newspaper. Madam, would you see to it your husband gets this sack? He is Mr. Richards, the bank cashier of Hadleyburg?

MRS. RICHARDS. Why, yes, of course.

STRANGER. Good. Thank you. You see, I'm a stranger. Just passing through. And this sack discharges a matter which has long been on my mind. The paper attached there will explain everything. You will never see me again. Good bye. *(A door opens and closes.)*

MRS. RICHARDS. How odd! The sack...what can be in it? I suppose it won't hurt to read the piece of paper... *(Sound of a paper being unfolded.)*

MRS. RICHARDS (CONT'D). Oh my lord...oh my lord!

...

(Transition music.)

MR. RICHARDS. All right, Mary! Why so excited? I've only just come in the door from Brixton!

MRS. RICHARD. Edward, please! Sit down! I have something to show you!

MR. RICHARD. Yes, I'll sit. I'm tired. To have to make these dismal journeys at my time of life. Always at the grind. On a salary. Another man's slave. And he at home, in his slippers.

MRS. RICHARDS. I'm sorry for you, Edward. You know that. But at least we have our good name.

MR. RICHARDS. Yes, Mary. You're right. Our good name. And that's everything. Don't mind my talk. Just a moment's irritation. Come, kiss me. There. Now. What's in the sack?

MRS. RICHARDS. Oh, Edward, you won't believe it! Here, read this paper!

MR. RICHARDS. "Be it known that this sack contains gold coin weighing a hundred and sixty pounds four ounces—" "My God! That's more than forty thousand dollars!"

MRS. RICHARDS. Read on!

MR. RICHARD. I'm reading! It says...

STRANGER. ...I am a stranger. A foreigner, presently going back to my own country. I am grateful to America for my stay here—and especially grateful to a citizen of Hadleyburg, for a kindness done to me. I will explain. I was a gambler. A ruined gambler. I arrived in this village late one

night. Without a penny. Hungry. I asked for help. In the dark. I was too ashamed to beg in the light. Well. I begged of the right man. He gave me twenty dollars. That is to say, he gave me life. For out of that twenty dollars, I made myself rich at the gaming table. But the man gave me even more. A remark he made has remained with me to this day. And at last it has conquered me, and saved the remnant of my morals. I shall gamble no more. *(beat)* Now. I have no idea who that citizen of Hadleyburg was. But I want him found. And I want the want the money in this sack to go to him.

MRS. RICHARDS. Who do you think it was, Edward?

MR. RICHARDS. Hold on, Mary! Let me finish the letter...

STRANGER. ...I regret I can't stay to find the man myself. But. Hadleyburg is an honest town. An incorruptible town. So I know I can trust it without fear. The right man will be easily identified by the remark he made to me that night. Seek him out privately. Or, if you prefer, publish this letter in The Missionary Herald. Thirty days from now, let the candidate appear at the town hall at eight in the evening, and deliver his remark in an envelope to the Reverend Burgess. Have the Reverend open the seals of the sack. He'll find a note from me, containing the remark. If the remarks match, let the money be handed over with my sincere gratitude.

MRS. RICHARDS. There! That's all of it!

MR. RICHARD. Impossible. Like something one reads in books! Well, I guess it means we're rich, Mary! All we've got to do is bury the money and burn these papers! If the gambler ever comes back, we just look him coldly in the eye and say 'what is this nonsense? We've never heard of you or your gold before!'

MRS. RICHARDS. Stop joking, Edward! What are we going to do?

MR. RICHARDS. All right. I'll take this note to Cox, the newspaper editor, right now. What a noise it'll make! Every other town will be jealous.

MRS. RICHARDS. Edward, wait. I don't want to be left

alone with it!

MR. RICHARDS. The sack? Why not, Mary? I trust you with it. Remember: you're from Hadleyburg!

(A door opens and closes.)

MRS. RICHARD. Forty thousand in a sack. God forgive me, it's awful to think such things...but we're so poor! *(beat)* 'Lead us not into temptation...'

(Transition music.)

COX. Evening, Mr. Richards. What brings you out tonight?

RICHARDS. Here's an item for your newspaper, Cox.

COX. It may be too late.

RICHARDS. Read it and judge yourself.

(Sound of paper being opened. Beat.)

COX. Oh my...oh my...oh my...dear Lord!

RICHARDS. Think you can find the space for it, Cox?

COX. Twenty dollars into Forty thousand! But—hold on. Just who in this town would've given a gambler twenty dollars?

RICHARDS. Only one man I can think of. Barclay Goodson.

COX. Goodson! *(beat)* He's been dead six months.

RICHARDS. That's right, Mr. Cox. For six months the town of Hadleyburg has been its own proper self once more—honest, narrow, self-righteous and stingy. As Goodson used to say.

COX. So where's the sack now?

RICHARDS. Home. With my wife.

COX. I reckon you'll be wantin' to get back there, then.

RICHARDS. Sure. Maybe some of the glitter will rub off on me! Good night.

(Transition music.)

RICHARDS. Mary? You still awake?

MARY. Of course I am, Edward.

RICHARDS. Well I got the note to the newspaper. We figure Barclay Goodson was the one who gave the twenty dollars.

MARY. Goodson? I can hear him laughing in his grave!

RICHARDS. So the whole town will have another reason to hate him. *(beat)* Maybe now they'll hate him even more they do the Reverend Burgess.

MARY. Burgess. Awful man! Edward, I've been thinking. Why would the stranger appoint Burgess to deliver the money? After that thing he did? I can't even speak it!

RICHARDS. Hmm. Maybe the stranger knows better than the town does, Mary.

MARY. What do you mean? The Reverend was guilty! Of course, a thing like that could never be proved. But everyone knows he did it.

RICHARD. Mary... I've never told anyone this. But Burgess never did that thing he was accused of. He was innocent. And only I knew it.

MARY. Oh, Edward!

RICHARDS. I was afraid to say anything at the time. The town was so angry! They were making plans to ride him on a rail. Well. I warned him about that part anyway, and he got out for a few days, until things cooled down.

MARY. You took a risk, Edward! They could've turned against you!

RICHARDS. As it was, they thought Goodson was the one who warned him.

MARY. Goodson. In his grave, now. *(beat)* Oh, Edward! Why did you run off so quickly to the newspaper?

RICHARDS. What?

MARY. Goodson's dead! And he hasn't left chick nor child nor relation behind him! The money really could've been ours, and nobody would be hurt by it!

(breaks down)

RICHARDS. Mary it must be for the best. It was so ordered.

MARY. Ordered! Oh, everything's ordered, when a person has to find some way out when he's been stupid!

RICHARDS. But Mary! We've been trained all our lives...it's just second nature not to stop and think when

there's an honest thing to be done.

MARY. Yes, shielded all our lives! Well it's weak as water when real temptation comes as it did tonight! God knows I never had a shade nor shadow of a doubt about my petrified and indestructible honesty until now. But it's come down like a house of cards! I'm a fake. I've been one all my life. Let no one call me honest again—I will not have it!

RICHARDS. I...I have to confess, I've felt a good deal as you do.

MARY. Then go, Edward! Go right now back to Cox! You and he are the only ones that know! Strike a deal with him! And the money will be ours!

RICHARDS. All right. Yes. I'll do it.

MARY. Go!

(Transition music. Footsteps ringing down a sidewalk. Getting faster. Another set of footsteps, distant. Urgent. A cat cries.)

RICHARDS. *(breathless:)* Cox!

COX. Mr. Richards!

RICHARDS. Well! Fancy meeting you here, on the street, at one in the morning.

COX. I guess we're thinking the same thing.

RICHARDS. It would appear.

COX. You're certain nobody knows about this but you?

RICHARDS. Not a soul. On my honor.

COX. Come on, then! We have to catch my apprentice before he sends those newspapers out! Quickly!

(“Tension” music.)

COX. The light's on at the printing office! He's still there! Johnny! Johnny!

JOHNNY. Here, Mr. Cox!

COX. Listen to me! Don't send the papers out! Do you hear? Not till I tell you!

JOHNNY. But Mr. Cox—the timetable for Brixton and all the towns beyond changed today, sir. I had to get the papers in twenty minutes earlier than common.

RICHARDS. What's the boy saying, Cox?

JOHNNY. They're gone, sir. The newspapers are gone.
(*Transition music.*)

ANNOUNCER. So it was, that news of the stranger and his sack of gold got out. The town of Hadleyburg woke up world-celebrated. And vain beyond imagination.

(*Crowd noise.*)

MAN. Have you heard?

WOMAN. Yes! Amazing, isn't it, Mrs. Billson?

MRS. BILLSON. Why, it made no impression on me at all! Where else could a stranger in the night leave a gold sack, and expect it to see morning, except Hadleyburg?

ANNOUNCER. The nineteen principle citizens of the town and their wives, congratulated each other. They fielded questions from reporters as far away as Tim-Buk-Tu.

(*Sounds of a Press crowd.*)

TIM-BUK-TU REPORTER. Uda de bulababa opotay?

WILSON. Uda de what? I'm afraid our foreign reporter friend here overestimates my command of the language! I'm just the town lawyer!

(*Laughter. "Tell 'em, Wilson!" etc.*)

WILSON (CONT'D). But, to answer your question anyway, sir, I suggest you purchase yourself an English dictionary, and look up the word 'Incorruptible'...where you will find just one solitary synonym...by the name of Hadleyburg!

ANNOUNCER. By the end of the week, the town quieted down again. Folks settled into a sort of deep nameless, unutterable content. But then a change came. The contentment turned sober. And then gloomy...

STRANGER. (*distant and dream-like:*) The right man will be easily identified by the remark he made to me that night... the remark he made...the remark...

ANNOUNCER. In the bedrooms of the nineteen principle households, was a single churning thought:

RICHARDS. Ahh! What could have been the remark that Goodson made to that stranger?

MRS RICHARDS. It's no use torturing ourselves, Edward.

RICHARDS. I feel ashamed for even thinking of it. But it's all I can do!

MRS. RICHARDS. I'm past shame. (*beat*) Before this, we used to sit here at night, I knitting, you reading. Or we'd chat. Or visit neighbors. It's all dead now. Our contentment...

RICHARDS. I can't even read a letter. They sit in a pile.

MRS. RICHARDS. I'll go through them. You rest.

RICHARDS. I tell you, Mary. It's been harder at the bank than usual. To have to stand there all day, the sack of gold in front of me, on display, with an endless line of gawkers filing through.

MRS. RICHARDS. Edward! This letter! I am...I am too happy! Here, read it! Read it!

RICHARDS. What now? It says...

STRANGER. I am a stranger to you. But no matter. You do not know who made the remark to the gambler. But I do. And I am the only person alive who does. It was Goodson. I knew him well, many years ago. That night, passing through your village, I was his guest. I overheard him make the remark to that gambler in Hale Alley. We had a smoke and talked about it on the way to the train station. Goodson also mentioned many of your villagers—most of them in a very uncomplimentary way. But he spoke of you and one or two others favorably. He said you in particular—I'm almost sure it was you—had done him a great service at one time, perhaps without knowing the full value of it.

RICHARDS. I did Goodson a service...?

MRS. RICHARDS. Finish reading it, Edward!

STRANGER. Now then. If it was you that did Goodson that service, then you're entitled to that sack of gold. I know that I can trust to your honesty, because you are from Hadleyburg, where this virtue is an unfailing inheritance. So. I am going to reveal to you the remark...well satisfied that if you are not the right man, you will seek and find the right one. This is the remark: "You are far from being a bad man: go, and reform."

MRS. RICHARDS. Oh, Edward! The money is ours! And

you're free of that bank job and nobody's slave anymore!

MR. RICHARDS. It's wonderful! It's...

MRS. RICHARDS. All you have to do is go to the Town Hall this Friday and tell them the remark! You'll have to memorize it!

MR. RICHARDS. Yes, I...

MRS. RICHARDS. Here, what is it again? "You are far from being a bad man: go and reform!"

MR. RICHARDS. Yes. "You are... far from a bad man—"

MRS. RICHARD. No! Far from *being* a bad man...

MRS. RICHARDS. Being a bad man...

MRS. RICHARDS. Oh, I am so proud of you, Edward! To do such a service for Goodson, and never brag or even mention it! Tell me: what was it you did?

MR. RICHARDS. Did? Well, I uh...

ANNOUNCER. The old bank cashier had no answer for his wife. But then again, neither did the eighteen other principle citizens of Hadleyburg who received the exact same letter that evening—names changed, of course. For the rest of the night those men racked their brains trying to think of a service they'd done Goodson. Their wives, meanwhile, were figuring out how to spend forty thousand dollars. During that one night, the nineteen wives spent an average of seven thousand dollars each—or, a hundred and thirty-three thousand altogether. In the morning, they began spending for real, on credit...

MRS. WILSON. We've heard you're a fine architect, Mr. Thomas. Draw up the plans. And I want at least four baths!

WILSON. Psst! Reverend Burgess!

REV. BURGESS. Yes? Why, hello, Mr. Wilson. I thought someone was following me...

WILSON. Here's an envelope. For you to open Friday night.

MRS. COX. ...That's right: five-thousand dollars in speculative stocks. We'll use our farm as collateral...

MAN. Psst! Reverend Burgess!

REV. BURGESS. Oh! Mr. Cox! I'm sorry. I didn't see

you there in that bush!

COX. I have an envelope! For Friday!

MRS. BILLSON. ...whatever money you require to prepare the largest and most elegant ball the town of Hadleyburg has ever seen...!

BILLSON. Psst! Reverend!

REV. BURGESS. Lord in heaven! I thought this confessional was empty.

BILLSON. I just wanted to pass this envelope to you! It's from me: John Wharton Billson! Got it wrote right there!

REV. BURGESS. That's an X, Mr. Billson.

BILLSON. Well, it's my mark! You remember it!
(Transition music. Sounds of a large gathering.)

REV. BURGESS. Good evening, ladies and gentleman. Members of the press. I'm afraid our town hall only seats four hundred, so squeeze in. Welcome to Hadleyburg: the most honest town in America!

(Applause.)

REV. BURGESS (CONT'D). Now then, we all know the purpose of this evening. My hand here rests on a burlap sack. It was left by a stranger at the home of Mr. Richards, our town's bank cashier. The sack contains forty thousand in gold. The stranger—a gambler—made this fortune from twenty dollars lent by an unknown citizen of Hadleyburg. If that citizen can be found tonight, the sack is his. The citizen will be known by a remark he made to the stranger, a copy of which is inside the sack. Now, let's see...I have a note here which was given to me earlier. Ahem. It says "I am the unknown citizen. The remark I made to the stranger was this: 'You are very far from being a bad man: go, and reform.'"

(Excited voices.)

CROWD PERSON 1. Who wrote it?

CROWD PERSON 2. What's the name, Reverend?

REV. BURGESS. Oh yes. The name is...Mr. John Wharton Billson!

(Gasps and shocked murmurs: "Billson!" "Twenty dollars to a stranger?!!" "This is too thin!" etc.)

BILLSON. Yes. That's me! John Billson. I made the remark.

WILSON. Hogwash!

REV. BURGESS. Attorney Wilson. Why do you stand?

WILSON. I stand, Reverend. because this man Billson pilfered my note! I'm the one who made the remark to that stranger!

(Chaos. Cries of "Chair! Chair! Order! Order!")

REV. BURGESS. Gentlemen, please!

MRS. RICHARDS. Edward! That note! It's the same one we handed in!

RICHARDS. Quiet, Mary! Something's strange here! Let's wait it out.

REV. BURGESS. Now gentlemen! There has evidently been a mistake somewhere. If Mr. Wilson gave me an envelope—and I remember now that he did—I still have it.

(beat) Yes, here it is.

CROWD PERSON 1. What's it say?

CROWD PERSON 2. Read it out loud, Reverend!

REV. BURGESS. The uh...the note from Attorney Wilson says, "The remark which I made to the unhappy stranger was this: 'You are far from being a bad man: go and reform.'"

WILSON. There! I reckon that settles it! I knew perfectly well my note was purloined!

BILLSON. Purloined! That's it, Wilson! Not you nor any man—!

REV. BURGESS. Gentleman! GENTLEMEN! Take your seats! Now. Might it be possible...that both of you made the same remark to the stranger that night?

TANNER. Sure it is, Reverend!

REV. BURGESS. Well! Mr. Miles, the town tanner, agrees with me!

TANNER. It's possible they made the exact same remark, Reverend. It could happen—twice in a hundred years. But there's not a chance in a million they both gave a stranger twenty dollars!

(Uproarious laughter.)

TANNER. Anyway, we can easily catch whoever's lying here.

REV. BURGESS. How, Mr. Miles?

TANNER. The two men haven't quoted the remark in the same words. Attorney Wilson said "You are far from being a bad man. But Mr. Billson was quoted as saying, "You are very far". Let's see which version is in the sack!

(Enthusiastic response: "Yeah, open the sack, Reverend!" "Slit it open!" etc.)

REV. BURGESS. Very well. If there are no objections, we'll cut this burlap...

(Sound of a coin spilling out. Sighs of "Oh, look at it shine!" etc.)

REV. BURGESS. Woops. I'll just put that gold coin right back on top, there... Hmm. There are two envelopes inside. One says "Do not open until all written communications to the chair have been read." The other one says "The test". It is worded, to wit:

STRANGER. I do not require that the first half of the remark made to me by my benefactor shall be quoted with exactness, for it was not striking, and could be forgotten. But the closing fifteen words are quite memorable. Unless these shall be accurately reproduced, let the applicant be regarded as an imposter. My benefactor began by saying he seldom gave advice to anyone. But when he did, it was to be taken for high value. Then he said this—and it has never faded from my memory: "You are far from being a bad man—"

TANNER. That settles it! The money's Wilson's!
(Excited voices: "Speech! Speech!" etc.)

REV. BURGESS. Gentlemen! Ladies! Order, please! I'm not finished. *(beat)* The remainder of the remark reads:

STRANGER. Go and reform—or, mark my words—someday, for your sins, you will die and go to hell or Hadleyburg—TRY AND MAKE IT THE FORMER.
(Silence—then sudden whoops of laughter.)

TANNER. How about that! They're both liars!

REV. BURGESS. Order! Order! Well, this matter has

become grave indeed. Both men have left out the crucial fifteen words!

WILSON. Um, that's...that's true Reverend. But I uh, I ask for this hall's indulgence to explain!

REV. BURGESS. I think some explaining is certainly in order, Attorney Wilson.

WILSON. I confess, I made the remark—the whole remark—as written by the stranger. I'm ashamed of it now. *(The crowd murmurs in sympathy.)*

WILSON (CONT'D). But the fact that I conveyed the first part of it correctly still proves it was stolen from me! *(Shouts of "Wilson's right!" "The money's his!" etc. Scattered applause.)*

REV. BURGESS. Wait! Attorney Wilson has been persuasive. But there is still one more document to read. *(beat)* Oh. I forgot. This can't be opened until all written communications to me have been read. Let's see, I have...ah yes. Another note, here. This one says, "The remark which I made to the stranger was this: 'you are far from being a bad man: go, and reform.'" Signed by Mr. Pinkerton, the owner of our bank!

TANNER. Well. Poor Attorney Wilson! It looks like two people robbed his note! *(Laughter.)*

TANNER (CONT'D). How many more notes have you got, Reverend?

REV. BURGESS. I don't know, Mr. Miles. I wasn't counting.

TANNER. Read the rest of the names! I think it'll do us good to hear how many incorruptible citizens this fine town of ours has! *(Enthusiastic applause and shouts of "Read 'em, Reverend!" "We want to hear!" etc.)*

MRS. RICHARDS. Edward, this is horrible! They're going to read our name along with the rest!

RICHARDS. There's nothing we can do now, Mary. It was so ordered... *(Mood music.)*

ANNOUNCER. Well, the stranger had it right: Hadleyburg was starting to look like a fate worse than hell—at least for its nineteen principle citizens. They squirmed in their seats as their names were called out one by one at the town hall. They had fallen prey to some devious prank—and to their own dishonesty—which was on display now for all the world to witness.

REV. BURGESS. Mr. Henry Cox!...
(*Whoops and cheers. Crowd chants: "You are far from a ba-a-a-d man!..."*)

REV. BURGESS. Mr. Robert J. Titmarsh!
(*"...Go and reform!" Whoops and cheers. "You are fa-a-r from a ba-a-a-d man!..."*)

REV. BURGESS (CONT'D). Dr. Clay Harkness!
(*"...Go and reform!" Applause.*)

TANNER. That's eighteen, Reverend! Eighteen symbols of Incorruptibility! We're rich!

CROWD. Next! Next! NEXT! NEXT!

REV. BURGESS. I...I believe that's all the notes I have!

MRS. RICHARDS. He's says that's it, Edward! Perhaps he's lost yours!

RICHARDS. It doesn't matter! I'm getting up to confess, Mary. It's our place to suffer with the rest!—

TANNER. Reverend! Reverend! I move we give three cheers to the only principle citizens of this town who didn't try to steal that sack of money—the Richards! Hip-hip-hooray!

CROWD. Hip-hip-hooray! Hip-hip-hooray!

TANNER. Now: who gets the sack?

REV. BURGESS. I suppose we should read the stranger's final document. It says: "If no claimant shall appear, let the money be held in trust by the town, to be used for good works, to further its spotless reputation..."

(*Groans from the crowd.*)

REV. BURGESS. Wait. There's a postscript. It says:

STRANGER. There is no test-remark. Nobody made one. Allow me to tell you my story. I passed through your town

once, and received a deep offense which I had not earned. Any other man would've been content to kill one or two of you. But I wanted more. I wanted to damage you where all foolish people are the most vulnerable—in their vanity. So I studied you. What were you most proud of? Your honesty. From there, my revenge was easy. I'm betting I caught you all in it. It's true you still have the sack. For what it's worth, you can keep it.

REV. BURGESS. Hmmmm.

(Sound of jingling coins...)

REV. BURGESS (CONT'D). Friends, I'm afraid these gold coins are only gilded disks of lead.

MRS. RICHARDS. The sack. I can't believe it. It was worthless all along.

RICHARDS. Yes, Mary. It was.

(Transition music.)

ANNOUNCER. As it turns out, the sack did have some value. A stranger—a collector of numismatics, he called himself—got up and bid a thousand dollars for the sack—to be donated to the Richards. He said he could make a profit by stamping the faces of the eighteen dishonest principle citizens of Hadleyburg on the coins. The motion was approved. The stranger then turned and secretly sold the sack for forty-one thousand dollars, to Dr. Clay Harkness, owner of a patent mint medicine. Harkness, you see, was running for state legislature. When the coins came out, they had only one face on them—the face of Harkness's political opponent, Mr. Pinkerton.

(A knock at a door.)

MRS. RICHARDS. Who's there? *(beat)* Edward! At the door. It's that man! The stranger!

RICHARDS. Mary, you're seeing things.

(A door opening.)

RICHARDS (CONT'D). Look. No one's out here. Except an owl.

MRS. RICHARDS. Look! An envelope! On the stoop. What's inside?

RICHARDS. I'm afraid to look. (*Rustling of paper.*) It's a bank check. For forty thousand dollars!...

MRS. RICHARDS. How can that be? We were only supposed to receive one thousand.

RICHARDS. We were supposed to receive nothing, Mary. We were as guilty as any of the others.

MRS. RICHARDS. Edward, the town has been through enough. It would do no good for us to admit to it now. It would just be selfishness of a different kind.

RICHARDS. There's a note here. You read it.

MRS. RICHARDS. It says:

STRANGER. Dear sir: I made a bet with myself that there were nineteen debauchable men in your self-righteous community. I lost. Your honesty is beyond the reach of temptation. Take the whole pot. It's yours.

RICHARDS. Ah, Mary. Those words are written with fire. It burns. I'm miserable.

MARY. I too...

RICHARDS. This check can go into the flames! There! That's a little justice, anyway...

(*Transition music.*)

ANNOUNCER. The Richards received one more communication—from the Reverend Burgess. In it, the Reverend admitted...

REV. BURGESS. ...that I hid the note you gave me. Mr. Richards, you saved me in a difficult time, when the town was against me, and I repay the favor with a grateful heart. None in this village knows so well as I how brave and noble and good you are.

ANNOUNCER. The note did nothing to relieve the conscience of Mr. Richards. For he knew how much more he could have done to help the Reverend. And in the next few days, he began to suspect that the Reverend knew too, and was mocking him. Or worse, waiting for the best moment to expose him, perhaps in collusion with the stranger. The Richards, husband and wife, grew deadly sick with worry, even as the town worshipped them. Finally, with death at

their door, the Reverend was called in.

RICHARDS. I have something to say to you, Reverend! I say it in front of the witnesses here. I want everyone to know—that I signed a lie to claim the sack, like all the others.

REV. BURGESS. Mr. Richards...

RICHARDS. Don't stop me. I escaped because the Reverend here hid my note that night—saving it to torment me with!

REV. BURGESS. Mr. Richards, that's not true! I make an oath!

RICHARDS. I don't blame you Reverend. I've deserved it. I could have saved you that time you were in trouble, if I'd only told the truth. I...I forgive you...

ANNOUNCER. And so it was, that the Reverend would be blamed once more for a thing he didn't do. With Mr. Richard's confession, the town of Hadleyburg was stripped of the last rag of its ancient glory. There was nothing left, but to change its name, and try to begin anew, a little wiser. They started by dropping a word from the official town seal, so that it now read: "Lead Us...Into Temptation." I'm glad to report that it is an honest town once more, and the man will have to rise early that catches it napping again.

(End of show music.)

Bartleby the Scrivener

A Story of Wall-Street

A radioplay adaptation
of Herman Melville's story

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by

Joe Doran and Sydna Byrne

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CAST

Lawyer..... Victor Small
Bartleby..... Sergeo Levitas
Turkey Stephen Brinckerhoff
Nippers Anthony Sucato
Ginger Nut/Businessman 1 Andy Champ-Doran
Tenant Renee DePietro
Businessman 2..... Anthony Puccio
Shopkeeper Debbie Puccio
Announcer/Cutlets..... Joe Doran

(FADE IN: Intro music. A prison door opening.)

LAWYER. Bartleby. The scrivener. Where is he?

CUTLETS. I'm not sure, sir. They let that one wander.

LAWYER. What do you mean, they let—

CUTLETS. Wait. There he is. In the south yard. Looking at the wall.

LAWYER. He's allowed to wander?

CUTLETS. He's not a murderer. You can go over to him, sir.

LAWYER. Bartleby? (*beat*) It's me.

BARTLEBY. I know you. I have nothing to say to you.

LAWYER. It wasn't I that brought you to this prison,

Bartleby. *(beat)* There's sky here, at least. There's grass.

BARTLEBY. I know where I am.

CUTLETS. Is...he a friend of yours, sir?

LAWYER. Yes.

CUTLETS. He won't live on prison food. I'm the grub man. Such gentlemen as have friends here hire me to provide them with something good to eat.

LAWYER. Well then...here.

(Jingling coins.)

LAWYER (CONT'D). Get him the best dinner you have. Bartleby? This is...

CUTLETS. Mr. Cutlets. Your sarvant, sir.

LAWYER. This is Mr. Cutlets. He's going to get you dinner.

BARTLEBY. I'd prefer not to. It would disagree with me; I am unused to dinners.

CUTLETS. Refusing! What's, he want to starve? *(beat)* Odd, ain't he?

LAWYER. I think he's a little deranged.

(Transition music.)

LAWYER (CONT'D). I am a rather elderly man. From youth upwards, filled with a profound conviction that...the easiest way of life is the best. *(beat)* I'm one of those unambitious lawyers who never addresses a jury. I do a snug business in a snug retreat on Wall Street, among rich men's bonds and mortgages and title deeds.

TURKEY. Here you are sir. The copied papers.

LAWYER. Turkey, these inkblots... Your work is useless after twelve. You know that, don't you?

TURKEY. Surely, sir, a blot or two on the page here...of a warm afternoon...is not to be severely urged against gray hairs. With submission, sir, we both are getting old.

LAWYER. Turkey was one of my clerks. Along with Nippers and Ginger Nut—named for the cakes he provided the other two. They each had their singularities. But no scrivener I ever knew was as strange as Bartleby. *(beat)* My original business of conveyances and contracts was

considerably increased at the time I advertised for another law copyist.

(A door opening and closing.)

LAWYER (CONT'D). You're here for the job advertised?

BARTLEBY. Yes, sir.

LAWYER. What's your name?

BARTLEBY. Bartleby.

LAWYER. And you desire to be a copyist?

BARTLEBY. I do, sir.

LAWYER. I pay four cents a hundred words. Do you have a neat hand?

BARTLEBY. I do, sir.

LAWYER. What experience have you had? No, look. You needn't take up a pen just now—

(Sound of paper.)

BARTLEBY. There you are, sir.

LAWYER. You've written: "I...have a neat hand." So you do. All right. You're hired. These offices are cramped. There are only two rooms. The outer one already contains my other employees. We'll set you up in here. Near that window.

BARTLEBY. This window, sir?

LAWYER. No. The other one. The one that...

BARTLEBY. ...looks out on the wall?

LAWYER. Yes. I believe it casts adequate light. I'll put up a partition. *(beat)* Give you some privacy. *(beat)* In those first days of employment, Bartleby did an extraordinary quantity of writing. More than Nippers, and certainly Turkey, with his afternoon fits.

TURKEY. "Whereas the aforestated items of said contract are held to be valid, this document is hereby Signed, Sealed, and Witnessed on this twenty-third day of April in the year of our Lord, One-thousand-eight-hundred-and-ninety."

(Paper being stamped.)

TURKEY (CONT'D). There you are. All sealed up, sir.

LAWYER. Turkey, you sealed it with one of your ginger cakes.

TURKEY. Oh. Did I? Sorry, sir.

LAWYER. Your work has been filled with blunders.

TURKEY. Perhaps I can rub it off a bit...

LAWYER. This is grounds for dismissal.

TURKEY. Oh no! With submission, sir! With submission...it was generous of me to find you in stationary of my own account...of my own account I will make good, sir!

LAWYER. You do that. *(beat)* I am not insensitive to the fact that copying law papers is a dry business. I can readily imagine that to some temperaments it would be altogether intolerable. I can't imagine that mettlesome poet Byron would have contentedly sat down with Bartleby to examine a law document of, say, five hundred pages, closely written in a crimped hand. But that is the job. *(beat)* Turkey.

TURKEY. Yes sir?

LAWYER. Call Nippers and Ginger Nut in here. All of you and Bartleby will verify these copies of the bank contract while I read the original.

TURKEY. Yes, sir. *(voice distant:)* Nippers! Ginger Nut!

LAWYER. All right. Does everyone have a copy?

TURKEY. Everyone present, sir. Here's the extra one, for...

LAWYER. Oh. Yes. Bartleby! Come out from behind that screen. I require something of you.

(Sliding of a chair; footsteps.)

BARTLEBY. Yes, sir?

LAWYER. Take this copy and sit with the others. I want you to verify its accuracy while I read from the original.

(beat) Well? What are you waiting for? Take it.

BARTLEBY. I would prefer not to.

LAWYER. Excuse me? *(beat)* We're all sitting down to compare these documents.

BARTLEBY. I would prefer not to.

LAWYER. "Prefer not to..." What, are you moonstruck? *(beat)* Bartleby, I'm asking you as my employee to verify this document as I read the original.

BARTLEBY. I would prefer not to.

LAWYER. Why do you refuse? *(beat)* Where are you going?

BARTLEBY. Back to my desk.

LAWYER. This is astounding. Turkey. What do you make of it?

TURKEY. I think your request is reasonable, sir.

LAWYER. What's your opinion, Nippers?

NIPPERS. I think I should kick him out of the office.

LAWYER. Bartleby! These are your own copies here we are put to examine! It is labor saving to you because one examination will answer for your four copies. It is common usage. Every copyist is bound to help examine his copy. Is it not so? *(beat)* Will you not speak? Answer!

BARTLEBY. *(at a distance:)* I prefer not to.

LAWYER. *(heated:)* You are decided, then, not to comply with my request—a request made according to common usage and common sense?

(Beat.)

LAWYER (CONT'D). My scrivener made no other reply on that occasion. I would have violently dismissed him then and there...but something in his manner strangely disarmed me.

GINGER NUT. I think he's a little loony, sir.

LAWYER. And that was only the beginning.

(Transition music; ringing of a shop door bell and voices of shoppers.)

SHOPKEEPER. Well, good morning, Ginger Nut! A little early for the cake shop, isn't it? I hope your masters aren't skipping breakfast.

GINGER NUT. Not likely, ma'am. I'm here for the new one. He wants a dozen.

SHOPKEEPER. A new scrivener? Why haven't I seen him? My window looks across the street to your door.

GINGER NUT. He works odd hours, I think. What work he does prefer to do.

SHOPKEEPER. He has a choice? Good for him. I sweat with these ovens whether I prefer to or not! There's your bag.

GINGER NUT. Thank you, ma'am. So long!

(Doorbell ringing.)

GINGER NUT (CONT'D). Oh! Good morning, sir!

LAWYER. Ginger Nut. Who are the cakes for?

GINGER NUT. Uh...they're for Mr. Bartleby, sir.

LAWYER. Go on. *(beat)* For Bartleby. That's all he seemed to eat. His remarkable conduct of late led me to begin observing him closely. He never went out to dinner; indeed, never went anywhere. Always behind that screen... *(beat)* Bartleby? *(beat)* Bartleby, here. Take this package to the post office.

BARTLEBY. I would prefer not to.

LAWYER. It's just around the corner. *(beat)* Are you saying you will not?

BARTLEBY. I prefer not.

LAWYER. His conduct was beyond the pale. No other employer would put up with it. But. He did continue to be useful to me. So I could afford to humor his strange willfulness. I even managed to lay up in my soul a sweet morsel for my own conscience: if it wasn't for me, Bartleby the scrivener would starve from lack of ginger cakes! *(beat)* Then, one Sunday morning, I learned he owed me even more. *(Church bells.)*

LAWYER (CONT'D). You there. Newsman. Do you have any more of this week's Journal?

NEWSMAN. One left, I think. My own, sir.

LAWYER. Oh. You invest, do you? Well. Here's two penny more for it.

NEWSMAN. A tidy profit. There you are, sir. What brings you down Wall Street this morning?

LAWYER. The preacher at Trinity Church.

NEWSMAN. That one from New Zealand? He won't be around till half before noon.

LAWYER. Really? I'll retire for the hour to my offices, then.

(Suspense music. Footsteps on woodboard. Keys jangling.)

LAWYER (CONT'D). These damned keys. Walls within

walls. Now which one is it?

(A door knob being jiggled.)

LAWYER (CONT'D). Why isn't this door opening?

(Knocking on door.)

LAWYER (CONT'D). Hello? Who's there? Who's in my office?

(A door slowly opening.)

LAWYER (CONT'D). *(quietly shocked:)* Bartleby!?

BARTLEBY. I am engaged at present, sir. You will have to come back.

LAWYER. What are you doing in my office on a Sunday morning...in your shirtsleeves?

BARTLEBY. If you walk around the block once or twice, that should be sufficient.

LAWYER. Sufficient for what? Let me in!

BARTLEBY. I prefer not to.

(Door closing.)

LAWYER. Bartleby!

(Knocking at door.)

LAWYER. (CONT'D). Bartleby!!! *(beat)* I will come back. I will...walk around, and...I am coming back, Bartleby! I am coming back momentarily! *(beat)* What could this man possibly be doing...no. No. I walked around that morning in a fit of thought. This would not do. Bartleby—whatever his eccentricities—was an eminently decorous person. He would be the last man to sit down to his desk in any state approaching to nudity. And yet—this is what I had seen with my own eyes.

TURKEY. Are...you sure it was him, sir?

LAWYER. I am very sure, Turkey.

TURKEY. Well, then. You keep valuable papers, sir. Much valuable information. Perhaps...

LAWYER. No. None of my private papers were touched. I would've spotted that at a moment. Any lawyer with assistants...

TURKEY. Oh. Yes. Quite, sir.

LAWYER. He's spending his nights here. Look. Rolled

away under his desk. A blanket. And the empty grate. Do you see what's in it?

TURKEY. A tin basin and...soap.

LAWYER. He's been keeping a squalid little...bachelor's hall. *(beat)* Do you know what he does for hours at a time?

TURKEY. What, sir?

LAWYER. He stares. Out that window.

TURKEY. At...the wall?

LAWYER. At the wall.

TURKEY. And...you watch him?

LAWYER. Yes. I try to do it in a way that he doesn't notice me.

TURKEY. Oh. *(beat)* With submission, I'll be taking lunch out today, sir. I think I'll stroll up to Broadway.

LAWYER. I could well understand Turkey's revulsion. The basin. The blanket. The desk. The wall. For the first time in my life a feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy seized me. *(beat)* Soon enough, a more prudential feeling took its place. Not owing to selfishness. But at a certain point...gloomy feeling for one's fellow man becomes too painful. Common sense bids the soul to be rid of it. *(beat)* The scrivener was the victim of some innate and incurable disorder. I would have to dismiss him. *(beat)* Bartleby. *(beat)* Bartleby, I'm not going to ask you to do anything you would prefer not to do. I simply wish to speak to you.

BARTLEBY. Yes?

LAWYER. It is...will you tell me, Bartleby, where you were born?

BARTLEBY. I would prefer not to.

LAWYER. Will you tell me...anything about yourself?

BARTLEBY. I would prefer not to.

LAWYER. But what reasonable objection can you have to speaking to me? I feel...friendly towards you. *(beat)* What is your answer, Bartleby?

BARTLEBY. At present, I prefer to give no answer.

LAWYER. All right. All right, Bartleby. Never mind then about revealing your history. But let me entreat you, as a

friend, to comply as far as you may be with the usages of this office. Say now you will help to examine papers tomorrow or the next day. In short, say now that in a day or two you will begin to be a little reasonable. Say so, Bartleby.

BARTLEBY. At present...

(A door opening.)

BARTLEBY (CONT'D) ...I would prefer not to be a little reasonable.

NIPPERS. Prefer not, eh? I'd prefer him, if I were you, sir!

LAWYER. Nippers—

NIPPERS. I'd prefer him. I'd give him preferences, the stubborn mule! What is it, sir, pray, that he prefers not to do now?

LAWYER. Mr. Nippers, I'd prefer that you withdraw for the present.

TURKEY. Ahh, with submission, sir...

LAWYER. What, Turkey?

TURKEY. Yesterday I was thinking about Bartleby, here, and I think that if he would but prefer to take a quart of good ale a day, it would do much towards mending what ails him... and enable him to assist in examining his papers.

LAWYER. So you've taken to using the word too, eh, Turkey?

TURKEY. With submission, what word, sir?

GINGER NUT. Mr. Turkey, Mr. Nippers. Would anyone prefer me to go out to the cake shop just now?

LAWYER. You see? That word, Turkey! That word!

TURKEY. Oh, you mean "prefer"? Yes. Queer word. I never use it myself. But as I was saying, if Mr. Bartleby here would but prefer—

BARTLEBY. I would prefer to be left alone here.

NIPPERS. I'd prefer to black his eye!

LAWYER. Turkey. Will you and the others please withdraw?

TURKEY. Certainly, sir, if you prefer that we should.

(Footsteps leaving; door closing.)

LAWYER. It was clear. This demented man was

beginning to affect my other clerks. He must be got rid of. I waited another day...watched him stand at his window in his dead-wall reverie for hours... *(beat)* Bartleby. Why do you not write?

BARTLEBY. I have decided to do no more writing.

LAWYER. To do no more writing?

BARTLEBY. No more.

LAWYER. And what is the reason?

BARTLEBY. Do you not see the reason for yourself?

LAWYER. What? *(beat)* Well, your eyes do look a little glazed and dull. That dim window... Yes. Perhaps you do wisely in abstaining from writing for awhile. Perhaps you should take in some open air. Here. I have a letter you can carry to the post office.

BARTLEBY. I would prefer not to.

LAWYER. Very well. In any case, you need do no more writing today. You can return to your copying tomorrow.

BARTLEBY. I have given up copying.

LAWYER. What? *(beat)* But—suppose your eyes should get entirely well—would you not copy then?

BARTLEBY. I have given up copying.

LAWYER. This is unsupportable. You are a law copyist. You are a scrivener! *(beat)* Why do you turn to that window? There is only the wall, Bartleby! I assure you, there is only the wall!

(Transition music; sound of horses in a crowded street.)

MAN 1. I'll take odds he doesn't.

MAN 2. Doesn't go? Done! Put up your money!

LAWYER. What are you men talking about?

MAN 1. Excuse me, sir?

LAWYER. You're wagering my clerk Bartleby won't quit my offices. Well he will go! I tell you gentlemen, he will!

MAN 2. We were talking about the election.

LAWYER. Election? *(beat)* Oh. Pardon me. *(beat)* The strain of my situation was taking its toll. I had finally made clear to my scrivener that he must leave. I gave him six days. It was now the expiration of that period.

(Keys jingling.)

LAWYER (CONT'D). These damned keys.

TURKEY. Would you like me to search it out for you, sir?

LAWYER. Turkey, has anyone besides yourself been in these offices this morning?

TURKEY. Not that I'm aware. *(beat)* There you are, sir. I believe this key is the right one.

LAWYER. Go on with your work.

TURKEY. Certainly, sir.

(Keys jangling. A door opening slowly.)

LAWYER. Bartleby? *(beat)* Is that you in the shadow, there? *(beat)* Why have you not quit this place?

BARTLEBY. I would prefer not to.

LAWYER. Look. Look. I am sorry for you, Bartleby. But the time has come. *(beat)* Here is money. But you must go. *(beat)* I owe you twelve dollars on account. Here are thirty-two. The odd twenty are yours. Now. Will you take it?

(beat) I am pained, Bartleby. I had thought better of you. I had imagined you...of such a gentlemanly organization, that in any delicate dilemma a slight hint would suffice... But. It appears I have been deceived. *(Growing angry:)* I could call in the police. Now: will you or will you not quit me?

BARTLEBY. I would prefer not to quit you.

LAWYER. And what earthly right do you have to stay here? Do you pay rent? Taxes? Is this property yours? *(beat)* Are you ready to write now? Or to examine a few lines? Or step round to the post office? In a word, will you do anything at all to give coloring to your refusal to depart my premises? *(beat)* You're a millstone around my neck. Do you know what I'm thinking right now, Bartleby? I'm thinking...I could kill you!

(Knocking on a door.)

TURKEY. *(from beyond the door:)* Is everything all right, sir?

LAWYER. Yes, Turkey. Everything's all right. I've been to mass this week. "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another!" *(beat)* I resolved then and there to

let my demented scrivener stand facing the window that looked out on the wall for as long he would. *(beat)* As days went by in his silent presence, I slid into the persuasion that Bartleby had been billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an all-wise providence. *(beat)* I believe this blessed state of affairs would've continued indefinitely, if not for professional rumors.

BUSINESSMAN 1. These contracts appear quite satisfactory. Our company will review them further, of course.

LAWYER. Certainly.

BUSINESSMAN 2. Your clerk. What is he doing over there?

LAWYER. My clerk?

BUSINESSMAN 2. Yes. He's been...just standing behind that partition this whole time.

BUSINESSMAN 1. What's he looking at?

BUSINESSMAN 2. It hardly matters. He does no work! You there! Clerk!

LAWYER. Um, gentlemen...

BUSINESSMAN 1. I think we've caught your copyist napping.

BUSINESSMAN 2. You! Step out from there. *(beat)* Do you hear me? I say step out! *(beat)* What, is he deaf?

LAWYER. Yes.

BARTLEBY. I prefer not to step out.

BUSINESSMEN 1 & 2. *(startled whispers)* Outrageous! *(Beat.)*

LAWYER. It was one thing for my clerk to be seen as eccentric. It was another thing for me to be perceived so. Call it a weakness, but I could not turn Bartleby out. I resolved to change my offices.

(Sound of desk being moved.)

NIPPERS. This desk is the last of it, sir—

LAWYER. Have Ginger Nut help you move it to the cart, Nippers.

NIPPERS. Sir? He's still standing in there. Shall I—?

LAWYER. No. Go on. I'll see to it.

(Sound of footsteps.)

LAWYER (CONT'D). Goodbye, Bartleby. I'm going. Goodbye. And God some way bless you. And take this...

(Sound of coins dropping to the floor.)

LAWYER (CONT'D). Well...you'll pick those up, perhaps, when you have need of them. Goodbye. *(beat)* Established in my new quarters, for a day or two I kept the door locked. My fears were needless. Bartleby never came. *(beat)* I thought all was going well. Until one afternoon, I was paid a visit.

(Knocking on a door.)

LAWYER. Come in.

TENANT. Yes. Are you the person who recently occupied the premises at Wall-street, number—

LAWYER. What is it?

TENANT. You are responsible for the man you left there. He refuses to quit the premises. He says he—

LAWYER. I know what he says—

TENANT. He says he prefers not to. It's very queer.

LAWYER. I'm sorry. But the man you allude to...is nothing to me.

TENANT. In mercy's name, who is he?

LAWYER. I am certain I cannot inform you. I know nothing about him. Formerly I employed him as a copyist. But he has done nothing for me now for some time past.

TENANT. Very well. But when they haul him off and do god knows what, I'm afraid it'll be your name in the papers.

LAWYER. Wait. I am in no way obligated. But for the sake of...I will go and have word.

(Tension music.)

LAWYER (CONT'D). Bartleby? What are you doing in the hallway of these premises?

BARTLEBY. Sitting on the banister.

LAWYER. Are you aware that you are the cause of great tribulation to me, by persisting in occupying this entry after being dismissed from these offices? *(beat)* Look. Either you

must do something, or something must be done to you. Now what sort of business would you like to engage in? Would you like to re-engage in copying for someone?

BARTLEBY. No. I would prefer not to make any change.

LAWYER. Would you like...a clerkship in a dry goods store?

BARTLEBY. There is too much confinement about that. But I am not particular.

LAWYER. Too much confinement? You keep yourself confined all the time!

BARTLEBY. I would prefer not to take a clerkship.

LAWYER. Well then, would you like to travel through the country collecting bills for merchants? That would improve your health.

BARTLEBY. No, I would prefer to be doing something else.

LAWYER. How then, about going as a companion to Europe, to entertain with your conversation? How would that suit you?

BARTLEBY. Not at all. I like to be stationary.

LAWYER. Stationary you certainly are! But that is NOT AN OCCUPATION! (*quieter:*) Bartleby...will you go home with me now—not to my office, but my dwelling—and remain there till we can conclude upon some convenient arrangement for you at our leisure? Come. Let us start now, right away.

BARTLEBY. No; at present I would prefer not to make any change at all.

LAWYER. There it is. I had done all I could to shield this man from persecution. He would not have it. (*beat*) In a few days, I received a note. It informed me that Bartleby had been picked up by the police, and removed to the Tombs as a vagrant. In my first visit there, I tried to see to it that food was provided him. After my second visit, he no longer had need of any. (*beat*) Mr. Cutlets? I've come to see Bartleby. Is he in the prison yard?

CUTLETS. The silent man? He's sleeping yonder. 'Tis not

twenty minutes since I saw him lie down out beyond there.
His dinner is ready.

LAWYER. Does he dine?

CUTLETS. No. He lives without dining.

LAWYER. Lives without dining...

CUTLETS. Here he is. *(beat)* Asleep. Ain't he?

LAWYER. With kings and counselors.

(Transition music.)

LAWYER (CONT'D). There would seem little need for proceeding with this history. Some months after the scrivener's decease, I heard a rumor...a vague report that Bartleby had been a clerk in the Dead Letter Office at Washington. Letters to the dead. Burned by the cart-load. From out the folded paper a ring meant for a finger now moldering in the grave; bank-notes meant for charity to one who no longer hungers; pardons for those who died despairing; hope for those who died unhoping; good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities. On errands of life, these letters speed to death. *(beat)* Ah, Bartleby! Ah humanity!

End of show music.

A Christmas Carol

A radioplay adaptation of Charles Dicken's story

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by

Joe Doran

Produced by High Window RadioClassics Theatre. Presented on December 18th, 1998, at the Vassar Institute Theatre, Poughkeepsie, NY. Broadcast live on WHVW 950 AM (Hyde Park, NY).

CAST

<i>Ebenezer Scrooge</i>	Brett Owen
<i>Christmas Present</i>	Victor Small
<i>Nephew</i>	Anthony Sucato
<i>Mrs Cratchet/Christmas Past</i>	Renee DePietro
<i>Martha/Fan</i>	Christa O'Neill
<i>Niece</i>	Amy Byrne
<i>Tiny Tim</i>	Bobby Kirby
<i>Fezziwig</i>	Stephen Brinckerhoff
<i>Gentleman 1</i>	Anthony Puccio
<i>Gentleman 2</i>	Andy Champ-Doran
<i>Carol singer</i>	Debbie Puccio
<i>Bob Cratchit/Marley/Announcer</i>	Joe Doran

(*FADE IN: Intro music—God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen...*)

ANNOUNCER. To begin with, Marley was dead. As dead as a doornail. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing good can come from this story...

CHILD CAROLERS. God rest ye merry gentlemen, may nothing you dismay! Remember—

CHILD 1. Quiet! Look down the street! Here comes old Scrooge!

SCROOGE. Is it enough I walk a snow storm without beggars blocking my way? Off the street! Or I'll take a stick

to you!

(Sound of a door opening and closing.)

CRATCHIT. Good afternoon, Mr. Scrooge.

SCROOGE. Mr. Cratchit, what are you doing with that shovelful of coal?

CRATCHIT. It's...bitterly cold, sir. I thought to warm the office.

SCROOGE. Burn one more brick today, and you and I shall part for all future time. Do you take my meaning, clerk?

CRATCHIT. Yes sir.

(A door opening.)

NEPHEW. Hello, Uncle Scrooge! Merry Christmas and God save you!

SCROOGE. Merry Christmas and God save me. Bah! Humbug!

NEPHEW. Christmas a humbug? Surely you don't mean that, uncle.

SCROOGE. I do, nephew, I assure you. What right do you have to be merry? You're poor enough.

NEPHEW. What right do you have to be dismal? You're rich enough.

SCROOGE. I live in a world of fools. What's Christmas but a time for paying bills without money? For finding yourself a year older and not an hour richer? If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart! No, you keep Christmas in your own way, nephew, and let me keep it in mine.

NEPHEW. But you don't keep it!

SCROOGE. Let me leave it alone then. A lot of good it's done you.

NEPHEW. Uncle, there are many things from which I have derived good, by which I have not profited. I've always thought of Christmas as a good time—a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time. When men and women seem to open their hearts freely, and to think of people below them as

if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, though it has never put a scrap of gold in my pocket, I believe it has done me good, and will do me good, and I say God bless it!

(Sound of Bob Cratchit clapping.)

CRATCHIT. Very well said, sir!

SCROOGE. Another word from you, Bob Cratchit, and you'll keep your Christmas by losing your situation! *(beat)* You're quite a speaker, nephew. I wonder you don't go into Parliament.

NEPHEW. Don't be angry, uncle! Come! Dine with us tomorrow!

SCROOGE. I'll dine with you in hell first.

NEPHEW. But why? Why?!

SCROOGE. Why did you get married?

NEPHEW. Because I fell in love!

SCROOGE. Because you fell in love! Good afternoon!

NEPHEW. We've never had any quarrel, uncle, so I'll keep my Christmas humor to the last. Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year!

SCROOGE. Good afternoon!

(Sound of door slamming.)

SCROOGE (CONT'D). And here's another one, my clerk. Fifteen shillings a week, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas. I'll retire to Bedlam.

(Knocking on door.)

SCROOGE (CONT'D). Who is it?

(Door opening.)

GENTLEMAN 1. Excuse me, sir. Have we the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?

SCROOGE. Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years.

GENTLEMAN 2. Well, we have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner.

SCROOGE. What do you want?

GENTLEMAN 1. At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge, we strive to make some slight provision for the poor

and destitute.

SCROOGE. You both look well enough fed.

GENTLEMAN 1. No, not us—

SCROOGE. Oh. Well, then. Are there no prisons?

GENTLEMAN 2. Plenty of prisons.

SCROOGE. And the union workhouses? Are they still in operation?

GENTLEMAN 1. They are. I wish I could say they weren't.

SCROOGE. Hmm. I was afraid from what you just said, that something had occurred to stop these useful institutions in their work.

GENTLEMAN 1. Yes, well...a few of us are endeavoring to raise a fund to buy the poor some meat and drink...

GENTLEMAN 2. Yes. And what shall we put you down for?

SCROOGE. Nothing.

GENTLEMAN 2. You...wish to be anonymous?

SCROOGE. I wish to be left alone. Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned. They cost enough. Those who are badly off must go there.

GENTLEMAN 1. But many can't go there.

GENTLEMAN 2. And many would rather die!

SCROOGE. If they would rather die, they had better do it and decrease the surplus population! Good afternoon.
(Sound of door slamming; a candle being snuffed out.)

SCROOGE (CONT'D). What's the idea of snuffing out that candle, Cratchit?

CRATCHIT. It's...getting late, sir.

SCROOGE. Oh. That's right. Don't work too late. You might make something of yourself. *(beat)* I suppose you'll want the whole day off tomorrow?

CRATCHIT. If it's quite convenient, sir.

SCROOGE. It's not convenient. And it's not fair. If I was to stop half a crown for it, you'd think yourself ill-used. And yet, you don't think me ill-used when I pay a day's wages for

no work.

CRATCHIT. It's...only once a year, sir.

SCROOGE. A poor excuse for picking a man's pocket every 25th of December! Very well, then. Be here all the earlier next morning!

CRATCHIT. Yes, Mr. Scrooge...

(Street sounds.)

VENDOR. Roasted nuts! Penny a bag!

CRATCHIT. I'll take one!

TIM. Hello, father!

CRATCHIT. Tim! Son! What are you doing out in the cold?

TIM. I wanted to walk you home on Christmas eve!

CRATCHIT. Good lad! Here, give me your crutch—and climb up on my back!

TIM. Are we going to slide on the ice?

CRATCHIT. We are indeed! Hold tight!

(Sound of sliding on ice.)

TIM. Weeee!

CRATCHIT. Ha ha! Woah!

(Sound of crashing in the snow.)

CRATCHIT. Are you all right, lad?

TIM. Yes, father! Father, is that Mr. Scrooge, over there, walking alone?

CRATCHIT. Yes, it is, Tim.

(Transition music. Sound of a door knocker.)

SCROOGE. What do I pay a servant woman for, she can't open a front door...aaahhhh! Jacob Marley's face! On the door knocker! What trick is this? Bah! Humbug!

(Door opening and closing.)

SCROOGE (CONT'D). It's nothing. Nothing at all.

(Sound of footsteps up stairs.)

SCROOGE (CONT'D). Up to my room...there. That's it. A bowl of gruel...a few coals in the fireplace...

(Sudden bells ringing.)

SCROOGE (CONT'D). What's that noise? The door bell? But...I can see the front door from this window! No one's

there!

(The Bells stop.)

SCROOGE (CONT'D). Humbug!

(Sound of chains dragging.)

SCROOGE (CONT'D). Who is it?

(The chains and moaning get louder; a door bursting open.)

SCROOGE (CONT'D). How now! I see before me, some shade, some spectre. Well? What do you want with me?

MARLEY. Much!

SCROOGE. Who are you?

MARLEY. Ask me who I was.

SCROOGE. Who were you, then?

MARLEY. In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley.

SCROOGE. Well, tell me: why do spirits walk the earth. And why do they come to me?

MARLEY. My spirit did not walk among men in life. Never beyond the limits of our money-changing hole. Now it is condemned to do so after death. Doomed to wander through the world—and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared...aaaaahhhhh!!!

SCROOGE. You're chained. Tell me why.

MARLEY. I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link and yard by yard. Do you know the length and weight of the coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and long as this, seven Christmas eves ago. You have labored on it since. It is a ponderous chain!

SCROOGE. Jacob, please! Speak comfort to me!

MARLEY. I have none to give. No space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunity misused! Yet such was I!

SCROOGE. But...you were always a good man of business—

MARLEY. Business? Mankind was my business! The common welfare was my business! Hear me! My time is nearly gone! You will be haunted tonight by three spirits.

SCROOGE. I...Jacob, I think I'd rather not—

MARLEY. Without their visits you cannot hope to shun the

path I tread. Expect the first when the bell tolls one!

(Sound of chains dragging off.)

SCROOGE. Jacob? Jacob, where are you? Bah! Hum...

(Transition music; a bell tolls one.)

SCROOGE (CONT'D). There's the toll of the hour. And nothing else. Here I am, warm in my bed. It was a dream.

CHRISTMAS PAST. Ebenezer Scrooge...

SCROOGE. What? Who are you? Are you the spirit whose coming was foretold to me?

CHRISTMAS PAST. I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.

SCROOGE. Long Past?

CHRISTMAS PAST. Your past. Rise and walk with me.

SCROOGE. Out that window? But...I am mortal, and liable to fall.

CHRISTMAS PAST. Bear but a touch of my hand, and you shall be upheld in more than this!

SCROOGE. My God, everything around me is vanished! Where am I? *(beat)* Wait. I see trees. An old crossroads... Why, over there! Those are my old schoolmates! Orson! Valentine! Don't you recognize me?

CHRISTMAS PAST. These are but shadows of things that have been. Come. There is a child left alone in the school house.

SCROOGE. I know. That's me as a boy. I wish...

CHRISTMAS PAST. What?

SCROOGE. Nothing. There were...some children singing carols on the street last night. I wish I'd given them something, that's all. Look! At the doorway! My sister Fan!

FAN. Dear, dear brother! I've come to bring you home! Home!

YOUNG SCROOGE. Home, little Fan?

FAN. Yes! Father is so much kinder than he used to be. I asked him once more if you might come home, and he said yes, you should!

CHRISTMAS PAST. Your sister Fan. Always a delicate creature, whom a breath might have withered. But she had a large heart.

SCROOGE. Yes, she did.

CHRISTMAS PAST. She died a woman, and had, as I think, children?

SCROOGE. One child.

CHRISTMAS PAST. Yes. Your nephew! Come.

(Street sounds.)

SCROOGE. Where are we now? Back in the city? Why, that warehouse! I was apprenticed here! There's old Fezziwig! Bless his heart! Old Fezziwig is alive again!

FEZZIWIG. Yo, ho there! Ebenezer! Dick Wilkins! Come here!

YOUNG SCROOGE AND DICK. Yes, Mister Fezziwig?

FEZZIWIG. No more work tonight! It's Christmas eve! Put up the shutters! And clear the room! We need space to dance!

(Music; sounds of a gay party.)

GIRL. Come! Do a jig with me, Ebenezer!

YOUNG SCROOGE. But, I'm afraid I'm not very good—

FEZZIWIG. Go on, lad! Life's for living!

SCROOGE. Yes! Go on! Go on!

YOUNG SCROOGE. Well all right! I'll give it a try!

CHRISTMAS PAST. A small matter, isn't it, to make these silly folks so full of gratitude? He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money.

SCROOGE. It isn't the money, spirit! He had the power, with a word, a gesture, to make our service light and our toils a pleasure! The happiness he gave was quite as much as if it cost a fortune!

CHRISTMAS PAST. Your face, Ebenezer Scrooge. What's the matter?

SCROOGE. Nothing. I...I should like to be able to say a word to my clerk just now. That's all. Where are we now, spirit?

CHRISTMAS PAST. Your sister Fan is giving birth.

YOUNG SCROOGE. Dear Fan, please be strong! Doctor, she looks feverish! Will she be all right?

DOCTOR. It's best you should wait now in the next room.

YOUNG SCROOGE. All right. Please call the moment anything happens.

(Sound of a door closing.)

SCROOGE. She died as my mother did.

FAN. Ebenezer...

DOCTOR. Your brother is in the next room.

FAN. Ebenezer, please promise me...please promise me that you will watch over my child always...

SCROOGE. Fan! Fan, I'm sorry! I didn't hear you! I...I didn't hear her. Spirit. I didn't hear her.

CHRISTMAS PAST. In your ear or your heart?

SCROOGE. Fan, forgive me...

CHRISTMAS PAST. This way, Ebenezer. The girl you danced with—do you see her over there by that bench?

SCROOGE. Yes. And myself. Older now.

GIRL. It matters to you little, Ebenezer. Another idol has displaced me. I pray it can cheer and comfort you in time to come.

SCROOGE. What idol has displaced you?

GIRL. A golden one. You fear the world too much. You seek to distance yourself from all hurts by your only remaining passion, Gain!

SCROOGE. Even if I have grown so much the wiser, what then? I am not changed towards you.

GIRL. You are changed. Our contract is an old one. It was made when we were both poor and content to be so, until we could improve our fortune by patient industry.

SCROOGE. I was a boy, then. But have I ever sought release?

GIRL. In words, no. So let me say them: I release you, Ebenezer! May you be happy in the life you have chosen!

SCROOGE. Spirit! Show me no more! Conduct me home! Why do you torture me? Let me go!

CHRISTMAS PAST. Not yet! There's one more scene...
(Sound of singing.)

SCROOGE. It's her again. Older now. And still so beautiful, sitting by a fire. Wait. Those children. Singing,

wrapping presents. Are they hers?

CHRISTMAS PAST. They are.

SCROOGE. All this...could've been mine.

CHRISTMAS PAST. Yes. Now it is time to go.

SCROOGE. Good! Leave me! Take me back! Haunt me no longer! I cannot bear it!!! *(beat)* My bed! I'm in my bed again. These things have drained me. I'm so tired...

(Transition music; a bell tolls 2 o'clock.)

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Wake up, Ebenezer Scrooge!
Know me better!

SCROOGE. What?! My room! It's transformed! It looks like a winter feast!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. I am the ghost of Christmas Present! Look upon me!

SCROOGE. You're like a giant!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. You've never seen the like of me before, eh?

SCROOGE. No, never!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. That's a wonder, since I have more than 1800 brothers!

SCROOGE. Spirit, conduct me where you will. If you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Very well! Touch my robe!

SCROOGE. Why...you've brought me to the home of my clerk, Bob Cratchit. There's his wife...

MRS. CRATCHIT. Peter, don't plunge that fork into any more of those potatoes! Wait for dinner! Martha?

MARTHA. Yes, mother?

MRS. CRATCHIT. Quick! Before your father comes in! Hide! He won't be expecting you yet!

MARTHA. All right!

(A door opening.)

CRATCHIT. I'm home, dear!

MRS. CRATCHIT. Bob! Darling! What took you so long?

TIM. Father carried me on his shoulder the whole way!

CRATCHIT. Are you up there, Tim? I'd all but forgotten!

But where's our Martha?

MRS. CRATCHIT. Not coming, Bob.

CRATCHIT. Not coming! Not coming upon Christmas Day?

MARTHA. Look! Here I am, father!

CRATCHIT. Martha! Bless my heart! You tricked me! You are here!

MRS. CRATCHIT. Now go wash up, children. *(beat)* And how was Tiny Tim, Bob? Did he behave?

CRATCHIT. As good as gold. Somehow, he gets thoughtful sitting by himself. He told me, coming home, that he hoped people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see... He's getting stronger, wife. I believe he's getting stronger.

MARTHA. Mother, we're washed now! Can we have our goose?

PETER. Please, mum!

MRS. CRATCHIT. All right, Peter! All of you, sit down! You're father is bringing it in!

CRATCHIT. Here it is!

(CHILDREN: "Oh my!" "Look at that!" "It's wonderful!", etc.)

TINY TIM. Hurrah!

CRATCHIT. Do you like it, little Tim? It's as big as you! And now, a toast! A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears! God bless us!

TINY TIM. God bless us, everyone!

SCROOGE. Spirit, tell me if Tiny Tim will live.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. I see a vacant seat in the chimney corner, and a crutch, carefully preserved. If these shadows remained unaltered by the future, the child will die.

SCROOGE. No! No, kind spirit. Say he will be spared.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Why? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.

SCROOGE. My own words.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Forbear what you say, until you have discovered what the surplus is. It may be that in the sight of Heaven, you are less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child!

CRATCHIT. I give you now, Mr. Scrooge, the founder of the feast!

MRS. CRATCHIT. Founder of the feast, indeed!

CRATCHIT. Dear, the children. It's Christmas Day.

MRS. CRATCHIT. It should be Christmas Day, when one drinks the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge!

CRATCHIT. Please, dear...

MRS. CRATCHIT. I'll drink his health for your sake and the Day's. Not for his. Long life to him! A merry Christmas and a happy new year! He'll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Now let us go out even beyond these shanty houses, Ebenezer Scrooge.

SCROOGE. Why? It's cold out here! And snowing! Where have you taken me, spirit?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. A place where miners live, who labor in the bowels of the earth. Look beyond these mud walls!

FAMILY. (*singing*) Silent night, holy night...

SCROOGE. This family! They have nothing!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. They have each other. And now: do you recognize this place?

SCROOGE. No. But it's warm and bright enough.

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. It's the house of your nephew.
(*Sounds of a party.*)

NEPHEW. Listen to this: he said Christmas was a humbug! And he believed it too!

NIECE. More shame for him, Fred!

SCROOGE. That girl. Is that my nephew's wife?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Yes. Do you approve?

SCROOGE. She's pretty enough.

NEPHEW. My uncle is a comical old fellow, and not so

pleasant as he might be. But. His offenses carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him.

NIECE. Fred tells me he's very rich.

NEPHEW. But his wealth is no use to him. He don't do any good with it. Or even make himself comfortable. Here, he takes it into his head to dislike us, and he won't come to dine. What's the consequence?

NIECE. I think he loses a very good dinner.

NEPHEW. Well, I mean to give him the same chance every year, for I pity him.

SCROOGE. Save your pity!

NEPHEW. Let's have a game!

NIECE. How about Blind Man's Bluff!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Have you seen enough, Ebeneezer?

SCROOGE. Spirit, wait! I'd like to watch a moment. I used to...I used to play this game...a long time ago.

NIECE. All right, Fred, now that I can't see anything, where are you?

SCROOGE. He's over there!

NIECE. Stop giggling!

SCROOGE. That's him! That's him giggling!

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. We can tarry here no more, Ebeneezer.

SCROOGE. Must we go? Are spirit's lives so short?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. My life upon this globe is very brief: but one day and night.

SCROOGE. Spirit, I see something strange protruding from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. It might be a claw, for all the flesh there is on it. Look!

SCROOGE. My God! Under your robes! Two children, so...wretched. Who are they? Are they yours?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. They are Man's. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased!

SCROOGE. Have they no refuge or resource?

CHRISTMAS PRESENT. (*laughs*) Are there no prisons?
Are there no workhouses?

SCROOGE. No please, spirit, don't torture me with my own words... Where are you? Where have you gone? You mean to leave me here in the middle of this dark street?
(*Ominous sound of Christmas Future.*)

SCROOGE (CONT'D). You...draped and hooded phantom...are you the third spirit meant to guide me tonight? Are you the Ghost of Christmas Future? I see you don't speak. You only shake your head. You are about to show me shadows of things that have not happened, but will happen.
(*beat*) I fear you most of all. But I know your purpose is to do me good. Lead on! Time is precious to me. (*beat*) You've brought me to the Exchange. Where I do business.

BUSINESS MAN 1. No, I don't know much about it either way. I only know he's dead.

BUSINESS MAN 2. When did he die?

BUSINESS MAN 1. Last night, I believe.

BUSINESS MAN 2. I thought he'd never die. What has he done with his money?

BUSINESS MAN 1. He hasn't left it to me. That's all I know. It's likely to be a very cheap funeral, for upon my life, I don't know anyone to go to it.

BUSINESS MAN 2. I'll go—if they provide lunch!
(*They laugh.*)

SCROOGE. Who are these men talking about? It can't be Jacob Marley. (*beat*) And where are we now, spirit? I see your bony finger pointing to a rag shop...

LAUNDRESS. I took the bed linens, Joe! Who's the worse for the loss of a few things like these? Not a dead man, I suppose!

JOE. No indeed!

LAUNDRESS. If he wanted to keep 'em after he was dead, why wasn't he natural in his lifetime? If he had been, he'd have had somebody to look after him when he was stuck with death, instead of lying gasping out his last there, alone by

himself.

JOE. It's true.

LAUNDRESS. Okay, Joe. What will you give me for the whole mess?

JOE. Wait a minute. He didn't die of anything catching, did he?

SCROOGE. Spirit! The case of this unhappy man might be my own. My life tends that way now... Merciful heaven! What is this? A wake? But it's completely empty, except for that reclined figure, under a shroud there! Take me away! *(beat)* Spirit, can you show me no tenderness connected with death? *(beat)* I've been brought back to Bob Cratchit's house. Why?

MRS. CRATCHIT. Go on, keep reading, Peter.

PETER. Yes, mother. "And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them..."

MRS. CRATCHIT. *(crying)* Excuse me, children, I'm sorry...the fire light...the color hurts my eyes...

MARTHA. You needn't be strong for us, mother.

MRS. CRATCHIT. I wouldn't show weak eyes to your father when he comes home, for all the world. It must be near his time.

PETER. Past it, rather. But I think he walks a little slower than he used to, these last few evenings, mother.

MRS. CRATCHIT. I have known him to walk...with Tiny Tim on his shoulder, very fast indeed.

MARTHA. So have I!

MRS. CRATCHIT. But he was very light to carry.
(Sound of a door opening and closing.)

MRS. CRATCHIT (CONT'D). There's your father now.

CRATCHIT. Good evening, dear. Children. I...I went by, today, to see the plot. It'll be ready by Sunday.

MRS. CRATCHIT. You went today, Robert?

CRATCHIT. Yes. I wish you could've gone. It would have done you good to see how green a place it is. But you'll see it often. I promised him...that I would walk there on a Sunday...my little, my little child...

MRS. CRATCHIT. Oh, Bob!

CRATCHIT. There. It's all right. I saw Mr. Scrooge's nephew today. When I told him about little Tim, he said, "I'm heartily sorry for it, Mr. Cratchit. And heartily sorry for your wife."

MRS. CRATCHIT. He's a good soul.

CRATCHIT. Yes. In fact, I shouldn't be at all surprised, mark what I say, if he got Peter a better situation.

MARTHA. And then Peter will be keeping company with someone, and setting up for himself!

PETER. Get along with you!

CRATCHIT. Well, there's plenty of time for that. But whenever we part, I'm sure we shall none of us forget poor Tiny Tim.

FAMILY. Never.

CRATCHIT. I am very happy. I am very happy...

SCROOGE. Spirit, something tells me our parting moment is at hand. I must know...what man was it whom we saw lying dead? *(beat)* This iron gate opens to a graveyard. I can hardly make it out in the darkness. Where does your finger point me? To which stone? That one? *(beat)* Before I draw nearer to it, answer me one question. Are these the shadows of things that will be, or things that may be? *(beat)* Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead. But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me! *(beat)* The gravestone! It says, "Ebenezer Scrooge"! Spirit, hear me! I am not the man I was! Why show me this if I am past all hope? Tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone! I pray! I pray! I...

(Music transition.)

SCROOGE (CONT'D). What's this? My bedpost! My... my room! My linens, my curtains, they're not torn down!

(Sound of curtain opening.)

SCROOGE (CONT'D). Oh, Jacob Marley! I will live in the Past, the Present, the Future! The spirits of all three shall strive within me! Heaven and the Christmas time be praised

for this! I say it on my knees, old Jacob. On my knees!
(*Beat. Giddy:*) I don't know what to do. I'm as light as a feather! I'm as happy as an angel! Let me throw open the window...

(*Window being thrown open.*)

SCROOGE (CONT'D). A merry Christmas to everybody! Yes, you there! Boy! What's today?

BOY. Today? Why, it's Christmas Day!

SCROOGE. Then I haven't missed it. The spirits have done it all in one night! Well, of course they can, they can do anything they like. Hallo my fine fellow! Do you know the poulterers, in the next street at the corner?

BOY. I should hope I did.

SCROOGE. An intelligent boy! A remarkable boy! Do you know whether they've sold the prize turkey that was hanging up there?

BOY. What, the one as big as me? It's hanging there now!

SCROOGE. What a delightful boy! Go and buy it.

BOY. Walk-er...

SCROOGE. No. I am in earnest! Go and buy it, and tell 'em to bring it here. Come back with the man, and I'll give you a shilling. Come back with him in less than five minutes, and I'll give you half a crown!

BOY. Yes sir!

SCROOGE. I'll send it to Bob Cratchit! He shan't know who sends it! It's twice the size of Tiny Tim! Let me get dressed! I have so much to do!

(*Transition music.*)

GENTLEMAN 1. Look. Coming down the street in green and red!

GENTLEMAN 2. It's Ebenezer Scrooge!

SCROOGE. Gentleman, good morning! You came to my place of business last evening. It was very kind of you. A merry Christmas to you!

GENTLEMAN 1. Mr. Scrooge...?

SCROOGE. Yes, that is my name and I fear it may not be pleasant to you. Allow me to ask your pardon. And will you

have the goodness of accepting from me—(*whispers the rest*)

GENTLEMAN 1. Lord bless me! My dear Mr. Scrooge, are you serious?

SCROOGE. If you please. Not a farthing less. A great many back payments are included in it, I assure you.

GENTLEMAN 1. Thank you, Mr. Scrooge! Thank you!
(*Transition music; knocking at a door.*)

MAID. Hello? Who's there?

SCROOGE. Is your master at home, my dear?

MAID. Why—yes. He's in the dining room along with mistress. I'll show you in, if you please.

SCROOGE. Thank you.

NEPHEW. Why—Uncle Scrooge!

SCROOGE. Fred! I've come to dinner—that is, if it's not too late.

NEPHEW. Not too late at all, uncle. Come in! Come in! I'd like you to meet my wife.

NIECE. Hello, Uncle Scrooge.

SCROOGE. Dear girl...can you ever forgive a foolish old man?

NIECE. Speak no more of it. You're welcome in our home!

SCROOGE. Thank you. God bless you. May I tell you something?

NIECE. What's that?

SCROOGE. If you should ever play Blind Man's Bluff, by all means do not fret if the participants giggle too much.

They're easier to find that way!

(*Transition music. Sound of a door opening and closing gently. Soft footsteps; a chair sliding.*)

SCROOGE (CONT'D). Ahem. Mr. Cratchit. What do you mean by coming here at this time of day?

CRATCHIT. I am very sorry, sir. I am behind my time.

SCROOGE. Yes, you are. Step this way, if you please.

CRATCHIT. It's...only once a year, sir. It shall not be repeated. I was making rather merry yesterday, sir.

SCROOGE. Now, I'll tell you what, my friend. I'm not

going to stand for this sort of thing any longer. And therefore...and therefore, I'm going to raise your salary! A merry Christmas, Bob!

CRATCHIT. Mister Scrooge? Are you quite all right?

SCROOGE. I haven't lost my senses, Bob. I've come to them. I want to help you and your family. Tiny Tim. We'll discuss it this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl. Now. Make up the fires. And buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another I, Bob Cratchit!

ANNOUNCER. Scrooge was better than his word. And to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was like a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man as the city ever knew. And it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that truly be said of us, and all of us. And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless us, every one!

(End of show music.)

Then Again!

Adapted from true stories that deserve a second visit

Episode One

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by

Joe Doran

Produced by High Window RadioClassics Theatre. Presented on June 30th 2000, at Barnes & Noble Booksellers, Poughkeepsie, NY. Broadcast on WHVW 950 AM (Hyde Park, NY).

CAST

Daddy/Bud/Radio Salesman 3/Gateman..... Brett Owen
Annalou/Perky/Nancy Amy Byrne
Doc Brinkley Victor Small
Heckler/Maytag Salesman Anthony Sucato
Vergie/Operator 2/Joyce..... Renee DePietro
Opal/Rita..... Christa O'Neill
Mr. Dobbs/Karl/Kenneth Anthony Puccio
Radio Salesman 2/Harry/Jim Reed Buderis
Dad/David..... Stephen Brinckerhoff
Gentleman 2 Andy Champ-Doran
Woman 1/Mama/Operator 1/Marjorie Debbie Puccio
Announcer/Radio Salesman 1 Joe Doran

(FADE IN: Intro music.)

ANNOUNCER. Are you old enough to remember things that should never be forgotten? Are you young enough to see the world new every day? Then pull your radio up close as we take you back in time to THEN AGAIN!, the show told by folks just like you...sharing memories that deserve a second visit...

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D). Driving with Mama in the 1920's was no quiet ride, remembers Vergie Rooker of

Denton, Texas...

VERGIE. By 1925, most people in our little community in Warren, Oklahoma had cars—except Mama...

(Sound of horse coming to town mixed with Model T cars.)

WOMAN 1. Why don't you get a car, Annalou? You won't have to hitch up the horse every day to come to town.

ANNALOU. Sorry. I'm determined to be the last holdout.

VERGIE. Finally deciding she was a disgrace to the family, Mama went to a car dealer...

ANNALOU. Your price is too high, Mr. Dobbs. My cows only produce so much cream. Besides, I don't drive.

MR. DOBBS. These new Ford sedans practically drive themselves, Mrs. Annalou.

ANNALOU. If I buy one, you'll show me how to do it? For free?

MR. DOBBS. Why sure thing!

VERGIE. Mr. Dobbs oversold himself on that one. Every Sunday he and his wife came out to our farm for dinner and the heartburn of Mama's driving lesson.

(A motor revving; the clanging of a minor crash.)

MR. DOBBS. If you want to get out of the garage, you have to go the other way, Mrs. Annalou.

VERGIE. The only feature in the car that looked familiar to Mama was the emergency brake.

MR. DOBBS. Now you're moving, Mrs. Annalou! Why do you realize we're traveling at more than 25 miles an hour?

ANNALOU. What's this lever coming out of the floor?

MR. DOBBS. I don't think you want to—

ANNALOU. Looks just like the lift of my old cultivator! Now this I should know how to work!

(Sound of a car screeching to a halt and objects clanging.)

ANNALOU. My! What happened? Why'd we stop moving? Did I break it?

MR. DOBBS. Yes, you certainly did, Mrs. Annalou...

VERGIE. I remember a treacherous hill between Blair and Warren that proved to be Mama's Waterloo every time...

(Sound of a car put-putting along)

LITTLE VERGIE. Mama you have to build up more speed or we're gonna start rolling back like we always do!

ANNALOU. Oh my. Oh my! We're going backwards!

LITTLE VERGIE. Mama, watch out for the ravine!

ANNALOU. What do I do? What do I do?!

LITTLE VERGIE. The cultivator, Mama! THE CULTIVATOR!

(Car screeching to a halt.)

VERGIE. And there we'd sit, at the edge of the ravine, until somebody happened by to rescue us. *(beat)* Mama was never at ease in that car. But she didn't let it stop her. She forded the North Fork of the Red River to drive into Kiowa county, and went to Tipton to take gifts to the children's home. She was happy to turn over the driving chores to me and my sisters, as soon as we were able. We missed that old sedan. But I don't think Mama ever did.

ANNOUNCER. From Bartlett, Tennessee, Opal Blaylock shares this "shaky pudding" story...

OPAL. It was all on account of my dear Aunt Clara. She couldn't help but feel sorry for us, her Arkansas "hillbilly" kin. So she was always sending something in the mail...

DADDY. What's this here package?

LITTLE OPAL. It's city food, daddy! Me and Mama are gonna cook it up!

DADDY. Well, that's fine. 'Cause I'm just about hungry enough to eat anything tonight. Even you, squirt!

(Little Opal giggling.)

OPAL. Now Mama could cook anything from scratch, but she didn't know much about prepared foods. So we read and re-read the directions in that package...

(A spoon mixing something in a bowl.)

MAMA. You got it all mixed, Opal?

LITTLE OPAL. Uh-huh! What do we do now, Mama?

MAMA. It says, "place in cooler".

LITTLE OPAL. But we don't got a cooler!

MAMA. Well we got the cistern on the back porch. That'll do.

OPAL. When the city food was “set”, we took it and set it in front of daddy...

(Sound of bowl and spoon set on table.)

DADDY. Woah! It’s movin! Just where did this shaky pudding come from?

LITTLE OPAL. From Aunt Clara, daddy!

DADDY. I shoulda known!

LITTLE OPAL. It’s called *Jello!*

OPAL. Later, when Aunt Clara asked how we liked the Jello, we truthfully told her we’d never seen anything like it.

ANNOUNCER. There was a day when radio pitchmen could sell almost anything imaginable, remembers Karl Romstedt of Wellsville, Kansas...

KARL. I recall back in the 20’s, a Kansas doctor named John Brinkley got famous on the radio pitching his strange operations. He also got rich enough to buy his own station—KFKB—“Kansas First...”

(Radio background music.)

DOC BRINKLEY. ...“Kansas Best!” Good evening radio listeners, I’m Doctor John Brinkley. I know many of you are ready to settle in for an evening of fine entertainment. You’ve worked hard today. The little ones have been put to bed. Your loved one sits across from you...sewing, perhaps. You look at her. She smiles. She appears as beautiful as she did the day you met...as enticing as the night of your first kiss... *(beat)* You smile at her...and turn back to the radio. Is there something amiss in this quiet evening? Something you want to do...something you used to do...but you just can’t seem to get up...out of your easy chair? *(beat)* Science has an answer. A way for you rekindle the animal spirit...and the answer is goat glands. Do not adjust your radio dial. Yes, goat glands. Do not laugh and do not be put off. These glands are not used as a topical ointment and they are not ingested. They are transplanted. From the goat. Into you. *(beat)* Do not be shocked. This is the medicine of tomorrow, and it can transform you today, back to yesterday...that storied youth, sewing your wild oats...and more...the primal past, the

stuff of myth and legend, the glade, the nymph...Bacchus in the woody glen...and all of it can be yours for just \$750. The gland of a goat and only a goat. Yes, I say only a goat, because I'm sure some of you have heard of recent imitators touting cheaper alternatives. Do not be tempted. Our procedure has been developed through rigorous trial and error, and to be blunt, there are definitely species you do not want to try this with...

KARL. Doc Brinkley became so popular, he ran for governor of Kansas in 1930...

(Crowd sounds—a political rally. Marching band, etc.)

DOC BRINKLEY. Fellow Kansans, I believe two things. One: our state capitol needs radical surgery. Two: there isn't an illness known to man that can't be cured by removal of the prostate...

HECKLER. For what, a goat's a—
(Crowd chuckles.)

DOC BRINKLEY. Stop right there, friend. There are little ones in the audience.

HECKLER. This guy's a fraud!

DOC BRINKLEY. Perhaps, my good friend, you should beware he who eats...tin cans for breakfast...

HECKLER. *(sounding like his neck is being choked:)*
Sorry...no offense!

DOC BRINKLEY. *(under his breath)* Baaaaa!!!

KARL. Unfortunately for the Doc, his campaign opponents continued to bring out a lot of embarrassing facts about his practice. Then the Federal government got involved. *(beat)* It didn't stop Doc Brinkley for long, though. He moved to Texas and opened up a radio station just across the Mexican border. With no restrictions, the XER radio signal was so powerful it could be heard from coast to coast. And Doc Brinkley's announcers pitched their hearts out—and sometimes, their souls, too...

RADIO SALESMAN 1. How's your life going? Is it going great? Bob Thickleberg's was too. Then he stubbed his toe at work.

(Sound of a man stubbing toe.)

RADIO SALESMAN 1 (CONT'D). No problem. Until Bob got home to his wife and two kids. She asked him to go upstairs to change a light bulb...

(Man tripping on stairs and twisting ankle.)

RADIO SALESMAN 1 (CONT'D). ...he tripped on the stairs, because of the stubbed toe, and twisted his ankle. Bob insisted on driving himself to work the next day, the bad ankle flopped against the gas pedal at the wrong moment...

(Loud thud, crunch and howl as man breaks his sternum.)

RADIO SALESMAN 1 (CONT'D). ...he hit a tree. Broke his sternum and three ribs. *(beat)* Couldn't sleep from the rib pain, since Bob liked to sleep on his side...

(Man tossing and turning, coughing...)

RADIO SALESMAN 1 (CONT'D). ...weakened his immune system enough to catch whooping cough. Coughed so hard one night the pain shot through his ribs, turned him back on his bad ankle, re-stubbed his sore toe...

(Sound of man going through mishaps and then screaming.)

RADIO SALESMAN 1 (CONT'D). ...fell into his fireplace and was burned alive. Yes. Life was going great for Bob Thickleberg. Until he stubbed his toe. Now he's dead, and his widow and two kids are on a street somewhere, cold. Hungry. Because Bob Thickleberg may have had a great life—but he didn't have great life *insurance*...

RADIO SALESMAN 2. Radio listeners, let's face it: you could buy normal tomato plants, that produce normal tomatoes, in normal yields. But why would you want to do that? This is America—just across the border—a land where we constantly re-invent the normal! So you have to ask yourself: can I live with myself eating normal tomatoes? Or do I want the ridiculously succulent, absurdly prolific, and frankly, strangely large tomatoes that grow on our exclusive VitaVine Tomato Plants?

RADIO SALESMAN 1. No, faithful listeners, you won't find this in any chapter and verse of the Good Book, but it's true, nonetheless: there are, in existence, personally signed

and autographed pictures of...Jesus Christ! And you can own one. Perhaps you know someone who has a signed photo of a movie star, or even the President. Well. What will they say—what will they think—when you show them your exquisite portrait of the Host of Hosts and Lord of Lords graced with an original and indisputable signature? The looks you will get! So don't miss out, quantities are limited. This offer may not come again for another two thousand years...

KARL. I know it sounds unbelievable that anyone would buy such things. It sounded pretty unbelievable back then, too. But Doc Brinkley's old radio station sure kept us listening.

(Transition music.)

ANNOUNCER. Now Bud Didier remembers how Ma Bell helped him pop the big question to his sweetheart in March of 1946...

BUD. My girlfriend, Louise Perkins, had visited with my family in San Francisco after separating from the US Navy Nurse Corps. I was attending the University of California at Berkeley.

PERKY. I've had a wonderful time, Bud.

YOUNG BUD. Do you have to go tomorrow, Perky?

PERKY. I haven't been home for almost two years. I came straight here to see you...but I guess it's time...

YOUNG BUD. Well, if you have to go, I wanna...I wanna...

PERKY. Yes, Bud?

BUD. I don't remember what I ended up saying to Perky that night. But I know what I didn't say—"will you marry me?" I just couldn't work up the nerve. And now she was 3000 miles away in Massachusetts. (beat) It was 9 o'clock pm on March 21st, when I decided not to wait a second longer. I picked up the telephone.

(Old phone ringing operator.)

YOUNG BUD. Hello, operator? I need to place a long distance call to Boston.

OPERATOR 1. All right. Give me the number and I'll

schedule it.

YOUNG BUD. Schedule it?

OPERATOR 1. We are still on wartime status. Unless you are a general or an admiral or have other official business of a high priority, you go on the waiting list.

YOUNG BUD. But I can't wait.

OPERATOR 1. You'll have to.

YOUNG BUD. For how long?

OPERATOR 1. Three weeks. At least.

YOUNG BUD. But you don't understand...there's a girl...

OPERATOR 1. Oh I understand plenty.

YOUNG BUD. But...I need to ask her to marry me!

OPERATOR 1. To marry you? *(beat)* Just a second, honey. For that, I think we can bootleg your call through. *(Sound of plugs being pushed and switches flicked.)*

OPERATOR 1 (CONT'D). Operator? I've got this guy on the line who wants to propose to his girlfriend in Boston. Do you think there's any way we can get his call through without a lot of red tape? This will be just between us girls.

BUD. During the next few minutes, I listened as she talked to operators all the way across the United States.

OPERATOR 2. Sure I'll help. If necessary, I'll just cut off some stuffy old general. They need to realize the war's over—it's time for some romance!

BUD. When the phone finally rang up in Boston, there must've been half a dozen operators listening in. *(Phone ringing.)*

PERKY. *(yawning)* Hello? Who is it?

YOUNG BUD. Perky? Is that you? It's me. Bud.

PERKY. Bud? Why are you calling so late? It's midnight.

YOUNG BUD. Midnight? Oh. It's only nine o'clock here. Will you marry me? *(Beat.)*

OPERATOR 2. Honey, if she won't marry you, I will!

PERKY. Who was that?

YOUNG BUD. Oh. Don't worry. So what do you say, Perky? So will ya?

PERKY. *(still a little groggy)* Uh-huh...

BUD. Perky still sounded sleepy. I wasn't sure she meant yes.

YOUNG BUD. Listen. If you remember this call in the morning, and if you really meant that "Uh-huh", send me a telegram confirming that you'll marry me!

BUD. With that the connection was broken.

OPERATOR 1. Don't worry, honey. She'll marry you. Lots of luck and happiness to you both.

BUD. I waited the next day. Sure enough, I got a telegram. We became man and wife on May 2nd, 1946—thanks to some very understanding long distance operators.

ANNOUNCER. Traveling salesman were a common—if not always welcome—sight in the early 1940's. Rita Finn will never forget the one who visited her family's farm in East Grand Forks Minnesota...

RITA. All ten of us—I had five brothers and two sisters—were relaxing on the porch after supper, when a truck came down our dusty road...

(Truck stopping along a dirt road.)

MAYTAG SALESMAN. Evening folks. I'd like to introduce myself. I am your Maytag salesman.

DAD. I got all the farm equipment I can use.

MAYTAG SALESMAN. If I may sir, this particular item is meant for the house...

RITA. That got my mother's attention.

MAYTAG SALESMAN. I think I can safely say its operation will defy your greatest expectations.

RITA. That young salesman certainly had the gift of gab.
(Grunting of men unloading and carrying machine.)

RITA (CONT'D). Dad and my brother Tom carried the white-enamel-covered machine into our dining room.

MAYTAG SALESMAN. Now, I'll need hot water.

YOUNG RITA. That's no problem, mister. We have a new cast iron pump recently installed in our kitchen.

MAYTAG SALESMAN. Fine, just fine. And what's your name, young lady?

YOUNG RITA. Rita.

MAYTAG SALESMAN. Well Rita, you can help me demonstrate for your folks. This here motor under the machine runs on kerosene. It turns this here agitator and just does a jim-dandy job. Now, bring me the dirtiest thing you got!

YOUNG RITA. Excuse me?

RITA. The salesman wasn't pulling my leg. He wanted something dirty, to wash in the machine. I saw my brothers and sisters smiling. We had no doubt about what the dirtiest thing around was.

YOUNG RITA. Well, mister, I guess you want...my dad's barn overalls?

(Sound of kids laughing.)

DAD. Now wait a minute! I use them overalls!

YOUNG RITA. But dad! They're so stiff with cow hair and manure they stand by themselves. Go get 'em, Tommy.

RITA. My brother got the overalls from the porch and the salesman put them into the machine with my mom's lye soap and hot water.

MAYTAG SALESMAN. Ah...whew! These are...these are perfect—for demonstration purposes. We'll just ease 'em in, and give 'er ten minutes...

(Sounds swishing water and clanking.)

RITA. Time ticked by as we listened to the swishing. We could hear the brass buckles clinking against the inside of the "washer".

MAYTAG SALESMAN. Okay. That should do it. Just pull the lever here to stop the agitator. And when you reach your hand in to take out your laundry, you'll be amazed at how...at how clean and...and, uh...

YOUNG RITA. Something wrong, mister?

MAYTAG SALESMAN. No, not at all. I just can't seem to...

DAD. Well, where are my overalls?

MAYTAG SALESMAN. Here, Rita, put your hand in, see if you can help me find 'em.

YOUNG RITA. I uh...I think I feel 'em...

MAYTAG SALESMAN. No, that's my shirt sleeve...

YOUNG RITA. Oh... Wait. I think I feel one of the buckles.

RITA. I pulled it—but that's all there was left of those overalls. Turns out the only thing holding them together was the cow hair and manure!

MAYTAG SALESMAN. I'm awfully sorry folks.

RITA. The salesman felt terrible. But rest of us didn't. Even my dad saw the value of his product. He bought that Maytag, and it stayed right in the dining room for many years. As for the brass buckles, Mama hung them on a nail by the back door to remind us all that even when things are falling apart, there's always something to smile about.

ANNOUNCER. Now, THEN AGAIN! shares these short memories of when things seemed to cost just a little bit less than they do now...

JOYCE MARTINSON. In 1936, I was born at the California Hospital in Los Angeles. My mom and I were there for ten days and the bill was 16 dollars.

KENNETH. I went with a youth group from Iowa to the Brown Derby restaurant in Hollywood in 1950. We were shocked to see the price of fancy Hors D'Oeuvres with caviar: two dollars and twenty-five cents!

MARJORIE MARTRATT. The death of my maternal grandfather in 1916 caused grief—but the price of his casket didn't. It was only \$45.

JOYCE MARTINSON. In 1957, I had my own child at the California Hospital. We stayed three days and I paid \$156.

DAVID MICHAELSON. The farm where I was raised in Wisconsin had a big red barn. My dad got it shipped from the Sears and Roebuck Company for \$913. Assembly was required.

JOYCE MARTINSON. In August of 2000 I called the California Hospital to ask about their birth center fees. They said the average stay was overnight and the cost was \$4000.

NANCY OVITT. In 1955, I was a contestant on the

television show, “I’ve Got a Secret”. Debbie Reynolds was one of the celebrities that night. Nobody was able to guess my secret, so I won the big jackpot—\$80!

HARRY TILSON. I don’t remember what chewing gum cost in 1944 in Oxford, Maine, where I spent one summer. But I recall that when I took a girl to the local roller rink, there was a wood board outside where you could stick your gum, then write your name underneath so you could pick it up on the way out!

NANCY OVITT. Of course, for that \$80 prize I won, 100 million Americans were let in on my secret—which was that my great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandfather...fell overboard from the Mayflower. He was rescued—otherwise, I wouldn’t be around to be embarrassed by the story.

ANNOUNCER. Finally this week, Jim Mais tells this tale about growing up in the ’40’s near the tracks of the Long Island Railroad, and witnessing the last days of the railroad “lookouts”...

JIM. Back then crossing gates were raised and lowered by hand. A railroad man was stationed at each protected crossing in a shack built on a high platform, so they could see the next train coming. *(beat)* I was around 10, and on my way home from school, the gate man used to wave at me...

GATEMAN. Hey, little fella!

JIM. One bitterly cold day, the man let me climb up to the shack to warm up for a few minutes. It was cozier than it looked from the outside.

GATEMAN. Go ahead. Set in front a the stove, little fella. *(A distant train whistle.)*

YOUNG JIM. Wow. Up here, you can see that train from way off.

GATEMAN. Tha’s right.

YOUNG JIM. Is that iron crank you use to raise the gates real heavy?

GATEMAN. Oh, not too heavy, I guess...

JIM. He let me try and lift it. I could hardly do it. After

that, I hung around the shack almost every day with my new friend, Frank, who also happened to be the first black man I'd ever met. *(beat)* He must've been at least 65. Frail and arthritic, sometimes he had a tough time raising and lowering those gates.

(Sound of a train whistle and a bell.)

YOUNG JIM. Do you need some help with the gate, Frank?

GATEMAN. Tha's alright, little fella. This is my post.

JIM. After he was done he'd climb back up to the shack, settle into an ancient wooden chair and read his tattered Bible. One day I asked him how long he'd been with the railroad.

GATEMAN. Oh, lot a years.

YOUNG JIM. As long as that old chair?

GATEMAN. No, no. There was men sat in this chair before me.

YOUNG JIM. Maybe one day I will.

GATEMAN. Maybe.

JIM. I think Frank knew better. He wasn't surprised like I was when I noticed new construction near the lookout one day soon after.

(Construction—nail pounding, etc.)

GATEMAN. The railroad's gonna automate all the crossings and put up electric gates. Should be done in another month or two.

YOUNG JIM. But what'll happen to you?

GATEMAN. I don't know, little fella. I've nowhere else to go.

JIM. It wasn't fair. Surely the railroad couldn't do this. But, of course, they could. Frank and I were stolidly watching the construction one day, when he told me...

GATEMAN. I'm afraid this is it—we won't be seein' each other any more.

JIM. He'd lost his livelihood—and I'd lost a true friend. But I never forgot his kindness and the dedication he displayed.

(End of Show music.)

ANNOUNCER. Time moves quickly—and that's all we have for this episode. Thanks for tuning in to THEN AGAIN!

(End)

theBOX

Episode One

(Radio Drama based on accounts from the oral history “The Box” by Jeff Kisseloff, and the Philo Farnsworth Chronicles Website)

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by

Joe Doran & Victor Small

Produced by High Window RadioClassics Theatre for
broadcast on WHVW 950 AM (Hyde Park, NY).

CAST

Stu Luis Rojas
Philo Farnsworth/Theo/Zworkin Brett Owen
Antonia Renee DePietro
Pem Amy Byrne
Mr. Peel/Justin Tolman/Bar Drunk Anthony Puccio
Philo lawyer Reed Buderis
Eddie Nichols/Senator Stephen Brinckerhoff
Sarnoff's lawyer Andy Champ-Doran
Courtroom watcher/foley effects Debbie Puccio
Announcer/Cliff/Sarnoff/Bartender Joe Doran

(FADE IN: Intro music with montage of voices and events from 20th century.)

ANNOUNCER. You have lived in times that, for better and worse, will never fade from memory. And the most amazing thing is, you may be remembered not so much for what you did, but for the way you watched it all on TV... *(beat)* Step with us now, back to a time when science was still magic, and the world was just beginning to open something called... the Box...

(Sound of a train pulling into a station.)

SOLDIER. Here she is! Pittsburgh! Look at all those

people on the train platform! I been waitin' two years for this! I'm gonna grab the first dame I see and kiss her! What are you gonna do, soldier?

STU. Me? I'm gonna pay a visit to Mr. Peel.

(Crowd Cheers. Sound fades to street sounds.)

STU (CONT'D). Hello ma? It's me. Stu. Look, I can't talk long. I'm on a pay phone. One of those letters you wrote me, you said Mr. Peel was in Pittsburgh, on State Street.

What number was he at again? *(beat)* No. I'm just gonna pay him a friendly visit. Seein' as I'm in town. Yeah. I'll be home. I love you too. Bye.

(Phone being hung up; street sounds fade. An elevator ding; radio music.)

ELEVATOR MAN. Here you are, sir. Fourth floor.

ANTONIA. Excuse me, sir. Can I help you?

STU. Is Mr. Peel in the back office there?

ANTONIA. If you take a seat—hey, stop! You can't just walk in there—

(Door being thrown open.)

MR. PEEL. Stuart Makely. Welcome home, son.

STU. I put in for Infantry, Mr. Peel.

MR. PEEL. Oh? *(beat)* Well, that...Colt 45 you're pressing against my temple is a nice war souvenir.

STU. I've spent the last 30 months watching men with body parts in a dozen different places screaming for their wives and kids, Mr. Peel.

MR. PEEL. I give you credit, Stuart. I served in the Infantry myself.

STU. Did you? Well I didn't. Nope. See, somehow someone up the chain of command got the idea to put me in a camera unit. *(beat)* Taking pictures. *(beat)* Any one of those screaming men could have been in my place, Mr. Peel. And I could've been in their place, fighting instead of framing shots. If it wasn't for you.

MR. PEEL. All right, now calm down, Stuart. I understand your feelings...

STU. No you don't. *(beat)* No you don't. Because you're

just a dirty old tycoon with some pull still tryin' to score with your high school sweetheart—my mother...

MR. PEEL. That's not true, Stuart. Your mother had nothing to do with it.

STU. Yeah? Then why'd you pull strings to get me outa combat? My old man went down testin' army planes in '31. If dying like that was good enough for him, it was good enough for me...cause all I ever wanted to be...was him! So tell me! Why'd you do it?

MR. PEEL. Why'd I do it? Well like I said, Stuart, I served in the Infantry...89th Infantry...the Divin' Diggers, they called us...on the Messine line...miles and miles stretching six foot deep...with a lot of other scared young boys...boys with no hope for getting out alive but each other. So I know...the last thing any one needs in a war is some poor son-of-a-bitch next to him...who actually wants to die. *(beat)* I'm glad you made it home, son. Now put the pistol down. *(Beat.)*

ANTONIA. You heard Mr. Peel, soldier. Put it down. I may not have served in the infantry, but I've done twenty-four years in Brooklyn, so I know how to use this.

STU. Your secretary packs a rod? What kinda joint you runnin', Peel?

PEEL. I'll tell you in a second. Take his gun, Toni.

ANTONIA. Sure thing. *(beat)* You know, I read in *Good Housekeeping* how you GI's may need a little time to re-adjust to civilian life. Two weeks. After that, you're neurotic.

MR. PEEL. Now tell Stuart here, what kind of joint we're running, Toni.

ANTONIA. How about I just show him.

STU. Hey—watch where you point that thing.

ANTONIA. This gun? Why, soldier? All it does when you pull the trigger is go...

(A gun clicking.)

ANTONIA (CONT'D). ...bang.

STU. It's a prop?!

ANTONIA. Yeah. See the cute little flag that says “bang”?

STU. What kinda loony place is this?

ANTONIA. A television station.

STU. Huh?

MR. PEEL. These are my new labs, Stuart. So what do you say? You want a job?

(Transition music. Sound of a harp.)

EDDIE NICHOLS. The harp, such a heavenly instrument...and so versatile...

ANTONIA. This is the TV studio.

STU. Why is that guy pushing hard-boiled eggs through those harp strings?

ANTONIA. That’s Eddie Nickels. He’s a comedian.

EDDIE NICHOLS. Yes, we’re predicting no housewife will want to be without one of these...and I do mean the soldier...

ANTONIA. Woops. Step over here. You’re on camera.

THEO. No he’s not. We just broke down again, Miss Assenza.

ANTONIA. Ah, nuts! Well fix it, Theo!

STU. What do you expect the kid to do?

ANTONIA. This “kid” is our engineer. Theo, this is Stuart Makley. Your new boss.

THEO. Hi! Glad to know ya.

STU. So where are all the lights, Theo? A WAC dancer in Nancy told me it took a thousand foot-candles to get a picture on some gizmo called television. Burned her eyebrows off.

THEO. Oh. You don’t need that kind of juice anymore, Mr. Makley. See this here? This is an image orthicon tube. It’s much more sensitive than the old iconoscopes.

STU. Hmm. When did they come up with that?

ANTONIA. When you were dancin’ with the WAC with no eyebrows.

THEO. RCA invented it.

STU. Huh. *(beat)* Who invented TV?

ANTONIA. He just told you. RCA.

THEO. Wrong! RCA didn’t invent TV! I know exactly

who invented TV! *(beat)* Philo Farnsworth! A thirteen-year-old kid from Utah!

STU. Philo Farnsworth? Never heard of him.

ANTONIA. Exactly.

THEO. Maybe you never heard of Philo Farnsworth because RCA and Sarnoff and the Government don't want you to hear about him.

ANTONIA. Shut up, Theodore!

THEO. See what I mean?

STU. Is the kid right?

ANTONIA. Look, Mr. Makley. All I know is RCA makes televisions. And Mr. Peel—your new boss—invented one little part that goes in 'em. So he gets a little piece of the pie...from which he pays all of us.

STU. Oh. So whatever RCA says goes, is that it?

MR. PEEL. Well Stuart, is Toni here showing you the ropes?

STU. She sure is, Mr. Peel.

MR. PEEL. Say, why is that dope pushing hard-boiled eggs through a harp?

ANTONIA. 'Cause they slice better than raw ones! *(beat)* Look, Mr. Peel, nobody's gonna buy TV's if there's nothin' on 'em. And if TV's aren't getting sold, then that little part you invented for 'em isn't makin' money. And if you're not makin' money, then what am I doin' here? Watchin' some idiot push eggs through a harp? No thanks!

(Footsteps storming off. A door slamming.)

STU. Was this station her idea, Mr. Peel?

MR. PEEL. Yeah.

STU. Well I think I've got my first story for it.

(Transition music; factory sounds.)

STU. Excuse me. You Cliff Gardner?

CLIFF. That's right.

STU. I'm Stuart Makley. With KTF—a TV station in Pittsburgh. Do you have a moment?

CLIFF. They've got one in Pittsburgh, huh? All right. Let's step outside.

(Steps to a door. It opens and closes. The factory sounds recede.)

CLIFF (CON'D). We're up to our ears converting factory machines from war production. How can I help ya?

STU. I'm doing a story about Philo Farnsworth. I know you're his brother-in-law.

CLIFF. Not much longer. He and my sister are divorcin'. What's your interest in Phil?

STU. There's a rumor going around...that he invented TV.

CLIFF. And you say you work for a TV station?

STU. That's right.

CLIFF. If you wanna keep your job, I suggest you turn around and walk away.

STU. I'll take my chances. After all, I can always go down to the soda shop and join the 52-20 club.

CLIFF. What you heard is true. Phil's the one that did it. *(beat)* His family came out to Idaho in a buckboard wagon in 1919. The first thing he noticed was their new farm had electricity. Phil learned everything there was to know about that generator...

(Sound of a machine churning.)

YOUNG CLIFF (CONT'D). Hey Philo! What's that contraption in the horse stall?

PHILO. It's an electric washing machine!

YOUNG CLIFF. Wow! It's swishing the water all around! *(Buzzing sound.)*

YOUNG CLIFF (CONT'D). Yeow! It's sparking like lightnin'! I think you better do your clothes by hand!

PHILO. Nah. It just needs a lid. See? *(beat)* There's gonna be lots of inventions, Cliff. You know you can use a quartz stone and a oatmeal box to get radio? And someday we're gonna be able to see people from far away...

YOUNG CLIFF. I'd just like to see in Josie Wilson's bedroom.

PHILO. I mean like explorers climbin' mountains and stuff.

YOUNG CLIFF. Sure. Or walkin' on the moon!

PHILO. Yeah. Like walkin' on the moon...

CLIFF. Philo was crazy for new ideas...like a lot of us boys in those days. He thought they couldn't help but come to good. *(beat)* He was tillin' a field on a horse-drawn harrow in 1921 when he first got the notion of how TV could actually work...

(A horse whinnying.)

PHILO. Yeah, I know you're tired, old girl. But we're almost through. You know, sometimes when I get done at night, I close my eyes and all I see is row after row of these fields, burned in my mind...line after line... *(realizing something:)* Line after line!

CLIFF. Philo was mighty excited about the idea that lit up in his head. He needed to tell someone—so he sketched it out for his science teacher, Justin Tolman...

(Sound of sketching on a chalkboard.)

TOLMAN. Woah, slow down there, Philo! This is a country schoolhouse. We only have so much chalk.

PHILO. I've gotta show you this diagram Mr. Tolman, because you're the only person I know who could understand it...and I want you to tell me if you think it can work...

TOLMAN. Sure, I'll be happy to tell you...as soon as you tell me what the heck it is.

PHILO. Sir, this is my idea for electronic television. I've read it's possible to manipulate electrons in a vacuum. And if you can do that...you can just magnetically deflect those electrons across a screen, the same way you plow a field, one row at a time...to make a picture...

(Transition music. Bar-room sounds.)

BARTENDER. What's takin' so long to get that box on, Miss Assenza? My patrons are waiting.

ANTONIA. Theodore is putting the antenna on your roof right now, Mr. Kaley.

BARTENDER. So where's the picture? I'm payin' four hundred dollars for this.

ANTONIA. Just a couple more minutes. In the meantime, why don't you pour another round for everybody in the bar. On us. *(To Stu:)* By the time we get this thing going, his

“patrons” will be ready to clap at static. Here, soldier.
Unwrap this wire.

STU. I’ve been checkin’ into that Farnsworth story.

ANTONIA. You’re wasting your time, Makely. It’s not gonna get on the air.

STU. Who says? I’m the new program director.

ANTONIA. Look. See the name on this TV set here? Radio Corporation of America. Owned by David Sarnoff. Parent company of NBC. Tied in with GE, Westinghouse and Ma Bell. The companies that just equipped World War Two!

STU. That’s okay. Guys like me fought it.

ANTONIA. Makely, I’ve been hearin’ bad things about Sarnoff since before I could hum “Little Orphan Annie.” My father hated him.

STU. Your father?

ANTONIA. He said he screwed Marconi—the “Inventore de Radio”—who was like the Holy Ghost in my Italian household.

STU. So fill me in.

ANTONIA. Sarnoff got his start at American Marconi, as a radio operator. He claimed he intercepted the transmission the night the Titanic went down...

(Sound of a telegraph machine.)

SARNOFF. Sir, I’m getting something on the radio wire... it’s a distress signal.

BOSS. Any details?

SARNOFF. “S.O.S... iceberg ripped through ship hull...” It’s from the Titanic!

ANTONIA. Sarnoff’s claim was pure bull. But—the guy could self-promote. In no time, he became Marconi’s right-hand man. *(beat)* After W-W-One, Marconi wanted to buy the worldwide rights to an alternator used in long distance radio communications. But Sarnoff had other ideas...

SARNOFF. Senators, I’ve called you here today...because radio is too important for our American Government to depend upon any foreign company.

SENATOR. Marconi invented radio, Mr. Sarnoff.

SARNOFF. Maybe. But he didn't invent strategy, Senator.

SENATOR. What are you proposing?

SARNOFF. Have General Electric handle the American end of radio communications.

SENATOR. How do we know they'll accept? It'll take new investment. It's a risk.

SARNOFF. I'm sure you could induce them...if you turned over patents to wireless communication developed during the war.

SENATOR. Those patents are public property, Mr. Sarnoff. They may prove to be worth millions...

SARNOFF. Well, if you believe that, Senator, you can certainly buy stock in GE...

ANTONIA. Sarnoff cornered radio that day. He was off and making millions. But his patents were only good for 17 years. So when he smelled a new thing coming, he vowed he'd get control of that too.

ASSISTANT. Mr. Sarnoff? The inventor, Vladimir Zworykin, is here.

SARNOFF. Show him in. (*beat*) Mr. Zworykin. They say you applied for a patent for electronic Television in 1923.

ZWORYKIN. Yes, Mr. Sarnoff. But it wasn't granted. I didn't really have a complete process...

SARNOFF. Never mind that. I want you to work for me. I'll set you up in a lab in Camden. Give you whatever you need.

ZWORYKIN. Yes, Mr. Sarnoff! Thank you. I would very much like to pursue my—

SARNOFF. Go to San Francisco first. There's an upstart there by the name of Farnsworth. Find out what he knows.

ZWORYKIN. But—Mr. Sarnoff, if I am working for you, that wouldn't be—

SARNOFF. Don't tell him you're working for me. Tell him you're investigating the possibility of buying a patent license from him. If Philo Farnsworth is really smart, he'll try to make money on them while he still can...

STU. So Zworykin went to San Francisco and stole

Farnsworth's ideas?

ANTONIA. I'm not tellin' you this to fuel your little crusade, Makley. I'm giving you fair warning: don't try to broadcast a show on Philo Farnsworth.

STU. What are you afraid of, Miss Assenza? That Sarnoff is gonna cut off your supply of boxes? Shut your station down?

ANTONIA. Sarnoff can break Mr. Peel's company. *(beat)* But maybe that's what you're really angling for. Isn't it, Mr. Makley?

(Crackling sound of static. Excited murmers.)

BAR DRUNK 1. Hey! Somebody's face! On that box!

BAR DRUNK 2. Tha's not a face. It's a plate. With sliced boiled eggs on it!

BAR DRUNK 1. That's it! Cut this guy off!

THEO. I got the antenna up, Miss Assenza.

ANTONIA. Good goin', Theo.

THEO. How's it look?

(Sound of clapping breaking out.)

ANTONIA. To tell you the truth, kid, I don't think they care.

(Transition music.)

EDDIE NICHOLS. This is Eddie Nichols. If I look like a cockroach, it's because our television camera is pointing down at me from the 4th floor window of our station, WKTF, so that we can now bring you...the Streets of Pittsburgh! This is the show where we ask the common man questions...and pray he doesn't give us a four-letter word response. *(beat)* Our question today: who invented television? *(beat)* You there, sir. Hello. Could you tell us—who invented television?

MAN ON STREET. No.

EDDIE NICHOLS. No? Come now. Are you just being stubborn?

MAN ON STREET. What?

EDDIE NICHOLS. Do you know who invented television? Or don't you care?

MAN ON THE STREET. What's television?

EDDIE NICHOLS. You're on it right now, sir. Do you see that camera in the fourth floor window up there?

MAN ON STREET. You mean that big thing that's about to drop?

EDDIE NICHOLS. About to what? *(beat)* Uh, this is Eddie Nichols of WKTF, getting the hell out of the way—*(Crashing sound; transition to "Soap" music.)*

YOUNG PEM. I love you, Phil. I don't want you to leave...

PHILO. I don't have a choice Pem. I've got backers. They're gonna give me six thousand dollars. But they want me in California.

YOUNG PEM. Then I'll go to California too. *(beat)* What? Don't you want me with you?

PHILO. I uh...Pem, I have to tell you. There's...another woman in my life...

YOUNG PEM. What? Philo Farnsworth, I don't care if you are a mormon, I will ring you neck—

PHILO. —and her name is Television.

YOUNG PEM. Why you—! That's not funny, Phil! *(beat)* I know you're caught up in your ideas. That's why I love you. But I'm not gonna let anyone—even TV—have all of you. I'll work in the lab right beside you if I have to.

PHILO. Okay. We could use another hand.
(Beat.)

YOUNG PEM. Are you at least gonna marry me?

PHILO. Gosh, Pem, I, uh...I never thought you'd ask...

STU. All right, actors. That was fine. Now. We're gonna switch to camera two while Philo throws on his white coat and hits his mark in the lab. Then back to one.

(Narration music.)

EDDIE NICHOLS. Philo Farnsworth and his bride set off for California. After two years of hard work, the young inventor filed his first patent for electronic television in 1927. But he still had to prove his invention would work.

CLIFF. It's taken me weeks to make this tube, Phil. I was

no professional glassblower when we started, but trust me, I'm pretty darn good now, and this is the best that can be done.

PHILO. All right. Then this is the one that will have to work. Hook it up. Pem?

YOUNG PEM. Yeah, Phil?

PHILO. I want you to go in the other room, where the receiver is. You watch it. It's gonna glow.

YOUNG PEM. (*from a distance:*) All right. I'm in here.

PHILO. Now. We take this glass slide, with a black line painted on it, and put it in front of this carbon arc lamp...and hope the image transmits to Cliff's tube—

CLIFF. —Image Dissector! Remember, Phil, we need nice fancy names, just like the big boys at GE—

PHILO. Whatever you say, Cliff.

YOUNG PEM. Phil! The receiver is glowing!

CLIFF. It's done that before.

PHILO. Pem? Do you see anything on it?

YOUNG PEM. No!

CLIFF. Damn...

YOUNG PEM. Just a black line in the middle of the screen.

CLIFF. Whoooooo!!!

PHILO. (*calling out:*) Pem! Which way is the line?

YOUNG PEM. Huh?

PHILO. I mean, is the line vertical—or horizontal?

YOUNG PEM. It's vertical. (*beat*) Phil? Did you hear me? I said it's vertical.

CLIFF. He heard you! He's horizontal!

YOUNG PEM. Oh Phil! Oh you did it! You did it!

PHILO. I'll be doggoned...the thing works! Television works!

(*Sound of lone person clapping.*)

ANTONIA. Congratulations. This is good soap, soldier. Did you write it yourself?

STU. It's not Hemingway. But it's pretty much the way it happened.

ANTONIA. Great. Now change the names, make the

invention some gizmo that vaporizes commies, and we've got a show.

STU. You can file comments in our new suggestion container right over there, Miss Assenza.

ANTONIA. That's the john, Makley. All right, if you won't listen to me, maybe you'll listen to my friend here. *(beat)* This is Elma "Pem" Farnsworth.

PEM. Mr. Makley. I've heard about what you're trying to do. And I want you to stop.

(Transition music or commercial break.)

PEM (CONT'D). When Miss Assenza called and told me what you were planning, Mr. Makely, I had to come. My husband has had enough taken from him...

STU. I'm not trying to take anything from him, Mrs. Farnsworth. Here's the script. You look through it. If it doesn't represent the truth, we won't do it. But I believe it is the truth. And you know better than anyone. Because you were there when Zworykin and Sarnoff stole your husband's invention. Weren't you?

PEM. Yes. *(beat)* I pleaded with Phil to be careful. But he was desperate for money, to continue his work. When Zworykin came to the lab, Phil showed him everything.

ZWORYKIN. Your solution to the problem of electronic television is ingenious, Mr. Farnsworth. I knew it was possible. I wish I'd thought of it myself.

PHILO. Well, now that you've seen it, Mr. Zworykin, I hope you'll consider licensing our patents.

SARNOFF. The Radio Corporation of America does not pay patent royalties. We collect them.

PHILO. Who are you? How did you get into my lab?

SARNOFF. An eerie little electronic glow. Well, who knows... I'll pay you a hundred thousand dollars for it.

PHILO. I asked who you were.

SARNOFF. I'm David Sarnoff.

PHILO. My invention isn't for sale, Mr. Sarnoff.

SARNOFF. No? That's a shame. Tell me, young Philo, who do you think is going to do business with you? Radio

manufacturers? The government?

PHILO. We'll see.

SARNOFF. Did you know that Vladimir Zworykin here, invented electronic television seven years ago—in 1923? He even applied for a patent.

PHILO. That can't be true. He just said he wished he'd invented it...

SARNOFF. Hmm. Well, sometimes wishes do come true. Good luck, Mr. Farnsworth. Come, Zworykin. There's nothing we need here.

PEM. Over the next decade, Mr. Sarnoff did everything he could to take my husband's invention away from him. Our lab was burned. They sent spies. Phil couldn't trust anyone. The legal battles were endless. They drained us of every penny.

STU. But you won in court, finally, didn't you, Mrs. Farnsworth?

PEM. Yes. We won, Mr. Makley. In court.

(A gavel pounding.)

SARNOFF LAWYER. Are we to believe that a 13-year-old boy came up with the idea for a device...a device which required a masterful comprehension of physics and mechanical technologies? Teams of scientists at GE and Westinghouse worked for years on the idea. But no. It was a Mormon farm boy—on a tractor in the middle of a field of potatoes—who really invented TV?! *(beat)* I ask you, ladies and gentlemen of the jury: Is this plausible? *(beat)* Is it possible. *(beat)* It's not. Common sense tells us so. Philo Farnsworth...the boy genius...is a common swindler.

(Court murmuring.)

PHILO LAWYER. Your honor. We have a witness to call. We've been unable to track him down until now. But he's here today. His name is Mr. Justin Tolman.

JUDGE. Very well. Approach the bench, Mr. Tolman. Raise your right hand. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

TOLMAN. I do, your honor.

JUDGE. Be seated.

PHILO LAWYER. Mr. Tolman. Were you a science teacher in Rigby Idaho in 1921?

TOLMAN. I was.

PHILO LAWYER. And was Philo Farnsworth a student of yours?

TOLMAN. He was.

PHILO LAWYER. Have you seen him since that time?

TOLMAN. No, I haven't.

PHILO LAWYER. Did Philo ever tell you about an idea he had for electronic television?

TOLMAN. Yes. I uh, I recollect that he...sketched it out for me one day.

SARNOFF LAWYER. Objection, your honor. This man's claim is absurd. Sketched it out! He remembers so much, perhaps he'd like to draw it for us all right now!

(Courtroom laughter.)

JUDGE. Order. Order! *(beat.)* Is what Mr. Farnsworth showed you something you'd be able to relate in more detail, Mr. Tolman?

TOLMAN. Well...I don't know about explaining exactly how or why it would work...

(Courtroom titters.)

TOLMAN (CONT'D.) But I could show you what he drew on that chalkboard right there if you want.

JUDGE. By all means.

TOLMAN. It, uh...it was a tube...

(Sketching on a chalkboard.)

TOLMAN (CONT'D). ...that looked like this...and this part here is where the electrons were focused and deflected to a screen of some sort, one line at a time...

PHILO LAWYER. Your honor, this man has just drawn Philo Farnsworth's Image Dissector Tube...the foundation of electronic television.

PEM. The court upheld Philo's patents. It was a joyous day. But Mr. Sarnoff kept his word. No radio manufacturer would come near us. If they did, they knew they'd lose their

radio patents. Meanwhile, RCA pressured the government to withhold commercial TV broadcast licenses. There was no money to be made from television.

PHILO. I've failed, Pem.

YOUNG PEM. No you haven't, Philo.

YOUNG PHILO. It doesn't matter...except that I've failed you, too. Spending our best years on nothing.

YOUNG PEM. Philo, please...

PEM. He withdrew so far, no one could reach him. It was as though he was afraid to communicate anything in his mind...for fear someone might use it...to hurt him. *(beat)* I don't want him hurt any more, Mr. Makley. We've separated as it is. I don't know what to do for him...

STU. All right, Mrs. Farnsworth. We'll do whatever you think is best.

(Transition music.)

MR. PEEL. Toni! In my office! Now!

ANTONIA. Yes, Mr. Peel.

MR. PEEL. I just got a phone call from certain representatives of the Radio Corporation of America. They've heard an ugly rumor.

ANTONIA. Oh yeah?

MR. PEEL. A rumor that we're planning to do a show on someone named Philo Farnsworth.

ANTONIA. "Someone named...?"

MR. PEEL. All right, all right. I know who he is. But I'm sure as hell not gonna be the stooge who tells the world!

ANTONIA. You're not going to be, sir.

MR. PEEL? No? There's no show?

ANTONIA. Not any more, sir.

MR. PEEL. Good. Who's stupid idea was it to begin with?

ANTONIA. Yours.

MR. PEEL. Mine?!

ANTONIA. You hired Makley. He thought it up.

MR. PEEL. Oh. *(beat)* Is there a script?

ANTONIA. Yes.

MR. PEEL. *(beat)* Is it good?

ANTONIA. Not good. True.

MR. PEEL. That's bad. Get it to me.

ANTONIA. You want to read it?

MR. PEEL. Yeah. Then I wanna burn it.

(Transition music.)

ACTOR PLAYING PHILO. It's three o'clock in the morning, Miss Assenza.

ACTRESS PLAYING PEM. Why'd you drag all of us here to the studio?

ANTONIA. Because we're doing the Farnsworth story.

ACTORS. Now? That's crazy! *(etc.)*

ANTONIA. That's right. We're all nuts. Now get into your costumes. All right Theo. You think you can keep the KTF signal on the air for half an hour?

THEO. If I have to conduct it through my ears, Miss Assenza.

STU. Hey. What's going on in here?

ANTONIA. Welcome to front lines, soldier. We're doing that story you wrote.

STU. It's three in the morning.

ANTONIA. If you knew anything about this budding medium called TV, Makely, you'd know that you get your most sophisticated audience at three in the morning. Now up to the booth. You're callin' the show.

(Narration music.)

EDDIE NICHOLS. WKTV now presents the, uh...the late show! Tonight, we bring you the story of...The Boy Who Invented Television...

PEM. Hello, Phil? I had to call you...Phil, there's a television station in Pittsburgh, and...they're telling our story, Phil! It's on television right now...and somebody's watching it, darling...somebody out there is watching it...

(End of show music.)

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