JANE WOODFIN

Of Mikes and Men☆

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OF MIKES AND MEN

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To my dear friends and co-workers in early radio who will attempt in vain to find themselves in the pages of this book. You aren't here. I couldn't put you in because you are normal. But you may recognize some of the screwballs we both knew.

OF MIKES AND MEN

CHAPTER 1

The ad said:

Wanted, experienced continuity writer. Female.
Apply Station KUKU, between 9 and 11 A.M.

It was the only insertion in the Help Wanted–Female column, for ever since Wall Street had crashed jobs had been getting scarcer than bald-headed Indians. None of my friends, who had been graduated with me that June from college, could understand any more than I why the fall of some silly street far across the continent had any bearing on our finding proper employment in Portland, Oregon. But there it was.

I had been one of the lucky ones—at first. Up until day before yesterday I had had a position, but the firm which had hired me to keep their books had discovered that I added slowly, not always accurately, and on my fingers. There was also some vague discussion of credit and debit sides of the ledger, talk which I did not understand. My employment had ceased abruptly. I was given eighteen dollars and a half, my salary for the week. The twenty-three-dollar rent on my one-room apartment was due shortly, and the situation was serious.

It was only eight o'clock when I found the ad in the paper. I had an hour to eat my breakfast, steam my wind-blown over the teakettle, and get downtown to the build-

ing that housed the radio station. Just as I was putting the coffee on, there was a knock at the door.

I knew it would be Barry Alden even before I opened it. He had a room in the basement of the same apartment house, and his pay day, providing he had sold enough asbestos shingles to have one, wasn't until tomorrow. Barry could sell the shingles all right. He could sell anything. The trouble was people couldn't pay for them after they were delivered, and Barry didn't get paid until their checks were received, deposited, and guaranteed good.

"Got any coffee, Woodie?" he demanded, coming in, taking over the davenport, and reaching for the want-ad page. "I haven't enough dough to buy a bottle of moon. Let alone any to waste on coffee. Hey—somebody's been cutting this up!"

I showed him the insertion I had torn from the paper, and his eyes brightened with interest. He read slowly, his lips moving with each word as he came to it, his forehead puckered into a knot between his eyebrows. He looked anything but what he was, and was enough of a showman to play the fact to every advantage.

His loud plaid jacket was an off shade to go with the rather shiny-seated trousers, and his socks did not match for the simple reason that their mates had worn out and Barry was using up the spares. This costume was calculated to prove to prospective customers of asbestos shingles that he, like themselves, was struggling to get along in the world and was not making too great a profit from the sale. His necktie was of the violent variety usually associated with Christmas gifts from maiden aunts, and intended to dazzle housewives who might require asbestos shingles for their households. His grammar was atrocious, and he took pride in it. "I'm just a common guy," he was wont to explain. "I ain't putting on no airs." Actually he had spent six years in college because he never got around to collecting the

prescribed subjects for graduation before then. There was always something more interesting he wanted to take first. Barry was, and still is, one of my favorite people.

He is perhaps three or four years older than I am, and in those days he reminded me of a doll I had owned years before. It was the predecessor of the kewpie, and known as a Billikin. Barry was short and stocky. His sandy hair grew down to a pronounced widow's peak in front, while the sides were already beginning to slide back. He had a wide mouth, blue eyes, and, when he smiled, creases in his cheeks, which later disappeared when he put on a little weight. Nobody had much extra weight that year.

"What's a continuity writer?" he demanded when he had finished the item.

"I don't know. At least, I don't know what continuity is. But I've always wanted to be a writer, and you know it. If times weren't as they are, some newspaper would have snapped me up long before this."

"Sure," he agreed tolerantly. "Al Hannigan's in radio. You remember Al at school, don't you? He's an announcer at another station here, but he wouldn't do you much good on this because I hear the radio stations in this town hate each other like poison. They don't even speak to each other."

"I don't need Al. He wouldn't remember me anyway. He was ahead of me in school."

"Well, don't break your pick. If you hadn't checked straight down the list they gave you at the employment office and claimed you could operate all the machines and do everything they had listed for office help, you wouldn't be in the mess you're in now."

"How did I know they'd choose bookkeeping?" I demanded indignantly. "I can type, and I can write shorthand a little if they don't go too fast. And I didn't know what

those machines were, so how did I know I couldn't operate them if I tried?"

Barry lost interest in the subject.

"Nothing here for me," he said, throwing down the paper in disgust. "I'll have to stick to shingles a little longer. Got anything for breakfast?"

"There's some bread. We can toast it in the oven."

"Bread!" he snorted. "You're almost twenty-two years old. By this time you ought to be able to cook something besides toast and coffee. What would you do if you lost your can opener?"

"If you object to toast and coffee, you don't have to stay for breakfast. Nobody invited you."

But Barry had already turned over to the front page of the paper and forgotten me. If I hadn't known him so long and realized he felt, ever since I had left home to make my fortune in a big city, that it was his duty to administer parental deflations to my ego, I would have thrown him out.

KUKU was housed in a downtown office building. There was a small lobby with the usual cigar counter and barber-shop and a restaurant which boasted possibly a dozen stools. Outside of its austere height, twelve stories, which marked it a skyscraper in Portland in 1929, there was nothing to distinguish it from any other office building I had ever seen. But it scared me. It scared me so much that I went around the block three times. On the third turn I took a deep breath, darted in, and told the elevator operator my destination was KUKU.

"Second floor," he said wearily, as though it was a question he had answered a good many times that morning.

I knew it was so the minute I stepped off the elevator. KUKU's lobby was directly in front of it, and through the glass door I could see it was crowded with women. There were old ones and young ones, women well dressed and

women shabby, fat ones and thin ones and in-between ones. There were so many that there was no place for them to sit down, and they stood, jostling and glaring at each other. I had no idea there were so many experienced continuity writers in the world, and I wished timidly that I might ask one of them just what it was all about.

There was no time, however, for as I slid in and tried to squeeze between two protesting females, a small gray-haired man pushed his way out of a glassed-in cubicle on one side of the lobby.

"That's enough, Miss Millikin," he bellowed, and his tone, I imagined, was a cross between that of a bull-of-the-woods and the city editor of a newspaper. "Lock the door."

A frightened, mouselike person ran to do his bidding, and in spite of the fact that two more women had alighted from the elevators and were pounding on the door, she kept it locked.

"Now," boomed the man, "Miss Millikin will pass among you and take your names and where you've had your experience. We've no time to fool with amateurs here. You got to have experience. This is a radio station, not a nursery school."

A few of the women began to back nervously toward the door at that announcement, and as Miss Millikin, with her stenographer's notebook, circulated among them, even more joined the growing crowd waiting to be released.

I stood my ground, and when it came my turn, I gave Al's radio station as a reference, hoping that Barry was right and that the two stations weren't speaking. If they didn't speak, they could hardly check a reference, could they?

The next step was a little confusing, but I was still feeling my way and pretending to be nonchalant about what was happening. Only ten or a dozen aspirants were left after Miss Millikin's pencil had weeded out the inexperienced, and we were led through another door.

The room into which we were ushered was stagnant and sepulchral. Only long-dead air dwelt there. Momentarily I had the feeling that it must be used on certain occasions as a funeral parlor, and the feeling must have been shared by the others, for automatically the twittering talk was hushed, and we walked on tiptoe lest our shoes stir sound instead of dust from the padded carpeting.

Perhaps the long draperies which shrouded the four walls from ceiling to floor contributed much to this atmosphere. They were of monk's cloth, a coarse weave which I have always imagined sackcloth must resemble, and chosen for their practical but dreary color of grimy gray. The outside windows had been ignored by those who hung these wall coverings, and the street wall was as completely shrouded as though openings did not exist. I later discovered this had been done to exclude noises of streetcars and passing vehicles, but the effect at the time was that of being contained in a gigantic coffin. There was one small glassed window, but it looked into an inner room filled with mysterious equipment. Through this window the gray-haired man and another a bit younger peered at us, and their glances were cold.

A row of folding chairs marched around the edge of the room, and when I timidly perched on one, its protesting squeak was sacrilege. Miss Millikin looked at me with reproach. There was a closed grand piano in one corner, somehow accusing in its silence, and in the center of the room stood a cheap varnished table with a folding chair on each side.

Miss Millikin sat at the table and somberly beckoned one of our number to take the seat opposite her. It was then that I noticed the curious object between them. It rose from a metal stand in the center of the table and appeared to be a flattened disk about the size of a human head.

A relic from the days of the Inquisition, I thought wildly, and then put the idea away as nonsense. After all, this was 1929 and a radio station. They would not be concerned with torture relics; they would be concerned with modern radio equipment, such as microphones. This object must be, I reasoned brilliantly, a microphone.

I examined it more carefully, since I had never seen one before. It seemed to be covered with roughly woven brown cloth of some kind and was encircled by a metal frame studded with many holes. The metal stand brought it about even with the mouth of anyone sitting at the table.

As Miss Millikin called our names, we came forward, took the seat opposite her, and read a few paragraphs from a woman's magazine she gave us. From time to time she stopped one or another of us, then picking up the metal disk, gave it a severe shaking before she set it back on the table and told us to proceed.

I did as the others and when it came my turn, read the marked paragraphs clearly and, I hoped, with expression. But the whole thing seemed very peculiar, especially as I now noticed that the two men observing us through the glass window appeared to be discussing us. Their lips moved as though they were talking to each other, but of course no sound came through.

It was most surprising then, as the last woman finished reading, to hear a man's raucous voice in the room with us. It was a loud voice, and harsh, seeming to emanate from all four of the curtained walls at once, and it called three names, one of which was mine. These three, it commanded, were to read again.

After the first startled moment or two I recognized the bellow of the gray-haired man and realized I was observing one of the wonders of radio. I had been correct in presuming the metallic object on the table to be a microphone. It

had carried our voices to him in the other room. Through another microphone he was speaking to us.

I was a little nervous with this second reading and did not do too well, but my competitors did not do as well as they had done at first, either. Miss Millikin looked up inquiringly as we finished, and again the man's voice filled the room.

"Miss Woodfin," he decided. "Not that she's good, but at least she's no soprano. Can't stand a squeaking soprano. Send her to my office."

As easily as that did I become a continuity writer in a radio station. Although I still didn't know what it was.

The man didn't tell me, either. He proved to be Mr. Woolen, manager of the station, and he spoke in staccatos, like someone rattling shot in the head of a snare drum.

"You start tomorrow," he said. "You go on the air at nine o'clock. You're Nancy Lee, our Better Homes Girl of the Golden West Network. You give cooking talks. Half-hour. Six days a week. Rest of the day you write continuity. Salary's twenty-five dollars a week."

"Yes, sir," I stammered. I heard only the last two sentences distinctly. I was to be a writer! I was to be paid the unheard-of sum of twenty-five dollars a week for being one! Just wait till I saw Barry Alden, who, while he had never actually said anything, had not seemed surprised when one newspaper after another turned down my services.

"Have your program all ready when you get here tomorrow. Make it by quarter to nine. That'll give you time to get acquainted with the announcer and get set up. That's all. You can go now."

I went. I went in a daze that still surrounded me when I reached the street. I had a job! I had a job in one of the newest, most glamorous industries in the whole country! I was in radio!

From time to time she picked up the mysterious metal disk and gave it a severe shaking

It was fortunate that I had been hired in the morning, for it gave me the whole day to learn to write continuity. I went to see Al Hannigan at once.

"Al," I began when I had introduced myself, for he didn't remember me. "I have a job writing continuity, and I'd like to see what some looks like."

"Where?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Station KUKU," I told him proudly.

"KUKU! Why, they're bankrupt. They were part of the Golden West Network. It folded. They can't even pay their telephone bills to Seattle. Everybody knows that. Most of their staff's already walked out."

"I was just over there. They seem to be running."

"Only phonograph records. They can't even get free talent to advertise a piano school. So far as I know, Jack Woolen's still hanging on. He's the manager, and I heard they've still got a couple of combination announcer-technicians. But they've let all their artists go, and most of the office help walked out. Pay's too uncertain."

"Just the same, I'm going to work for them. Could I see some continuity, please? What is it?"

"Continuity is everything the announcer says," he explained. "Maybe it's an announcement sandwiched in between two shows. We call that a 'spot.' Maybe it's the introduction to musical numbers. It's all continuity. The writer writes it, the announcer reads it. I guess it'd be all right to show you some."

As he showed me the difference between spot announcements and musical introductions, he kept looking at me with pitying disbelief. Several times he shook his head as though the whole thing was beyond his comprehension, but for all that he was very helpful. At least I had an idea of the general form of continuity and how it should look on the typed page.

It was not until I had left him that the full significance

of Mr. Woolen's remarks struck me. Continuity was only part of my job. I was expected to arrive at the station tomorrow morning with a half-hour commentary on culinary arts, and ready to deliver it myself. And I couldn't cook.

My next stop was a bookstore. If I was going to deliver cooking talks, I had to have a cookbook. I bought the fattest one they had, and one which included a section on balanced menus, stain removals, and table setting. It would be just as well, I thought, to vary the recipe-reading with discussions on allied subjects. Perhaps my listeners wouldn't get tired of one cup of flour, two teaspoons of baking powder, but I was afraid I might.

Writing my broadcast was quite a chore. I wasn't sure how many pages I would need to fill a half hour on the air, and I hated to bother Al again to ask him. I had heard homemaking programs but had never given them my full attention. All I seemed to remember, and that but dimly, was that you could read a recipe twice, the first time with long waits while your listeners wrote down the proportions, the second time more briskly, in case they wished to check what they had written.

I had decided that the whole thing should be typed, as I did not think it seemed exactly professional for a culinary expert such as I to be seen carrying or reading a cookbook in public. It took me half the night to compose my initial masterpiece, and I rather hoped Barry would come knocking at my door so I could gloat a little. But he didn't, which meant he had run into someone whose pay day came earlier than his own.

Promptly at a quarter of nine the next morning I presented myself at the studio. Yesterday KUKU had been so overflowing with applicants for the job, and later I had been so excited that I hadn't paid much attention to the physical surroundings. Today I gave them my careful inspection.

Through the front door one entered immediately into a reception hall, furnished with a davenport in a bilious shade of yellow, two ugly and uncomfortable tapestry-covered chairs, and a dusty table. There was an empty desk in one corner, obviously reserved for a hostess who had departed with the other Arabs, and a loud-speaker with a dingy cloth face, through which came the program KUKU was then broadcasting.

A small glassed-in cubicle on one side of the front door was reserved for the manager, and on the opposite side of the lobby were doors marked, respectively, "Ladies" and "Gents" and a longer office containing empty desks, typewriters, chairs, and filing cabinets. Windows and a glass door on the farther side of the reception room looked into the single studio, and it in turn was flanked by the control room, a mysterious affair filled with batteries and switches, a turntable for playing records, and an electric oven for storing microphones overnight. This oven was one of the most important pieces of equipment, since the fine crystals of carbon which carried the voice waves had a tendency to collect moisture and pack down solid during the day. Heat loosened them once more, and our programs, consequently, were always clearer in the early morning than late at night.

Jack Woolen was at his desk glowering at the morning newspaper and wondering which one of the advertisers therein he could approach with a schedule card and a request to buy time on the air. He put down the paper to glower at me instead.

"Oh, it's you," he grunted by way of salutation. "Come on. I'll have to introduce you to the announcer."

The announcer was a tall, thin individual with sparse, greasy black hair carefully distributed to best advantage, and with a supercilious manner. Those were the days when announcers were important persons, and no one knew it better than they.

"This is Roland Bean," mumbled Mr. Woolen. "He'll put you on and give you a couple of records to play."

"Records!" I gasped.

"Can't have a woman gabbing for a whole half hour without a break. Listeners wouldn't stand for it. One phonograph record in the first fifteen minutes, another in the second. I'll be listening. You better be good."

He left me with Mr. Bean.

" 'Doll Dance' and 'When the Red Red Robin Comes Bob Bob Bobbin' Along,' " announced Mr. Bean. He always spoke as though he were delivering a commercial message for a zealous sponsor. "You announce them. I play them from the booth. Write them down, because I won't be in there to remind you if you forget."

Rightly assuming that these were the musical selections which would brighten my culinary chatter, I wrote the titles hastily on the top of my script.

"You ever worked a mike before?" he demanded. I hesitated, but this was no time to bluff. This time I had to have help. I shook my head, and he nodded with satisfaction. "I thought not. Jack couldn't hire anybody with experience for what he's willing to pay. Come on and I'll show you."

"I'm getting a good salary," I objected indignantly as I followed him into the studio. "Twenty-five dollars a week!"

"The Better Homes Girl we had before The Crash got that for doing this one program and nothing else. She wasn't on full time, only for this one show. And you'll be writing continuity, too, Jack says."

"That's right."

"We used to pay our writers thirty-five and forty dollars a week," he said triumphantly. "Besides, it was all in cash. Now, you sit here at this table."

I sat at the table. Facing me was the round disk I had encountered briefly the day before, but somehow it had changed. The blank mesh face had suddenly assumed an ex-

pression. Two of the decorative holes in the frame I singled out as eyes, and those eyes were staring at me balefully.

"This is a microphone," said Mr. Bean witheringly. "You talk straight into it, like this. Don't get your face off to an angle, or it will whistle. If you see me pounding on the glass of the control room, that means it's gone dead on you. Then you pick it up and shake it, like this."

"What does that do?"

"Jolts loose the carbon crystals. This is a carbon mike. Got to keep them loose. Be sure to keep your eye on me. They'll probably pack down a couple of times during the show. And remember to keep looking straight at the mike."

How I could simultaneously watch Mr. Bean through the window and keep looking straight at the mike I couldn't imagine, but I nodded meekly. I was too much in awe of everything to question his obvious intention of leaving me alone. As a matter of fact, it was necessary that he do so. The early announcers were, in most cases, their own technicians. Many of them had regular operator's licenses, and it was only an occasional program which was announced from the studio. Generally it was done from the control room where the announcer could flip a switch to turn on the voice microphone and another to pick up the music of a record. Moreover, when anyone was talking, he was required to keep his hand on a little dial which regulated the volume of tone coming over the air.

"You want the same introduction?" he continued. "You going to be Nancy Lee, the Better Homes Girl of the Golden West Network?"

"I think so."

"I'll introduce you as that. If Jack had wanted a change, he'd have said so. There's the clock up there. Keep watching it so you'll know when to sign off. When you see me jab like this, it's time to start talking."

With that he left me and the round accusing eyes of the

microphone alone, and I discovered I was frightened. My hands, when I attempted to unfold my script, were sticky with dampness. My stomach had somehow moved up from its accustomed position and was lodged in my throat. It interfered with my breathing. If my legs had not been so weak, I would have run from that room, gladly throwing away all the glamour of radio and my chance at a job and a twenty-five-dollar pay check. But my legs would not carry me.

I sat on, watching the second hand of the studio clock gallop around and the minute hand race to overtake it. Always my eyes came back to that evil circle facing me on the table. Four minutes. Three minutes. I counted the soiled folds of monk's cloth which draped the room from ceiling to floor. Twenty-two folds across—no, twenty-three if you counted the big bunch in the corner, but maybe half of that should be counted on the other wall. The microphone was still there, jeering at me. Two minutes. One minute.

Desperately I cleared my throat and my voice croaked back at me. Then I was aware that Mr. Bean was pounding on the control-room window, his finger jabbing at me accusingly. I raised my script, took a deep breath, and opened my mouth.

"Good morning, girls," I quavered. "How about surprising the family with a lovely tutti-frutti cake for dinner tonight? I have the recipe right here, and if you'll all run and get your pencils and papers, we'll start right in on it. I'll wait while you sharpen your pencils."

At the first break for a musical number Mr. Bean appeared beside me with criticism and advice.

"You're not good," he said, "but maybe I've heard worse somewhere. Keep your eye on me. You lost a whole minute with a dead mike."

If I expected the second half of the program to go more easily than the first, I was disappointed. I went through the

same starting agony at the conclusion of each record, and as a matter of fact, the situation never did improve. In all those weeks I was on the air I was never at ease, nor did the microphone and I ever get to be other than formal acquaintances.

CHAPTER 2

Barry Alden didn't show up for four days, and when he did, I felt I was well established in my new field and a veteran in radio. He knocked at my door early one evening bearing the last tangible proofs of his pay check—a five-gallon can of alcohol, two cans of grapefruit juice, and a steak.

"I'm working," I told him proudly.

He set down his burdens carefully and inspected the tools of my trade spread out on the table: typewriter, paper, carbon, and an open cookbook. He shook himself a little when he came to that last item.

"Just what are you doing?" he demanded suspiciously.

"I'm a continuity writer. I got the job at KUKU," I explained, trying to keep my tone casual.

"And this?" he jabbed at the cookbook.

"Oh, I have my own program on the air. I'm Nancy Lee, the Better Homes Girl of the Golden West Network. I'm listened to by thousands. Maybe millions." The last three sentences were quotes. I heard both KUKU's announcers recite them many times a day, and the words came naturally to my tongue.

"Cooking talks! You!"

"I make twenty-five dollars a week," I shouted above his laughter, and that held him. He calmed down at once.

"You better not let them find out you can't cook," he said seriously.

"I don't see how they can. Nobody around there pays any attention to my program. Not after the first day. Even the announcer in the booth just watches the needle on the gain control; he doesn't listen to what I'm saying. They're only interested in the continuity I write because that's commercial, and I'm getting pretty good at it. Even Roland Bean says so."

"What is continuity, anyway?" he asked with interest.

"It's everything the announcer says," I told him, quoting Al Hannigan. "He just doesn't stand up and talk, the way it sounds. He reads it off the paper, and I write what's on the paper. It's fun. The only trouble is there's so much of it. I haven't been out of there before seven o'clock at night since I started work, and when I get home I still have to write my own show."

"Oh, well," said Barry philosophically. "You asked for work when you went there, didn't you? What are you crying about now you've got it?"

"I'm not. It's just that I don't know what I'll do when business picks up. We've only got a few accounts now, but things will be better pretty soon."

"Things may get a lot worse before they get better," he said gloomily. "Let's have a drink."

We all thought that drinking was something new with our generation, and maybe it was. Our families didn't drink; whisky was used for medicinal purposes only. As a matter of fact, we didn't drink whisky, either; it wasn't available in prohibition days to people of our financial stratum. We drank moonshine, gin (manufactured by the bootlegger or at home from straight alcohol), or straight alcohol itself. In college where we had discovered that smart, sophisticated people such as we drank intoxicating beverages, we had learned on Dago Red or one of the so-called wine tonics sold by drugstores.

"I don't think I'd better," I suggested feebly. "I've got work to do. My show, you know. My public."

"My grandmother's pale-pink nightshirt," Barry said scoffingly.

He fished in his pocket and came up with a rather worn Liberty nickel. Holding me firmly with his light-blue eyes he flipped it in the air, caught it on the back of his hand, and covered it with the other.

"Heads," I said automatically.

"Tails," he announced triumphantly. "Get the hose."

As there was no way of pouring alcohol from a five-gallon can without danger of spilling some of the precious liquid, we had evolved the happy solution of siphoning it off. For that purpose we kept a rubber hose, one end of which could be inserted in the opening of the can. Anyone sucking on the other end of the hose could start a stream of fluid into a glass. The only drawback was that once it started flowing, you got a portion of hot, biting, searing alcohol in your mouth before you could remove the end and place it over the glass. I felt that a gentleman would never have forced such an unpleasant experience upon a lady, but with Barry I had to take my turn.

We diluted the alcohol with grapefruit juice, whereupon Barry plunked down the same nickel on the end table.

"I'm not going to start it again," I objected indignantly. "It's your turn, and you know it."

"I'll take my turn," he said severely. "I've just worked out a new system for buying another crock when this one is empty. A five-gallon can of alky costs twenty bucks. I got it figured out that you can get four hundred drinks out of it. Now four hundred drinks cost twenty bucks, so that's five cents a drink. And if we never take a drink without putting a nickel in the kitty, by the time the can's empty there'll be enough to buy another."

"Who keeps the kitty?" I demanded suspiciously.

"Me, of course. The can stays in my room. You ain't always around when I'm having a drink."

"But if anyone else had one, you'll make him pay a nickel?"

"What do you take me for?" He sounded hurt. "I don't buy free alky for anybody. Not at these prices."

"All right," I agreed reluctantly. "But I've only got a nickel in my purse. Tomorrow's pay day at the station."

"Then you only get one drink tonight," he decided logically.

The first pay day at KUKU was one which will always stand out in my memory. I had ducked downstairs on the chance I could talk the restaurant operator into trusting me for a cup of coffee, and when I returned, Miss Millikin, the combination bookkeeper, stenographer, and receptionist, had delivered our checks.

Mine was fluttering in my typewriter, but the desk top was practically hidden by a miscellany of unrelated articles which had no place there. On first glance these included twenty loaves of bread, a glass bowl in which swam two goldfish, and a gigantic carton labeled "Fish Food," certainly enough to satisfy every piscatorial denizen of the Columbia River. There were also several unidentified parcels wrapped in brown paper. As I reached my desk, Miss Millikin came hurrying over.

"Here's your inventory," she said. "Please sign your name for a receipt."

But I had already seen the figure on the check. "Just a minute," I interrupted quickly. "There's been a mistake. I'm to receive twenty-five dollars a week. This check is for only ten dollars."

"You surely didn't think you'd get it all in cash?" she demanded in surprise. "You have fifteen dollars' worth of merchandise on your desk. That makes up the difference."

"But I don't want merchandise. I want the money."

"We all had the full amount of our checks in cash before The Crash," she said dreamily. "But, of course, that isn't possible now. The station has to take part of the amount our clients owe for radio time in merchandise. Naturally, these portions have to be passed over to our employees. The head office wouldn't accept them. But Mr. Woolen is very fair about it. If you can find a store which will let you redeem the merchandise for cash, you're free to do so. Personally, I've never been so lucky."

"What's in these other packages?" I demanded, jabbing at one with my finger. I was rewarded with a metallic clank.

"That would be nails and bolts," she told me. "Ten pounds of them. From Henderson's Hardware. You should remember. You write their copy. And the envelope contains a dollar-and-a-half's worth of tickets from the amusement park. They're good for Joy Rides. But be careful of the bulgy package. There's two bottles of Patton Brothers Hair Renew in there, and they're breakable. There's also one of their Magic Massage Brushes to stimulate sluggish scalps."

I stared at the motley collection in horror as Miss Millikin thrust a pencil in my weak fingers.

"It's all here on this slip," she said. "There's a carbon for you. Everything is listed according to its retail price. You'll find it quite correct. Fifteen dollars' worth of merchandise. Please sign."

I signed. There was nothing else to do. Outside of the manner in which I was to receive my pay and the recipes which I resented copying each night and delivering each morning, I was enjoying my job. I was learning to write continuity in the best possible way—by doing it.

We had plenty of old files of past continuity, and these I carefully studied for patterns. The accounts we now had were not the same, so there was no temptation to lift a phrase or a slogan. I had to make up my own. Moreover, the speaker was turned on every moment of my working day,

and with half a mind on tomorrow's copy I heard today's coming back at me.

That was before the day when constant repetition became the smartest thing in advertising, and there is nothing more boring than hearing the same words day after day and knowing you could do something about it if you wanted to. I tried to be kind to my own ears by feeding them different phrases and wordings each day, and before I knew it, words were coming at the turn of a faucet.

They weren't always good words, because I had to write so many, but they were varied, and we gave full value to our advertisers. A phonograph record ran two and a half minutes, and we ran four, sometimes three, on a fifteen-minute program. That meant our listeners had from five to six and a half minutes to become thoroughly acquainted with all phases of our client's product. Figuring a hundred and twenty-five words to the minute, it was a lot of words, even with so scanty a commercial schedule as we had. I wrote them all.

The cooking broadcasts, which I still had to write at home, were getting worse and worse. Moreover, they were cutting me out of all social life. My friends from school had almost dropped me, and even Barry's brief visits were getting rarer.

"You're getting dull," he said candidly, and I couldn't argue. It was true.

It seemed to take every minute at the station to write our required commercial copy. I was too new at it to have built up speed, and even if I finished before seven, I didn't feel quite free to open a cookbook at the station. It hardly seemed necessary to call attention to my culinary shortcomings so long as they were going unnoticed. So I dashed home, ate a sandwich—my almost invariable diet—thanks to twenty loaves weekly as salary money—and went to work. If guests dropped in, they had to maintain strict silence

while I selected menus from my cookbook and copied proportions. They seldom called a second time.

I was through with the pastry section by this time, having had a brief fling at entertaining with and without a maid, and with the removal of common stains. I was now on vegetables, which I considered much safer and less complicated ground even if it did take more recipes to fill the time.

And then one morning as I skidded in the door at one minute to nine, Jack Woolen bellowed at me from his cubicle.

"See me after the broadcast!"

"Yes, sir," I panted, grabbing the slip on which Roland Bean had written the names of the two records he had selected for my program.

There was the usual mental battle with the sinister monster in brown mesh on the table, the usual gasp or two before I could get the first word released from my constricted throat, the same quavering start and the sudden rush of words, for I operated on the theory that if I talked as fast as possible, I wouldn't be so scared. A couple of times Mr. Bean pounded on the glass, and I shook the microphone viciously, for it was at these moments that I vented my true feelings for it.

The program was finally over. The hatefully familiar "Voices of Spring" signed me off, taking up the extra minute and a half of slack where I was short of copy.

Then I remembered Mr. Woolen's command to visit his office, forgotten for thirty minutes in my greater fear of the microphone. I gathered up my script and attended him meekly, Mr. Bean following my progress across the room with curious, prying eyes.

"Siddown!" roared Mr. Woolen.

On the desk in front of him was a pile of letters at which he poked distastefully. "Look at these!"

I looked. The top letter was addressed to Nancy Lee, the

Better Homes Girl of the Golden West Network. So was the next, and the next. The whole pile was for me, and from the size of the stack I judged that at least one of every fifty residents in Portland had written me a letter.

"Fan mail," I glowed, still unable to believe. In all the weeks I had been on the air I had never received a fan letter.

"Read it," he snorted.

"You've been reading my mail!" I accused, so affronted at the indignity that I forgot I was speaking to the manager of a great station.

He assumed a begonia hue and waved, speechless, at the letters. The envelopes were already split open, and I slid out a page.

Dear Miss Lee:
I have listened to your broadcasts for some time because they were so bad they were funny, but this morning when you suggested cooking a pound of spinach in a quart of water, it was too much. What if some new and unsuspecting bride took you seriously? Now, Miss Lee, you know very well, one never puts any additional water on spinach—

There was more, but I didn't read it. I felt my face growing warm as I reached for the next letter. Another complaint. So was the next, and the next. There was no need to finish the pile. It was then that Jack Woolen asked the question I had been dreading for over a month.

"Can't you cook?"

"No," I admitted miserably. "I took everything out of a cookbook. The night I wrote that broadcast I was pretty sleepy, and I must have mixed up two recipes."

"H'm," said the manager of KUKU thoughtfully. "Well, you've been doing fair in continuity, and now that I've got some more accounts there's enough to keep you busy. I never did like women's programs, anyway. Starting tomorrow we'll take the damn thing off the air."

CHAPTER 3

One of the first things I heard when I came to KUKU was certain raised-eyebrow, sepulchral-toned discussions of *they! They* were going to salvage the wreckage! *They* were going to do this! *They* wouldn't like that! I heard about them from the announcer, Roland Bean, and from Miss Millikin, and from the technician who came up from the basement transmitter once a week to collect his check and pick up his advertising loot, and from Jack Woolen himself. *They* might appear any day, and when *they* did, things would happen.

"But who the hell are *they*, anyway?" demanded Barry one evening when I was entertaining him with tidbits of station gossip.

"I'm not exactly sure. I think they're the higher-ups in Seattle. They own our station and one up there, too. And whenever *they* say something, it seems to be pretty important."

"Brass hats," Barry decided wisely. "Well, just remember you're dangerous as long as you're swinging."

I remembered his advice the morning when I came into the station and noticed a crowd in Jack Woolen's cubicle. The office was so small that two persons filled it to capacity, and this time there were four packed within its narrow confines. No one volunteered me a shoehorn and an invitation to join them, so I went on back to my desk and found Miss

Millikin, suspiciously pink around the eyes, cleaning out her desk drawer.

"If those are clients in Jack's office," I began brightly, "I hope it's a fur account. I haven't a decent coat, and the weather's turned colder."

She shushed me with a glance, and bending over as though to extract hand lotion, aspirin, adhesive tape, and a quart of sewing machine oil she had received on her last week's salary, she spoke without opening her lips.

"*They*'ve come," I finally made out. "*They*'re firing everybody. *They* just gave me my check, and now *they*'re giving Jack his. You'll be next."

The first thing that flashed through my mind was the Elixir of Youth reducing pills that Jack had forced upon me as part of last week's salary. The Elixir of Youth was a new account, and one for which I had written glowing, adjective-abounding copy, but when I had tried to turn those pills into cash at various drugstores, I had been told that no reputable druggist would handle them.

I had thirteen dollars' worth at home, and today I had determined to face our manager with the fact that I had been cheated. Now he was no longer the manager. I probably wouldn't be a continuity writer by noon, and I might have to eat the Elixir of Youth pills to keep from starving.

It made me so mad I hung up my coat and kicked my galoshes over by the radiator. If I was going to be fired, they'd have to pay me for an extra five minutes of work.

Miss Millikin looked at me reproachfully as she continued with her packing, but I ignored her, throwing myself into spots and introductions without even a momentary wait for the right word. Sheets of copy piled up in my basket, and with each addition I got just a little bit madder. At the rate I was going I'd have eight hours' work completed in two.

Roland Bean came briskly from the control room, a sheet

of paper in his hands. Presumably it was to consult me about some copy, but I knew Roland. He was after news.

"Have *they* talked to you yet?" he hissed, leaning over and waving the paper under my nose.

"No," I said stiffly, pushing him away.

"*They* will," he predicted grimly, annoyed that I wouldn't cooperate. "I just got two weeks' notice, and I've got to work it out. That's the breaks *they* always give me. With that extra check right now I could make it to San Francisco on the bus. The only reason I'm not on a San Francisco network now is that I've never had a break. You couldn't get one around this cheap joint. I'm glad to shake the dust from my feet."

I continued typing and pretty soon he gave up and went back.

An hour went by and then two. Jack Woolen and Miss Millikin left, while *they* held down the cubicle. Roland kept on grinding records and reading spots, and I kept on turning them out.

Then I was aware that someone was standing by my desk. He was a diminutive man in tweeds, with shoulders padded in the best manner of an Atlas ad. His thin neck rising out of his collar and his bony hands emerging from his sleeves gave the lie to that muscular development, but the tweeds were obviously so expensive, as were his handmade shoes and scarlet cravat, that no one around KUKU would challenge him.

"Miss Woodfin?" he asked, looking me over appraisingly. "I'm Chet Minsinger. Mr. Zerhorst would like to see you."

This was it. As I followed him back to the manager's office, I glanced at the studio clock. Five minutes of eleven. I could charge them up with two hours' time today, anyway.

The third man of the trio had departed, and in the swivel chair sat a cold-eyed individual with a mouth that closed like a coffin lid and as efficiently ended the subject. He was

different shades of gray—hair, eyes, and clothes—but some of it could have been an illusion of the cigar smoke which filled the cubicle like sea fog and to which both Mr. Minsinger and Mr. Zerhorst appeared bent on adding as rapidly as possible.

"This is Miss Woodfin, the continuity writer," said Mr. Minsinger, removing his cigar.

"Sit down, Miss Woodfin," said Mr. Zerhorst, not removing his. "How long have you been at KUKU?"

"About two months," I admitted, trying to hold my breath so I wouldn't choke.

"You came after The Crash?"

"Yes, sir."

The Crash, to which we always referred in capital letters, meant the recent bankruptcy proceedings of the Golden West Network. The financial condition of the country at large was small in our minds by comparison.

"What salary do you get?"

"Twenty-five a week. Ten of it in cash."

"It will all be in cash from now on," frowned Mr. Zerhorst, puffing even harder. "No more damn merchandise. KUKU's going to make a comeback. Going to grow. It's going to be the best damn radio station in this damn town. Chet Minsinger's your new manager."

"You mean I'm to stay?" I gasped, forgetting and inhaling naturally. It was a mistake and I paid for it with a coughing spell, but doubtless both men thought it was caused by my intense emotion.

"Certainly you're going to stay," smiled Mr. Minsinger smoothly. "We're going to rebuild the studio and have a whole new staff. Good efficient people. The right kind of people. Just one big happy family."

Mr. Zerhorst had lapsed into a thoughtful contemplation of the tobacco fog, and Mr. Minsinger silently signaled that my interview was at an end and that I could return to work.

I could hardly wait to get home that night to see Barry. There was every likelihood that he would show up, because his pay days had been getting fewer and farther between. Times were definitely worse, and people not only were unable to buy shingles for their houses but were losing the shingles they had as their houses were being repossessed.

Barry was pretty discouraged. He talked wildly of going into vaudeville, for which he had always had a secret hankering, only vaudeville had almost shut down. He would have joined the Navy, he said, but he couldn't even get in a rowboat without getting seasick, and he would prospect for gold —only nobody would stake him to a pan or a pair of rubber boots. I wasn't sure what radio might hold for Barry, but Mr. Zerhorst was putting on a staff, and Barry was sure to have some ideas.

There was no answer when I knocked on his door, so I stuck a note underneath telling him I wanted to see him and went on up to my apartment. My dinner menu was all set up, because I had received a bushel of apples last week on my pay check, and twenty loaves of bread each Wednesday was a standard order from our bread account. I decided to make applesauce for a change, thereby proving that my month and a half as a culinary expert was of some use. I was peeling the apples when Barry came knocking dispiritedly on my door. His face changed as I told him my news.

"Staff!" he murmured. "A whole new staff! What do you think that includes?"

"We have two announcers now, one to work days and one nights. Miss Millikin keeps books and does the typing. Jack Woolen manages the station and sells time. Then there's a couple of boys in the transmitter, and that's all except me," I said doubtfully.

"He must mean more than that," mused Barry thoughtfully. "Look, to hear you tell it, everybody in radio has to do more than one job."

"Not the boys at the transmitter."

"No. But that's technical. I couldn't learn that before tomorrow. But your announcers announce and also operate the controls. Your bookkeeper keeps books and takes dictation—"

"And answers phones and meets people who come in."

"And the station manager doubles as a salesman. That leaves only you with just one job."

"I had two," I reminded him with dignity, "before I got so busy with continuity."

"You mean before they found out you couldn't cook. I think it would be safest if I asked for a combination job, too. Say, a salesman and an entertainer."

"The only way you can entertain people is by making faces," I reminded him. "At school all you could do was pantomime."

"I excelled at pantomime," he objected. "I was so good at pantomime that they didn't get to my other excellent qualities. They were overshadowed, that's all. All I've got to hit on is an angle, and that's a mere bag of tails. Thanks, kid. I'll be in tomorrow."

"Aren't you going to stay and eat dinner?" I demanded in surprise.

"I got a date. New girl. Rich, too. She's having me to dinner, and she gets paid in other things than bread and apples."

"Just make sure you charge her a nickel a drink," I yelled, but he had already shut the door.

By the next morning a definite change had taken place. It was apparent even before one opened the glass door labeled KUKU, for the lobby was not soundproof, and the noises of ripping partitions and of hammering and sawing were lusty and continuous.

Mr. Zerhorst, in the best tradition of *they,* was no longer

with us. That was one of the most effective measures *they* used for creating awe among staff members. *They*, like the Wizard of Oz, emerged rarely and briefly from behind a screen, chopped off a few heads, laid down a few ultimatums, and were gone.

Yet two members of this higher circle remained among us, which marked this situation as a serious one indeed. A third man was there that morning, and with him was a crew of workmen, obviously determined to wreck the place before they rebuilt from the rubble. He was never introduced to me, nor did we ever exchange more than a shy glance, but he was the chief engineer of the Golden West Network, and the work he managed to get out of his hirelings not only was incredible but, to my knowledge, has never been duplicated.

Overnight we had taken space formerly occupied by adjoining offices, and now, instead of one studio, we were to have two. The monk's cloth draperies that supposedly had deadened sound had been taken down and sent out for their first cleaning, the rugs ripped up from the floor for the same purpose. Broadcasting was temporarily done from the control room.

The offices were also being enlarged, and most amazing of all, the requiem was knolling for my old enemy, the carbon mike. We were to have condensers—long, thin, tubular objects—which were attached by heavy cables to plugs in the wall.

Condenser mikes were the very latest thing, Roland Bean informed me a little enviously, for now that he was to use ours for so short a time he was beginning to be a bit squeamish about his chances for a California audition. They did not have to be coddled at night in an electric oven. Shaking them during a broadcast was unnecessary. Nor did they snarl back at you and whine in the middle of a program.

To add to this confusion, there began that morning a constant procession of strange and assorted individuals who had answered Chet Minsinger's advertised plea for a staff. They were of both sexes and all ages, some hopefully carrying musical instruments, although it had been definitely stated that only an office force would be hired at the start.

Chet, however, saw them all, and if the young and more pulchritudinous females basked a little longer in the fumes of his cigar, who was to criticize? I had learned the first day *they* arrived that Mr. Minsinger's wolfish instincts were adequately muzzled.

He had followed me to my desk after my first interview with Mr. Zerhorst and had tentatively suggested that we might consider plans for my future over dinner that evening. Even while I gulped, wondering what was the diplomatic way to avoid him and still hold my job, the door had opened to admit an apparition in a white polo coat, white velvet hat with white feathers, white galoshes, and a white wolfhound on a leash. She was at that time a blonde, and without looking to right or left she seemed to scent Mr. Minsinger out, or perhaps the wolfhound was for that purpose. After a brief but scathing inspection of me she clutched him possessively by both lapels.

"Darling," she murmured. "Zaza was so lonesome for her little Chester. Zaza couldn't stand it. She had to come straight to Portland where her dreat big handsome husband was at."

"My God, Gert!" roared Mr. Minsinger. "I told you I'd be busy. I told you to stay home."

"Zaza," she pouted. "Call me Zaza, naughty boy. You make Zaza very angry when you forget and say Gert."

"It's your name!"

"Not any more," she snarled. "I changed it. And you'll call me Zaza, or I'll bust your nasty little head. And if you think I'm going to stay up there and leave you free to chase

An apparition in a white polo coat, white velvet hat, white galoshes, and a white wolfhound on a leash

everything in skirts, you got another think coming. I'm here, and here I stay, just as long as you do."

"Keep your voice down, you fishwife," he advised in a hoarse whisper. "My office is over there. Go sit in it."

"I'll sit," she agreed grimly. "And I'll sit till it's time for you to go to dinner. And tomorrow night I'll be back to sit again, and the next night, and the next. If you think you're going to throw our money away on some other dame, you're nuts."

She meant what she said. Promptly at five each afternoon she swept into the studio in a cloud of perfume, took possession of Chet's office, and grimly awaited his leisure while she worked on the contents of a silver flask she carried in her handbag. If he kept her waiting longer than usual, she might emerge glassy-eyed, but always on her feet. There was nothing Chet could do about it. If he left early, she found him. She had a faculty for ferreting him out of hotels and speak-easies that was perhaps her one remarkable talent.

Barry Alden had been one of the first interviewees in Chet Minsinger's office, but there had been no time to talk with him, and it was not until much later that I discovered he had done the impossible. He had dreamed up and sold Chet a midnight all-request program with himself as master of ceremonies and salesman de luxe.

The microphone gave to Barry's voice all the romantic timbre of a bullfrog faking falsetto, but at that hour of the night our listeners weren't critical. He ran the whole show himself, which meant that he pulled records from the file and played them, answered telephone calls, tabulated requests, and threw out the drunks who were always wandering in. During the daytime he sold spot announcements for the program, nor was any other salesman permitted to poach upon that sacred sixty minutes. Each spot brought a dollar and a half, and Barry was allowed to keep seventy-five cents. What he made depended on his own efforts, and he

did all right. Barry, in the best American vernacular, was a go-getter.

By the end of the week we had a full staff. There was a hostess, a petite blonde named Vi Weathering, who answered phones, handled the public who came to gape through our new glass windows, sorted mail, and took Chet's dictation with speed and wisecracks. There was a new bookkeeper, imported from Seattle and named Miss Tolman, who kept entirely to herself behind inch-thick glasses. She handled all communications between us and the head office. There were three new announcers, who for the first time in radio were not expected to handle their own controls as well as announce. To twist dials and modulate voices we now had two new technicians who did nothing else. There were also two full-time salesmen, whose mission it was to extoll the virtues of KUKU as an advertising medium to prospective sponsors. We were, as Chet Minsinger had promised, just one big happy family.

No sooner had the work on the studios been completed than Chet decided to display them to an admiring public with an open house. In order to make sure that the right people came, mostly potential sponsors, it was strictly invitational and was run on a rigid schedule.

From eight to nine, for instance, we would honor the Breakfast Club with listening members present in the studio. There would follow an hour of regular programs, which meant, of course, records, giving us a chance to clear the hall and welcome members of the Women's Club from ten to eleven. Then at noon we might have the Kiwanis or Rotary, with luncheons sent up from the restaurant downstairs, and so on through the day.

We went all-out for the occasion, soliciting live talent from the better musical schools, and when they ran out, even hiring pick-up orchestras to play before our guests. Everyone worked like a fiend. I turned out copy by the ream,

and the announcers stood around reading it aloud until I went crazy. They even went so far on this occasion as to look up a few pronunciations.

Vi Weathering talked herself hoarse answering queries over the phone. Miss Tolman held innumerable consultations with florists and caterers and emerged from each with her glasses all steamed up and looking more and more flustered. Chet Minsinger's consumption of cigars doubled.

The salesmen invited all their prospects and were crushed when they found there were no seats left in any of the organized programs, so we added an extra hour just for prospects. Chet told Barry he could announce the Prospects Hour if he'd break down and buy a new suit, but Barry retorted that he was already planning his own open house at midnight and that cab drivers, waitresses in all-night restaurants, and college kids didn't care what he wore.

Even Zaza Minsinger, anxious to be in on things, had two dresses sent out on approval and condescendingly brought them up to ask us which we thought she should buy. Vi, who had already convinced us by virtue of her own abundant wardrobe that she was an authority on clothes, said the yellow was the smarter but that it definitely called for a brunette. The next day Zaza appeared with raven tresses and the announcement that she had kept the yellow.

They had been invited and *they* accepted, arriving in midafternoon on the day before our open house. *They* made a tour of our newly redecorated studios—sniffing, peering, touching, nodding, whispering. The newly hired staff stood at attention, and I have the distinct feeling that we saluted, although I guess we didn't really. Mr. Zerhorst gave each of us an absent nod and a smoky wave of his cigar, and the chief engineer favored us with an embarrassed duck of his head. Then *they* left the station, and our manager, who had again become one of *them,* tagged along.

Nobody cared a great deal, for Chet had developed all

the fussiness of an old lady preparing to entertain a sewing circle, and we were ready to drop. Vi kicked off her shoes under her desk. Bob McRoberts, one of the announcers, threw his much-read copy of the Commercial Club Hour script into the wastebasket, and I was too tired to object.

"In my room," began Barry reflectively, for he had decided against selling spots that day and was giving us the benefit of his company, "there's a five-gallon can of alky. If you siphon it out and cut it with grapefruit juice, it's not bad. For five cents a drink—"

We just looked at him, and Barry sighed.

"It was only a suggestion," he said.

At this moment Zaza Minsinger made a dramatic entrance, and we realized it was five o'clock. She was being the leopard woman today, with a scarlet dress peeping from beneath her fur coat and with flaming hat and gloves. She was redolent of Tobac Blonde perfume and bathtub gin.

"Resting?" she inquired with a coy wife-of-the-manager lift to her eyebrows. "Where's Chet?"

"I don't think he's gone far," answered Barry. He looked suggestively across the room toward the door marked "Gents" as he spoke, and Zaza, following his glance, nodded understandingly. "Why don't you sit down and talk to us a minute, Mrs. Minsinger?"

"Call me Zaza," she commanded prettily, arranging herself to advantage on our new green leather davenport. "The old joint looks pretty snazzy now, don't it? You'd never believe it was the same old hole Chet started with."

"He probably did it with monkey glands," agreed Barry coldly. There was no mistaking her inference that Chet had created the transformation singlehanded.

"Poor Chet's worked so hard," she pouted. "It's taking too much out of him. Sometimes I wonder if it's worth it, the things it's doing to his health and all."

"What is it doing to his health?"

"Drink!" she said darkly. "He's taking it out in drink. He works so hard down here all day that the only way he can relax is to get drunker'n a skunk every night. Party, party, party! It's all the poor boy can do! It's getting me down."

Vi gave an indignant snort. It was quite true that Chet did spend his evenings making the rounds of speak-easies, but Zaza was always at his side, guzzling glass for glass. Moreover, Chet seldom started until after five, while she always had a fine edge when she arrived.

"I tried to get him to take the cure, but you know how men are. Never think anything can happen to them. But I finally figured things out for myself. I know what to do now."

"What are you going to do, Zaza?" demanded Barry with his first real interest.

"I sent away for some stuff to put in his coffee," she smirked wisely. "It comes in a plain envelope, so he don't know about it. And it's the same thing as taking the cure. It's guaranteed to work."

"When are you going to start this experiment?"

"Just as soon as I can get him to drink coffee," she admitted doubtfully. "He never touches the stuff, you know."

Vi disappeared under her desk in search of her shoes, and Bob McRoberts made a choking noise and muttered he had better get back to the studio.

"I think I'll go home," I explained unnecessarily, for Zaza had addressed all her remarks to Barry and Bob, excluding Vi and me in a frigid outer circle. "I'm about dead, and there's nothing more we can do tonight."

Barry said he might as well run along, too.

"I hope you won't have to wait too long, Zaza," he smiled courteously.

"Well, I should think not," she said in surprise, glancing uneasily over her shoulder. "You don't suppose he's fainted or anything?"

"Oh, no. He'll probably be back pretty soon."

"Back? But you said he was—"

"I said I didn't think he'd gone far. He went out with Mr. Zerhorst. They're probably at the hotel by now."

Zaza called him an unpleasant name and made for Chet's office. When I left she was calling telephone numbers as fast as she could.

KUKU's open house went so smoothly that none of us could believe it. Thousands of people thronged in and out all day. Twice Miss Tolman had to call the florist to replenish bouquets which had been denuded for boutonnieres by passing guests. Our live talent was enthusiastically received, and proved better than we dared hope. The announcers got by with no serious fluffs, and we stayed on the air without even a fading signal.

Chet Minsinger was in and out all day, shaking hands, accepting congratulations, and trying to look as though he hadn't done everything singlehanded. He had arrived early, a little bleary-eyed and shaky, but at the nine o'clock break he had dashed over to the hotel to confer with *them* and had returned steadier, jollier, and more fragrant. After that he made regular trips at alternate hours, his aroma and high spirits growing with each return.

"I'm afraid we should do something about Chet," worried Miss Tolman as the afternoon raced on. "We're supposed to keep entertaining until midnight."

"What could we do? Call Zaza?"

"No," she shuddered. "But perhaps Mr. Zerhorst—"

"Where do you think Chet's getting it?" snapped Vi, and Miss Tolman grew very pink and looked as though she might cry.

They attended the noon broadcast, and Mr. Zerhorst was introduced to say a few words before the microphone. He looked in better shape than Chet, and his enunciation was

not impaired by the things he had been pouring into his stomach.

It was a privilege to be here today, he said. He wished his business was such that he could spend more time at the Greater KUKU. It was a wonderful station. A growing station. It had a wonderful personnel. He knew every one of his employees; he had helped hand-pick them, and he could assure the good citizens of Portland that they were the best to be had anywhere. These wonderful persons in this wonderful station in this wonderful city made Mr. Zerhorst feel very humble to be allowed to have his small part in things. All he could contribute was financial backing. It was the employees, the advertisers, the listeners who were the lifeblood of wonderful, wonderful KUKU.

As I listened I began to share a little of the intense feeling which flowed so warmly in Miss Tolman's flat chest. It was good to be appreciated, gratifying to know that I was more important than a package of phonograph needles. The feeling made me linger by the door as Mr. Zerhorst sped the last straggling club members on and out.

Then he turned to me.

"You," he said coldly. "You work here doing something or other, don't you? Did you see where I put my hat? I want to get out of this damn place."

CHAPTER 4

"One thing an announcer has to have is his own teeth," insisted Chet Minsinger. "You can always spot the false ones by the whistle."

So in the regular printed application form submitted to prospective announcers Vi typed an additional closing line: "Do you wear plates?"

Although we had a full staff, Chet was never one to overlook a possible bird in the bush, and on Wednesdays we held auditions. These were an especial trial to our announcers, for all they had to sell was their voices, and there was always a possibility that one of the prospects, modulating so carefully and roundly before our new condenser mikes, might edge one of them out of a job.

"Good for 'em," said Chet firmly. "Keeps 'em on their toes."

The audition consisted of standing before the microphone and reading a handful of copy selected from the day's file. This was usually sufficient to weed the possibilities from the strictly hopeless, and Chet, listening in his office, would send out word who, if any, he wished kept for the final test.

The final test was one line: "The seething sea ceaseth, and having ceaseth the seething sea sufficeth me." If the now trembling auditioner got through this one without a whistle, Chet had him speed it up a couple of times, and if he still managed to keep his tongue out of his teeth, he was in and his name went on the Eligible list.

That's how Bruce, Teddy, and Bob made it.

Bruce Horton was our oldest announcer, and his previous experience before the public had been in stock. Bruce gave his age, at Miss Tolman's insistence, as thirty-five, but no one would have batted an eye had Bruce admitted to ten years more.

His scalp was balding, and he carefully combed the remaining locks over the spot. He had a deep rich voice with a rounding roll which would slide over unfamiliar words with such assurance that it made you mistrust your own pronunciation. His wardrobe was limited but loud, and his ties were usually soup-spattered, but that never prevented Bruce from believing himself a lady-killer or certain ladies from agreeing with him.

He was married to a dimmer replica of Zaza, but one who was lacking in Zaza's looks, money, and general gumption. We saw her only on pay day, when she joined the usual complement of radio wives waiting to snatch up their husband's checks, but we heard from her often.

She called the station a dozen times a day to check on Bruce. Where was he? He'd been off the air half an hour and wasn't home yet! Would Miss Weathering ask Mr. Horton to bring home two pounds of hamburger and a quart of milk? Bruce hadn't been home all night, and she was just frantic. Couldn't Mr. Minsinger do something about his employees?

Mr. Minsinger, who probably had a secret admiration for this ability to sidetrack a wife, spoke chidingly. If Mrs. Horton didn't stop calling the station, the station would be forced to dispense with Mr. Horton's services; he had a double line of prospects wanting a job, every Wednesday. For a week after that Mrs. Horton sulkily left the telephone alone. Then she forgave us and began bothering Vi again.

Robert McRoberts, our second announcer, had, we felt, missed his calling by not becoming a shoe clerk. He was neat

to the point of annoyance, with a servile manner (unless someone questioned his microphone work) and a wide-eyed air of disbelief at his own good fortune in being there.

He invariably read all copy in a flat, monotonous voice, which once or twice in every sentence pounded at inoffensive words as though he were swatting flies. Mr. McRoberts was the only announcer who virtuously read every piece of copy before it went on the air and underlined certain words for emphasis. Generally they were the wrong words, and the whole sense of the announcement was lost. Chet, who had hired Bob, used to tear his hair over it.

"He read that final test copy without a whistle," he moaned. "His voice is as clear as a bell on every word, but he just doesn't get things across somehow."

Our third announcer was only eighteen and fresh out of high school. He was pink-cheeked, blue-eyed, naïve, and humorless. Ted Smythe was, of course, unmarried, and Vi, who already had her hands full answering Mrs. Horton's and Mrs. McRoberts's telephone communications, was delighted. She celebrated too soon. Mrs. Smythe, Teddy's mother, was worse than any wife.

Teddy had to report his arrival at the station each morning. He had to telephone home the announcement that he was going out to lunch and tabulate what he had eaten when he returned. He never left at night without advising his mother that he would be home soon, and in between his calls she called him. He had sounded a little hoarse on that last spot. Was he sure he wasn't getting a cold? She'd just had a letter from dear Aunt Mabel at Scapoose, and Aunt Mabel had heard Teddy announce a program, and guess what she said about it!

It was these three who were summoned by Chet to attend a special meeting in his office one morning, and I was also requested, in my capacity of continuity writer, to be present.

"Our open house is finally bearing fruit," Chet began,

snipping off the end of a fresh cigar. "We're going to have our first big nighttime commercial program."

"Live talent?" asked Bruce.

"Certainly live talent!"

"Another new music school?" I demanded skeptically. Our live programs so far consisted of Windy's Hawaiians ("Steel guitar and banjo taught, instruments rented at reasonable rates"), Frankie Stairs, Jazz Piano ("No music to learn; if you don't play by ear just like I do after ten lessons, your money back"), and the Dawn School of Music ("For virtuosos of the piano, violin, and vibraharp").

"No music school," denied Chet frowning a little. "Paid talent. Bill Rocks and his Five Little Pebbles."

"But they already play at Donahue's Dance Hall," protested Ted. Mrs. Smythe, naturally, would not permit Teddy to attend a public dance hall, but he read all the ads.

"Not on Monday night. Monday's their day off, and they're available for engagements. We have a sponsor all signed up. We'll use the full orchestra, all five pieces, and maybe their girl singer. It'll be a night-club broadcast. You know—fake all the atmosphere of one. All that stuff."

"What account?"

"Babston's Root Beer. 'The root beer with the enviable bubble. The root beer bought by billions.' And when we get through advertising it, those billions will run into trillions."

"Who sold the account?" I asked weakly, amazed that anyone could sell anything but a spot announcement or a record program, but my voice was lost. Mr. Horton, Mr. McRoberts, and Mr. Smythe had leaned forward to demand in a chorus, "Who gets to announce it?"

"Well," said Chet, leaning back and beaming on them paternally, "I thought we'd have auditions. We'll have Woodie here tear us off a little copy, and then you can all

have a turn at reading it. Whoever does the best job gets the show."

"I should have something to go on," I objected. "I'll need a list of numbers the orchestra's going to play. And I should know something about the product."

"I'll see that you get it," promised Chet grandly. "I'll talk to the salesman on the account. He'll do all the leg work on it. Round things up for you."

"But who is the salesman?"

"Barry Alden. He's been getting a little tired of his midnight program. Asked for a chance to do something else. I told him if he brought in a couple of big shows to really prove what he can do, we might get someone else for that midnight shift and put him on as a straight salesman."

This was news, but not surprising. I had seen less of Barry Alden since he came to work for KUKU than I had before. Daytimes, when I was working, he was scurrying around selling spots on his program. At night he was busy at the station, and his chummy midnight disk-jockey program had earned him many new friends, apparently not all of them bar flies. He was continually being asked "to drop up afterward for a party." But one of Barry's chief qualities was ambition. No matter how successful a midnight request program might be, he wouldn't be satisfied with it very long.

He must have known we wanted to see him, for he perversely stayed away all day. He wasn't home when I knocked on his door, nor did he respond later to a note I poked underneath. It bothered me all evening, so at midnight I took a cab and went back to the station. It would be like him not to show up on office time for a week, and I'd have to have copy before that.

He was just signing himself on as I walked in, and I was surprised to hear only one dedication—"To Jim"—and

this especially as I observed a growing list of frantic requests on the table beside the telephone.

"Who's Jim that he rates all this?" I asked curiously.

"My bootlegger," Barry admitted without shame. "He listens every night, and when he hears me play 'Ding Dong Daddy from Dumas,' he knows I want him to deliver a crock."

"Here?" I demanded horrified.

"Where else? I'm here, ain't I?"

I absorbed this information while Barry answered three phone calls, wrote down innumerable names, dashed to the cabinet where records were filed, and made a selection. Then he announced a little number for Ella and Bubbles and for Pete and Blondie and for all the gang at Chickie's and for Dolores from Frank. As I watched him operate, I grudgingly had to admit the boy was good.

"What's all this about Babston's Root Beer?" I demanded the moment he had flipped the switch and the record started playing. Both phones were ringing, but Barry temporarily disregarded them.

"I can't stay here spinning records and taking these goofy calls much longer or I'll blow my top," he admitted with more gravity than I thought he possessed. "Every time I open my mouth I feel like a pantywaist, and while God knows I'm not particular, the following you get on a deal like this is really something."

"So you're going to be a salesman again!"

"They could stand one around here."

"Well, that's true. Can you get me some material on root beer? I hate the stuff, so if I had something to go on, it would help in writing the copy."

"Babston's have never done much advertising," he admitted doubtfully. "This is more or less of a trial campaign for them. Of course, I can get you a bottle of the stuff, and it'll have something on the label. And we could pick up

some copy from one of their competitors. Change the name and all. That might help."

"How about orchestra numbers?"

"I'll get them all right," he promised, giving up and reaching for one of the insistent phones. His face, as he listened, assumed a curious expression. In anyone but Barry Alden it might have been construed as embarrassment. "Yes, Zaza. Just a minute, will you? I've got to change a record."

By the time he had completed this process and reeled off a sizable acknowledgement of names, most of whom had requested something quite different, his face had grown peony pink.

"Now," he said briskly to the waiting phone. "What can I do for you, Zaza? Oh, no. I couldn't do that. I won't be through here until one, and you already said that Chet—Yes, Zaza. Yes, I know. But honestly, I don't think that idea's so hot. Yes, I realize jealousy is a strong emotion, but Chet never seemed—Zaza, the other phone is ringing—" Wildly he motioned to me to take the instrument. I nodded at him happily and sat where I was.

"Dammit!" he yelled, and it was plain he was interrupting a steady flow of conversation from the other end. "I'm busy. Stop bothering me."

He slammed down the receiver and reached for the other telephone. By the time he had completed the call, jotting down an assortment of names on a smudged list, the record had run out. He changed it with what he considered suitable remarks, and by the time he faced me again he was beginning to regain a little of his composure.

"Somebody's just told Zaza that every man needs a rival. It keeps up his interest," he explained shortly. "Evidently I've been picked to make Chet jealous. That's the third time this week she's tried to get me to join them at some speak when I went off shift."

"That's very flattering." I arose to go. "Don't forget to get me that stuff on Babston's Root Beer and the music numbers by tomorrow. I'll have to write copy so Chet can audition the announcers."

"It'll have to be Horton," mused Barry thoughtfully. "He's the only one who won't hack it."

"But can he pronounce it?" I reminded him skeptically. "Oh, and Barry, if you really want to get rid of Zaza, why don't you start calling her Gert?"

A dark-browed, burly individual in blue serge, carrying a conspicuously new leather suitcase, brushed elbows with me on the way out. Barry was receiving delivery on his order, and from the sounds of the constantly ringing telephones, he would probably need it.

The next day I wrote copy for Babston's, trying to be as fair as I could to each of our announcers. Every announcer has his own peculiarities and his own best points, and the continuity writer usually keeps these things in mind. Bruce Horton excelled in rich, flowing phrases, in beautiful rolling words which didn't have to mean much. Robert McRoberts had to have short, sparse sentences, because the fewer the words, the less likely he was to emphasize the wrong ones. Teddy Smythe was a little in-between, but his voice lost in its very youthfulness the quality of experience. When Teddy read a spot for stomach pills, you knew instinctively he had never resorted to them himself. It would have all the authenticity of a six-year-old giving a testimonial for Einstein's theory.

With a root beer account, however, I had hopes for Teddy. Root beer seemed just right for his talents. I was a little surprised when he sought me out with the sad tidings that he couldn't audition.

"Why not?" I demanded. "Don't you want to?"

"It isn't that," he admitted miserably. "But I'm on the early morning shift."

"That doesn't matter. This is a special program. It will have a special announcer, not the one on duty."

"I know. But it's at eleven o'clock at night. And Mother says I can't be expected to be down here until almost midnight and then get up for a six o'clock shift. She says it isn't worth it. She called up Mr. Minsinger to ask if I could be excused from work the morning after, and he hung up the phone. Mother's pretty upset about it. She didn't want me to come back to work at all. She says I should be working for a gentleman, not somebody who is rude. She wanted me to quit right away, and I had a hard time talking her out of it."

Barry had brought me what material he could, a list of orchestra numbers scribbled on the back of a restaurant menu and some tear sheets advertising Holgate's Root Beer. Holgate was Babston's chief competitor, and Barry suggested I use practically the same thing but with more adjectives.

It wasn't brilliant copy, but the Better Business Bureau in those days was more lenient, and I didn't spare the superlatives. Moreover, everything was written phonetically. I had already learned that phonetic spelling was the safest way to submit continuity to an announcer. It completely ruins anyone for any other form of writing, however, and my mother's answers to my letters home always concluded with her amazement that anyone who was supposedly holding down a writing job could have my complete disregard for Webster.

When it was completed, I showed it to Barry, and we carried it to Chet for his approval. The great man began reading when suddenly his eyebrows raised in amazement.

"Come, come, Woodie," he remonstrated. "Enviable is spelled with an *i*, not an *e*."

"I know, Chet. I wrote it that way for the announcers."

"It's safer," soothed Barry.

"I don't like it," said Chet, pounding on his desk to prove it. "This whole copy is filled with misspelled words. Our announcers are grown men, and they're supposed to be able to read the English language. That's why they're announcers. Besides, you'll have to show your copy to the sponsor."

"Sure. But I can explain."

"You'll explain nothing. I won't have you telling a sponsor that our announcers have to have words misspelled for them. And I won't have them know we have a continuity writer who spells that way. Now you take this copy back and correct the spelling and retype it, and then I'll look at it again."

With misgivings I did as he ordered, and this time it met with his approval.

"That's more like it," he grunted. "Give it to the boys and tell Walt to switch on the audition panel. You and Barry can listen in here with me."

Robert McRoberts read first, and he gave it everything of which his dry monotone was capable. I had hoped that in the copy I had written he could not possibly emphasize the wrong words, which just proves that I underestimated Mr. McRoberts.

"Hello, everybody," he began thoroughly but unenthusiastically. "Welcome *to* Babston's Root Beer Jamboree—*a* sparkling half hour *of* mirth *and* music with Bill Rocks and *his* Five Little Pebbles. Babston's Root Beer is the *drink* with *the* enviable bubble—cool and thirst-quenching—the best root beer on *the* market today. *It's* hospitable to serve Babston's. Billions agree, for Babston's is bought *by* billions. It's the one *thing* which shatters class distinction—enjoyed by *the* millionaire and *the hoi polloi.*"

"Turn off the speaker," said Chet weakly. "He couldn't sell a hamburger to a shipwrecked sailor. I don't understand it, either. He came through his test audition so well."

"That leaves Bruce," said Barry cheerfully. "Want to hear him?"

"Might as well," agreed Chet darkly, and Chet leaned across the desk to give instructions on the house phone.

In a minute or two Bruce Horton's deep mellow voice flowed through the speaker. His words rolled with the richness of dairy cream, but like dairy cream there were occasional clots.

"I see why you put the *e* in the middle of enviable, Woodie," Chet admitted grudgingly, "and the *ay* ending on cliché, and somebody'll have to tell him how to pronounce 'hospitable.' But what's that holy poly thing he's talking about?"

"*Hoi polloi*. You know—the common people."

"Cut it out. He'll never get it, and it stinks, anyway."

"We can't cut that," objected Barry. "That's their slogan. 'Enjoyed by the millionaire and the *hoi polloi*.' A poor thing, I admit, but their own."

"It's printed on the label of every bottle," I argued. "But if I could sound it out—spell it phonetically in the copy—"

"No!" he roared. "I won't have it. You read the copy to him aloud as it should be. Get him to mark his mistakes and then have him read it back to you. The orchestra leader, the sponsor, all kinds of people are going to see that continuity. The only copy that's going to be marked up is Horton's."

Bruce was pleased when notified that he had won the audition, but not surprised. Bob was surprised, and smoldered in the conviction that he had been discriminated against. Teddy Smythe was certain that if it hadn't been for Mother he'd have walked away with it, and was heard to mutter that when he was twenty-one things would be different.

The next day Bruce and I settled down to a closed-door session of reading and listening. First he read aloud and I stopped him to correct each mispronounced word. There

always ensued a light argument, but rather than go to the bother of looking it up in the dictionary, he gave in. Then he read the whole thing again and we picked up tag ends. Finally there was nothing left unmarked but three- and four-letter words.

He couldn't miss on that, I told Barry, who sighed with relief. He was just about at the end of his rope on the request program, he repeated, but if this show went over smoothly, he'd have no trouble selling another. Several prospects would be listening in.

"How are you and Zaza making out?" I inquired.

"I forgot to tell you about that. I don't know how you ever figured it out, but I called her Gert a couple of times and she hasn't spoken to me since."

Although Barry had made several excursions to Donahue's Dance Hall to check up on Bill Rocks and his Five Little Pebbles, the rest of us had never heard them. Almost anything with life and motion would have sounded good to us, however, and when late in the afternoon of the broadcast instruments began arriving, we could hardly restrain our excitement.

The program was not until eleven at night, but no one made a move to go home. We all planned to dine in the lunchroom in the building in order to see everything, and from time to time we ventured into Studio A just to tap gently on the drums or to revel in the unaccustomed clutter of music stands.

Zaza made her five o'clock entrance, and pouted when Chet announced flatly he wasn't going to leave the building.

"This is a big thing," he told her. "The sponsor's staging a party—which reminds me, Vi, send out for a case of Babston's Root Beer and some glasses. We want to make a good impression."

"Root beer!" snarled Zaza indignantly as she made for

Chet's office. "Just try to give me any root beer and I'll throw it in your face."

At six o'clock Bruce arrived. Monday was his day off, and he had obviously spent it in preparation. He wore a new tweed suit, which was an inexpensive copy of Chet Minsinger's, a clean shirt, and a yellow tie unsullied as yet by soup. His hair was combed over his balding spot, and he reeked of toilet water.

Bruce was likable enough ordinarily, but tonight he had left his best qualities at home with his old clothes. He stalked around favoring us with lifts of his eyebrows, smoothing casually at his hair, clearing his throat, and testing his voice. He fiddled with the microphone stands until Walt, the technician, ordered him out of the studio, whereupon he took himself to the announcing booth where Bob McRoberts was grimly carrying on with his regular shift.

Bob was jittery enough without Bruce hanging over his shoulder. He still felt himself the better man and thought that he should have won the audition. Probably he had been hoping that Bruce would contract laryngitis or break a leg, but here he was in perfect health, instruments were set up, the musicians would start arriving soon, and he, Robert McRoberts, would be forced to stand anonymously by and watch the whole thing.

What was being said in the booth we couldn't tell, but with each announcement Bob's voice became more ragged and upset. He was pounding on conjunctions and punching prepositions until I wondered that they could stand the strain. Finally even Chet noticed it.

"What's the matter with that guy?"

"I think Bruce is upsetting him."

"Bruce is upsetting everybody. Nine o'clock, when the orchestra comes, is plenty early for him, too. Get rid of him."

"I'll take him out for a cup of coffee," offered Barry.

Bruce, however, was not thirsting for coffee. He didn't want to leave. He wanted to stay in the scene of his impending triumph. He allowed Barry to entice him from the booth, but there he balked. It was at this moment that Zaza rolled out of Chet's office. She was glassy-eyed and reeking of gin.

"What's everybody doing?" she yelled coyly. "What are you all standing around like stuffed shirts for? Let's make whoopee! Zaza want to make whoopee!"

"Go sit down, Gert," ordered her husband, and then suddenly realizing her condition, an expression of horror displaced his mild annoyance. "No, go home instead. We can't have the Babston party see you like this. They're teetotalers."

"Call me Zaza, you lousy little pill! And I won't go home," she shrieked. "You're just trying to get rid of me. You're ashamed of me. And I'm your wife—your wife—*your wife!*"

"Don't I know it?" he muttered through gritted teeth. Then, with a change of tone, "Zaza, please. Please go home to the hotel. Wait for me there. That's a good girl."

"No!"

"Then, for God's sake, you've got to eat something. You've got to sober up."

She pouted prettily.

"Barry," he ordered quickly, seeing that she was wavering, "take her out and feed her. Buy her a steak. Buy her a whole damn cow, with lots of black coffee."

"I won't go. I wouldn't be seen with Barry Alden, the nasty little slug!"

"Perhaps Mrs. Minsinger will allow me to take her to dinner," suggested Bruce smoothly, the fact that he was the evening's star performer giving him strange new courage. "If she doesn't think I am presuming to suggest it. If we go now, there will be time before I have to return for the rehearsal."

"Call me Zaza," she purred, turning glazed eyes to his newly resplendent person. "Are you sure you want to take poor little Zaza to dinner?"

"It would be an honor. A privilege," he said fervently. "Of course, I don't dare eat a thing myself. My voice, you know—"

"Then come on," she decided, slipping her hand through his tweeded elbow. "Chet won't mind. Chet isn't jealous. Chet never gets jealous of little Zaza. He's too sure of her, in a pig's eye."

Bob calmed down somewhat after they left, and for that matter so did the rest of us. By nine o'clock the Five Little Pebbles began rolling in, and by nine-thirty Bill Rocks himself tossed his toothpick away at the door and joined us.

"We'll get a setup first, and then take a run-through for time," he said. "That ought to be enough. We know the score. Of course, if your announcer needs a rehearsal—"

"Oh, yes. We'll need a complete rehearsal with script," agreed Chet quickly. "It calls for it in your contract. Somebody get Bruce."

But Bruce did not answer when he was called. Vi ran downstairs to look in the now darkened lunchroom and reported the steak dinner must have been consumed elsewhere.

"But where'd they go?" exploded Chet. "It couldn't have been very far. Bruce knew he was due back here at nine. Some of you will just have to make a tour of the eating joints close around here."

We organized ourselves into searching parties and made individual tours to the several restaurants still open and close by. Zaza and Bruce were in none of them. By the time we returned it was after ten, and the orchestra had already completed a run-through without announcer.

"Babston's party will be here by a quarter of eleven,"

moaned Chet. "I don't want a rehearsal going on when they come. I want the program to sound fresh to them. Somebody get on the phone and call some of the restaurants a little farther away."

"Maybe it'd be better to call the speaks," suggested Barry realistically, and Chet gave him a horrified look.

"They couldn't do that to me. They couldn't!" he gasped. "Vi, take the other phone. Call every place you can think of. They've got to be somewhere."

At ten-thirty the telephone squad reported no success, but at twenty minutes of eleven the culprits arrived. Zaza's hair was tousled, and Bruce's face wore an exceptionally high color. His new tie was spotted, but not with steak, and the reek of toilet water was lost in the fresher application of juniper juice.

"Shorry we're late," he said carefully. "But Zazath introdushed me to shome of her friendsh."

"You're drunk!" roared Chet. "You're both drunk!"

"I reshent that!" Bruce drew himself up to his full height, but his conscience pulled him back and he dissolved in tears. "I'm shorry—I'm shorry—but it'sh all right. I'll be all right—"

"Put him in a cab and send him home," ordered Chet, his own face almost as red as Bruce's. "And put Gert in it, too, and tell the driver to drop her off at our hotel."

"In the same cab?" she demanded, so surprised that for a moment she was almost sober. "You wouldn't trust your little Zaza in a cab with *him!* Not after we've been making the speaks all evening. You know what liquor does to people. What kind of a man are you, anyway? Haven't you got any jealousy?"

"No!" he bellowed. "If he wants you, he can have you, and I'll throw in a bonus. Only get out of here."

They were both crying as Barry led them to the elevator and the cab Vi had phoned for.

"Now," said Chet briskly, "we'll have to work fast. Woodie, get a copy of the Babston Root Beer Jamboree script. Vi, run in and tell that half-baked excuse for a band to put on their coats, and if they burn holes in the carpet with their cigarettes, we'll sue them. There's supposed to be no smoking in the studio, anyway. Miss Tolman, set out the glasses and slide that case of root beer out of the corner. Bob—where the devil is Bob?"

"Here I am, Chet," called McRoberts almost too quickly, trotting out of the booth. He alone of all of us realized what had happened to him.

"O.K. You'll announce the show. Woodie'll give you a script. Now for God's sake, give it everything you've got. Try to remember how Bruce announces. Do the kind of job he'd do—under other circumstances, of course."

"Yes, sir," agreed Bob, too excited to be hurt by the comparison.

"This is the last carbon," I reported doubtfully returning from a search of my desk. "Bruce had the original. I don't know what he did with it."

"This will do nicely," agreed Bob, his hand trembling a little as he took it. "About a rehearsal with the orchestra—"

"No time for that," interrupted Chet. He looked back toward the elevator and groaned. "Oh, Lord! They're here already." He hurried out to welcome the local root beer king.

"At least I'll have time to mark a few words for emphasis," murmured Bob, disappearing into the studio.

In the hubbub of getting Mr. and Mrs. Babston, their sons and daughters, nieces and nephews, brothers, sisters, and in-laws comfortably settled and supplied with brimming glasses of their own product, there was no time for last-minute nerves. Almost before I knew it Chet was hold-

ing up his hand and pointing to the glass windows of the studio.

Bill Rocks was standing with his own hand raised for the signal, his Little Pebbles clustered bright-eyed and waiting all around him. Before the microphone Mr. McRoberts poised, script in hand, waiting to hear the call letters given from the control room. Walt, the technician on duty, would have to do it tonight in the absence of an extra announcer, and Walt's voice, I remembered, was adenoidal.

At last Bill Rocks lowered his hand, and the strains of "I Want to Be Happy" flowed through the speaker. We exchanged smiling glances, but as Bob's voice broke through at the place in the script marked "Down and Under" our smiles faded.

"Hello, everybody. Welcome *to* Babston's Root Beer Jamboree—*a* sparkling half-hour of mirth *and* music with Bill Rocks and *his* Five Little Pebbles." It was obvious that he had been at work with his pencil, and that conjunctions, pronouns, and prepositions were in for it.

"Babston's Root Beer is the *drink* with the en*vii*-able bubble—cool and thirst-quenching—*the* best root beer on *the* market today. It's hos*pit*able to serve Babston's."

Chet had spoken unwisely. Bob was indeed attempting, with poor success, to announce as Bruce might have done, and from a straight script with no phonetical spelling as a guide. Uninformed of our little closed-door sessions on pronunciations, he was reading it as Bruce had done in the audition, and the combination of Bruce's mispronounced words and his own uninspired delivery was bloodcurdling.

It was agony sitting there, unable to do anything, listening to that dry voice beat at the wrong words and mispronounce the others. It was impossible to look at the Babstons who were engaging in a little game of Lift the Eyebrow among themselves.

"Billions agree," droned Bob through the speaker, "for

Babston's is bought *by* billions. It's the one *thing* which shatters class distinction—enjoyed by *the* millionaire and the *holy poly.*"

"Oh, well," whispered Barry to me over the opening and somehow mocking strains of "Painting the Clouds with Sunshine" rendered by Bill Rocks and his Five Little Pebbles, "that midnight all-request program ain't so bad. At least, the announcers all leave as soon as I walk in."

CHAPTER 5

From the night of Babston's Root Beer Jamboree Chet Minsinger was a changed man. He was distraught and jumpy and he discarded his cigar for cigarettes. Zaza, too, had been subdued since that occasion, and while she still arrived punctually at five every afternoon, it was noticeable that her costumes were in severe and somber black, particularly effective with her new shade of titian hair.

And then one afternoon Chet called us all together and introduced his successor.

"I'm going back to Seattle," he announced. "KUKU is now on its feet and has a good start, and, besides, Mr. Zerhorst feels that there are certain problems in the home office which require my personal attention."

This explained the strange-looking individual who had accompanied Chet to the studios that morning and who had, rather pointedly, remained unintroduced until now.

"John Strong will be your new manager," continued Chet. "He has the very highest recommendations, and while this is his first position in commercial radio, he has dabbled in it as an amateur since its inception."

"Seven KF," announced the man beside Chet as though that explained everything. It meant nothing to me, but I observed the two technicians exchange rather startled glances.

John Strong was a lavish-eyebrowed individual with a high color and nondescript hair. He towered above Chet,

and his hands, which hung loosely at his side, were perpetually clenched as though at any moment he might be called upon to sock somebody. He had the qualifications for a station manager in that he was addicted to cigars, but Mr. Strong never desecrated his by a match. He chewed on it. You could make a fair guess at the time of day by its condition, for he started it fresh at nine, removing it only for lunch. By this time he had chewed almost up to the center, and after eating he thriftily turned it around and began on the other end. By five it was a soggy wisp protruding an inch beyond his lips.

He had had a checkered career, mostly in selling, and had finally ended up managing an advertising give-away sheet. He had been with that doubtful paper for three years, and in that time it had grown from four pages to eighteen, proof to Chet Minsinger that Strong could do something of an allied nature for KUKU.

John Strong's influence was felt immediately, and in every department.

"Write selling copy!" he used to shout at me on an average of three times a day as he invaded my continuity corner to keep me on my toes. "Punch 'em in the eye with it. Call a spade a spade, and make 'em buy it! That's what we pay you for!"

To Vi Weathering, who answered telephone complaints as well as our occasional bouquets, he advised, "Let 'em get it all out of their systems first. Then you're in a position to really sell 'em. You've already listened to their beefs and they feel better. You're smart enough to talk 'em out of 'em. Why, when you get through with 'em, you ought to have sold 'em KUKU so they'll tune in nothing else. That's what we pay you for!"

The salesmen were the hardest hit by the John Strong regime, but fortunately the first thing he did was to increase their numbers, chiefly, we thought, so that he would have a

larger attendance at his bi-daily sales meetings. Since these additions to our staff worked on a straight commission, but were treated as though they were drawing big salaries and fat expense accounts, few of them stayed with us more than a day or two.

"You call yourself salesmen?" he used to bellow on these occasions. "How can you be salesmen with all this open time staring you in the face? Why, any one of these spots is ripe for some lucky sponsor to clean up on if he only knew it. You can't blame him, though, because he doesn't know about it. You haven't sold him. We've got all the stuff to back you up—good phonograph records, selling copy, prestige—and we're practically giving it away. What are you waiting for? For me to go around and hold your hand while you talk to him? Now you get in there and pitch, all of you. And when you get back here tonight, you better have plenty of names on the dotted line. Plenty! That's what we pay you for!"

John Strong was an albatross about the necks of the technicians. Where we had been wont to keep our discreet and respectful distance, he devoted a large share of his time to the control room where he breathed down Walt Denny's and Perce Green's necks, or in the transmitter in the basement of the building, a dim archive which I, for one, seldom visited.

Technicians are a caste unto themselves and rarely mingle with the other workers in radio. We would have heard little of these complaints if it hadn't been for Walt. Walt was the exception. He was as friendly as a terrier pup, with a round face upon which his smile might grow wider but never completely disappear. Unlike other radio engineers he never attempted to awe us with his technical knowledge, nor was he ever too busy or too unobliging to switch on the audition panel if there was something going on we wanted to hear. From him we heard what the technical side was

doing and thought about things, and I suppose in turn he reported to members of his own department our views on station policies.

"Guess what the Old Man asked me to do today," he said one day in disgust. "He wants me to write a letter to the head office and ask if he can't change over to screen grid tubes!"

"Are they better?" I asked, because it seemed the suitable remark to make.

"Well, sure. But the kind he wants takes AC current, which means we'd have to convert from DC just after we plunked down thousands of dollars for new amplifiers. That's what gets me. I'd rather have tubes with DC on the filament. Let somebody else play around with screen grid. How do we know they'll stand up?"

It was as foreign to me as the Chinook language, but I clucked sympathetically.

"And he's taken to coming back here after we've closed up for the night and fiddling around with things. He goes down in the transmitter, too. It's a wonder we're still on the air."

"Has he hurt anything?"

"Oh, I suppose not. He's changed a couple of switches that I was figuring on changing myself when I got around to it. Did a fair job, too. It's the principle of the thing we don't like. No other manager ever tried to run the technical side."

"He must be pretty smart if he can do that."

"Oh, he understands electricity, all right. He's one of the best hams in town, so far as that goes, but personally I wish he'd keep it that way."

Even Miss Tolman, who usually was not concerned with anything but bills and bookkeeping, checks and head-office communiqués, came in for her share of annoyance from John Strong's carping tongue.

"Miss Tolman," he would say. "I've been going over this DX mail. The distance we're getting out is disgraceful. Not much farther than Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Toronto, Canada."

Miss Tolman would place a finger on the list of figures she was tabulating and look up patiently.

"But that seems rather good for five-hundred watts, Mr. Strong."

"Good? Good? Why, do you realize that with my little homemade set I bring in Rome and Shanghai? I talk every night to a fellow in Brooklyn."

"That must be very interesting, Mr. Strong."

"What KUKU needs is more power. Why don't we apply for more power, Miss Tolman?"

"I believe *they* did," she frowned thoughtfully. "Yes, I remember seeing letters on it. But the Federal Radio Commission turned us down, I believe."

"Federal Radio Commission!" he snorted. "They're as bad as a utility!"

To John Strong the most terrible blot on civilization was a utility, particularly the telephone company. And since the existence of a radio station is largely dependent on telephone lines, the monthly bill from that company was to him little short of a slap in the face. He flung it at Miss Tolman unopened, and stalked away muttering, "Grafters! Hog-in-the-mangers! Bloodsuckers!"

Those were the days of multitudinous remotes, a remote being the term applied to any program which originated at a distant point from the studio and was then picked up by telephone lines and relayed back. Some of them were lengthy affairs, and it was not uncommon to broadcast a complete church service or to take two hours straight from some dance hall. Moreover, remotes were becoming the fashion among stores, who hired a band, preferably girls, dressed them in red or white satin, and had them broadcast

from a store window, à la goldfish in a bowl. The performers didn't have to be good; the fact that there was motion in a window ordinarily given over to inanimate objects was enough to stop traffic, and the program was automatically credited with success.

We had several such window remotes, and while they were good pay, John Strong groaned with each new account. They meant revenue not only to us but to the telephone company, for special lines had to be installed from the studio to the place of broadcast, and we were charged rent on those lines and an installation fee as well.

Usually when a salesman brought in a remote contract, he placed it on John's desk and automatically braced himself for the tirade on utilities which would follow. But the day George McPherson brought in a contract from McMinty's Restaurant on Broadway, none was forthcoming.

"McMinty's Singing Waiters," mused John, and his customary bellow was only a mild rumble. "Every noontime, direct from the restaurant. Thirty minutes straight across the board. Good work, George."

George, who was prepared for the worst, blinked, and I could feel my mouth falling open in surprise.

"It's a remote," reminded George reluctantly, because John had obviously overlooked the fact.

"I know. I know. Won't be too bad on the air, either. I've heard McMinty's Singing Waiters. They almost carry a tune."

"Shall I tell Miss Tolman to order lines?" asked George weakly.

"No," said John. "I'll attend to it myself."

He was still smiling gently as he left us.

I worked unusually late that night and then wandered into the control room to watch Barry Alden getting ready for his midnight request program. Generally this was quite a job, for he had to separate records and arrange them in

piles easy to find by titles, as well as answer early telephone requests that came in ahead of the program.

Tonight, however, he was not busy. He was sitting on the edge of a chair, his eyes on the glass window leading into the reception room. The telephones, too, were unusually silent, and I wondered why until I noticed they had both been removed from their hooks.

"There he goes again!" shouted Barry as I was reaching for a chair. He jumped up, pushing me rudely out of the way, and raced across the room. He disappeared through the door marked "Gents" close on the heels of John Strong.

I felt that although the occurrence was unusual, it was not one to call forth discussion from a lady, so I attempted to exchange pleasantries with Walt on other subjects while I waited for Barry to return. Walt, however, seemed strangely distracted and did not hold up his end of the conversation.

I saw John emerge first and go back to his office, and in a minute or two Barry returned to the control room.

"Nothing," he reported glumly in answer to Walt's raised eyebrow, and I felt my face growing pink.

"There's something up," he told me, not noticing my embarrassment. "We aren't sure what it is, but the Old Man is up to something tonight."

"You mean he's ill?"

"Him? No, this is some devilment or other, and it's got something to do with the can. He keeps going in there, and Walt and I have been taking turns following him to see what he's up to."

"Well, after all, Barry—"

"There he goes again," yelled Walt. "It's my turn now." He was out of the control room and across the lobby in time to catch the door before it closed on John Strong.

"It's got something to do with a tennis ball," mused Barry.

"I can't figure out just what. Every time I go in he's standing there with a tennis ball in his hand. Then he sort of laughs and puts it in his pocket and leaves. I can't figure it out."

I couldn't either, but remembering John Strong's unusual acceptance of the new remote that afternoon, I wondered if we hadn't underestimated his health.

Walt returned without new details.

"He bounced the ball this time," he reported. "Said something about its being one he was taking home to his kid. Maybe that's all it is."

"I don't believe it," denied Barry. "The trouble is that I'll have to put the phones back on the hook in another ten minutes and go on the air. Then you and Bob will go home, and that'll give him a clear hand. Unless—"

"Don't look at me," I protested. "You know I can't go in there."

"I guess not," he agreed dismally. "Although you could always pretend you made a mistake."

"I'll stick around a while after shift," promised Walt. "The whole thing's got me kind of curious."

When Bob McRoberts signed off at midnight, Walt set everything as he usually did so Barry could flip a few switches at one o'clock, check by telephone with the operator in our basement transmitter, and close down for the night. John was still in his office, apparently absorbed in an old copy of *Variety*.

"I'd better pretend to leave with Bob," Walt decided. "Then I'll sneak back in when he's not looking." He picked up his lunch pail, and calling "Good night" louder than was necessary, banged out the door into the darkened corridor.

Barry was in the middle of his opening announcement when I, doing lookout duty at the control room door, saw John start out from his office. Barry saw him, too.

"This is for Ella and John and Matthew and all the gang at Marie's," he raced, jumbling names together in a single breath. "And for Mary and Bud and Bubbles to Toots."

He flipped a switch, and "Ten Cents a Dance" began to grind out its mournful introduction. Both phones were ringing madly, but Barry was not there to hear. He was tearing across the reception room, pushing aside a couple of wide-eyed youngsters who had wandered up to gape through the windows.

Automatically I reached for a phone, and in the stress of writing down names and trying to keep the requests straight I lost sight of the drama. The next thing I knew Barry was snatching my scribbled notes, misreading the names, and announcing the second number. Walt was back, too, apologizing for his too-discreet delay in the hall.

"He flushed it down the can," Barry told us as soon as we had music. "Don't ask me what for, but I saw him do it."

"The tennis ball?"

"The tennis ball. There was a string tied to it."

"Maybe he thinks it's one way of getting on good terms with a plumber," I suggested brightly. "Maybe we're going to have a plumbing account."

"He's just crazy," offered Walt. "It's been coming on a long time. Why, do you know he's given orders that before we put the station on the air we have to push that extra switch over there? It's one you switch off every night, Barry. He says it's hooked to the power plant in the building, so if the utility power goes off, we stay on the air. He rigged it up himself, and he says he'll fire the first guy who forgets to switch it on in the morning and off at night."

"He's crazy like a fox," denied Barry. "There's something up, and I want to know what it is. That tennis ball means something. Look! There he goes. He's got his coat and hat

on. You two follow, and don't you let him out of your sight till you find out what it is."

"But Barry," I objected. "It's midnight. He's probably just going home. I can't—"

"You can and you're going to," he ordered. "I'm stuck. And don't forget to come back here and tell me about it. If you don't, I'll rout you out of a sound sleep to find out."

KUKU was on the second floor. John Strong took the elevator and Walt and I the stairs. We reached the main lobby simultaneously and lurked behind a pillar until he had gone out on the street. I hoped we'd lose him, but Walt stuck a half block behind as though we had been attached to John's coattails by a tow rope.

He went down the street a few blocks, then turned into an alley. There were a couple of garbage cans and a pile of cardboard cartons stacked up behind a back entrance to be carried away, and Walt pulled me down behind them. He whispered that he had a fine view, and I might have had one too if I hadn't been too scared to peek out more than once or twice.

John was on his hands and knees on the pavement, and beside him was the cover to a manhole which he had removed with much clanking and muttered profanity. The building next to the alley had installed an overhead light, and it was shining down on his midnight endeavors and thus affording him a fair view into the recesses below. He ignored the fact that he was plainly visible from the street, for at that hour no one passed to see him.

"What's he doing?" I whispered cautiously.

"I don't know, but I've seen people fishing through holes in the ice. That's what it looks like."

"There must be a sewer down there. Who'd fish in a sewer?"

"I'm beginning to get a hunch," breathed Walt, "that the fish he's trying to catch is a tennis ball. This may take a

long time. You go back and tell Barry what's happened and that I'll stay on the job. Tell him if I'm not here at one o'clock to look for me at McMinty's Restaurant."

I made my report and went home to bed, convinced that not only had our station manager lost his mind but that Barry and Walt were on the verge of following suit.

John was in particularly high spirits the next morning. He gave the salesmen their usual verbal drubbing and sent them on their way. Then he turned his attention to us.

"We're getting out better!" he shouted, having seized the audience mail from Vi's hands before she had a chance to count it. "Here's one from Poughkeepsie, New York. We never got that far before. And from Rio de Janeiro."

"I don't believe it," protested Vi. "It must be a freak of the weather."

"Certainly not. It's a matter of operation. Of know-how. I've given the boys a few pointers. Changed a switch or two, checked equipment, told them how to do things. You can see the results for yourself. Why, on 7KF—"

"Excuse me, John," put in Vi hastily. She had already heard of 7KF and all the quirks of its kilocycles. "The phone—"

"Well, answer it! That's what we pay you for!"

In midmorning John got around to me.

"I want you to run down today and talk with McMinty. Get some copy for his new remote broadcasts. Write some selling commercials. Something that'll really drag the customers in. We can't depend on those lousy waiters to do it with their singing. We got to sell 'em with copy."

"I don't know whether I can squeeze it into my schedule today, John."

"To hell with your schedule. You got to go today. The program starts tomorrow."

"But the lines aren't even in, are they? It usually takes a couple of days."

John was on his hands and knees over the manhole, and he seemed to be fishing

"They're in," he said positively. "Everything's installed and ready to go. Now you write the kind of copy to go with 'em. That's what we pay you for!"

I saw Mr. McMinty on my lunch hour and managed to talk him out of reading the entire menu, with prices, on each broadcast. Then I tore back to the station and pounded out what I hoped would be "selling" copy. I hadn't counted on McMinty's, and it threw me so far behind that when Walt checked in at four and stopped by my desk, I was still snowed under.

"Come in the control room after a while," he whispered. "We got the whole dope. You'll never believe it."

"I can't now, Walt. I had to do my own leg work on the McMinty account, and I'm behind because of it."

"I know," he nodded wisely. "The lines are installed. They begin broadcasting tomorrow."

"That's right. When I have a minute, I'll come in."

When I finally took a breathing spell, Walt was entertaining not only Barry Alden but Bruce Horton. It was evident from their veiled glances that the matter was not one to discuss in front of the announcer, and also that Bruce had no intention of leaving.

"McRoberts makes his announcements from the studio," said Walt pointedly. "He says it's good practice for the time when he makes a network station."

"Imagine McRoberts, with his voice, on a network!" scoffed Bruce. "Why, did I ever tell you about the time when he—"

"Yes," said Barry rudely.

"But you don't know what I was about to say."

"Never mind. What we'd rather hear is what really happened the night you took Zaza Minsinger out."

"Nothing happened," said Bruce with dignity. "I told you we just went to some speak-easies, and that's all. I hardly touched a drop, and was perfectly capable of going

on the air. Chet just wanted to make something of it. If I had announced the show, we wouldn't have lost the Babston account."

"Ah well," sighed Barry. Ordinarily the mere mention of that night was enough to send Bruce scuttling to another room. Just as I was about to give up and go back to work, Vi summoned him to the telephone.

"It's Mrs. Horton!" she said evilly. "She has a grocery order a mile long, and she had the nerve to ask me to take it down."

Bruce turned crimson, and Walt's and Barry's laughter didn't help. He stalked out of the control room in a huff.

"Tell me what happened before he gets back," I demanded quickly. "Did you find out what John was doing?"

"We found out," nodded Barry, his eyes glittering wickedly. "He was installing his own lines to McMinty's Restaurant."

"What?"

"Sure! To gyp the utilities. Walt stuck with him till one o'clock, and I was in on the finish. We saw the whole thing."

"But how could he do that?"

"He flushed one tennis ball down the plumbing here," explained Walt. "That's what he was doing last night. Then he went a couple of blocks down the street and opened up a manhole cover over the sewer—"

"He must have studied the sewer system of this town for days," marveled Barry.

"Probably did. He had it all figured out. Right there was a cut-in in the mains. When the tennis ball came by, he reached in with a wire and pulled it up. It had a string attached which reached back here to the studio. Then he went to McMinty's, flushed another tennis ball with another string, and when he got that one, he tied the strings together. Then he could tie a line onto the string, and when he pulled that through, he had a remote."

"But it's against the law, isn't it? Won't the telephone company be mad?"

"They won't like it. But they may not find out right away."

"But when they do—"

"That's what we're waiting for!"

McMinty's Singing Waiters came through with such clarity the following noon that I was inclined to think Walt and Barry had made up the whole thing, but John's attitude seemed to back up their theory. He did a rightabout-face on his stand toward remotes. He no longer sneered when they came in; he encouraged the salesmen to go out and sell them.

Once, just for curiosity, I asked Miss Tolman how she was getting such rapid service on installation. We used to count on at least a couple of days after the order went in, but now installation was made and ready the next morning.

"Mr. Strong must have a friend at the telephone company who is using his influence for us," she admitted helplessly. "I could never get them to work that fast, so Mr. Strong attends to all the details himself. He's getting a special price, too."

When the legislature met in Salem, John decided we would take part of the session straight from the floor. This was a pioneering gesture in those days, and he was as pleased as a small boy with a circus pass because he'd thought of it first. He consulted no one. He merely announced his decision and said that he himself would go to Salem to make the preliminary arrangements.

"He's strangled himself on his own line this time," prophesied Barry. "He can't run one fifty miles."

"Maybe he's really going to pay for it this time," I suggested, although I really knew better.

"Not our John. Not to a utility. And the tennis ball trick

won't work on two separate sewer systems. How do you figure it, Walt?"

"I don't. All I can think of is—"

"I hate to break this up," interrupted a dry voice behind us, "but I'm Himes of the Federal Radio Commission. I'm here on inspection."

"Yes, Mr. Himes. Come in, Mr. Himes," invited Walt unnecessarily, for Mr. Himes not only was in the control room but had his nose well into the panel.

"Why isn't this switch labeled? What circuit does it control?" he demanded.

"It doesn't control any circuit, Mr. Himes," we heard Walt explaining as we left. "That's a little gadget the boss installed himself. He hooked it to the power plant in the building to prevent failure if the regular power goes off."

Mr. Himes and Walt were closeted for a long time in the control room, after which the Federal man visited our transmitter in the basement and climbed up to the roof of the building to look at our antenna. He left consternation in his wake.

"Do you know what he accused us of?" Walt reported indignantly. "Broadcasting on a higher power. I told him he was nuts. You'd think he'd believe me when he saw those five-hundred-watt tubes in the transmitter, but Todd, who was on duty down there, said even after he saw them he claimed he wasn't through and that he'd be back."

"If we were on higher power, we'd be getting out farther, wouldn't we?" I asked. "Because we have been lately. I've seen some of the DX letters."

"That doesn't mean anything," denied Walt shortly. "Freak conditions, that's all. I guess I ought to know when I'm transmitting at five hundred watts, and that's what I'm doing."

John returned from Salem the next morning with the news that his plans were completed. We'd take one hour

from the floor of the Senate, and one from the floor of the House every day. It would begin at three o'clock, which would give Dan Parsons, our remote technician, a chance to load the equipment on a van after the McMinty remote and reach Salem in time to set it up.

Remote equipment was never left overnight because it was too valuable to be risked, and our monthly bill for a driver and his van to cart it around ran into three figures. The minimum required for a broadcast included two six-volt storage batteries in a box weighing sixty pounds, a box of B batteries, cords and tools weighing thirty, a Western Electric 8A amplifier in an oak cabinet which weighed a hundred, and a large, unwieldy box with three microphones and separate stands.

These boxes were chained together and padlocked to discourage light-fingered but strong-backed coveters. If the remote happened to be music, the technician must also include in his equipment a mixing panel of heavy iron which weighed an additional one hundred pounds.

Walt ran a test on line quality at two forty-five, as soon as Dan phoned that he was set up, and we all listened breathlessly. KUKU had once been on a small Northwest network of its own, but that was before the time of any of us employed there now. Even though we expected nothing but dry legislative discussions, the fact that we were broadcasting from fifty miles away gave us a mental lift.

The test came through surprisingly well, and John was so elated that he finished his customary five o'clock cigar by three. In reckless abandon he began on a new one in mid-afternoon and had it well under way by the halfway mark of the broadcast. His high spirits were not allowed to continue, however, for right in the midst of a fascinating discourse on state taxes, Mr. Himes returned.

Instinctively he made straight for John, who was occupying a comfortable chair in front of the loud-speaker.

"Mr. Strong?" he asked in a voice which muffled the words of the state legislator.

"Sh!" hushed John. "See me later."

Without a word Mr. Himes turned and made his way to the control room. In a matter of seconds the speaker went dead.

"The lines!" yelled John jumping to his feet. "Something's happened to the lines!"

"Nothing's happened to your lines, Mr. Strong," remarked Mr. Himes coldly from the doorway. "I just threw the station off the air."

"You—"

"Federal Radio Commission," explained Himes tersely. "We've been doing a little checking on KUKU. You have a license for five hundred watts and you've been operating at a thousand."

"Preposterous!" snorted John, but his voice lacked conviction. "If you want to check our equipment—"

"I have checked your equipment," stated Mr. Himes calmly. "You were pretty smart. I didn't catch it the first time I looked. The wire from the basement looks like it leads through the court to the antenna on the roof. It takes a pretty close inspection to see that it goes into a third-floor window before it reaches the roof."

John slumped in his chair, his cigar waggling like a distress signal.

"I just located the final amplifier in the storeroom of that third-floor closet. It connects with that switch you installed yourself. The one that's supposed to hook to the building power plant."

"I didn't know it was really connected with anything," said Walt plaintively. "I thought it was just another crackpot idea of the boss's. He's full of them."

We were aware that a stranger had opened the door and was joining our circle. Vi rushed forward.

"KUKU is not receiving visitors right now, sir," she explained hastily. "It's a staff meeting. Another time—"

"I'm afraid not, sister," said the stranger regretfully. "This isn't a social call. I'm from the railroad and I'm looking for John Strong. He's trying to use our tracks between here and Salem as a line for radio broadcasting. That's something the railroad can't permit."

He stopped suddenly at the expressions on our faces. In the silence Miss Tolman's voice, as she reached for the phone, grated unusually loud.

"Operator, get me Mr. T. V. Zerhorst in Seattle. It's an emergency."

CHAPTER 6

They caught the first plane from Seattle and were in Portland that evening. What *they* did to soothe the ruffled dignity of the Federal Radio Commission and to appease the railroad and telephone companies we never found out, but it was effective.

We continued operations over our legal five hundred watts, received new and legitimate installations on remote lines, and inherited a new manager practically simultaneously. The new manager was the biggest shock of all.

He was Barry Alden.

We were so surprised over this turn of events that we almost forgot to tender congratulations, and Barry, who was more amazed than any of us, was so flustered he didn't even notice our oversight.

"I can't figure why *they* picked me," he said honestly. "I don't know anything about running a radio station."

"That's never stopped any of the others," I said, my previous experience with three managers as proof. "You can learn."

"Yes," agreed Barry thoughtfully. "But things are going to be different around here. I guess, maybe, I'd better buy a new suit."

Just how different things were going to be around KUKU even Barry didn't realize at first. The financial condition of the head office had improved, and the old Northwest chain was to be partially reinstated. We were now

hooked up with a station in Seattle and one in Spokane, and for stated periods each day we would exchange programs.

It was unthinkable that we send our canned music or even Windy's Hawaiians ("Steel guitar and banjo taught, instruments rented at reasonable rates") to these cities, which meant that at long last we would have our own orchestra. Barry, whose favorite musical number was "Tie Me to Your Apron Strings Again" and who hardly knew an alto sax from a string bass, set out to hire it.

He always operated on the principle that you should go to the top of the heap and work your way down, and after certain inquiries he made up his mind that the conductor of the Portland symphony was the top of local musical circles.

It was a current saying among local hot shots that this gentleman was on a give-and-take basis from Belgium—we gave him a job during the symphony season and he took his money back to Belgium to invest as soon as it was over. His name was Dr. Renault, and stories of his temperament and artistry were one of the drawing cards which pulled people to the concerts. They were afraid to stay away for fear that would be the evening Dr. Renault might give way to that touted temperament and throw his baton through the timpani.

"I want you to call Dr. Renault for me," Barry told Vi a little apologetically. He was still pretty used to placing his own calls and embarrassed about asking anyone to do things for him. "Tell him I want him to stop in and see me tomorrow afternoon."

To everyone's surprise but Barry's Dr. Renault made no objection to this peremptory summons. He arrived at two the next afternoon, complete with frock coat, and Barry, who had been helping clean out an old bin of phonograph records, received him in his shirt sleeves.

"Come in, Professor. Come in," he urged hospitably.

"We'll have to sit out here, because the window washers are working in my office. It's too bad, because this is a private discussion."

Everyone but Miss Tolman immediately stopped whatever he was doing to listen. Dr. Renault's face was worth stopping for.

"You are the manager of this radio station?" he inquired wonderingly. His English was beautiful, with just enough accent to be fascinating.

"That's right," beamed Barry. "Have a cigar."

The doctor accepted a cigar, and refusing a match, sat turning it over and over in his hand.

"First of all," began Barry getting right down to business, "let me ask you one question. Who's the best damn musician in this town?"

"I am, of course," replied Dr. Renault, his eyes flashing.

"Good. Then you're the guy we want. We're going to put on an orchestra. Staff, you understand. Six-hour basis a week. Now six hours ain't much, and you only play one concert a week at the auditorium. You ought to be able to take this on like a breeze."

"Ah," said Dr. Renault thoughtfully. "And how large an orchestra had you in mind?"

"Well, I wanted to ask you about that. Five or six is enough for popular dance stuff, but we want to go into long-haired deals, too, and maybe you'll need eight or nine. You understand we've got to have variety in those six hours. Dance stuff, popular, maybe hillbilly, then some high brow. That's why the guy we get has to be good."

"And the remuneration?" asked Dr. Renault. He hadn't changed expression.

"Union scale. Six hours for twenty bucks, and five hours' rehearsal time thrown in. Of course, you'll get leader-fee, which is 10 per cent."

We waited for the celebrated Renault temperament to

exert itself, but either the doctor was in an unusually good humor that day or Barry's personality had him hypnotized. He sat tugging at his lip for a moment, then remembered the cigar and put it in his pocket.

"Mr. Alden," he said finally. "It is true that I am the best musician in this town, but this does not seem to me quite my sort of position. Not quite."

"I'm sorry," said Barry sincerely. "I like your looks. I think we'd get along."

"And I," said Dr. Renault gravely, "like yours. But I think in a position like this you need a man who plays not only the classics but—er—your syncopated American rhythms as well."

"Why, sure. That's what I mean. Don't you?"

"No," said the director without a change of tone. "I do not. But I have in my orchestra a young man in the first-violin section who may be exactly what you have in mind. He is a good musician, you understand. But I have trouble with him sometimes—yes, I have trouble—"

"I wouldn't want a troublemaker," objected Barry seriously. "No time for temperamental artists or stuff like that. This is business."

"It is not that kind of trouble," said the doctor. "I have come in unexpectedly and found him playing things which were not—uh—written in the music. The term for such playing is, I believe, 'hot.' "

"But he can play the long-hair stuff, too?" inquired Barry anxiously. "He can do both?"

"He can do both," assured Dr. Renault. "He interprets the classics very well, and he tells me he does the other with equal facility. I will send him to you tomorrow. His name is Samuel Twohy."

Sammy Twohy, violin case beneath his arm in lieu of an identification button, arrived the next day. He was a young man with a ghostly white skin and hair of so pale a tan you

had to look twice to see where it fitted against his forehead. He had a big nose and small, always curious eyes that were never still. His fingers were long, restless, and stained yellow with the constant cigarette which was missing from his hand only when he was wielding a violin bow.

Barry was never one to buy a product on chance recommendation. He led Sammy into the small studio and requested a sample.

"Where's the accompanist?" demanded Sammy.

"We'll get around to that later. If you're as good as the professor says, you don't need one."

Sammy, undismayed, unpacked his violin, twanged a couple of strings, and tore off a little Sarasate.

"Fair," admitted Barry. "How about some slow stuff?"

Sammy obliged with "Asa's Death," but Barry stopped him in the middle.

"I don't want to hear it. I just wanted to make sure you could do it. Now, the hot jazz. You know—like Henry Busse."

This was more than Walt could stand. He had plugged in the audition panel, and we were all standing in the control room enjoying the concert. Now he flipped a switch and voiced his protest. "Busse doesn't play a fiddle. He plays a trumpet."

Sammy Twohy jumped nervously at the unexpected voice in the studio, but Barry didn't move a muscle.

"Go back to work, you bums," he ordered without turning around. "I'm hiring this band. And what difference does it make what Busse plays? It's just to give this guy an idea."

It gave him an idea all right, and Sammy acted upon it. He bent over his instrument. The neck of his violin pointed to the floor and he began to play "Wildcat." "Wildcat" is not a number for the novice, and not, for that matter, for every violinist. It tears up and down, and the strings whine, and you find yourself catching your breath. But Sammy

could play it, and he even added a few extra flourishes of his own.

In the control room we were pounding each other on the back. We were exclaiming over our good fortune at having such a versatile musician on our staff, but Barry had one more test. He nodded approvingly at the conclusion of "Wildcat," then leaned forward in his chair.

"Now," he said. "Play 'Tie Me to Your Apron Strings Again.' "

Sammy played it, and I swear the twang of his violin was as nasal as though Barry had sung the melody himself.

"You're hired," Barry announced as the last note died in its nose, but to our amazement Sammy hesitated.

"There's just one thing," he demurred. "It's about a clock. I got to have a clock."

"You've got one," objected Barry sensibly. "Right there on the wall before your face."

Sammy's small eyes darted to the electric timepiece, twice the size of his own head.

"That one's fine," he agreed, "if I happen to be facing that way. And if I look the other way, I can see the one through the control room window. But what if I happen to be looking at the ceiling while I play?"

"Why should you be looking at the ceiling?" demanded Barry in amazement.

"You don't understand us artists," Sammy answered sadly. "We get carried away. Now when I play the compositions of the great masters, I always look at the ceiling. I can't help it. It's as though I was getting my inspiration from the sky, which I probably am. It's why I'm great. I might get so inspired that I'd go on and on and not stop playing."

"You can't do that in radio," objected Barry in alarm. "We operate on a time schedule."

"I know you do," agreed Sammy sympathetically. "So maybe you'll have to be satisfied with an inferior artist who

never has an inspiration. Somebody who won't really give out. Now if I had a clock right there on the ceiling staring me in the face, I'd have to remember that I was working on time. I'd have to realize I couldn't play on and on, or stop when the inspiration told me to stop."

"When you played that fast thingumajig, you didn't look at the ceiling. You looked at the floor," argued Barry. "You had the end of your fiddle practically touching the floor."

"That wasn't the classics," explained Sammy with dignity. "When I play classics, I look at the ceiling. When I play jazz, I look at the floor, naturally. Any artist in jazz would. It's the way you get your tones. Of course, if you don't care about tones— But I should have a clock on the floor, too."

"You can't," objected Barry indignantly. "I'm not going to have a clock fastened to the floor for everybody to stumble over. That's out."

"Ah well," sighed Sammy reluctantly. "I could put my own watch on the floor, I suppose, when I'm about to give with a hot. But you can't expect me to hang it from a string from the ceiling. It would swing around."

"Maybe not," agreed Barry. "I'll talk to Walt about a clock on the ceiling, but it sure sounds screwy to me. No wonder they say all musicians are harebrained."

Fortunately, before Walt got around to making the installation, Barry discovered that he was the victim of a practical joke. Sammy Twohy was full of them, and he would go to any length to work out the details of one. He cultivated Walt's electrical knowledge, and there was a day when certain chairs around the reception room were wired to shock unsuspecting victims who might sit in them. As he passed through the control room, he innocently moved up the speed indicator on the record player so that for a second or two we broadcast sounds more closely resembling those of a Chinese orchestra than of a modern dance band.

Almost a dozen times the first week he was there, Barry came close to firing him, but Sammy always talked his way out of it somehow. He never meant to do serious damage, nor did he intend to disrupt programs; he wanted only to add to the embarrassment and discomfort of those contributing to the programs. This he felt to be his mission in life, to keep things moving and out of a monotonous calm. Once the joke was in the open, he was always surprised and hurt if the victim did not enjoy it as thoroughly as he had himself, and there was never a time when he wasn't having to apologize to someone for a trick which had caused hard feelings.

Aside from his horseplay, there was never a more conscientious worker than Sammy, and he gave to his job everything he had, which was a great deal. Often we'd come to work at nine to find Sammy still in his tuxedo sorting orchestrations and arranging programs. He'd played a late dance job the night before, then come to the station to work until morning getting set for the next day's broadcasting.

He was a pushover for sentiment, and on one occasion I saw him endorse and turn over his whole check when donations were being taken for a sick musician with a large and hungry family.

Barry recognized him for what he was and babied him along, calming down the more riotous pranks which might interfere with station operations. But Barry never forgot the clock episode and was determined to even up that score. He did, finally, but it took a long time.

Sammy was serious about one thing and that was his drinking habits. He drank only sweet spirits of niter, and he was solemnly trying to disprove a theory that if you drank it for over one year, you would lose your mind.

He had been working on this theory close to the twelfth month by the time Barry had his idea. Sammy was running daily tests to make sure he was undergoing no mental

change. He had a prodigious memory, and every day he would make it recall some intricate piece of music he had learned in his youth or some lengthy poem he had been forced to memorize in school or the street address or telephone number of a friend in a distant city with whom he had practically lost contact. So far the memory had never failed him, but, as Sammy said, the twelfth month was the real test.

He extracted the alcohol from the niter himself and got a fluid which he considered suitable for pouring down his throat, and he was constantly collecting a new supply. Much of his spare time was spent running from drugstore to drugstore buying up small bottles of niter which he always told the druggist he meant to use as a remedy for poison oak. It had to be purchased in small quantities, and from many drugstores, and since he made up a gallon at a time, his collections went on all the time.

One day Sammy announced that he was about ready to brew up a new batch, and those who were interested in watching could come to his house on that night.

This was the moment for which Barry had been waiting, and after taking Walt Denny, Vi, and me into his confidence, he made an excursion into the suburbs for supplies. He was determined to make Sammy think the niter had really got him, and for that purpose he needed a box filled with snakes. Walt was supposed to help Barry catch the snakes; Vi and I had to know beforehand because he didn't trust us to keep silent when he turned them loose in the room, and naturally the snakes were supposed to be visible only to Sammy.

They weren't too successful with their snake catching, but they managed to corral a couple of inoffensive members of the garter variety, and these they smuggled into Sammy's house in Barry's overcoat pocket. Sammy was a bit suspicious about the overcoat, for it was a warm night, but Barry in-

sisted he was coming down with a cold, and Sammy's mind was so filled with laboratory problems he let it go.

"You can all help me empty out the bottles," he invited hospitably. "I leave the niter in the bottles it comes in until it's time to boil up a batch. The corks are tight."

We all stood around and self-consciously emptied six- and eight-ounce druggists' bottles into an aluminum pan. Sammy kept up an educational lecture as we did so.

"Once you get used to this, you'll like it better than gin," he promised. "It's got more kick. It may make you sick at first, but you'll get over that."

"We didn't promise to help you drink it," objected Vi. "We just wanted to see you make it."

"It smells like medicine," I agreed. "I'm sorry, Sammy, but I won't touch it."

"It'll smell even worse than this while it's cooking. It'll practically knock you out of the room," he assured us proudly. "But once you get it evaporated out and cooled, there's no smell at all. The smell evaporates right out with the niter. It leaves only the straight alcohol in the bottom."

"Then why not drink alcohol and save yourself all this work?" demanded Walt.

"This is cheaper. Besides, don't forget the experiment. It makes me mad when some guy stands up on his two hind feet and claims such and such is so. How does he know this stuff will make you go nuts after twelve months? Has he tried it himself?"

"He might be right," argued Barry darkly. "Maybe one of these days it'll hit you just like that. You'll start by seeing things."

"I haven't yet," said Sammy cheerfully. "Or forgotten them. Just before you came I tried to say a piece I learned in the fifth grade. Remembered every word. *Under the spreading chestnut tree the village smithy stands. The smith a mighty man is he, with—*"

"That's enough," said Barry quickly. "Only don't say I didn't warn you. How long will this take?"

"It takes quite a while," admitted Sammy doubtfully. "But I've got a drink all around left out of my last batch."

"You can have mine," I said quickly.

"And mine," agreed Vi.

Sammy looked at us in disdain. "The whole point is to do this slowly," he told Barry and Walt, ignoring Vi and me altogether. "You got to watch it every minute, or it may blow up on you. You bring it to a boil, and the secret is not to boil it too long. Just right."

We nodded solemnly, and the bottles having been duly emptied of their last drops, Sammy placed the aluminum pan on the flame of his gas stove.

"I'll start it high and turn the fire down in a minute," he said. "I want to get it started, though, and hurry it up as much as I dare. Hate to make you folks wait too long for a drink."

"That's all right," said Barry graciously. "I must have left my handkerchief in my overcoat. This cold I've got coming on is worse than I thought."

"What do you cut it with, Sammy?" asked Walt in an effort to hold his attention away from Barry's departure.

"Grape juice," said Sammy promptly. "Only thing that will cut it. You can't drink it straight. Even the guys who drink alky straight, the white-liners, won't touch this stuff that way."

"It certainly smells awful," said Vi frankly, and she was right. The fumes of the niter were filling the kitchen, and they were dreadful. They choked our noses and mouths and watered our eyes. Sammy alone did not seem to mind it.

"It's just as bad in the front room," reported Barry coming back.

"Oh, you can smell it a block away," agreed Sammy cheer-

fully. "But, of course, it's different when it's cool. Just wait till you taste it. I'll get you two guys a drink."

He turned his back to reach in the cupboard for a bottle, and Barry stooped quickly to release the two surprised garter snakes on the kitchen floor. We tried desperately not to look at them, and at first Sammy did not see them, either. He set the bottle on the table, reached for glasses, and then suddenly remembered his cooking.

"The flame! I've got to lower that flame! I got to talking and didn't notice!"

The garter snakes were uncurling by this time and one was directly in his path as he turned to the stove. He stepped on it, pulled back his foot, lost his balance, and fell to his knees. He stared into the small beady eyes of the garter snake.

"Snakes!" he gasped.

"What are you talking about?" demanded Barry in careful surprise. "This is your own kitchen. No snakes in here."

"Of course there are no snakes in here," we all hastened to reassure him. "You must be seeing things."

Sammy put out his hand to touch one of the sluggishly moving reptiles and we held our breaths. If he actually felt it, and knew it was really there, he would realize it was a plant. But Sammy's own fear of live snakes made him withdraw his hand before it came quite close enough.

"God! I'm crazy!" he shrieked. "They were right! I'm out of my mind! I better get to Salem. They'll have to lock me up!"

He dashed out the back door, and we knew he was heading for his garage.

"We'll have to stop him," said Barry, reluctantly becoming the station manager. "The guy's got an early morning show and if he really thinks he's got a screw loose, he'll bang on the door of the nut house till they let him in. The state

he's in they'll think he's really that way, and we won't get him out in time for the broadcast."

We hurried to follow Sammy outside, and only with difficulty convinced him that the snakes he had seen had been live ones carried into the house in Barry's coat pocket. Sammy was a rare practical joker, though, in that he could see one on himself, and as soon as he was satisfied that his mental health was as usual, his eyes gleamed with anticipation.

"That was a slick one," he admitted. "You sure took me in. I can think of a couple of guys I can pull that on. Let's go back and find the snakes. I can use those babies."

He never did, though. As we stood there in the starlight, there came a muffled explosion from inside the house. The sweet spirits of niter had blown up on the stove.

CHAPTER 7

"I don't pretend to know everything about music," Barry had admitted the day Sammy Twohy went on the payroll. "That's why I want the best musician in town working for me. It's your problem now. Hire an orchestra."

Sammy was delighted to hire an orchestra and proud of the responsibility of choosing it himself. After a long conference he convinced Barry that it was economy to hire twelve pieces instead of eight.

"We can use the full band for a couple of shows a week, and then break it down into small combos for the other hours," he explained. "That way you'll make it go farther."

Barry saw the sense to this suggestion, and I was called in for a session of program planning.

"We don't want just plain music programs," he told me shrewdly. "We've got to dress them up with showmanship. That's the only way we can sell them. We're not in this for our health. I've been spending money like a drunken sailor, and we've got to show a profit to the head office."

Sammy had hired two pianists, a flute player who could double on a French horn, a cellist, another violinist besides himself, a string bass, two clarinets who doubled in sax, a trombonist, and a drummer who brought his timpani. Most of them were colleagues of Sammy's in the symphony.

We divided them—Sammy doing most of the work—into natural classifications. We had, besides the full orchestra

which played together as a unit, a half hour with a string trio which we called When Artists Meet, introducing each member singly and with much dragging out of his Continental background (luckily these three had one), and we eventually sold the show to a shop specializing in art objects.

We used all the strings and a piano in another little gem called Dining at Home, the point being that if you were, why not enjoy the luxury of the soothing, restful music provided by the best hotels. It was a natural for a grocery account.

We had a hot little five made up of Sammy, the sax and clarinet men, the trombone and drums, and this aggregation changed its name from Murphy's Melodians to Johnson's Jazzters at the nod of a sponsor. They proved very popular and also worked outside the station on a number of special jobs they picked up by virtue of their broadcasts.

Sammy did a pretty good job of dividing up men to get the most from his hours, but Sammy was only human. He ended up with the flute player and a pianist, who each had thirty minutes of vacant time.

"I don't know what to do, Barry!" Sammy was almost crying. "I could put the flutist in another show, I guess, although we don't really need him. But there's only one piano in a studio, so you'll just have to give the guy a half hour to himself."

"A half hour's too long for piano solos unless you're sitting there looking at it," objected Barry. "Think of something, Woodie. Something like that Beachcomber deal you dreamed up where we roll the shot in the drumhead for surf and Bruce reads all that slop about moonlight and lagoons and driftwood on beaches."

"The Beachcomber has an eight-piece orchestra back of it, Barry," I explained patiently. "This time we've got two pieces, and one of them's a flute."

"It could be worse. One could be a drum," he pointed

encouragingly. "Sleep on it. It'll come to you. You're the continuity writer, so it's your problem."

The best I could do was The Pipes of Pan, with Teddy Smythe reading tales from Greek mythology to a background of flute and piano. I still wonder if the Greek restaurant which bought it ever realized full value from its advertising.

Outside of Sammy and one of the pianists, a girl named Sylvia Wren who appeared quite normal, we seldom knew our musicians socially, and perhaps this was as much their fault as ours. They were with us eleven hours a week, six in actual broadcasting and five in rehearsal, and as soon as they had finished with this stint, they were off and about business of their own. Most of them had music pupils; they had symphony rehearsals and theater engagements whenever a road show came to town; the dance men had occasional special jobs; a few sold insurance.

They fell into two definite categories: the strictly long-haired, who recognized no later composer than Fritz Kreisler and thought Victor Herbert verged as close to syncopation as the laws of decency allowed, and the dance men, who could read legitimate music but who could also swing out with improvisations in any key and on any old chestnut you could name.

Each of them considered himself an artist in his field, and while Sammy had his hands full with their devious temperamental manifestations, they were all good showmen. There was the evening, for instance, when the strings were providing background music to Bruce's rendition of Shelley, Byron, and Eddie Guest, when the firemen answered a call to put out a small blaze on our floor of the building.

There must have been some other way of entering, but they chose to come up the fire escape and climb through the windows of Studio A where the program was in progress. That was the first evening, I think, that many of us realized

there actually were outside windows concealed behind the monk's cloth draperies. They were suddenly pushed aside by assorted fire fighters dragging lengths of hose. Bruce faltered in his reading, but our musicians never missed a beat. The liquid measures of Debussy flowed on undisturbed as the intruders made their way out and through the lobby, nor were they interrupted later when, the fire having been extinguished, the firemen paraded back by the same exit.

Musicians were helpful in building program ideas, too, although, because they were as jealous of each other as announcers, the ideas they submitted centered usually about themselves.

Sammy had a quarter-hour violin recital once a week, and Jacques Bernstein, our diminutive Russian cellist, had been smoldering about it. Nobody appreciated the cello, he was heard to mutter. Why wasn't he given a solo program? He had played before the czar—or would have been asked to if the czar hadn't been killed first. He made so much of it that Sammy felt it was diplomatic to give him a one-time spot.

Jacques submitted his program to me in advance, and when I looked at the sheet, I saw it contained three selections: Bach Sonata in G Minor; Bach Sonata in D Minor; Bach Sonata in B Minor.

"I bet I know what you're going to call this program, Jacques," I told him. "Sonata!"

"Oh, no, no, no," he denied quickly. "It will be called Jacques Bernstein, Cellist. I have friends, you see, who will want to hear me. If they saw only the word 'Sonata,' they might mistake the program for another."

When it came time for the broadcast, Jacques waved aside offers of an accompanist.

"Let Sylvia play for you, Jacques," urged Sammy. "She plays for me. She's a good accompanist."

"It is not that I discredit her accompaniment," contended Jacques stubbornly. "It is that I prefer to play Bach as it was written. The Bach sonatas are written for the solo cello or the solo violin. I will play them that way."

"But there's a piano part, too, Jacques," urged Sylvia. "I've already gone over it at home. I'm sure I can please you."

"It is not I you must please; it is Bach. He wrote the sonatas for the strings. The piano was added afterward. I will play them as they were written." Whereupon he disappeared into the small studio and closed the door firmly behind him.

"I don't like the smell of this," Sammy worried. "Bach is fine, but unless you're used to it—"

"Maybe you'd better fill the spot yourself," agreed Sylvia seriously.

"I can't do that. He's the best cellist in town, and he might walk out on me."

We took up our usual positions in the control room so we could watch proceedings through the window. Jacques was tuning up, bending his head low over his cello as he drew the bow delicately across each string. Bob McRoberts stood by, looking singularly unhappy with the script. He had hoped to read long, flowing, descriptive passages, but there is not too much you can say about three Bach sonatas. We could see them exchanging comments, but Walt hadn't switched them on, so it was impossible to catch their words.

The longest minute in the day, that before a cue, finally arrived and Bob signed the program on. He introduced Jacques with all the glowing adjectives I could dig out of the thesaurus. He spoke briefly of Bach and how his music represented the ultimate of ultimates to a musician. Jacques, listening appreciatively, nodded agreement with every word. Then Bob announced that as a special treat Mr. Bern-

stein would favor our radio audience with three of Bach's best-loved sonatas, and Jacques was off.

At first I thought he was tuning up, although I had distinctly seen him attend to this before the broadcast. Then I wondered if someone hadn't slipped him a second-violin part by mistake, for the notes he was drawing lovingly forth were to me ponderously unmusical. I heard Walt snort in disgust, and glanced at Sammy and Sylvia. They looked unhappy but not surprised. Jacques was doing a fine job on a Bach sonata.

I waited for the second number, which sounded exactly like the first, then wandered back into the reception room. Barry nearly knocked me down on his way into the control room.

"What the hell's happening?" he shouted. "What the hell kind of a program is that?"

It was Sammy's problem, so I went over to see Vi who seemed to have one of her own. As usual it was the phones. One was ringing madly as she tried to placate the other.

"No, madam," she was saying desperately. "Nothing is wrong with your radio. No, I know it sounds like somebody practicing scales, but it isn't. It's Mr. Bernstein playing Bach."

Sylvia Wren was as versatile in her chosen field of piano as Sammy with his violin, and as our musical shows began building, those two were put on a forty-hour-a-week basis. Sammy needed the time to make up programs, to sort orchestrations and put them away, and to talk to all the would-be singers and has-been musicians who hopefully came around for auditions.

Sylvia had to play for the auditions, since she could transpose on sight or play with equal facility a number which had once been hummed to her. We also acquired a couple of vocalists who required her professional assistance, and in those days someone was always coming to town with some-

thing to peddle musically, and radio was used as the first sample from the bottle.

If Peter Aloysius James-James appeared in concert at the auditorium, his manager arranged for Mr. James-James to sing a preliminary teaser over the station. And if a traveling company did the "Desert Song," the leading man would have an air interview during which he could be prevailed upon to sing "One Alone." Sylvia accompanied all comers, but perhaps her most unusual assignment was the program of Chief Wahunsonacook.

None of us had heard of the chief before, and the first intimation we had of his coming was a wire addressed to Barry as manager of the station.

ON GOOD-WILL TOUR OF THE NATION. ARRIVE PORTLAND SEVENTEENTH. WILL SING FIFTEEN-MINUTE PROGRAM YOUR STATION THAT NIGHT. PROVIDE ACCOMPANIST. REMUNERATION UNNECESSARY. CHIEF WAHUNSONACOOK.

"What is this? A gag?" demanded Barry suspiciously.

It might have been, but again it might not. Anything could happen in radio. There seemed to be authority behind the wording of that telegram, although whose authority besides that of the unknown chief himself no one knew. And it was free!

Vi got on the phone and called everyone we could think of: the Chamber of Commerce, the Better Business Bureau, the booking agents, the Musicians Union, and all other stations. No one had heard of the chief. Finally she called the public library and we got our first tangible clue.

"Wahunsonacook was the real name of the Indian in that old story about John Smith and Pocahontas," she reported triumphantly. "In all the history books they call him Powhatan, but I guess that's because it's easier to spell."

"If that's so, he'd be dead," scoffed Barry. "So it is a gag."

"The librarian thinks it might be a descendant," Vi

protested. "She says they often take the names of their famous ancestors."

"And remember he's singing for nothing," reminded Sammy. "That'll be good for the budget."

"Maybe there is something in it," agreed Barry, who wasn't hard to convince if you could make a dent in his head. "We could blow it up. Good-will tour. The Indian returns to his last frontier. Call the papers, Vi, and tell them about the wire. Tell them we've got Chief What's-his-name, son of the original Chief Whosis, sewed up for a special program the seventeenth. If he gets the right kind of advance publicity, he doesn't have to be good."

Barry set to work on the project with enthusiasm. He decided we'd put the full orchestra back of the chief, and had Sammy hunt up all the orchestrations with an Indian flavor. He made the band practice them, too, which meant that with only five hours' rehearsal time some of our regular programs went on without a run-through.

He had me dig up all the material I could find on John Smith and Pocahontas and on Wahunsonacook, and was delighted to discover that the original chief was the sachem of the confederacy of the Algonquin tribes and that he was a combination of shrewdness, executive ability, and cruelty. All this went into long and flowery copy to be read over a throbbing background of tom-toms created by our drummer.

On the seventeenth Barry had the leading hotels primed to call us the moment Chief Wahunsonacook signed the register, and we sat around on the edges of our chairs doing a minimum amount of work.

At five o'clock we still had no word, although Vi had been checking back all afternoon for fear one of the clerks might have forgotten. Sammy was just about to pull extra fill numbers when the chief called us. Barry took the call in his office, but the door was open and we all flocked around.

"Yes, Chief. Glad to hear from you," he boomed enthusiastically. "Just beginning to get worried about you. I've got a newspaper photographer all lined up to run over to the hotel and take your picture. Where are you?"

His face, as he listened to the chief's reply, grew puzzled, and I saw him jotting down what appeared to be directions on a piece of paper.

"I guess we'll skip the photographer," he said finally. "You stay where you are. I'll be right out myself and bring you over here."

"Where is he? Is he going on? Does he sound like Chief Wahunsonacook?" we demanded as soon as Barry hung up.

"How do I know how Chief Wahoo's supposed to sound? I wouldn't have taken him for an Indian by his voice, but of course they're civilized now. And that's who he says he is. He's at a motor court out at the edge of town. I think I'd better look him over myself before we get in any deeper."

There was really no reason why the chief shouldn't choose a motor court at the edge of town instead of a hotel, but it didn't quite fit in with the picture we had built in our minds. And to have him announce his arrival with a call from a pay phone was something of a letdown.

Our qualms disappeared later when Barry returned ushering our guest before him. You would have known without being told that he was a chief. He wore a leather jacket, heavy with beads, and a red silk shirt which clung to him damply from the heat of the day. His hair hung in two braids beneath his Stetson, and his face was round, brown, and smiling.

"This is Chief Wahunsonacook," introduced Barry proudly. "He's from Oklahoma, and he's really no relation to the first chief by that name. He just uses it professionally. He used to be on the concert stage, but he retired. Then he got itchy feet and decided to tour the country to see what had been going on."

Chief Wahunsonacook was making a good-will tour of the country

"That's right," agreed the chief bowing, and his voice was not the deep guttural we expected but a high tenor. "The best way to meet people is to have a radio program and sing in a station. I don't care about money. I got plenty of that. Oil lands. I just want to meet people."

"We'll see that you do that, Chief," promised Barry. "The program we've got worked out for you—well, you better tell him, Sammy."

"First we come on with the tom-toms—that's the drummer," began Sammy enthusiastically. "Then the clarinet picks up the beat for a few bars of 'Pale Moon.' Then the announcer comes in with a big blurb about what a big shot you are among your own people and so on, and then the whole band takes it away and finishes the first number. Then you sing a song and the band plays and you sing again —alternating, you know."

"It got lonesome back home," nodded the chief gravely. "Wasn't like when I was on the road. Met lots of people then. Good people. That's why I decided to start out again."

"You'll meet 'em," assured Barry quickly. "Why, when they hear this show, they'll give their eyeteeth to shake your hand. All announcements have the tom-tom and clarinet back of them to make it sound like a big powwow. You know—showmanship—atmosphere! It ought to knock 'em dead."

"Where," demanded the chief abruptly, "is my accompanist?"

"Why, the band," began Sammy, but the chief waved him down.

"No, no. I sing only with a piano. I don't sing with bands. I have brought my music."

"But Chief," argued Barry, "it's a good band. They can fake anything."

"I sing with the piano or I don't go on," said the chief flatly.

"In that case," gulped Sammy, "you and Sylvia better go in the small studio and have a quick run-through. We go on the air in twenty minutes."

"You'll let the band be on the same program, won't you?" pleaded Barry. "You don't care if we go ahead with the show as we planned, so long as you get to sing with just a piano?"

"That's O.K.," agreed the chief royally. "I don't care about the rest of it. I only sing so I can meet people."

Sylvia and the chief disappeared into the small studio, and the rest of us sat mournfully looking at each other.

"It probably won't be so bad," said Sammy desperately. "Of course, any singer sounds better with a full orchestra, but if he's used to a piano and nothing else—"

"Sure, it'll be fine," said Barry. "The rest of the show's a knockout. We knew beforehand he might not be good. But the show's built so that no matter what kind of a voice the guy has he can't spoil it."

Perce Green was on the control that night, so we didn't have the audition panel plugged in as Walt would certainly have done. Perce was not very obliging about little cooperations like that, and Barry never thought to tell him to do it, so we didn't hear the chief until he was on the air.

Sylvia was smiling as she came out of the studio, and Sammy asked her how she got along with the chief. She said all right. His music was simple enough. He had a good tenor voice. That ended the conversation.

The program got off to one of those starts that everyone connected with radio dreams of. The kettledrums sounded more tom-tomish than real tom-toms. The clarinet on the high, sweet introduction of "Pale Moon" was so lonesome and mournful you could almost see the solitary Indian scout silhouetted on rimrock against the skyline. Bruce did a rich, rolling introduction which lauded the red man to the high-

est ozone, and the band never sounded better than on its first number.

I had written introductions for the chief's songs, leaving blanks for titles, so all the announcer had to do was fill them in at the time of broadcast. We listened appreciatively as Bruce began on the first one.

"Only a true son of any race can interpret the music of his people correctly," Bruce intoned above the steady beat of tom-toms. "And few of us have had the opportunity to hear music of America's original owners as sung by one of their number. Tonight we bring you just that: Chief Wahunsonacook singing one of the traditional favorites of his tribe, 'When Irish Eyes Are Smiling!' "

CHAPTER 8

"What this sponsor wants," George McPherson, our most prolific salesman, frequently explained to me, "is a program just like Amos 'n Andy. Something that'll make folks stop whatever they're doing at the time it goes on and listen. The sponsor's got ten bucks a week to spend for talent."

I heard that remark so often that I came to dislike Amos 'n Andy, whom I had never met, almost as heartily as the sponsors, who were constantly in my hair. The sponsor is the man who signs the checks. He is always right.

At KUKU in the early thirties there was more leniency with sponsors than at any time or place since. Listeners today may be pulled up short by an announcement on liver pills or deodorant, but the phraseology is more delicate. The precise use and ultimate aim intended for these intimacies of boudoir or bathroom are suggested only by veiled hints. In those days we called a spade a spade, and quite frequently we came right out and said it was a dirty old shovel.

One of our best accounts, from the point of pay, was Dr. Chandler's Bladder Clinic ("Gallstones removed without surgical operation"). Dr. Chandler, a distinguished white-haired gentleman who looked as though he would have been more at home mint-juleping on the veranda of a Southern plantation than in his chosen profession, showed me through his establishment.

It occupied the whole floor of a downtown office build-

ing. The reception room was instep deep in Oriental rugs, and numerous small rooms, where patients awaited the doctor's individual ministrations, were spotlessly furnished in a hospital style few hospitals could afford.

Dr. Chandler was scorned by the medical profession, chiefly, I gathered, because he advertised his services. They had attempted a time or two to bar him from practice, but he always managed to wriggle out of the accusations, and his license hung proudly behind his private desk, triumphant proof of victory. Now his colleagues contented themselves with snubbing him.

Not KUKU. We cultivated him furiously. Dr. Chandler had purchased a half-hour strip across our schedule from seven-thirty to eight each morning.

"I want to get people at breakfast," he told me. "They're particularly receptive to bladder information at that time."

He gave me innumerable printed folders to follow in writing my copy, supplemented by his own special lecture on the subject, and I quoted long paragraphs verbatim, because that's what Dr. Chandler wanted.

"Have you gallstones?" such an announcement might begin intimately. "Do you needlessly spend painful, restless nights when Dr. Chandler's new method, entirely without surgery, can correct this condition?" Or we might go into a long dissertation on the matter of bile and its disagreeable effects, a perfect complement, I always thought as I typed it, to the breakfast bacon and eggs.

Dr. Chandler was one of our old-fashioned advertisers when it came to live talent.

"A phonograph record's good enough," he said. "It's always brought in patients before; no need to change now. Give them a nice talk on the gall bladder, then a record while they digest that, then another talk, and so on. You're doing a fine job. Don't try to change a thing."

We had better luck with our advertising dentists, of

whom we had several. They would buy anything: dramas, live music, even weather reports which we cut from the morning paper and sold as spot announcements. It made a nice tie-in, the weather. "Fair and warmer, just the right kind of day to visit Dr. Whoozis and have your snaggy old teeth pulled out!" Or "Continued rain, but don't stay in with a toothache. See Dr. Jerkum this very afternoon!"

All our dentists seemed to specialize in plate construction and fitting. These, if the listeners were to believe my copy, which in turn came from the mouths of the sponsors, were so lifelike they could not be detected from nature's own, except that they were handsomer. In fact, one progressive and enterprising oral surgeon came right out and said if your own teeth were irregular, discolored, decayed, or unsightly, he could do a better job, with no waits while the gaping wounds healed over.

All our dentists worked without appointment. You just dropped in any time, and there he'd be, waiting to receive you with yawning chair, forceps in hand. You didn't need to bother much about payment, either. A dollar and a quarter a week, probably for the rest of your life, would cinch the deal, and you could even start your first payment on the second Tuesday after the first Friday in some distant month.

Our salesmen worked closely with their accounts, and you could almost tell by the kind it was to whom it belonged. Most of the spot announcements were brought in by Frank Beeman, because he refused to bother with anything else. George McPherson was our most prolific salesman, and the majority of the new programs were his. Harry Fosdyke was our trouble shooter, and whenever an account proved difficult to handle, it was turned over to him. Harry wasn't so fast on an initial sale, but his talent for soothing ruffled feelings amounted to genius. He used it not only on our clients but on his fellow workers.

"We'd better give them a credit on that fluffed spot,

Barry," he might argue. "I know it was only one word lost but the guy's sore. KUKU's too big to quibble about that. Besides, it means saving the account."

And Barry, feeling very benevolent and big, would allow a discount for something which wasn't our fault. The advertiser was always right.

More than once he used his diplomacy in the same way on me.

"It makes the guy feel important to have the writer come to see him personally"—he flattered. "I know how valuable your time is, but it means a lot to me to keep the account."

Since Harry was one of the rare persons who appreciated the value of my time, I could do no less than make personal calls on his favorite accounts. He used much the same tactics on other staff members, and by cajoling, flattering, cutting rates, and extra service we seldom lost an account.

For most of our advertisers we furnished a complete copy service. Local advertising agencies seldom bothered about radio, classifying it (as did newspapers) as something beyond the pale, a toy with which the public would soon tire. We had a few accounts, however, whose executives fancied themselves writers, and they composed their own messages. Of these we admired Mrs. Adolph Klein the most.

Mrs. Klein owned, managed, and ruled with an invincible thumb Klein's Golf Shoppe, which she had inherited at the decease of her husband a few years before. Perhaps in Mr. Klein's lifetime the Golf Shoppe was an entirely different sort of place, but it had become suddenly gay with Scottish tartans and dour with an atmosphere reflected by the help. These were, on the main, middle-aged men whom Mrs. Klein would have liked to dress in kilties. Unable to do this, she saw that they wore always the tweediest of tweeds.

Miniature golf courses had suddenly sprung up on every vacant lot in town, and the Klein Golf Shoppe catered to

patrons of these as well as to those players who took the game on a larger scale. It sold clubs, balls and bags, sweaters and tees and plus fours, slacks and shoes, gloves and silver flasks for the nineteenth hole.

"Everything the Gentleman requires for the Game of a Gentleman," wrote Mrs. Klein in her single-spaced voluminous copy submitted each week, "will be found in Klein's Golf Shoppe, the bit of Old Scotland in America, as familiar to Society Men as is their own address."

Involved as her writing was, it had to be read exactly the way it was written, for she listened to each announcement with carbon in hand. Mrs. Klein was out for what she considered upper-crust trade, and she made no bones about it.

"You can buy cheaper golf equipment than at Klein's Golf Shoppe," she wrote frankly, "but the Society Man prefers to pay a little extra for that label of distinction in his golf bag or jacket."

There came a time when Mrs. Klein decided to go to Scotland on a buying trip. Since most of her merchandise was manufactured in America, I wasn't sure, until the letters began arriving, what she expected to gain from the trip but a sea voyage. These communications were all postmarked New York, but inside they were headed with Scottish names—Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee—and composed in the form of cables. They were to be read on the program as though freshly received from the wire.

NEW YORK CITY, said the first one. PROMINENT PORTLAND BUSINESS WOMAN, MRS. ADOLPH KLEIN, PROPRIETOR OF THE STORE SOCIETY MEN PATRONIZE, KLEIN'S GOLF SHOPPE, SAILED TODAY ON THE U.S.S. ALEXANDRIA FOR SCOTLAND, WHERE SHE WILL FILL ORDERS TO THE SPECIFICATION OF HER DISCERNING CUSTOMERS.

Later we were informed that she was making unusually fortunate purchases in heather golf sweaters and tartan

plaid socks direct from the looms of bonnie Scotland, and that soon Society Men of Portland would have an unequaled opportunity to purchase same.

After almost too short an interval, she returned and the announcement was fittingly made on her program. Then we had a rather snobbish report of a preview showing, by invitation only, to Society Men, of the merchandise she had purchased, following which the sale was thrown open to the public. Even then the public was not allowed to forget it was the public.

"Society Men sleep late," she advised her listeners through the voice of our announcer. "So please do your shopping at Klein's Golf Shoppe in the morning hours."

Society Men must have had their money tied up in American Tel and Tel, however, for despite her own glowing commercials and Sammy Twohy's best efforts to make a string trio sound like bagpipes, at Christmas time everything went on reduction. Shortly after that she went bankrupt.

Sometimes the sponsor's demand for the impossible actually resulted in a program which surprised everyone. One of these was a florist who bought a fifteen-minute program once a week. I say "bought" advisedly, for KUKU took it out in fresh flowers for the reception room.

"What we want," explained this sponsor as he was talking things over with the program department, which consisted of Barry, Sammy, and me, "is fifteen minutes something like Amos 'n Andy."

Barry glanced at me warningly, but I knew better than to talk back to a sponsor.

"Those fellows have all the listeners in the country," continued the florist admiringly. "Why, they even stop movies when they come on, so people can listen. That's why I figure it would be good for me. It shouldn't be too expensive with only two people in it."

"You want a dramatic program, Mr. Bretherton?" asked Barry without turning a hair. After all, why should he? He wasn't the continuity department.

"Yes," agreed Mr. Bretherton, "although some folks like music, so I figure we better have some of that in it, too. Besides, I wouldn't want Amos 'n Andy to think I was copying them, and music would make it different. Now I've got a kid working for me as delivery boy who's got a jim-dandy voice. I thought I might send him up here. We'll build him as the singing delivery boy from Bretherton's, and it'll be good for business and keep costs down some more."

"We'll audition him, Mr. Bretherton," agreed Sammy doubtfully. "Although you want to remember that the microphone does funny things to people's voices."

The microphone did nothing funny to Beau McKenzie. How that Scotsman was ever born with such a lyric Irish tenor I'll never know, but he was. Moreover, he had a good speaking voice and could read lines, so we paired him up with Sylvia, who could sing harmony as well as play the piano. Once a week they did a fifteen-minute skit interspersed with songs. We called them Beau and Bouquet, and for once insisted that the announcers mispronounce the first syllable intentionally.

While they never achieved the national greatness of Amos 'n Andy, they weren't bad. It was an economical program, too, for Beau did it on store time, receiving two dollars extra each week in his pay check, and Sylvia's and my services cost nothing since we were on staff. Eventually someone with influence heard the show, and Beau was whisked East so fast he hardly had time to remove his tan delivery jacket with the florist's insignia. We used to listen to him from New York, the featured singer on the network program of a famous comedian. They changed his name, but not his voice.

Even worse than the sponsor who wrote his own message

was he who insisted on appearing on his own program, and of these Jack Frost was the worst.

Mr. Frost was a restaurateur, and his place of business was decorated with festoons of icicles and banks of simulated snow. He was a pompous little man with pink cheeks and a voice that sounded like somebody sharpening a rusty saw in an empty music hall.

That voice he inflicted on KUKU listeners in Jack Frost's Hour of Good Cheer, during which three young ladies termed "The Snow Flakes" tried to sandwich trio numbers between Jack's always inane and practically constant banalities. He always gave away a free meal to a name selected at random from the phone book during each broadcast, and because this was the depression and Jack had good food, people listened just on the chance they might win.

Once in desperation, after sitting through a typical Hour of Good Cheer, Barry had me write copy for the show, giving more than the customary opening words to the announcer, a chance to sing more than a chorus to the girls, and trying to draw a point to Jack's witticisms. Jack was delighted and studied his script carefully. But when it came time for the air show, he read so haltingly and with so great an effort that it was painful. Halfway through, he himself came to the realization that he wasn't doing so well, and with a clear and resounding "Oh, hell!" which rattled the kilocycles, he cast his script in the corner and went back to the old routine. We left him alone after that; he paid his bills regularly.

We were all firm in our belief that every sponsor sat with ear glued to his receiving set for the full time his commercial message was on the air, and poor Teddy Smythe believed this harder than anyone. He had an unpleasant experience with Julian's French Restaurant to prove it.

Julian had bought a spot on a participating program,

one we received each afternoon on an exchange basis from our Seattle station. The program was a jamboree sort of thing, with much gagging back and forth between the master of ceremonies and cast members. The boys and girls had such clean, funny good times that they sometimes forgot to watch the clock for station identifications.

Teddy had been warned that at two-thirty, the middle of the program, he must make a local cut and announce our call letters or face the wrath of the radio commission. He took this very seriously, as well he should, and in addition he was supposed to read a hundred-word announcement for Julian's Restaurant at that break.

On this particular day the jamboree gang cut up harder than usual, and two-thirty passed without a chance to break. At two-thirty-one they were still going strong, and at two-thirty-two. Teddy began to get nervous.

"You'll just have to cut out of the network," he told the technician. "I've got this spot to read."

It was all right with the teck. As a tribe they love to cut someone loose from high C or clip the point of a story.

Teddy gave our call letters and read Mr. Julian's long and gustatory announcement. It told how delicious was the food he served. It described the smart, sophisticated atmosphere of the restaurant. It spoke of the service and the reasonable prices, and finally it came to a beautiful, glowing end. Teddy looked up. The teck flipped the key.

"Now, folks, you know that's a bunch of hooey!" exclaimed the jamboree emcee in a tone of withering disgust.

Julian was in the studio in a shorter time than it takes to change a phonograph needle, and no amount of talking could persuade him Teddy hadn't done it on purpose. Harry Fosdyke had a hard time saving that account. Julian canceled on the spot, but after Harry had paid him four calls, eaten four dinners, given him a cash refund on the

announcement Teddy had balled up, and promised that another announcer would read it henceforth, he reconsidered.

It was in this era that the Better Business Bureau awoke one morning to an awareness of radio and decided it had been overlooking a bet. We became acquainted with this when their local manager, a Mr. French, came striding into the office with a very much embarrassed individual in tow.

"This is Mr. Leow," announced Mr. French loudly. "And I think we'll have him sue you as a test case."

"I don't want no trouble," protested Mr. Leow quickly. "I wouldn't a gone to see Mr. French in the first place, only there's the hospital bills to be paid, and the doctor'll charge something, and it's coming on harvest time, and with Mattie so laid up and all, I don't know who'll cook for the hands."

"Come into my office," invited Barry quickly with a stern look at the expectant faces of his employees who had all stopped whatever they were doing. He shut the door firmly, and we were left to speculate among ourselves.

After a while, however, he sent out word that I was to bring in the Elixir of Youth copy, and we knew what had happened. The Elixir of Youth had been on the air since Jack Woolen's time, and gave every indication of remaining there permanently. It was one of our few national accounts, having its headquarters somewhere in the Middle West. They paid their bills promptly, Miss Tolman reported, and without question.

In Jack Woolen's regime they had had a local office, but that had since been closed, and now those who wished to try the safe, sure, harmless way to a slender figure or your money back wrote for the pills and paid the postman $4.98 on delivery.

"I can't quite see how you can hold us, Mr. French," Barry was saying as I opened the door, file in hand. "After

all, we're just quoting the claims the advertiser himself makes."

"You're quoting without bothering to check up to make sure they're telling the truth," retorted French promptly. "You're using the air lanes to defraud."

Barry did not invite me to linger, and I was forced to return to my desk. After a time he sent for Miss Tolman and her notebook, which meant that *they* were to be notified. It was that important. Miss Tolman was tight-lipped as usual about the whole thing, and even Barry was not his usual loquacious self. He gave orders that the Elixir of Youth account was to come off the air immediately, and shook his head thoughtfully.

"How'd we know too much of the stuff could poison somebody?" he demanded petulantly. "This guy's wife took more than the usual dose and ended up in the hospital. The Elixir of Youth company has to make a big fat donation that'll buy the guy the adjoining south forty he's had his eye on. It serves them right, but we're stuck for her doctor and hospital bills. It just goes to show you can't trust anybody. From now on, we'll have to watch every step."

However, the Elixir of Youth incident gave Barry an idea. If they could make money capitalizing on women's desire for slenderness, why couldn't we? In a legitimate way, of course.

He shopped around until he found Julie Joy, and then he shopped some more until he found Nuwai Health Foods to sponsor her. Just to make sure Nuwai was harmless, Barry tried the products himself, reporting them a combination of hay, spinach, and dry oatmeal and almost as edible as chop suey if drowned in sufficient soy sauce.

Julie Joy gave setting-up exercises, which, if you followed religiously, subsisting meanwhile on a diet of Nuwai Health Foods, would reduce you to a thin shadow of your former

self. Julie went through her routine at six-thirty each morning, a little too early for a studio audience, which was just as well since Julie herself was no walking advertisement of her exercises.

She would have rolled up a neat 180 pounds on the scales could you have induced her to step up that high, which is doubtful. Julie avoided not only stairs but exertion of all forms. Her uncorseted figure was clad, always, in a girlish middy blouse and a blue, pleated skirt, held up, I'm convinced, by a shoulder waist, for Julie was not one who would restrain herself with anything so confining as a belt. She wore tennis shoes in which she shuffled into the studio each morning as far as the chair nearest the door. One of the boys usually moved a microphone to her side rather than go through a losing argument of trying to make her move a second time.

Her voice, however, was anything but listless.

"Good morning, girls," she'd begin brightly, leaning back in her chair. "Let's take a few quick setting-up exercises first, just to get the sleep out of our eyes. Open the window. Wider than that! Now, three deep breaths. One, two, three! Fill your lungs with oxygen just as far down as you can. Hold it. Fine! Now exhale. And again. One, two, three!"

Through these vocal maneuvers Julie Joy would never stir a finger, but it was different with the more strenuous exercises. She threw herself into them, and as she counted enthusiastically, she waved her hands from the wrist, to and fro, gently, as though breeze-swept.

"Hands on hips, girls," she'd say. "Legs far apart. Now, on the count, jump, holding the heels together. On the second count, back to the former position. Ready. One and two and three and four. One and two . . ."

We all liked Julie Joy tremendously. She was warm-hearted and friendly, and as she often fell asleep in her

Julie Joy gave setting-up exercises which guaranteed to make you a thin shadow of your former self

chair after the program and was still there when the office force arrived at nine, we got to know her well. We were delighted when her program received an enthusiastic audience response, for that meant Julie would be with us a long time.

Once in a while the true sponsor of a program remained incognito, and we dealt only through an emissary. Such was the case with J. Thornton Edgar, self-styled The Voice of Fair Play. True, J. Thornton signed the contract himself with a fine flourish, but even George McPherson, who brought in the account, admitted that The Voice was undoubtedly acting for others who preferred to remain nameless.

Mr. Edgar had a law diploma and political ambitions. He paid cash for a quarter-hour evening time three times a week, and spent that time cussing out anyone who fell under his displeasure, particularly chain stores. Chain stores were just coming into prominence at that time, and we secretly felt, but couldn't prove it since he paid for his time in cash, that his true sponsors were certain independent merchants.

"Listen to that!" he used to shout, shaking before the microphone a can of tomatoes which he had reduced to pulp by considerable muscular effort. "That's what the chain stores are selling you for tomatoes. Just listen to it, folks. It's labeled tomatoes! It's marked tomatoes! It's got a picture of tomatoes on the can, but listen to it!"

Glub, glub, glub! emitted the can obligingly, and the sound was amplified over our equipment.

"That's what your money buys at one of the thieving chain stores," he shouted, while Walt clung desperately to the control, trying to pacify the agitated needle. "Burglars! That's what they are. No better than a thief who sneaks into your house and steals your money out of your pants pocket."

After the Elixir of Youth scare the Voice of Fair Play began to make Barry nervous, particularly when it became evident that J. Thornton Edgar was preparing to run for the legislature and that part of his radio time was to be devoted to campaigning.

"You'll have to write down what you're going to say and let us have a copy in advance," he told Mr. Edgar firmly. "You've been going at it pretty heavy, and the first thing you know we'll be accused of slander."

"Slander's harder to prove than libel," argued J. Thornton, "and as soon as you write it on paper, it's libel. Besides, I can prove everything I say, so it isn't either of them."

"Just the same, you got to write it," said Barry firmly. "One copy for us and one for you."

"It's discrimination!" shouted Mr. Edgar. "Nobody else had to do that."

"Some day they will," predicted Barry sourly. "Sooner or later all radio stations are going to make all politicians read script. And so far as KUKU is concerned, the rule starts right now."

J. Thornton grumbled, but he wanted to stay on our air, so there was nothing to do but agree. The next afternoon he delivered a typed manuscript of his evening's broadcast, snarled at everybody, and left.

"You read it," Barry told me. "You're the continuity department."

I hadn't gone past the first paragraph, however, before I decided this was outside my jurisdiction. On the air J. Thornton's spoken accusations were bad enough; in black and white they were terrible. They left us wide open. I dumped it back on Barry's desk, and he went grimly to work with a red pencil.

"You've cut at least half of it," I warned him. "There isn't over seven minutes of copy left."

"Then we'll just have to fill with records," said Barry grimly. "The guy sticks to the copy, and he doesn't say anything else."

To make sure that his orders would be carried out, he scribbled directions to the technician across the top of the manuscript in large red letters and carried it in to Walt.

"You'll have to read right along with him," he said grimly. "He'll have his own copy, and when he comes in tonight, make him mark the changes from this. If he deviates even one word, jerk the switch."

"I sure will," agreed Walt, beaming in anticipation.

Only Walt and Bob McRoberts were present when Mr. Edgar arrived to do his broadcast, but we heard about it in detail.

"The guy forgot his own script," reported Bob, "and there wasn't time to go home after it. I told Walt to give him the carbon Barry had corrected, and at first Walt didn't want to. Finally he pulled it out, and I could see why. Barry had written across the top, 'If this son of a B changes one word, yank him off the air.' "

"You mean that's the script he read from?"

"That's the one. Walt was afraid J. Thornton might change something and he wouldn't know about it, so I looked over Edgar's shoulder all the time he was reading in the studio. I was going to give Walt the high sign if he pulled something, but he didn't."

Shortly afterward J. Thornton departed in a huff to another station, where for many nights he regaled his listeners with the inside picture of the dirty deal he had had at KUKU and how everybody over there who wasn't already completely red was tinged with pink. We heard later that he was having trouble with the Federal Radio Commission, and finally he dropped quietly out of sight.

The most difficult hour in the day to sell was between eleven and midnight, and Barry and the salesmen chewed

over that problem long and thoughtfully. Early morning was taken care of by Julie Joy and an advertising minister. After midnight, the all-night restaurants and cab companies took spots on the request program. But try as the salesmen did, that eleven o'clock hour remained uncracked.

And then the Walkathon opened in an old skating rink on the east side.

"It's a natural!" shouted Barry. "We'll stick in lines and broadcast from there. A nightly report on how the deal's coming on. Nice cheap show, too. All it'll cost is an announcer."

"But Barry, do they do anything but walk at those things?" I protested.

"Oh, sure. The contestants sing. It's not good, but it doesn't have to be. And they'll have a small band at night to keep up enthusiasm. Ray Turner told me he was going to play the job. These things build, you know. You have to see it to realize it, but in a month we'll have everybody in town who isn't out there watching tuned in to see who dropped out."

"Do you think the Walkathon people will buy it?"

"They'll have to. They can't get newspaper coverage on a thing like that. Radio's their meat."

So Barry put on his hat, took a blank contract out to the place where the Walkathon was being set up, and returned with a signature.

I listened for a few times that first week and thought he had lost his mind. Our announcer seemed to be trying so hard, but nothing happened. People just walked around in couples or singly while he read off the numbers on their backs. They were being sponsored in couples by various firms around town, motorcycle repair shops, clothing stores, beauty salons, and so on, and these, of course, got free mention on the air. The band, which wasn't good, played, and the contestants, most of whom couldn't, sang. Once in a

while someone stumbled, and the announcer made quite a to-do about it. After a while he signed off the program.

There was no payment on the bill that first week, and Miss Tolman chided Barry about it.

"They depend on the gate for their dough," he said reassuringly. "It takes a little time to get this thing rolling. We can carry them for a couple of weeks."

At the close of the second week there was still no payment, and even Barry began to get restless.

"They've got a big overhead," he explained, more to himself than to anyone else. "But they're beginning to get the crowds. I don't like to cancel them, because I don't know who else we could get to buy that spot. We'll hold on just a little longer."

He must have known what he was talking about, for a few days afterward the Walkathon began to pay up. The payment was made by day, however, not by week, and a large part of it was, surprisingly, in small coins. They were in a Manila envelope on Miss Tolman's desk each morning when she came to work, and she sniffed a little as she counted them out and entered the amount on her books.

It was always exactly right according to the day's broadcast.

After the Walkathon had been on the air for a month, I went, out of curiosity, to see it myself. It was a little frightening at first to see those zombies ambling around the old skating rink floor, chewing gum and regarding the audience with dull, apathetic eyes. From time to time they were requested to dance, whereupon each male would clutch his female partner and shuffle awkwardly in small circles for a few minutes.

As I remember, they walked for eleven minutes, then a bell sounded, and they threw themselves on cots and slept in broad sight of the audience for two minutes. At another bell they arose groggily, partners attempting to waken each

other, and tried to get back on the floor in their thirty-second allotment. The audience hung on their every motion, and Bob McRoberts, as he translated their actions into words, was stung to his first real animation.

All this, I thought, for a thousand-dollar prize! Why did they do it? What did people want to watch it for? Why did they throw money on the floor to these depraved persons, and cry and shout encouragement as one of the contestants stumbled? There must be some fascination, however, for the house was packed and people stood in the aisles.

And then it began to get me, too. I began to pick out individuals on the floor. I found myself having favorites. I heard my own voice cheering. I was, I was sure, losing my mind, and it was high time I got out of there.

As I pushed through the fringe of people clustered around the soft-drink stand in the foyer, I had a good view of the box office, and standing before it was a familiar figure.

It was Barry Alden. His hat was off and upside down on the counter before him. Into it the cashier was counting money, dollar bills, fifty-cent pieces, nickels and dimes. I saw him nod finally that it was all there and leave. When I was sure he was gone, I made my own way to the car.

Barry was making the eleven o'clock spot pay off, but it seemed to me a hard way to do it.

CHAPTER 9

"It ought to be the responsibility of a radio station to operate in the public good," said Barry pompously.

"It's the heat," I reminded him. "You'll feel all right when the weather cools off."

"I don't think it'll ever cool off," sighed Sammy, the third member of our program-planning committee. Then he broke into hysterical laughter.

"What now?" asked Barry weakly, tugging at his collar. There was no question that it was hot everywhere, and the hottest spots of all were the KUKU studios. Air conditioning was unheard of, and we dared not open the windows lest street noises interrupt our programs. Even our wall hangings seemed to perspire.

"I was thinking about Abrams," said Sammy as soon as he was able to speak. Abrams was the announcer who had succeeded Barry on the midnight all-request program. "Last night he came in to do his show, and because it was so late and all, he didn't expect anybody to be around, so he stripped down to his shorts. And the first thing he knows, he gets a call to come out of the booth, and who do you suppose is standing there? A couple of old dames with lorgnettes that have decided it's too hot to sleep anyway, so they wander down to see a radio station. I wish you could have seen Abrams's face when he barges out of the booth and sees them. Nothing on but his shorts, see? No shoes, no socks—"

It was swelteringly hot during the midnight all-request show, and Abrams had stripped down to his shorts

"And who called Abrams out of the booth in the first place?" demanded Barry wrathfully.

"Well, it wasn't as if he didn't have on his shorts," said Sammy reproachfully.

"Someday you'll go too far, Sammy," Barry told him, but it was too hot to stay mad. After a moment he made himself return to the reason for our conference. "What we need is a program that will do somebody good."

"All our programs do somebody good," I defended.

"I mean save lives. Like that Louisville station that broadcast when the Ohio flooded and helped evacuate refugees."

"There's always the Columbia," suggested Sammy helpfully. "To say nothing of the Willamette."

"They aren't going to flood that much," I reminded him. "They never have. Why should they start now?"

"If they do, we'll be in there pitching," retorted Barry stanchly. "But we can't wait for that. We're going to have to cook up some programs for the public good. Sleep on it, Woodie. You're the continuity writer. It's your problem."

"Somebody else has to think, too," I objected.

"We'll all think," agreed Barry.

Now that we were thinking about it, we suddenly realized that some of our efforts were in the public good. We had accepted them as part of our job before. Now that we realized that people might actually be benefiting from our programs, it came as a satisfying shock.

For instance, the last two minutes before midnight each evening were devoted to reading a list of missing persons, delivered to us in late afternoon by a blue-shirted member of the police force. We thought little about these routine readings other than that they kept us on the good side of the gendarmes, until one day we received by post a box of apples, a sack of walnuts, and a dressed turkey which

had lingered too long in transit to be acceptable to polite society.

The note which accompanied them expressed the gratification of some family in the Willamette Valley whose teen-age son had run away from home. Hearing his name on our midnight roundup, he concluded all was forgiven and that his folks were worried about him. They gave us all the credit for his return, and for several weeks after that the boys put real feeling into their missing persons lists.

Barry said that was what he wanted. We were operating in the public good. He was also excited the day Vi unsuspectingly answered the phone on her desk and was greeted by a frenzied voice on the other end calling from the Riverside Hospital.

"We have a patient who is dying of a rare tropical disease, and unless we can find someone who has had and recovered from the same disease, he can't last through the day. An immediate transfusion is necessary to save his life."

"'What's the name of the disease?" demanded Vi, and after a second she said, "You'd better spell it. We'll do what we can."

Barry was out of the office and no one knew where to find him. Today, no one under the Vice-president in charge of Spot Announcements would dare issue such an unsanctioned plea, but Vi typed it up and ran into the studio with it.

"You'd better give it every quarter hour," she advised. "The chance of anybody's having had a disease like this around here is just about as rare as an invitation to the Last Supper."

"We're taking net from Seattle," agreed McRoberts, "but I'll keep cutting in."

After the first announcement our phones were tied up, and we later discovered the hospital lines were likewise

flooded. I was in on it by this time, and rewrote the spot, advising anyone who had had such a disease to waste no time telephoning first, but to go straight to the hospital.

As usual the majority of our listeners disregarded this advice, and it was several hours later before business slacked off and the hospital got through to us. A man who had actually recovered from this peculiar malady had responded to the call and the patient was a little better. More than that, exactly 183 individuals who had recovered from some unrelated condition which they felt would prove as acceptable had presented themselves for transfusions. They were more than a little incensed that the hospital had no facilities for taking and storing their blood.

We were thoughtful and a little amazed at the power of radio.

Carl Greenleaf, one of our vocalists, once sang a number on his afternoon program which was picked up by an amnesia victim. It struck the right note to flick his lagging memory, and he returned to his tear-drenched wife in their vine-covered cottage. Again we preened ourselves with the wonder of it all.

Sammy thought he had really made his contribution the day he saved someone's wedding from collapse. The bride's mother frantically telephoned the station to say that the wedding party was waiting to go down the aisle and the organist hadn't showed up. Could we send someone to the church in a hurry?

Our boys were going on the air in five minutes, so that was impossible, but Sammy obligingly offered to incorporate the wedding march on the program they were about to broadcast. The wedding party rushed out for a radio, plugged it in at the church, and Sammy hastily concluded a selection so he could begin "Lohengrin" on the split second.

We were rewarded with half a wedding cake for this

service. The only trouble was that Sammy and the members of the Early Bird program discussed the incident so much on the air that we were bombarded with requests to broadcast marches for other weddings. Sammy tried to be obliging, but Barry finally put a stop to it. We couldn't have "Lohengrin" popping up in the middle of every program all day long, he insisted; people would get tired of it. There was such a thing as giving the public too much for its own good.

The two attempts we made to originate programs for the public good were not so successful as those which fell into our laps. One was a service wherein we read the morning newspaper to our listeners, thereby saving them the trouble; the other was a quiz show, a rarity in those days, on which worthy contestants might win prizes they were not able to afford for themselves.

Prizes, of course, could be anything, for in the early thirties few of us could afford anything beyond the barest necessities. For free plugs on the air, restaurants, haberdasheries, and furniture stores donated prizes which we awarded to those who answered correctly. The questions, of course, were so simple that a moron could have figured out the right answer, and if the contestant was lower in intelligence than that, our announcer put the right words in his mouth.

The public was invited to be present for this program, and the acceptance was in a way for which we were hardly prepared. It went on at eight at night, but by three in the afternoon they began arriving. We wouldn't admit them to the studio itself before seven, but that didn't stop them. They swarmed in our lobby like bees hiving in a new tree. When so many were inside that it was impossible to open the door, they waited in the hallway outside. Most of them brought lunches in paper bags, and the crumbs and orange peels were terrific. The elevator refused to make stops on

the second floor, and by six o'clock the queue was packed solid up the stairway and into the street. They elbowed and shoved, glared and muttered. It was every man for himself, and with but a single thought—get something for nothing.

The program was entitled Grab Bag, and slips of paper on which were written the prizes and the establishments furnishing them were dropped in a goldfish bowl. It was the only fair way, we had decided, to let the contestants draw for themselves. We had the musical organization known as the Early Birds lined up for talent, and in addition to the prize the contestant was permitted to ask any artist to render any number he cared to hear. There was a special prize if he could choose a number someone in the orchestra couldn't play, but we felt pretty safe on that score. No one had stopped the Early Birds yet.

Our public came from every walk of life, and there should have been a prize to suit every contestant, but it never worked out that way. All we had to do was let some old bum from First and Burnside near the fish bowl, and he'd draw a dinner for two in Portland's swankiest restaurant. A tottering Civil War veteran with a bad heart was a cinch to draw a dollar's worth of rides on the roller coaster, and a dignified dowager would invariably turn up with a slip good for six shaves and a haircut.

This, Barry pointed out, added to the merriment of the crowd and consequently to the popularity of the program, so although the fire marshal threatened and rumbled, the Grab Bag went blithely on. The end of this venture for the public good was brought about by a little child.

She was about four years old, and had arrived early with her mother. They were both expensively dressed, and we couldn't understand how any parent would submit such a small girl to the long and grueling wait. There was no understanding the public, we agreed again, but finally Vi couldn't stand it and, disobeying rules, she whisked the child

and her mother into the studio where they sat alone on the front row for another couple of hours.

Bruce was the emcee that evening, and we'd all told him the little girl must be a contestant. "But make the question easy," we reminded. "A nursery rhyme or something like that."

"I'll just ask her her own name," he decided, relying on past experience. "She can certainly answer that."

Early in the program he called on her, and we saw what he meant.

"Patsy," she whispered in a wee little voice, which was nevertheless picked up and amplified by the microphone.

"Patsy what?" he prompted.

She shook her head. Clearly she didn't know what her last name was.

"Well, what's your daddy's name?" asked Bruce in the tolerant Uncle Wiggly voice announcers still use for interviewing small children. At this Patsy came alive.

"I don't have a daddy," she confessed. "But Mamma has a boy friend, and his name is Horace Hottenfetter."

Mr. Hottenfetter, a married man with several children, called immediately, and his call was followed by one from his lawyer. We were already getting protests from irate prize-givers, and the fire marshal was getting nastier. We took the Grab Bag off the air.

The newspaper reading sessions fell apart for another reason. It had been decided that those of us who rarely appeared before the microphone were to be the artists who would conduct these little gems. That meant Vi, Miss Tolman, three salesmen, and me.

This decision was reached for two reasons: one, it gave our listeners new and unfamiliar voices; and two, although we did not mention this, it gave us behind-the-scene workers a crack at the loot sent in to favorites on the air.

George McPherson, one of the salesmen who had been

vainly trying to get on the air for years, was the only one openly jubilant.

"I'll never make it by six-thirty, Barry," I protested.

"You'll make it."

"Even if I get here, I can't say a word before breakfast," argued Vi. "All I can do before I have my coffee is croak. And if I have to be here by six-thirty, there'll be no time to eat first."

"That's right," agreed Harry Fosdyke, another of our salesmen. "I'm no good myself until I've had coffee."

"I have coffee at five o'clock each morning," announced Frank Beeman, the third member of the sales force. "But by six-thirty I'm ready to eat again."

"Dammit all," roared Barry. "I'll give you coffee, then. I'll give you a whole damn breakfast."

"The restaurant's not open that early," objected Sammy, who was not to be on the program but who was kibitzing as usual. "When we get off the Early Birds, it's just barely starting up. We always have to wait for their coffee to boil."

"Who said anything about the restaurant?" yelled Barry recklessly. "We've got to read the papers early, or people will read them for themselves. We want to save them the trouble. We'll cook our own breakfast."

"Where?" we demanded in one voice.

"Right here. We'll get an electric plate. We'll cook coffee and bacon and eggs and toast and whatever it is you have to have to get through the day. We'll eat and discuss the news. A breakfast club program."

"The sound effects of bacon and eggs frying will be terrific," said George thoughtfully. "We can make a real production out of this. We can pick up the sounds of coffee perking, too. And maybe toast—"

"There's no sound effect of toast," Harry reminded him.

"There is when it's done crisp," retorted George triumphantly, "and somebody's eating it."

"Maybe you've got something," agreed Barry, suddenly carried away with the idea. "A family breakfast club. The KUKU family! Miss Tolman, will you see about ordering some electric plates?"

"And eggs," added Frank Beeman. "I can eat a half dozen myself."

We assembled on the appointed day at the unheard of hour of 6:15 A.M. Only Teddy Smythe and Perce Green, the technician, were there, having opened up fifteen minutes before, and the studio looked large and empty and strange. Our groceries were stacked up beside the microphone, and our two electric plates grinned up with their new white coils.

"Who's going to cook?" asked someone.

"We'll draw straws," Barry decided. "The job should be rotated, of course." When I drew the short straw, he glared at me as though I had done it on purpose.

"If you burn that bacon—" he began.

"I won't," I promised quickly. "You haven't been down to see lately, but I'm getting lots better."

"Just the same, you keep your mind on your cooking today, and don't try to read anything from the paper," he decided. "Maybe we'd better glance through it and decide what we're going to discuss."

"And lose all the spark of spontaneity!" cried George in horror. "I've been going over this pretty carefully in my mind, and I've got a good routine worked out. It'll be just like it might be in any home. The program starts when I go out to get the paper on the front step, see? Then I bring it in, and you each ask for your favorite section. Everybody's got a favorite section. Vi, here, might ask for the women's page, and—"

"I hate the women's page," said Vi flatly. "I'll take the funnies."

"All right. Miss Tolman, then, will ask for the women's page—"

"I generally read the financial section first," she objected gently but with authority.

"All right. Woodie, then—"

"I'm cooking," I reminded him.

"Well, we don't have to have the women's page every day," he decided. "But you get the idea. Everybody has his favorite section and asks for it. Then he reads the others tidbits from that section, and we discuss them."

"It might work," agreed Barry. "Only we've got to make sure there's no dead air. We got to keep going."

"When do I start frying eggs?" I wanted to know.

"Just as soon as Teddy puts us on the air," said Barry. "We'll pick up the sound of cracking egg shells, too."

We had wasted so much time that Teddy gave the signal just then. The warning light flashed, and we heard his voice announcing the new service for our listeners. From now on they would not have to strain their eyes reading the papers. We would do it for them. Authorities would discuss important items and make suitable comments. There would be experts on both sides of each question, and our listeners could draw their own conclusions from these unbiased findings. It was another great undertaking for the public good and in the public interest by KUKU, the Friendliest Spot on the Dial.

"Well, well, well," said Barry automatically, for everyone looked at him when the second light flashed. "Here we are. Yes, here we are, ready to read the paper over the breakfast table."

"I'll get it," offered George, mugging into the microphone. "Just heard the paper boy on the front porch."

There was an awkward pause as he realistically dashed

toward the studio door, but he tripped over a cable and everyone tittered. I broke an egg into the frying pan, then remembered I hadn't greased it, and dumped some butter in on top.

"Here we are," shrieked George, coming back. "Who wants what?"

"I'll take the funnies," cried Vi.

"I'll have the financial page," said Miss Tolman firmly.

"Give me the main news section," ordered Barry.

"I like sports," said Harry Fosdyke.

"Editorials," grunted Frank Beeman. "Not that those guys ever know what they're talking about."

Gaily and with much ostentation, George parceled out the paper and found to his dismay that he himself was left with the despised women's section. However, he made a brave best of the situation.

"Here's a recipe for a new salad made with orange and onion slices," he announced.

"I like catchup on them better," grunted Frank.

"On oranges?"

"No, onions."

"The weather today is to be warmer," read Barry quickly. "And I see by the paper that another guy's been struck down by a hit-and-run driver."

"Where?" asked Vi, coming up from the comic page.

"Out on Terwilliger Boulevard. That street's getting to be a speedway."

"P & P has dropped again," announced Miss Tolman sadly. "In fact, everything's dropped except those that are holding their own. It gets worse and worse."

"The best way to take rust stains out of white material is with a solution of oxalic acid," reported George.

"Something's burning," sniffed Frank. "But it sure ain't these editorials."

"The toast!" I screamed. "I forgot to turn it to pop up. I'll make some more."

"Let me read you this article," said Barry hastily. "It says prohibition has failed, and it gives statistics."

"Nobody likes statistics this early in the morning," objected Frank gruffly. "Always skip them myself."

"Not all statistics," objected Harry Fosdyke. "Let me read you the scores of the Lucky Beavers. Now in 1929, they—"

"I'm going to read you this prohibition article," said Barry firmly, but just then the eggs were done and I said so.

There was a scramble for plates and silverware, and the microphone was left to itself. Barry remembered it after a second. His little group of newspaper critics were busily stowing away their free breakfasts. Hastily he motioned to Teddy Smythe in the control room to put on a record. It tolled the knell for the passing of this service for the public good.

In 1930 Congress appropriated $300,000 to complete the restitution of "Old Ironsides," first begun by the nickels and dimes of American school children, and the act had repercussions at KUKU. Barry was visited one day by the principals of three of Portland's fifty-odd grammar schools.

"This is the new radio committee from the schools," he introduced gravely after I had answered his summons to join them. "They've just come up with what sounds like a pretty good idea. I want to know what you think about it."

"Allow me to explain," interrupted the individual I took to be the chairman of the new committee. "Since this is the centennial of 'Old Ironsides' ' retirement from duty, we feel it should have proper commemoration. We feel that a series of radio broadcasts dramatizing the various battles in which the glorious frigate was engaged would have real value."

"It would take some research," I objected feebly.

"Oh, you can squeeze it in," Barry told me airily. "Besides, this will be a snap. You'll be writing for kids."

"Kids?"

"What we had in mind," continued the chairman, "was taking these broadcasts in the classroom. Of course not every school will fall in with the idea. There is even some discussion of Mr. Walter Damrosch, who has programs on the radio for youngsters, and what we have in mind will be even more severely criticized. Music is one thing. History is another. But although this is a revolutionary way to teach history, there are enough broad-minded principals among us so that we are anxious to give it a trial."

"Education by radio," mused Barry. "It's screwy, but it might work. Anyway, the little devils would listen. Be sure to put in plenty of blood and thunder and walking of planks and drawing and quartering."

"You're thinking of Captain Kidd," I reminded him witheringly. "This is the frigate *Constitution*."

"Same thing," he nodded. "Yes, gentlemen. KUKU will be glad to cooperate. But how about sets? Have you radio sets in your schools?"

"Not all schools have radio sets," admitted the chairman reluctantly. "At my school we have a fine new radio in the auditorium. And since our auditorium will accommodate three hundred persons, we can assure you of a good audience there."

"We don't have a radio, but I plan to bring my own from home," advised another of the committee quickly. "I think you will find cooperation all along the way. Necessity is the mother of invention, you know."

"It's a deal then," agreed Barry, concluding the interview. "You supply the audience. We'll supply the program. Education by radio! You know, the more I hear that, the more I like it."

For nine or ten weeks, as many actual battles in which the frigate *Constitution* had engaged, we beamed broadcasts to the schools. There was no attempt to write for a definite age level, for at that time children were children so far as I was concerned. Nor did we hear criticism from the teachers on that score.

The youngsters were marched in, first through eighth grades, until the school auditorium was filled. They joined in a flag salute, sat down, and were shushed to quiet as the radio was tuned in. Over the strains of "Anchors Aweigh" —perhaps not quite in keeping with the period, but certainly nautical enough for anyone's taste—Bruce's voice rolled into our regular introduction.

"Radio Station KUKU takes pleasure in presenting to the boys and girls of our Portland public schools, the stories of the noble frigate *Constitution!*" (Loud fanfare from the brass section) "No ship more justly deserves the homage and affection of our people than does this proud and invincible champion of our liberty and our rights as a nation—'Old Ironsides'!" (Another fanfare) "On her decks, which ran red with blood, fierce privateers from the French settlements of the West Indies clashed swords with American seamen!" (Loud sounds of sword play, created in the studio by battering two metal music stands together) "For two long years the forts at Tripoli and the Barbary states knew bombardment from her forty-four deadly guns!" (Here his voice was momentarily drowned by the roar of cannon, our soundman rolling shot in an inflated basketball bladder.) "All through the war of 1812 she won victory after victory from the British forces!" (More cannon) "Battle-scarred but invincible, withstanding hostile shell and fury of storm—" (Loud cracking of guns, cries of men, and the wind machine turned on full blast drowned out his voice for a second, then subsided.)—"she has been fittingly preserved as a monument to her glorious past, a symbol to the heroism

which built our nation!" (Another fanfare, and the band swung briefly into a few bars of "Stars and Stripes Forever.") Only then were we ready to get down to business and into the program itself.

Those children who were sitting close enough to the set could, if they listened intently, hear above the usual noises of squeaking seats, wriggling bodies, and shuffling feet. But whether they heard or not, they sat for the fifteen minutes once each week, then, at a signal, rose and filed back to their individual classrooms. There was no preliminary, no follow-up; it was every child for himself.

We discovered after the first two scripts that there was a disturbing similarity about sea battles, so I took Barry's advice and improved on history. The cast enjoyed working on these far-from-factual episodes, and the youngsters who were close enough to the radio enjoyed hearing them. Nobody learned anything, but a good time was had by all on our educational radio programs.

The tallest waving feather in our cap for the public good was the part we played in apprehending a criminal.

The whole state had been shocked by the kidnaping and eventual slaying of a ten-year-old girl, and the criminal, a man named Rickles, was still at large. The newspapers carried banners about the case, and every time someone thought he saw Rickles, an extra appeared on the street.

One morning Barry had a call from the chief of police, and when he came out of his office he made for my desk.

"Rickles has been sighted crossing the Burnside Bridge," he said tersely. "He's in a dark-blue Hudson sedan, and supposed to be heading out the Columbia River Highway. Write a spot telling all police officers to be on the lookout and to approach with caution. He's armed and desperate."

"The Burnside Bridge is a long way from the Columbia River Highway," I began logically. "How do they know he's—"

"Just write what I told you," he snapped, and I was so surprised at his tone that I stopped arguing.

We started broadcasting our message on the quarter hour and ran it all morning. By midafternoon we were still at it. Finally Barry could stand the suspense no longer, and he called police headquarters for information.

"Oh, sure," said the chief in surprise. "Are you folks still broadcasting that warning? You better stop, because we picked Rickles up a couple of hours ago."

"How? Where?"

"On the highway. A couple of the state boys did it. They'd stopped in a restaurant in Hood River for coffee and heard the announcement on the radio. They jumped in their car, started down the highway, and met Rickles coming up. Didn't have a bit of trouble. There's an extra on the street now. You better go out and buy yourself a paper. It tells all about the capture."

"You mean the restaurant owner had KUKU on his set? That's what they heard?"

"He must have had," agreed the chief in surprise. "I didn't call anybody else. Didn't have much faith in it to tell you the truth, but I figured we might as well try everything."

CHAPTER 10

"I wonder if you could help me," said the befuddled voice on the other end of the phone. "Last Wednesday—no, it was Thursday, I think—no, it was Wednesday, because I'd just baked that chocolate cake. Yes, last Wednesday, I happened to tune in on a station just as they were telling about a recipe, and I think they said you could send in for it, and I wonder if you could tell me what the recipe was for, and where I send, and whether there has to be a box top or anything?"

I had stopped by Vi Weathering's desk, and she was holding out the receiver so I could hear the voice which shattered eardrums. Vi had the toughest job in the whole station, and the most patience.

"Was it this station to which you were listening?" she began soothingly, running down our schedule with one finger as she searched for programs which might possibly have contained a recipe reference.

"Well, I'm not sure. No, I don't believe it was. Because right after that the Friendly Hour came on, and you don't have that program, do you?"

"No. That's not our program. If you'll call—"

"But it will keep me from making another telephone call if you'll just tell me now. I'm using a neighbor's phone, and I hate to bother her too much. Besides, I'm terribly busy this morning. And it may be a recipe I want. I collect them, you know."

Vi was in for a long discussion, so I went back to my desk, thanking my good fortune again that I wasn't a radio hostess. It meant that you were expected to be an authority on everything from mah-jongg to the date of the last eclipse of the sun.

It would have been hard to find a more perfect hostess than Vi. She was pretty and blond, chic and gay. Her head was filled with bright remarks, not always original but unfailingly apt. She was as decorative as she was efficient, too, and it was as good as watching a style show to see her come to work each morning. Her lavish wardrobe included two fur coats, one mink and one summer ermine, and two diamond rings, but it was a tribute to her personality that not one girl in the office, nor even one of the office wives, envied Vi this unrivaled and unexplained mark of elegance. We were just glad that she could look so well.

As if this weren't enough in itself, Vi went out of her way to be helpful, too. To answer queries like the one she had just taken, Vi tried to keep on her desk the schedules of other local stations besides our own, and when she could get them, a list of their current give-aways. She also clipped from the newspaper each morning the day's showing at each movie house in town, because she could never tell when a voice on the phone would demand brusquely, "Say, girlie, what's playing at the Bijou?"

We had in the continuity department an ancient copy of an inferior encyclopedia, and Vi moved it to her desk because she needed it more than I. On one occasion a listener asked her to locate by province a small town somewhere in China, and someone was always demanding on a moment's notice the birth date of some obscure figure in history.

A regular chore, and one which she executed many times a day, was reading not only our own but the schedules of other local stations to shut-ins. Many of these were blind listeners, and Vi got to know them by name, interspersing

her reading with bright little comments and personal observations on the programs.

Whenever a fire siren sounded anywhere in town, Vi was sure to get a call from some citizen who had heard the engines pass by and wanted to know where they were going. These questions were impossible to answer, although Vi did her best to bribe one of the firemen to phone her whenever an alarm went out. It seemed that there were too many fire stations and too many alarms, and cooperation of this kind was impossible.

She was always sure of at least one good laugh a day, such as the time a listener wanted to know who sponsored the Ivory Soap program. Another insisted stoutly we were off the air, and when Vi assured her we were going full tilt and that something must be wrong with her own set, she sizzled the telephone wires with her denial. There couldn't be anything wrong with her set; she'd had it seven years, during which time it had always run perfectly. Why should anything go wrong now?

When Vi went to lunch, there was the problem of filling her place at the hostess desk. Barry thought he had solved this by issuing an order that the "girls" in the office should take turns relieving her. The "girls" meant Miss Tolman, Sylvia, and me. Miss Tolman had patience, Sylvia was naturally sweet, but I had none of the qualities which would have recommended me for such a job.

I struggled through the first assignment because Barry gave orders so rarely that when he did everyone tried to please him. It was a particularly trying noon hour. We had a new program and one of which our public apparently disapproved. I meekly took complaint after complaint until my patience snapped.

"If you don't like it," I barked into the telephone, "why don't you shut off your radio or dial another station? Nobody's making you listen."

There was a horrified gasp, a click at the other end, and I hung up smugly, pleased that I had settled her hash.

I'd settled it all right. Later that afternoon Barry came around and told me that I'd insulted the wife of our biggest advertiser. The account was in jeopardy for some time after that, with the sponsor insisting that the program was pulling and his wife arguing that no station with such rude employees was qualified to carry it.

Barry never gave an inch, and we kept the account. He was the only manager under whom I have ever worked who took the side of his employees against all comers, and all he ever said about the incident was to tell me to stay off the phones. The announcers relieved Vi when it came my turn on the noon shift.

Vi had become an involuntary mother confessor for certain of our regular visitors, and we had many of these. She knew them by name, and most of them poured their personal problems into her ear.

One day shortly before the incident which brought about my release from hostess duty, I was taking a noon shift at Vi's desk when in wandered a plump little woman perspiring beneath a poppy-wreathed hat. I recognized the hat as one I had seen around the station several times, although the lady under it was the nondescript variety who would be lost in a crowd of three. She advanced to the desk and looked at me almost hostilely.

"Where's Miss Weathering?" she demanded.

"She's at lunch right now," I told her. "She should be back in an hour. Is there any message I might take?"

"No," sighed the woman. "No, I guess not. I just wanted to say good-by. I'd have come in before, but there wasn't time with the packing and all. My bus leaves in an hour."

"Oh, I'm sorry," I told her. "Miss Weathering will be sorry to have missed you, I'm sure. If you'll tell me your name—"

"Ethel Wilkins," she said mournfully. "Ethel Dalton, that was."

I duly wrote both names on a pad, and as Ethel Dalton Wilkins lingered, I felt in duty bound, to Vi, to make further conversation.

"Are you going far?"

"To Independence." Independence was perhaps fifty miles away. "I'm going to see the grave. Make sure it's well cared for."

There seemed to be no appropriate comment for such a dolorous errand, so I made none. It wasn't necessary; Ethel continued anyway.

"Frank was a good husband. A wonderful husband. Frank Dalton, that is. Of course, Willis is a good husband, too. I married Willis after Frank was killed, and Willis is good. He understands how I feel about Frank. Sometimes when I hear a certain piece on the radio, I just break right down crying, and Willis he comes and pats my hand and says, 'That's all right, Ethel.' He understands I'm thinking about Frank. He's a good husband."

I agreed that Willis must indeed be a stalwart character.

"He died in a car accident," Ethel continued. "Turned clear over. I was with him. He didn't know what hit him, but I knew. It was the steering wheel. I was under the car and when they came to get me out, the sheriff said, 'Roll her over easy, boys. The little woman has no one to care for her now. She's all alone.' " She paused to wipe a tear.

"It's a good thing you have Willis," I said desperately.

"Yes," she agreed. "Willis is sweet. And he understands about Frank. Frank was sweet, too. That's why I have to go down every so often and care for the grave. You tell Miss Weathering where I went. She's always been so interested."

"I'm sure she is," I agreed fervently. "I'll give her your message."

"Thank you," said Ethel Dalton Wilkins and turned to

go. Then, possibly feeling she had placed too great an obligation upon me, she turned with a sad smile. "If you forget, it's all right. I'll be in to tell her all about it when I get back next week."

I knew then that if Vi was a receptionist by profession, she was an angel by nature.

Those were the heydays of loot for those who appeared before the microphone. Listeners adopted artists and announcers they heard over the air as members of their families, and hardly a day went by without the mailman's delivering a box containing cakes, homemade cookies, or fried chicken sufficient for the whole staff. We all shared in the take, and it cut down considerably on lunch money.

On our Early Birds program, for instance, at seven-thirty in the morning, there was always a great deal of ad-libbing around the script, and any member of the orchestra who felt called upon to make an impromptu remark did so. Since our musicians were forced into this early rising by their profession and came without breakfast, their comments were often about food.

"My, I'm hungry," Ray Turner, one of the sax players, might expostulate without warning. "I'm so hungry I could eat a skunk."

"Not me," Sammy would return brightly. "I'd rather have a good piece of ham and some fresh eggs."

Nine times out of ten the next day's delivery would bring Sammy a whole ham and a dozen ranch eggs from some friendly listener, while Ray would find himself the bewildered new owner of somebody's de-scented pet skunk.

One of the boys in the orchestra, as spring came on, nostalgically wished himself fishing on the banks of the Mississippi. "Oh, if I could just put my toes in that old Mississippi mud again and see the tail of one of them old grandfathers of all catfish go slithering by!"

This was a mistake, for several weeks later he received

in the mail a glass jar filled with mud, and in the same odoriferous and moldy package, the tail severed from the body of a Mississippi catfish.

Unlike the anonymous members of today's orchestras, each of our players was known by name, and a lot of this was due to the horseplay which went into many of our programs.

Sammy had discovered that certain of his orchestra members had singing voices, and by dint of flattery, threats, and the promise of a little extra in the weekly pay check, he had managed to combine some of them into a fair vocal quartet. This was a great addition to an otherwise straight orchestral program.

It might have been jealousy on the part of the nonsinging members of the band, but no sooner did the quartet go into a song than the rest formed a solid front to break it up. Sometimes this was done by silent gestures and facial contortions. Other times they went so far as to produce props, such as clothespins for noses, ear plugs, false whiskers, and so on.

Invariably this proved too much for the decorum of the singers. One by one they would break down, until only Dead-Pan Turner was left singing. Fortunately he was the tenor and carried the lead. Far from feeling dismay at this breaking down of the show, our listeners entered the conspiracy to help make Dead-Pan laugh. They sent in suggestions and effects to be used for this purpose, everything from false teeth to be clacked in front of his face to dead fish to be dangled before him. The Early Birds loved it, although the program was usually a shambles.

Barry stalked in occasionally with the threat of docking pay if they didn't stop clowning, but they knew he didn't mean it. So long as they kept on broadcasting and so long

as the listeners liked it, Barry would take no actual steps. Horsing around in a studio was a healthy sign.

Probably the biggest take of all at KUKU was made by Tex Hoxie, one of the few authentic singing cowboys I've ever met in radio. Tex sang the old songs of the Chisholm Trail legitimately because that's where he'd learned them. He and his guitar had been lured from some rodeo or ranch by a barnstorming vaudeville troupe, and he'd drifted into radio when the outfit went broke on the road. Now he wanted to go home, but somehow he could never save the money.

He used to take his audience into his confidence, for he announced his own numbers, and one day it paid off. Vi took the call during the broadcast, and Tex called the hotel and room number listed on the paper when he signed off.

"It's a guy from Texas," he told Vi wistfully as he hung up the phone. "He heard the show and he wants to talk to me. I don't know if I better go down to the hotel or not."

"Why not, Tex?"

"Well, maybe it might make me lonesomer 'n ever talking to somebody from home," he admitted. "But I guess I might as well go."

When he returned a few hours later, his eyes were shining and he was bursting all his shirt seams.

"I'm goin' home!" he shouted. "That fellow—awful nice guy—is in town for a convention. And he heard me sing, and it made him homesick for Texas, too. He can't go home himself, on account of he's workin' for some syndicate or somethin', so he's sendin' me back there to manage his dude ranch. He give me a two-year contract an' is supplyin' a car so I can get there."

We thought he was out of his mind, and Barry was reluctant to accept his resignation, but the next day a brand

new coupé rolled up in front of the building. The driver came in, asked for Tex, and delivered the papers to the car made out in his name. A stranger who had heard him sing once was waving a wand to send Tex home.

Sometimes our public listened long and earnestly and decided that the results of their own efforts would contribute to our program structure. When that happened, they either called or came to see us. One of these was the Weather Prophet.

"I've been listening to the weather reports that you give at six o'clock and at noon, and they're nearly always wrong," the prophet told Vi earnestly. He stood by her desk, hat in hand, apologetic but determined to do his duty.

"We get them from the weather bureau, sir," she told him gently. "We just broadcast what they give out."

"I know, but you shouldn't go by what those fellows say," objected the prophet mildly. "You ought to ask me. You see, I make the weather."

Barry came out of his office to join Vi and her caller. Drunks who wandered into radio stations were common occurrences, and Barry probably thought his services as a bouncer would be required, but this man was not drunk. He was a small, quiet-appearing individual with piercing eyes, modestly garbed in a blue suit and a wash tie.

"Maybe I can help you," Barry began a little belligerently. "I'm the station manager."

"Oh, no. It's you who need to be helped," denied the little man quickly. "I've been noticing that your weather predictions are generally wrong. It isn't your fault, of course, because you didn't know that I alone am responsible for the weather. Few people do know it."

"What do you mean you're responsible for the weather?"

"I just am," admitted the prophet patiently. "I've tested myself quite thoroughly. You see, I could hardly believe it myself at first, but it's so. It's what I eat."

"What you eat?" gasped Barry, and Vi groaned as the phone called for her attention.

"Yes. You see, for some time I've been noticing that what I eat makes a difference in the weather. And the amount of exercise that I do has a similar effect," explained the prophet. "As I say, I cannot explain why I have been chosen to manifest this phenomenon. I just know that I have."

"You mean that on hot days you eat cold food and on cold days you eat hot food?" asked Barry as patiently as he could.

"No, no, no," denied the man quickly. "That's what the average person would choose in the way of diet. This is something quite different. It's what I eat now which has an effect on the weather later in the day. Do you see?"

"No," said Barry bluntly.

"If I eat starchy foods, potatoes or rice, in great quantities, the day is sure to be cloudy, with much precipitation."

"Like today," nodded Barry knowingly, looking out the window. The sky was solid with gray clouds and a light mist hung in the air.

"That's what I had for breakfast," agreed the prophet. "Hot cakes. Lots of hot cakes. They made it rain. Now, on the other hand, if I don't eat much—if I have something light, like fruit, or do without food entirely, the sun will shine. It will even be hot."

"Is that so?" said Barry, moving a step back and regarding our caller cautiously.

"So I wondered if perhaps you wouldn't like to have me check with you each morning as to what I had for breakfast. Then you could make your morning weather prediction in all accuracy. I could do the same at lunch and at dinnertime. Since this gift has been given to me, I feel it is my duty to share it with the world."

"Maybe you shouldn't be too hasty," urged Barry.

"And of course I shall notify you if my actions between

meals indicate a change in weather," interrupted the prophet. "If I do any great amount of exercise on a cloudy day, the weather will clear. If, on the other hand, I just lie around doing nothing in hot weather and eat quantities of food, we might be in for a thunderstorm. I would notify you in time for storm warnings."

"How about a little sample?" demanded Barry, deciding the prophet was harmless and getting into the spirit of the thing. "It's been raining for a week straight, and I'm a little fed up with it."

"I'll be glad to change the weather for you," agreed the prophet promptly removing his coat. "How many floors are there in this building?"

"Twelve."

"If you will show me the stairs, I will run up to the top and down again. Running up and down stairs is hard exercise."

"The stairs are to your left behind the elevator," said Barry settling himself comfortably on the davenport to wait. "But I warn you that this is only the second floor."

The prophet tucked in his shoestrings, then raced out of the studio as fast as he could go. We saw him disappear behind the elevators and heard the stairway door slam.

"Do you suppose he'll run all the way up to the top floor and back down?" demanded Vi.

"Oh, sure," agreed Barry. "He's a crackpot."

Even at a dead run it takes some time to climb eleven stories and descend. The prophet was red and perspiring and almost out of breath as he returned.

"I am sorry to have to inform you," he said, panting as he retrieved his coat, "that while I was running the voices spoke to me. I cannot share this gift of the weather with the world. It is for me alone."

"That's all right, bub," agreed Barry genially. "Thanks for thinking of us, anyway."

"Yes," agreed the prophet soberly. "I should have liked to help you out each day, only they tell me it would not be right—a commercial enterprise. The gift is for me alone."

"Sure, sure," agreed Barry ushering him to the door. But as he came back into the reception room, he stopped, his eyes fastened on the outside window. The solid gray clouds of the past week had broken. The blue carpet was widening by the moment, and the sun was drawing the morning mist to the sky.

One of our most popular programs from an audience point of view was called simply and unimaginatively Songs for You. It came in midafternoon and frankly catered to housewives who, at that hour, were supposed to be sitting at home, housework completed, relaxing before time to start dinner.

Songs for You were sung by a romantic tenor named Carl Greenleaf, with piano background by Sylvia and violin obbligatos by Sammy. Carl announced his own numbers, threw in a little Eddie Guest now and then, and more or less philosophized on life and happiness and turning the other cheek and counting one's blessings.

He was a sincere individual who really believed all the things he said, and that helped him to put them over. He had a terrific radio audience, as his daily mail attested, and a faithful radio audience of a half-dozen women who always showed up to watch his broadcast.

Carl was nice to them, and the fact that he was downright handsome didn't hurt his cause, either. Many of them returned again and again, and we got to recognize certain faces as they turned into the lobby round three o'clock and stood diffidently awaiting Vi's invitation to go right into the studio. Frequently they came armed with requests, which Carl was always willing to sing, and he tried to make each dedication a little more personal than the last.

One of these program-followers was a plump little woman

named Mrs. Clarissa Milwee, and among ourselves we came to call her "Mrs. Milkweed" because the name seemed so appropriate. She was pale, plump, and a little perspiring about her own boldness in actually coming up to a studio and sitting in the same room with her air idol.

Vi ushered her in the first day, turning her over to Carl, who welcomed her with one of his firm handshakes and intimate smiles. She collapsed completely in a chair where she sat shaking with embarrassment during the whole show. As she left we thought she murmured "Thank you," but we couldn't be sure.

A week later she returned, and this time she had built herself up to a state of bravery where she was able to push a wisp of paper toward Carl.

"Would you sing it for me, please?" she whispered.

"I'd love to," he agreed heartily, and during the broadcast he made the dedication. "For the express pleasure of Clarissa Milwee, I'd like to sing 'Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland,' and I only hope I sing it as she would like to hear it sung."

There were tears in Mrs. Milkweed's eyes as she listened. The following week she returned with another dedication, also written on a scrap of paper.

"I will sing 'I Love You Truly,' " said Carl as Sylvia slid into the introduction, "for Clarissa Milwee. A beautiful song, and I'm glad she likes it as much as I do."

This time she did not weep, but her cheeks flamed, and the glance with which she inspected the circle of sighing housewives was close to triumph.

It was always on a Thursday that Mrs. Milkweed favored us with her presence, and the next week she was early. She handed her request number, written on a folded slip, to Vi to deliver to Carl and preceded him into the studio.

"Tell him it's for me," she whispered. "He'll know."

"It's that funny little fat woman," Vi tried to explain to

Carl when he came in. "You know. She comes in every week. Mrs. Milkweed."

"That's not quite her name," protested Carl. "And she can't help it if she's fat. Let's see now—Milwee, that's it. Clara—Claribel—Clarissa. Clarissa Milwee!"

He made the customary studio rounds of his coterie, shaking each by the hand and assuring her that he was more than delighted that she could come. Mrs. Milkweed's hand was shaken with the others, and he went into his regular program. At its close there were the usual congratulations all around and the women began drifting out by ones and twos. Mrs. Milkweed didn't drift, and Carl, who had suddenly remembered he was parked in a loading zone, steered her gently with one elbow.

"Carl, I want to thank you for my song," she was saying hesitantly as they reached earshot. There were people in the lobby, but for her they did not exist. Her eyes were fastened adoringly on his face. " 'Love Me and the World Is Mine'! It's a beautiful thought."

"It is indeed," agreed Carl cordially. "Now if you'll—"

"And the way you sang it," continued Mrs. Milkweed, happiness flooding her face. "Such sincerity! Such feeling! I wasn't sure until then."

"Sure of what, Mrs. Milwee?" asked Carl patiently.

"Of how you felt. No one could sing a song the way you sang 'Love Me and the World Is Mine' the way you did and not mean it. My answer is yes, Carl. There's only one thing I can do. Divorce my husband and marry you."

"Mrs. Milkweed!" gasped Carl, forgetting himself in his astonishment. "Mrs. Milkweed, you don't know what you're saying. It's just a song. You requested it yourself. It doesn't mean a thing."

"It means something to me," she insisted. "And I know it means something to you."

Vi, who had more experience in dealing with the public than any of us, decided to come to his rescue.

"Carl," she called. "Your wife just telephoned. She wants you to hurry right home and take all of your six children to the dentist."

Once in a while the good intentions of our listeners reacted in reverse.

Sammy Twohy saved his money and bought a new car. It was a souped-up job, and he figured it should do a hundred and twenty miles an hour. It didn't make quite that, but the officer who caught him on the outskirts of Forest Grove claimed he was crowding a hundred. Sammy was hailed before the local constable, but the constable was out of town for the day. There was some talk of throwing him into the bastille to wait, but Sammy talked them into letting him telephone, and Barry, emitting profanity whenever he unclenched his teeth long enough, drove out to the rescue.

It was decided to release Sammy on Barry's bond for a few days until the constable should return, whereupon Sammy was to drive back and receive his sentence. Sammy thought the whole thing was unfair, and he took his radio audience into his confidence. On the Early Birds program he and the band hashed over the whole affair in great detail, naming names and places and dates. When Sammy returned to Forest Grove, he found he was expected.

"You're Sammy Twohy?" demanded the judge. "The one who plays a fiddle on the radio?"

"Yes, sir," agreed Sammy promptly.

"You've been talking about this case on a certain program called the Early Birds?"

"I may have mentioned it," agreed Sammy, beginning to lose a little of his cockiness.

"A lot of people must listen to that program, Mr. Twohy, and I figure every last one of them's sat down and written me a letter about it."

"They have?"

"I got about five hundred letters, all asking that you be let off because you play so pretty. But I'm not going to do it, Mr. Twohy. I'm going to make an example of you. You go back and tell those listeners of yours that if the President of the United States drives through the city limits of Forest Grove at a hundred miles an hour, it'll cost him fifty dollars. Because that's what it's going to cost you."

One of our most constant listeners—and we could prove it, for she did her listening every day on one of our reception room chairs—was an individual whom we called the "Ghost of KUKU." She began her haunting every morning shortly after nine, when she would enter, smile vaguely around at everybody, and take up her vigil on the closest vacant chair to the loud-speaker.

She sat there all morning, listening and smiling to herself. At noon she might or might not leave for a short while, but at one o'clock she was back to hear the afternoon programs. She never greeted any of us beyond a shy nod, nor did she enter into any of the activities about her, but her constant presence and ineradicable smile cramped our styles.

The Ghost was obviously not a wealthy woman, and she probably had no other place to go. She wore, summer and winter, a brown print dress and a misshapen felt hat. In cold weather she had a nondescript coat which had obviously been intended for someone of more ample proportions than hers. Either she had exceedingly flat feet or her shoes made her walk that way, for she planted them firmly, decisively down, and her whole body seemed to vibrate with each tread.

"Doesn't she have a home?" demanded Bruce one day in a whisper which certainly must have carried to the corner where she was sitting.

"Sh-sh," warned Vi, but Sammy, who was standing there, shook his head and replied in a perfectly normal tone, "Haven't you heard? This is it!"

The Ghost sat her ground serenely, her ear tuned to the music.

"I'll fix her," decided Sammy suddenly. "I've had enough of this. She gives me the creeps."

He made his way to the control room, and through the open door we could see him in confidential discussion with Walt. Suddenly the music coming over the speaker faded, and instead there issued a sepulchral voice. After the first startled moment we recognized Sammy on the audition panel.

"You!" accused the voice balefully. "You, there on the davenport!"

The Ghost started in amazement.

"Stand up!" ordered the voice, and the Ghost struggled to her feet.

"Turn left," continued Sammy, and like one hypnotized she obeyed. "Now, march. Out! Out! Out!"

The heavy, shaking tread carried the startled Ghost across the reception room and through the door.

We all thought this a wonderful trick, and Sammy was so puffed up with pride that he told the story over and over. It was a long time until we saw her again, although we were aware that she had not, under the spell of Sammy's commands, walked clear out of town. Teddy Smythe reported seeing her one day on the street.

"She was handing out some of those pamphlets that tell about the world's coming to an end," he explained. "She stuck one in my hand when I went by."

We thought little more about it, quite content that she should haunt a street corner instead of us, and then came the night of the first Springtime Melodies broadcast.

Springtime Melodies was sponsored by Frances and Hilda's Dress Shoppe, and the proprietors, a Mr. Israel and a Mr. Arnstein, had brought a few of their favored friends for the debut. The program featured the strings playing frothy favorites from musical comedies and Carl Greenleaf singing romantic ballads. The whole idea was to create a mood so sentimental and romantic that every woman listening in would throw out her old unglamorous wardrobe and hie herself down to Frances and Hilda's for an irresistible new outfit.

Mr. Israel and Mr. Arnstein had approved of the program in audition, but their wives, sisters, in-laws, and a few favored friends were to be given this special studio showing. After all, they explained, women were their customers; it was right that women should pass judgment on the new program.

The Frances and Hilda party arrived in a flurry of furs and an aura of expensive perfume and were seated around the reception room.

"You can get a better idea of how they sound on the air by listening out here instead of in the studio," Barry explained. "You can see them all the time they're broadcasting through the windows."

There was much bright chattering and talking, and an expectant inhalation as Barry smilingly pointed to the clock.

"Two minutes more," he promised, "and you'll hear the greatest little quarter hour that's hit the airways for a long time. Frances and Hilda's Springtime Melodies!"

At that precise moment the elevator stopped at the second floor and began dislodging passengers. The Ghost had returned to KUKU, and she had brought her friends. Moreover, the friends had tucked under their arms or slung across their shoulders certain appurtenances not usually associated with spiritual bodies. One had a French horn,

The heavy, shaking tread carried the startled Ghost across the reception room and through the door

another a trombone, a third carried a banjo. There was an accordion among the party, and the Ghost herself carried a tambourine.

Marshaling their forces, they fell into line and marched into the reception room, in the center of which they formed themselves into a hollow square facing out. The Ghost made a complete circle of all of us, pressing into our individual hands a printed sheaf bearing the warnings that the world as such would soon cease, but that there was time to repent of our wickedness. The Frances and Hilda party looked at one another in amazement, but the rest of us were too stunned to move.

It was then that the Ghost spoke the only sentence we ever heard fall from her lips. "You folks have been so good to me, it's only brotherly that we should do something nice for you." After this she resumed her place in the square.

At the precise moment that Sammy lifted his bow for the opening introduction of "Song of Love" from *Blossom Time,* the Ghost and her friends burst forth in "Onward Christian Soldiers." In vain Barry entreated with the crusaders to leave. They smiled expansive, brotherly smiles and played the more lustily. He attempted to throw them out bodily, but they only closed their ranks, keeping him at a distance with playful jabs of trombone or horn.

"Call the police!" he yelled to Vi, when with the third springtime melody the crusaders were still going strong.

Perhaps this was a disturbing thought, for they played only one number after that. Then, led by the Ghost, they retreated in good order toward the elevator, and the music of the strings was permitted to flow sweetly unmolested through the speaker.

We looked at each other aghast. It was the closing theme.

CHAPTER 11

There wandered into the studio one fine morning a tall gentleman of affluent appearance, with a derby hat perched rakishly on the back of his blond head, and wearing the only raccoon coat I have ever seen in a mild Oregon winter. He had gigantic hands which dwarfed even the three-carat diamond on one finger, a big nose which had been broken at some time and improperly set, and a grin which gave youth to his forty-odd years.

"Good morning, Blondie," said the stranger, lifting a suggestive eyebrow at Vi. "Tell your boss that Tom Williamson is here to talk business."

"Please have a chair, Mr. Williamson," said Vi coldly. "Mr. Alden is on the telephone. I'll give him your message when he has completed his call."

We knew by the absence of lights on the telephone box atop Vi's desk that Barry was not telephoning and that Mr. Williamson was being made to suffer for the Blondie crack. He appeared, however, to bear up under the chilly treatment, and calmly bent down to inspect the Reverend Albert H. Kramer's mail which awaited his arrival.

The Reverend Kramer received a great quantity of mail each day, so much, in fact, that when she separated it from the other KUKU communications, Vi placed it in metal wastebaskets. It filled three of them this morning.

"A psalm singer, eh?" whistled Mr. Williamson in sur-

prise, after reading the addresses on several envelopes. "I thought for a minute somebody was muscling in on my racket."

"The Reverend Kramer conducts the Hour of Family Prayers over this station each morning at six," Vi volunteered.

"What's he get out of it?" demanded Mr. Williamson crudely.

Vi blushed, and we knew that she hated herself for doing so. The Reverend Kramer was to orthodox Presbyterians, Methodists, Catholics, and Baptists what Dr. Chandler was to the medical profession. He acknowledged no particular sect save his own; he presided over no church except the one he conducted each morning in our studio; and *he advertised.* There were some who even doubted that the Reverend Kramer held his ministerial title with other sanction save his own, but the doubters were not those who filled our wastebaskets daily with his mail.

Barry had been a little doubtful about the account when he took it and had even talked the matter over at length with Mr. French of the Better Business Bureau.

"A lot of that mail has money in it," he said frankly. "Kramer claims it's good-will offerings, and no different than taking up a collection in church."

"Well, I suppose it's voluntary, isn't it? He's not selling anything but his own peculiar brand of religion, is he?"

"That's all. I checked the first program to make sure. He pours it on, of course, about how he's a poor man and it costs money to carry on his work. And he practically guarantees that anybody who donates now will get extra diamonds in his crown later on."

"That is something we cannot disprove," said Mr. French regretfully. "I'm afraid it's out of our province. You are within your rights in keeping him on the air if you want him."

"Well, he's good pay," admitted Barry, considerably cheered up. "And it helps fill up the schedule."

None of us was particularly proud of the Reverend Kramer's program, however much we might envy his lucrative daily mail. Perhaps it was because we weren't fond of the Reverend Kramer himself. He was a tall, spare, baldheaded individual with excessively thick glasses which did not conceal his bright greedy eyes. He had a tight-lipped way of pursing his mouth, and an ecclesiastic stalk with his hands clasped behind his coattails. He was so assured and confident of himself, so obviously disapproving and critical of all of us that when his mail count was a letter or two short of the day before, Vi published the fact as good news.

"What's he get out of it?" repeated Mr. Williamson stubbornly, and Vi rose to her feet with dignity.

"We do not discuss our clients," she said coldly. "Mr. Alden has finished his call. I will tell him you are here."

"What's eating her?" Mr. Williamson demanded of Robert McRoberts who had taken this moment to wander out of the studio.

"Who? Vi?" asked Bob innocently. He regarded the raccoon coat and the glimpse of pink shirt and blue tie beneath with visible admiration. "I don't know. She's funny sometimes."

"I just asked her what the guy's racket was, the one who gets all this mail, and she darn near bit my head off. Maybe he's her sweetie or something."

"The Reverend Kramer?" scoffed Bob, kicking at the baskets. "You ought to see him. His audience ought to see him, too, and they wouldn't be so free with their contributions, maybe."

"Contributions?"

"Sure. All those letters have dough in them. Quarters and half dollars and dollars. Send what you can is his motto, and do the suckers send it in!"

"Well, well," said Mr. Williamson with interest.

"Mr. Alden will see you now," reported Vi coldly, and he removed his derby with the flourish usually accorded plumed hats and bowed from the waist.

Barry and Mr. Williamson were closeted for some time, and when they emerged Barry was grinning. He led the stranger around the office, introducing him to each of us in turn.

"This is the Mystic Inner Eye," he said proudly. "Privately known as Tom Williamson. He's just bought that eleven forty-five spot every night except Sunday."

"Just what kind of a program will we be doing for the Mystic Inner Eye?" I demanded suspiciously when it was my turn.

"You don't have to do a thing, sister," the Eye hastened to inform me, "except start a phonograph record at the beginning and end of the act. I do all the work myself."

"He's a soothsayer," explained Barry. "Used to do a turn in vaudeville, and now he's going to do it on the air."

"How's Mr. French going to like that?"

"What's this got to do with French?" demanded Barry angrily. "Tom here knows all the ropes. He'll be careful what he says—cagey and all that. He won't pretend to be a psychic. He'll just answer questions that people write in, and give his own opinion on their personal problems."

"That's all," agreed Mr. Williamson. "It's an old racket, but still good. Particularly when it's got a new angle like radio to dress it up."

I don't think Barry was entirely free in his own mind about the Eye, however, for I found out later that wherever he was he tuned in every one of those eleven forty-five programs himself to make sure the new angle didn't go off at a slant.

Tom's program was a masterpiece of showmanship and business. The showmanship lasted for the first minute and

a half of introduction, whereupon with a change of timing so skillfully done that it was almost impossible to detect it, he speeded up his tempo and crowded in so many messages that it made your ears pop to absorb them. The messages were business, and each one meant a dollar bill in Tom's bulging pigskin billfold.

As the program signed on the air, the announcer pounded three times on a brass gong, after which the technician slid into the "Song of India" on a phonograph record. He let that play unmolested for ten seconds of atmosphere before the announcer said stentoriously, "Ladies and gentlemen! The Mystic Inner Eye!" There was another gong, and as it blended with the music, Tom began to speak.

"I hold no claims to supernatural powers," he said somberly. "The things I am about to say to you are my own personal opinions. Mrs. T.V.W., you ask about the affections of your husband who you believe is straying away from you. In my opinion the man is worried. He has something on his mind, a problem from which he wishes to shield you. I recommend patience and understanding. Mr. B.A., you have been foolish, it is true, but time alone, which is the healer of all things, will be your salvation. Work hard and hold your head high. In time people will forget your old weakness. Miss E.H.D., I do not think this young man is worthy of you. He is toying with your affections. I recommend that you forget him."

On and on Tom tore at breakneck speed for exactly two minutes by the clock. Then the announcer would pound again on the gong, and to a little background music he came in with the first commercial.

"If you would like to obtain a copy of the horoscope as cast by the stars for persons born under your birth date, send one dollar in cash, no stamps, to the Mystic Inner Eye, care of Station KUKU. In addition, you may include one question concerning your own problems which will

be answered by the Mystic Inner Eye on this program. For additional copies of the horoscope, and, of course, extra questions, increase the amount you send correspondingly. Now back to the Mystic Inner Eye."

It was amazing to me to see how filled with questions our listeners appeared to be. On the first morning delivery following the Eye's initial midnight broadcast he received a good-sized stack of mail. He himself was not astonished.

"Order more wastebaskets, Blondie," he called confidently. "If it takes three a day for the Reverend Kramer, it's going to take six for me."

Perhaps it was unfortunate that the Reverend Kramer chose this moment to call for his own mail and overheard Tom's remark. Vi took pleasure in making the introduction.

"Reverend Kramer, Mr. Thomas Williamson, publicly known as the Mystic Inner Eye. He has been deeply interested in your audience mail."

Mr. Kramer's curious little eyes darted possessively to the overflowing baskets, and appeared relieved that they remained intact.

"Oh, yes," he murmured, but the Eye had seized him by the hand and was pumping it enthusiastically.

"Glad to meet you, Rev," he admitted. "You and me are in the same line of work, in a way of speaking, but I guess there's enough for all of us."

"The same line of work?" repeated Mr. Kramer sourly.

"Sure. You scare hell out of 'em when they first wake up, and I calm them down at night so they can get a good night's sleep. And we both take their dough for doing it."

"Mr. Williamson is a soothsayer," explained Vi smoothly. "He has a new program at eleven forty-five each evening."

"Soothsayer! Charlatan!" gasped the Reverend Kramer virtuously, and the Eye looked suddenly angry.

"I'm a soothsayer, but I ain't no charlatan," he growled.

"I conduct a good, clean business. Every bit as clean as yours, maybe more so, because I really give 'em something for their buck. Lots of folks live by them horoscopes, and we send one out to everybody that writes in."

"Really!" gasped the Reverend Kramer. With trembling hands he unfolded the canvas sack which was under his arm and dumped the contents of the wastebasket within. In thin-lipped silence he took his leave.

"Charlatan!" muttered Tom beneath his breath, gathering up his own delivery of mail. It was the only time we ever saw him upset.

From then on there was open, although undeclared, warfare between them. In their anxiety to see what the mail held they both called for it as soon as it was delivered, and frequently met twice a day. The Eye on these occasions was resounding in his welcome, but the Reverend Kramer usually grunted, shying away as quickly as possible.

Once we grew accustomed to his mannerisms, we all liked Tom; even Vi, who, to offset the Blondie, began calling him Charley. This, she took pains to explain, was short for charlatan, but Tom only grinned and said that from her it sounded good.

The Eye was an amusing conversationalist. He had traveled all over the country in his business, and had a retentive mind for details. He was always willing to add to this general store of knowledge and would start conversations with strangers, asking questions that verged close to the personal but somehow never seemed insulting at the time. We couldn't imagine why Tom was so genuinely interested in these fragments of other people's lives, but he was. I doubt if he ever forgot anything.

He made no bones about the fact that he considered his audience a bunch of suckers, and refusing to accept Vi's tabulation of his mail he gleefully recounted it himself before he left the studio. In no time at all he had three

full wastebaskets, and the day he surpassed the Reverend Kramer he celebrated by bringing us a five-pound box of candy.

He had invited all the girls, including Miss Tolman, to go out with him on various occasions, but since he made no secret of his own designs, everyone declined his offer. Tom never held a grudge, however. What difference did it make whom he took out, he shrugged, so long as it was a woman? We were the ones who were missing out, not he.

Things continued for several months without anything of serious moment, and then the Inner Eye turned in his old Packard for a new one. He was telling us about it one morning, inviting anyone who could get away to sneak downstairs for a ride around the block, when the Reverend Kramer came in. Tom invited him, too, and was refused tersely.

"Mighty nice car, Rev," said its owner. "Course you can't buy a car like that on nickels and quarters. It takes folding money."

"My wants are simple. My needs are few," quoted Mr. Kramer virtuously, but his eyes glittered a little.

A few days later Vi noticed that the mail for the Hour of Family Prayer had taken a sudden spurt.

"What do you think he's putting in those sermons, Charley?" she asked the Eye.

"Why don't you tune in and find out? They come on too early in the morning for me, Blondie," he yawned.

"You couldn't pay me to listen to that stuff," she objected. "Why even the teck and the announcers won't listen. That's one show that has to do the best it can without a monitor."

A few days later the Reverend Kramer surprised everybody by announcing that he had purchased an automobile.

"It's a Cadillac," he said proudly. "The Lord wished me to have it because I have worked so long and earnestly in

His cause, so He provided a way. It is in front of the building now, and I would be pleased to show it to anyone who cares to examine it."

Only Tom accepted the invitation, and he came back whistling.

"It's a custom job!" he exclaimed. "Longer than a hearse and blacker than the end man in a minstrel show. Maybe there's more than I figured in nickels and dimes."

Whenever any of us sighted Mr. French alighting from the elevator at our floor, we automatically held our breaths. Not that the Better Business Bureau could immediately put us off the air, but they could make things decidedly uncomfortable.

Vi saw him first that morning, and before he could open our door, she yelled frantically for someone to go down and get Barry out of the coffee shop. Then she assumed her most conciliatory smile.

"Good morning, Mr. French," she said sweetly. "Mr. Alden will be here in just a moment. Won't you sit down?"

Mr. French grunted and moved aside. We could see that he had two visitors in tow. They were old people, with the kind of appealing gentleness which is sometimes the recompense for age, and obviously they had lived together as man and wife so many years they had come to share the same thoughts.

The old lady sat bravely where Mr. French indicated, but she must have been frightened, for her husband patted her reassuringly on the hand and she thanked him with her smile.

"Where's this guy that calls himself the Mystic Inner Eye?" demanded Mr. French, too impatient to wait for Barry. "Maybe you better send out a call for him, too. We're going to be needing him."

"Mr. Williamson always comes in around ten o'clock. It's almost that now. I'm sure he'll be here."

Barry came puffing into the reception room at that moment, out of breath from the stairs he had chosen in preferance to waiting for the elevator.

"Hello, Mr. French. One of the boys ran down and told me you were here. Glad to see you."

"You won't be. This is Mr. and Mrs. Griswold of Condon. Mr. Alden, the manager of this magnificent station."

"Mr. and Mrs. Griswold," exclaimed Barry, turning on his charm. "Condon's in eastern Oregon, isn't it? Does KUKU get in up there?"

"Sometimes," answered Mr. Griswold smiling gently. "We have some interference, though."

"You should have had more," stated Mr. French flatly. "Where's this guy that calls himself the Mystic Inner Eye? He's the one we're gunning for this time."

"What's Tom done?" demanded Barry in alarm.

"He's just got you in trouble up to your neck, that's all," reported Mr. French with satisfaction. "He's been giving out false information."

"What false information?"

"What else would you call it when he says a certain girl will be found at a certain address in a certain town, and when you check up they never heard of her? Is that false information, or isn't it?"

"Well, yes," agreed Barry cagily. "But I don't think anybody could pin Tom down to anything like that. He's too careful. I checked his show every night for months, and he's never slipped. I did miss a couple of nights last week for the first time, but—"

"That's when it was, Mr. Alden," agreed Mr. Griswold. "Last week."

"You see," put in Mrs. Griswold in a voice like a cracked bell that was still sweet, "it's our granddaughter. Adeline Pinecrest her name is. Her folks, her father and mother—

he was our son—died when she was a little girl, and father and me, we raised her. She's eighteen now, and the restless sort, and living where we do, outside of town a little ways, she hated it. One day she—she ran away. We never heard from her since."

"That's when they wrote a letter to this Mystic Inner Eye of yours," interrupted Mr. French, "and sent him a dollar to tell them where she was. He said if they'd go to such and such an address in Seattle, they'd find her. So they did, drawing out practically all their savings to make the trip. And when they got there—no granddaughter. Nor had the people ever heard of her."

"Of course we might not have heard the address right, and we wanted to see the Mystic Inner Eye to ask him," explained Mr. Griswold. "We told the people at the Travelers Aid—we checked with them all along—and they wanted us to go see Mr. French."

"Which was the proper thing to do," agreed Mr. French. "If more people did more complaining, it'd be a cleaner world all around."

"We don't care so much about spending the money, although that was important, too," said Mrs. Griswold. "We just want to find Adeline. Maybe if you'd ask the Mystic Inner Eye—"

"You bet we'll ask him," agreed Barry. "And that's not all we'll ask him, either." He was suddenly conscious of the fact that they were still standing in the middle of the reception room and that his entire staff was sympathetically, if silently, participating in the conference.

"Come into my office," he invited, glaring at us. "Vi, send Tom in the minute he shows up."

Tom arrived shortly, and Vi delivered the summons without additional information.

"Let him get himself out of that one the best way he

can," she snorted. "Sending that nice old couple on a wild-goose chase like that. Just as I was beginning to like the guy, too!"

"We all liked him," said Bruce. "That stag he threw was the best party I ever went to."

"What do you suppose this will do to the station?" Miss Tolman was worried. "I wonder if I ought to call Seattle."

We expected fireworks to issue from under the crack in the door, but nothing happened. The five of them were visible through the glass in the office door, and only Barry and Mr. French seemed upset. By Tom's expression no one would have believed he was being threatened by both of them in turn. Instead, after the first few remarks, he appeared to ignore them entirely, devoting his entire attention to the Griswolds.

We saw the gravity with which he listened to their story. We saw him accept a slip of paper from one of them, probably the Seattle address he had given for the missing Adeline. He studied it for a moment, nodded, and his lips moved. Then he rose to his feet and gallantly assisted Mrs. Griswold to rise. The interview was over, and far from being crushed, the Mystic Inner Eye appeared to have taken command.

With the tenderness he would have accorded Canadian whisky in those prohibition days, he steered the Griswolds out of Barry's office. Mr. French, looking a bit astounded at the turn of events, trailed resolutely in the rear.

"Two hundred miles—why, that's nothing at all," Tom was saying. "There's a good heater in the car. You'll be nice and warm and comfortable. You just leave everything to me."

At the outer door he turned to shout last-minute instructions to Barry. "Just in case I don't get back for the show tonight, have Woodie knock out some spots saying the Mystic Inner Eye is communing with his mystic inner

soul. And have Bruce read 'em several times with hootchy-kootchy records in between. But I'll probably be here."

I was gratified to hear those instructions. When Barry came over to tell me about the spots, I thought maybe I could get more information out of him. Unfortunately, Barry could add little more than we already knew.

"He admitted reading it all right," he said glumly. "He even remembered their letter, and he stuck to his guns about the address."

"But how could he? Had he ever seen those people before?"

"Never. But nothing would do but that he drive them back to Seattle and check for himself. French said it was o.k. so long as he went along, too."

"But what's the use? The girl isn't there. They found that out themselves. And anyway, how could Tom know where anybody's missing granddaughter is?"

"I figure he's stalling. But I don't know what else we can do but let him stall, so long as French will play along. Of course, what Tom's hoping is that during that drive up to Seattle he'll have time to talk them out of the charges. He'll write them a big check and try to smooth things over, but French really has his dander up this time. I'm afraid we're in for it."

I wrote the announcements saying that due to circumstances beyond our control the Mystic Inner Eye was unable to be with his listeners tonight. I was afraid to predict whether he'd be on the following night, so I let it go at that.

Sammy hunted up some Rimsky-Korsakov records, muttering vindictively about anyone who filled with canned music instead of paying for good live artists. Barry told Vi that if her evening date would excuse her long enough, he'd appreciate having her check in at eleven forty-five for a little session with the phones. What with the regular re-

quest listeners and the Eye's irate audience, who wouldn't believe the announcement but would insist on personal confirmation of his absence, we anticipated trouble.

I hung around, too. So did Sammy and Sylvia, Harry Fosdyke and Bruce, who was off duty, although Mrs. Horton kept calling at regular intervals to demand when he was coming home. We felt that we had to be there. The loyalty accorded early radio stations by their employees was not unlike that an undergraduate feels for his school. If the Eye didn't produce, KUKU might go off the air permanently. We were worried about our jobs, of course, but the feeling went a little deeper than that.

Every time the elevator stopped on two we jumped, although we'd figured out if Tom got back at all, it wouldn't be until after ten. He had a four-hundred-mile drive, and he'd had a late start.

At ten-thirty Vi wandered in. She'd quarreled with her date, she said, and anyway he was a big goof. She might as well take over the phones. Barry sat on the davenport and whittled slingshots. He had a desk drawer filled with them, for he claimed whittling calmed his nerves, and whenever he was confronted with a major problem, he began a new one. By eleven-fifteen there was no word from Tom. Everyone but Barry gave up all pretense of keeping busy. We sat in the reception room and stared at each other, watching the clock.

"I could try to get Charley long distance," Vi suggested.

"Where? Ask the telephone company to have him paged over a public address system in the downtown streets?"

"I thought you might know the hotel where he stays when he's up there," she replied with hurt dignity.

"I don't," Barry snapped. "For all I know the guy may never have been in Seattle before."

At eleven forty-four Bob McRoberts opened the studio door and looked at us inquiringly.

"Play the records," ordered Barry hopelessly. "He ain't coming."

But he did come, and I've always wondered if Tom Williamson, with his great love for the dramatic, didn't hold the elevator downstairs until the exact second when Walt began the "Song of India" and Bob beat the second gong, to make his entrance.

Certainly the elevator door opened more noiselessly than usual, and Tom was across the floor and into the studio so fast that we saw only a flash of fur and felt a quick breeze on our startled faces.

Bob had already begun to read my opening apology and his eyes were on the paper. "Ladies and gentlemen, due to circumstances beyond our control—" Here he was aware that someone had taken the chair across the table from him. He glanced up, saw Tom, and attempted to make a quick recovery. "—we present the Mystic Inner Eye."

Tom went into his opening lines without a break in his voice, but the rest of us were laughing so hysterically we couldn't hear. It was a relief to know that things were settled, for surely the Eye wouldn't have returned if they hadn't been.

We gave him no chance to join us when the longest fifteen minutes in radio was concluded. We joined him. What had happened? Where were the Griswolds? Were they satisfied with their settlement? Where was French?

Williamson leaned back in his chair and beamed at us. He looked tired but entirely satisfied with himself.

"French is wherever French lives," he explained. "I was in a rush when we got in, so I dropped him off and he took a cab. The Griswolds are asleep by this time in a Seattle hotel. They've got a ticket back home, and they're happy as a couple of little bugs in a rug. There wasn't any settlement."

"But how did you do it? How did you convince them?"

"Simple," he said calmly. "We just went to that address I gave them, and after that we located Adeline. She was glad to see them, too. If it hadn't been for her pride, she'd have knuckled under and gone back home a long time before this."

"You mean you actually found that dame?" demanded Barry. "You mean you knew where she was?"

"I knew where she'd been," admitted Tom modestly. "It wasn't my fault the police had raided that address since I was in Seattle last, and Adeline and the other girls had had to move. It was just a matter of finding where she'd moved to."

We stared at him in amazement. Seattle is a big city. How could he have singled out one girl and run her down? Tom, teetering on his chair legs, was enjoying our confusion.

"Now don't you ask me how I did it," he said firmly. "After all, I am the Mystic Inner Eye, and some things are professional secrets."

Although we had a couple of good theories of our own, that's all we could ever get out of him.

A week later we had another call from Mr. French.

The Mystic Inner Eye was not one who would let himself be caught short a second time, and the commercial copy which went across my desk was comparatively pure. Although Mr. French was not given to social calls, we could think of no other reason why we were thus honored.

"Sit down, Mr. French." Barry's manner was cordial. "Haven't seen you since you went to Seattle and helped the Mystic Inner Eye locate that missing girl."

"Lucky thing for you we did locate her, Alden. But this time you're not going to wriggle out of things so easy. This time we've really got you."

"You mean Tom's been up to something again?" demanded Barry in alarm. "You must be mistaken, French.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, due to circumstances beyond our control—ulp—we present the Mystic Inner Eye"

We're clean. I've checked every one of his programs myself since then, and he—"

"You've been checking the wrong end of the day," interrupted Mr. French rudely. "It's the Reverend Albert H. Kramer I'm talking about."

"But I've already gone over that with you. I told you he was asking for good-will offerings, and you said good-will offerings were outside your province."

"That's right," agreed Mr. French sourly. "But selling something under false claims isn't, and that's what he's been doing on your radio station. It's been going on for several weeks now, but it just came to our attention today."

"But he hasn't got anything to sell except his particular brand of religion."

"That's not what he's telling your listeners. He says he's got splinters for sale—splinters from the original manger. Five bucks for a little splinter and ten dollars for a big one."

CHAPTER 12

I had wondered how long it would take for Barry's secret yearnings for the stage to assert themselves, and one day they broke loose.

"I've been wanting to go into dramatics," he announced. "You know. Radio plays. The only thing that's been stopping me is a director."

"I should think you could do that yourself," I scoffed. "Along with playing the lead."

"I would have," he agreed, without cracking a smile, "only my mind runs to comedy pantomime, and besides, with all the other things that are thrown in my lap these days, I haven't time. So I've been looking around, and I've picked out the best guy in town for the job."

"Who is he?"

"His name is Dusendorf. Mike Dusendorf. He owns a hardware store on Stark Street."

"That's a fine recommendation for a theater director."

"That's what he does now," Barry put in hastily. "He used to be in stock. He still works with the civic theater, and they give him A-1 rating. He's the kind of a guy with imagination who can get other people to work for him. You ought to see those salesmen at Dusendorf's hardware store break their necks to give satisfaction. And the guy never lifts his voice. I spent three hours in his store last Saturday shopping for the right size bolt, and he never raised it once."

"Bolts?" I demanded suspiciously. "What did you want with bolts?"

"I didn't. That's why I was so hard to please. I was just sizing him up."

Because a man has patience to cope with crackpot customers in a nuts-and-bolts store didn't seem to me recommendation for a radio director, but that just goes to show I'm sometimes wrong.

Mike Dusendorf was thin and emaciated, with graying hair and a smile that was as warming as a feather bed. And he had a beautiful faculty for getting over his own ideas by some kind of telepathy and letting you think they were your own.

"Just what kind of plays do you and Miss Woodfin think we should do first, Mr. Alden?" he began. "Of course we wouldn't want to encroach on the fields now being explored by other local stations in dramatics, but we might as well profit by their experiences."

"There's one local show about pioneers," began Barry thoughtfully. "It seems to have lots of listeners."

"The West is always a good subject for the West," Mike approved.

"There's a crime show on another station," I remembered. "It's bloodthirsty, but people seem to like it."

"The West—and perhaps a moral against crime. Much, much action. Surely that ought to suggest something to one of us."

"You're darn tootin' it does," agreed Barry promptly. "We'll do an old-time wild West show. You know—cattle wars, cowboys, poisoned water holes, and the villain always gets it in the end. Woodie can write that, can't you Woodie?"

"I never have," I admitted doubtfully, but lack of confidence comes with experience, so I finished brightly, "but I can."

"Splendid. Now when can we expect a script, so that I can start casting?"

"I'll do it tonight," I promised eagerly.

"About actors," said Barry thoughtfully. "What do the other stations pay?"

"The current scale here is two-fifty for a thirty-minute program. Two dollars for a quarter hour. Of course that includes a rehearsal, providing the script is finished in time to have one. I shouldn't care to mention names, but there's one local station which works so close to a deadline that pages from a script are handed to the actors on the air as the writer finishes with each one. He has his typewriter just outside the studio door."

"We'll have none of that at KUKU," said Barry firmly. "We're going to have a deadline on scripts. They've got to be finished the night before the broadcast goes on the air. And it seems to me if we paid a little more than the going rate, we'd get better cooperation from the actors, wouldn't we?"

Mr. Dusendorf nodded in amazement. Such a free-handed gesture left him momentarily without words.

"Five bucks, then," decided Barry. "Five bucks for a thirty-minute show. And plenty of rehearsal time thrown in."

The theory was sound, and for double the going rate we got double the going effort from our actors. They all had other jobs which required their services from nine to five, but they rehearsed a couple of hours the night before and returned immediately after their work on the following day to practice until the minute before the actual broadcast.

Almost every profession was represented by our evening thespians. We had a dentist, a lawyer, a vice-president of a bank, an accountant, an advertising man, several housewives and secretaries, a laboratory technician, and a swimming instructor. They were not, fortunately, financially de-

pendent on their radio checks, but I'm sure none of them worked harder or more conscientiously on another job than they did for us.

Sound effects, and our scripts were studded with them, were handled by Duncan Abrams, the short, swarthy, and salacious announcer who had replaced Barry on the midnight request show.

No effect was too difficult for Duncan to handle, and Vi had a new regular on her daily telephone chore, Duncan's mother complaining that he had denuded her kitchen of an egg beater, potato masher, or mop handle. These were destined to appear before our microphone in a guise not intended by the manufacturer, and so great was his skill that they generally sounded as he meant them to.

He had the usual standard equipment for sound in those days, including the versatile halves of coconut shells which he beat, inverted, upon his breast to simulate horses' hoofs on a dirt road. When the horse was walking on gravel, Duncan manipulated the shells on a box of rocks he had painstakingly carried to the station, and for horses on cobblestones he clomped the two shells together. Roller skates on a sheet of cast iron produced a clickety-clack not unlike a freight train switching its tail of cars, and by laying a bass drum on its side and scrubbing it vigorously with his mother's vegetable brush he produced the exact sound of water lapping against the sides of a boat.

Our one electric fan was always missing in warm weather, for Duncan kept it in the studio closet in preparedness for the script which called for an airplane engine. He could create this by running the fan with a piece of cardboard against the blades, and his skillful fingers kneading against an inflated balloon close to the microphone gave off a better imitation of an ice floe breaking up than the real ice. Rumpled cellophane gave off the crackle of a fire, and the harder Duncan rumpled, the greater the blaze. A box of

cornstarch between his fingers simulated the crunch of footsteps on snow, and mashed cornflakes became someone breaking through a wooded thicket.

Many of his best effects were constructed with hammer and saw, nails and elbow grease, and after the first disappointing failure of an outside carpenter, Duncan built every one himself. The first project which led to this final resolution was a door.

Duncan had shopped for it himself, visiting auctions and bidding until he finally became the proud owner of a decrepit old thing with rusty hinges and a rattling knob. This he carried proudly to a local carpenter's shop with instructions to build a frame to encase it. It was a double frame, on wheels, so that it could be rolled easily before the microphone, and while the door occupied one half of it, it could be turned around and there you had a window which slid noisily up and down and a clattering old screen which could be realistically banged.

Duncan told us with pride about this creation which would be delivered by van, and when it came, we all gathered round to hear the masterpiece. Duncan reached for the knob, and his expression changed to surprise as it turned smoothly and with nary a rattle in his hand. He opened the weather-beaten old wreck, and it closed noiselessly as he let go. The carpenter had done a thorough job; he had carefully oiled out every creak and bang. For radio the effect was worthless.

Duncan built his own wind machine. It looked very much like a squirrel cage, with slatted cylinders which revolved. A piece of canvas was laid tenderly across the slats, and there was a handle to turn them. The faster he turned, the louder the wind blew.

He built another frame from which was suspended a sheet of tin, and with one flick of his wrists he could create a plausible roll of thunder, and there was always a pile of

peach crates and strawberry boxes lying around which made realistic the battering down of flimsy walls and doors should the script call for such destruction.

Surf was the gentle rolling of buckshot across the head of a snare drum, and shot in an inflated basketball bladder produced explosions of various intensities. But the thing which gave Duncan the greatest delight was a script which called for the bashing-in of heads or the cutting-off of fingers. The finger-cutting sequence he managed, with much experimentation, by bringing a meat cleaver down on a crisp carrot, and the head-bashing was, according to its ferocity, done by smiting a cantaloupe with a wooden mallet or striking one of the coconut halves with a padded brick. For an effect which called for a fiend's crashing in a man's skull, Duncan used a head of cabbage and the short-handled ax from the Abramses' woodshed.

Gunshots gave him the most trouble. A crack of a ruler against the leather cushion of the davenport sounded convincing to the rest of us, but failed to satisfy Duncan. He made a nuisance of himself to the extent that the police department finally gave him an old .38-caliber revolver, and he purchased a supply of blank cartridges.

Mike argued about this. Even though they were expecting it, the flash and the spurt of smoke were so disconcerting to our actors that they often paused momentarily in their lines. Duncan claimed that this break in their voices added to the realism of the production, and he was so upset about it that Mike hadn't the heart to be insistent.

One day, however, the gun failed to go off as Duncan pressed the trigger. Again he pressed and nothing happened. The actor who was supposed to be responsible for the immediate killing looked over, saw what was happening, and with rare foresight changed his line.

"Shooting's too good for a skunk like you," he barked. "I'm goin' to stab you to death."

Recorded sound effects were beginning to be available in small quantities, and Duncan gave them a whirl but he didn't think much of them. He received, on trial, the record of a train approaching, coming to a halt in the station, and emitting a loud whistle. Since a current script called for such a sequence, he decided to try it out, but he neglected to acquaint the cast of this fact.

Ordinarily Duncan's sound effects were gathered together in one corner of the studio, but the record had to be played from the control room. A little before its time, he quietly left his post and joined Walt in the booth, and so intent were they upon their scripts that the actors didn't see him go.

One of them looked up and noticed that Duncan's sound corner was empty. Before him was a script plainly marked "Sound: Approaching train to mike. Whistle to stop."

Throwing himself into the breach, the actor left his place and rushed across the studio. At the exact second when Duncan was bringing in his record, the actor began, vocally, to imitate the sound of an approaching train. He advanced, chugging and tooting, and the result on the air was two trains each attempting to outdo the other.

Radio actors, we learned early, had one of the qualities traditionally attributed to riveters on steel beams high above the city streets. If one of them slipped, the others immediately tightened up, and accidents usually happened in rapid succession. Vocal fluffs, the ever-present nightmares of announcers and actors alike, seemed to be catching.

They ranged from transposing on sight a whole line, thus changing the complete meaning of a sentence, to adding extra syllables or letters to a single word.

We once had a gallant Southerner who, trying to thank his host for overnight lodging, surprised himself out of character on the air by misreading, "You-all are certainly indebted to me for my hospitality, sir!" And there was

the announcer who pronounced loud and warningly, "Ladies and gentlemen, muder has been committed and the Homisquid Sod swings into action."

Directions for actors were written in capitals, and we learned to give them an underscored line of their own rather than let them simply follow a speech. We learned this lesson the hard way. One of our most seasoned actors—who had previously worked in stock and who had gone through several rehearsals of the production concluded his directions on the air. "I'll see you tomorrow. Fading from mike," he read blithely, and the cast was thrown into such convulsions it could hardly continue.

A red globe was supposed to light up above the studio door whenever a broadcast was in progress, but it was often ignored, and dramatic programs especially were often interrupted by the remarks of someone who had just wandered in. I remember one chance comment of a friendly janitress, whom we had come to call "Scheherazade" because she was an inexhaustible source of rather pointless, off-color stories. There was a hot love scene in progress before the microphone as Scheherazade wandered into the vacant reception room that evening. She was dragging her vacuum, and from where we were standing engrossed in the control room, she wasn't visible until she had already opened the studio door.

"Darling, I love you. I cannot live without you," the hero was murmuring throatily, but Scheherazade's nasal tones drowned him out.

"Ain't you folks got no home?" she demanded playfully. "Quit messin' around and get out of here. The joint needs to be cleaned up."

Several of our thespians had had previous experience at other stations, but some of them came to us fresh from the varnished boards of our civic theater. Mike found he had trouble initially getting them to stand in one place before

the microphone. They yearned for the freedom of a stage on which to deliver their lines.

His usual solution to this problem was to slip a rope around their necks and anchor it to the mike stand, but one young actress objected to this indignity. It wasn't ladylike, she insisted, and she refused to be tied up like a horse.

Mike pondered this problem overnight and at the next broadcast he appeared with a broom under his arm. As a concession to our dramatic cast, who often appeared on our nighttime dramatic productions in evening dress, he had attached a blue satin bow to one end of the broom.

"No one can deny this is the accouterments of a lady," he said firmly. "You will not be tied, but the broomstick will, to the microphone stand. You will hold the broom handle in one hand and your script in the other. The broom will remind you not to step back."

One session with the broom was enough. She kept the proper distance thereafter.

Scripts generally required two hands and a grip on each side of the sheet, for we had numerous experiences with pages which slid from nervous fingers to scatter themselves indiscriminately across the studio floor. No casualties resulted from these accidents, for another actor automatically stepped into the break, his finger marking the place on his own script.

Realism was the thing for which Mike strove, and he encouraged his actors to make use of gestures even though they would not be seen.

"When you tell somebody he's a scoundrel, shake your fist at him," he would say earnestly. "If you were saying it in real life, you wouldn't just stand there. The action you do with your hands is going to carry over into your voice."

On one occasion it carried too far. Sam Young was playing the villain in the piece, and it called for him to grasp the hero by the throat and choke him until "Music Up and

Out." Sam, carried away by the spirit of the thing and spurred on by Mike's advice, leaned across the microphone and grasped Tom Dryman, who was doing the hero.

"I'll teach you to interfere with my plans," he muttered through clenched teeth, his hands moving spasmodically. "The Gray Shadow allows such interference from no man."

Poor Tom, clutching and clawing, emitted highly satisfactory noises of a man being choked to death, and Horace Angel, the pianist who was supplying the musical bridge, crashed down into suspense music to end the scene. The bridge was of necessity longer than we had planned, for Sam had been too realistic. The hero had so much breath choked from him that it took several minutes before he could pick up his lines, and even then he concluded with a vocal huskiness not present in his opening speeches.

Another bit of realism which would have been carried too far but for the resourcefulness of the actor concerned was in a little drama which called for two firemen exploring the cause of a past conflagration. They were supposed to be crawling around under the foundations of a house, and, to secure this hollow effect, Mike had them read their lines with metal wastebaskets over their heads, using hand mikes as they crawled on the studio floor.

Everything went well until the scene ended and the supposed firemen attempted to stand up. One was a gray-haired veteran of years of legitimate stage, who was using radio as a hobby after his well-deserved retirement. He had spent too long on the drafty floor, and rheumatism or one of its cousins had set in. He simply could not stand up, and there was no time to render first aid. Nothing daunted, the veteran cast off his wastebasket, and still using his hand mike, delivered his remaining speeches flat on his stomach.

When an actor was called for a production, he never could be sure what kind of a part, or how many, he would play. There was no such thing as type casting, and the actor

The thespians had difficulty standing in one place, but there was an obvious solution

who could do three or four roles in the same show was the one most frequently called. It took a complete change of register, as well as change in tempo, to do a double, and practice was important.

Duncan Abrams, after innumerable sound sessions, decided he could do as well as anybody and that he should take vocal parts in our productions. The fastest way to build up a demand for his services, he decided, was to develop as many voices as possible.

He was pretty good, but even the best gets tiresome when you're called upon to admire it twenty times a day, and we finally told Duncan to shut up. In injured dignity he decided we didn't appreciate his talents and that henceforth they would be bestowed upon people who did, namely his mother and his public.

We were sitting around one evening in someone's apartment, having for once got away from the studio before the next day. We were still with it in spirit, of course, for the radio was turned on. McRoberts signed off at midnight, and a strange voice in a broad Brooklyn accent introduced the midnight request program.

"Who's that? Where's Abrams?" shouted Barry, making a dash for the telephone.

As usual it was impossible to get a call through on the request hour, and at the end of the first number we were startled to hear the cracked voice usually associated with vaudeville hayseeds introduce the next selection.

Barry was livid. He kept calling and hanging up and calling, and finally he could stand it no longer. He left the party to investigate himself. It took a little time for him to reach the station, and while we waited we heard an inhaling Japanese, a gangster, and a cockney Englishman reading requests.

By that time we had figured out what had happened. Duncan was trying out his voices on his audience. What

Barry said to him we never knew, but after an interval he came on in his own voice, considerably subdued, and the performance was never repeated on that program. His hard practice paid dividends, however, for not long after that Mike came to Barry with the request that he look around for another soundman. Duncan's multitudinous voices were needed to keep down talent costs.

Barry was already looking for a spare announcer, since, with our remotes days off and generally full schedule, three regulars could hardly handle the work. A combination man who could announce and handle sound was the logical answer. There came wandering into the studio in the midst of this search a rather seedy individual who gave his name as Gladstone Brown and who stated he was an actor.

"We don't need an actor," frowned Barry. "But we do need an announcer and a sound man. The job pays thirty bucks a week."

Mr. Brown was prompt in his claims to be able to fill both positions. He had never done announcing, he admitted, but surely with his theatrical training it would be simplicity itself. As for sound, he had actually done a little, but as usual the stations which had employed him as such were at so great a distance that it was impossible to get immediate references.

Barry, of course, called for a demonstration. We gave Mr. Brown a handful of copy to read, which was intoned with such eloquence and feeling that even Barry was impressed. Then he had Duncan confront the neophyte with his stack of coconut shells, egg beaters, wind machine, and strawberry crates. To everyone's surprise, Mr. Brown made correct use of the standard equipment.

"That's great! That's wonderful!" applauded Duncan. "After all, every soundman makes up his own effects, and it's only natural the guy didn't figure out some of mine

right off the bat. He worked the coconut shells and the wind machine, didn't he?"

"Sure," admitted Barry, who for some reason seemed to have reservations about Mr. Brown. "And he slammed the door. No two-year-old could have slammed it harder."

"Oh, give him a chance," urged Duncan. "We've got to have somebody for that auditorium show on Thursday. It's a cinch I can't do sound. I'm playing five parts as it is."

So Gladstone Brown was added to our staff.

The auditorium show was a live dramatic broadcast which was to be performed for a delegation of patients from the veterans' hospital. They were an enthusiastic, if critical, audience, and we were trying to give them our best efforts. The script was packed with action, but surprisingly enough, there was only one sound effect in the whole show. It was important, however, and depicted the dropping of a dead body from a great height to the floor below.

Duncan had already taken care of the preliminaries. He had built a scaffold and receiving platform, and had filled a gunny sack with a hundred pounds of sand. With much grunting and groaning they hoisted the sack up a teetery ladder to a platform which was large enough for it and the soundman, but with no room to spare. Then they dropped the sack to the receiving platform below, testing the sound with the microphone, and Duncan nodded with satisfaction.

"That's good. We ain't going to drop it at the last rehearsal," he told Mike. "We know it sounds right, and if you think that sack of sand's not heavy, try lugging it up."

So they rehearsed without sound, Mr. Brown being present for the first run-through, then returning to the studio for a two-hour announcing shift.

Preliminary run-throughs, sometimes even the final dress, bear only vague resemblances to the finished product. There are cuts to be made after timing. Sometimes whole scenes are rebuilt and musical cues altered.

Gladstone Brown returned with only moments to spare and received a marked copy of the corrected script. Mike went over the immediate changes surrounding the sound sequence with him, but beyond that he was on his own. He climbed the scaffold, perched himself uneasily beside the sack of sand, and surveyed the stage below.

It must have looked to him more like the beginning of a stage production than the end, for there was nothing to suggest a set. Beneath him were the specially built platform which would increase the thudding sound of the falling sack and three microphones on stands.

The actors, in their ordinary clothes, sat on folding chairs around the edge of the stage. As it drew time for one of them to speak, he rose and walked quietly to the microphone, read his lines, and returned to his chair.

Radio productions were an old story to the veterans who made up our audience, since it was customary to entertain them in this manner several times a year, and they accepted the lack of trimmings far better than did Mr. Brown. They cheered and hooted and hollered in the preliminaries, and as Sammy Twohy and the boys struck up the opening theme, they settled down to enjoy the play.

Mr. Brown on his scaffold was enjoying it, also, but he was having trouble following his script. Below him actors were reading lines which did not appear in his copy and leaving out others. I could see him looking back and forth from script to cast in puzzled amazement, and then because things were going even better than I had hoped, I forgot to watch him.

Radio actors so infrequently hear the applause of their listeners that when they do, it is a spur to urge them on to greater heights. Tonight they were really outdoing themselves. The play built smoothly to a climax. It was almost time for the body fall.

Not until then had I remembered to look back at Glad-

stone Brown. Now I saw that he was carried away by the thing. He had stopped attempting to follow his script. He was leaning perilously far over the scaffold, and no face in the audience was more intent or interested than his.

Duncan looked up at him about the same time. He waved frantically to attract Gladstone's attention, but that, unfortunately, was on the actors at the mike. At that very moment one of them gave the cue for the falling body. Gladstone sat imperviously on, his chin in his hands, his elbows on his knees. He made no motion toward the sack at his side.

But we had the effect of a falling body. Duncan made it across the stage in two leaps, throwing himself full length on the wooden platform. The sound of his fall was realistically picked up, and the watching veterans were enchanted by this new form of flying tackle. Duncan later turned in a bill for two cracked ribs and a front tooth, and Barry paid it without a whimper.

Once in a while one of our actors would acquire a grudge against a fellow worker, and then it took all the diplomacy of which Mike was capable to hold them in line. They never went so far as to ruin a production intentionally, but rehearsals became a nightmare for everyone around.

Mike had discovered a child actor named Freddy Barber whom he considered a prodigy, and Freddy himself concurred in this opinion. Freddy was fifteen but sounded ten, and there was no disputing the fact that he was good. The way he read his lines put far more experienced thespians to shame, and he could run the gamut from a cockney English lad to a starving waif of China. The trouble was that as he finished his own lines he stood back with a supercilious air of condescension to listen to his elders interpret theirs, and even half a glance showed that in Freddy's opinion they stank.

Sam Young was the object of Freddy's greatest scorn, and Sam, who worked harder than anybody, resented it. Whenever possible, Mike cast them in different plays, but once in a while this couldn't be done.

We had a Sunday afternoon classic called Magic Miniatures. These were of fifteen minutes' duration, each one a complete story, preferably a tear jerker. In one of these an old man attempted to rescue a small boy from drowning, almost lost his life in the attempt, and they both were saved by a noble dog. Freddy played the boy; Sam was cast as the old man, since he could simulate extreme age better than anyone else; and Duncan was the dog.

For the sake of amity Mike gave Freddy and Sam separate microphones. Freddy was to use a table mike, and Sam had one on a stand at a respectable distance.

It was a bad rehearsal. Freddy sneered, Duncan clowned, and Sam got madder and madder. With great difficulty Mike calmed him down enough to go on. For the river sequence Freddy and Sam had both been provided with basins filled with water. Certain of their gasping remarks were made with their faces submerged and with the sound of bubbles coming up all around them. The idea was Duncan's, and it was tricky but good.

Three times Sam upset his basin in rehearsal, and each time Freddy registered greater disdain. His own was before him on the table, and finally Sam was forced to use the same microphone and put his basin opposite Freddy's. This brought them face to face, at closer proximity than they usually worked, and we were all a little apprehensive.

The program went very well, however, and we had a convincing near-drowning and last-minute rescue. They finished their lines, and Sylvia Wren, who was playing transitions, went into the theme over which the announcer gave the closing commercial. It was unfortunate that at

this moment Sam put his elbows on the table, and his basin upset for the fourth and last time into his lap.

Freddy doubled up with silent laughter as did everyone else in the studio and control room, but it was only Freddy Sam noticed. He leaned across the table and with one huge hand forced the boy's face flat into the remaining basin. Sputterings and gurglings came through over the announcer's words.

Mike was signaling frantically from the control, and Walt had hastily shut off all but the stand mike being used by the announcer as Sam relented. Freddy's head popped up indignantly, and forgetful of the fact that he was a child prodigy and better than anyone else, ten unprintable words which shouldn't be, but sometimes are, in the vocabulary of fifteen-year-old boys came over the air.

Mike was always hankering to do something artistic, and Barry, who thought box office dealt with themes more modern than ancient Greece, was reluctant to let him try. Finally Mike wore Barry down and came to me with his idea. He had worked it out so completely that it was only a matter of filling in lines.

"It's a tragedy," he explained with shining eyes, "and it builds on a vortex to a crashing finale. We have this chorus lined up—they'll do it free for the plug—and they begin chanting on their way up the hill. Then you hear the sound of chariot wheels and horses racing in from another, and then the legions of Rome marching up from the third. By the time everybody gets to the top we're on one huge wave of sound. It will be terrific."

"I'm arranging special music," put in Sammy Twohy. "We're going to use the whole orchestra and special singers. He's really got something, Woodie."

As I began to write, I had certain doubts about what it was he really had, but as we went more and more deeply

into the thing, I, too, began to be excited. From the standpoint of cast alone it was the most elaborate production ever staged at KUKU, and perhaps even in the Northwest.

There were innumerable rehearsals by sections, and by the complete organization, and eventually we were ready to go on the air. Naturally we could not permit such a spectacle to be broadcast without our presence, so we lingered on, getting more and more in the mood for triumph.

Barry had invited the radio editor of one of the local newspapers to be his guest in the studio during the broadcast, hopefully anticipating even a small piece in the paper. Newspapers had never felt too kindly toward radio stations, pointing to the permanence of the printed word over the spoken one and squinting jealously at our advertising. Dick Carrington, this reporter, was sometimes apologetic about the limitations set on his column and quick to explain that it was his editor who did the cutting. But even Dick sometimes wondered if radio was legitimate.

We listened through the speaker in Barry's office, having first viewed the cast of the spectacle, and it sounded even better than we had expected.

The plot—and there was a simple thread of one if you could untangle solos, choral numbers, orchestrated score, and sound effects which tried to disguise it—unrolled itself. The heroine, accompanied by a chanting chorus of priests, climbed a hill where she was to become the living sacrifice to the gods. The hero, who had been a captive of the Romans, broke away, stole a chariot, and began ascending the same hill to try to prevent the death of his sweetheart. The Roman legions, discovering their prisoner gone, set off in hot pursuit. We did it in flash backs—short radio scenes which jumped from one focal point to another to depict progress up the hill.

"Almighty Gods of Mount Olympus," chanted the chorus. "We bring you a virgin—pure and innocent as the

drifted snow." There were fifty or sixty voices, and even the deafest god couldn't have missed them, especially as with each supposed step forward their voices increased in volume. Clatter, clatter, clatter went the coconut shells in Duncan Abrams's hands, and rattle, rattle, rattle went the chariot wheels which followed the artfully simulated horses. The shells and the rattle seemed to pick up the last note of the chanting voices. Bong, bong, bong, went the kettle-drums, and the orchestra gave everything it had at Sammy's perspiring insistence.

"Hear us, O Gods of Mount Olympus," screamed the chorus, and thump, thump, thump marched the legions of Rome, actually about two dozen wooden pegs strung on wire and set in a wooden frame with which Abrams could reconstruct anything from a mere platoon to a whole regiment of marching men.

As they reached the summit of the hill, with ascenders arriving simultaneously from three approaches, the roar was deafening, but it was a roar which merged on a single note. The very room seemed to rock and vibrate with the sound. It was tremendous. Certainly Mike had achieved a new high in radio production, and even the skeptical newspaperman looked a little impressed.

"It was good," Dick admitted when the program concluded. "But it's gone. You won't be repeating it. That's the trouble with radio. What can I say to my readers? That you had a good show, and it's too bad they didn't listen?"

At that moment Vi poked her head in the door to call Barry to the telephone.

"Who is it?" he demanded a little irritated because she was interrupting one of his favorite arguments.

"It's a Mr. Smith. J. T. Smith," answered Vi frowning and signaling.

"I don't know any J. T. Smith," reported Barry. "Tell him I'm in conference."

"I've already told him that, but he insists on speaking to you personally."

"Tell him to call tomorrow. What does he want that's so important, anyway?"

"I think you'd better talk to him yourself," she urged. "It's—well, it's something you'll have to take care of."

"What is it? Do you know?"

"Yes, I know. But you'd better talk to him."

"Dammit all. What does the guy want?" roared Barry.

"It's about a fish bowl."

"Fish bowl? What the hell do I know about fish bowls?"

"It isn't what you know, it's what you're going to do about one," said Vi firmly. She had done her best, but Barry had ignored all her warnings. "It seems he had one sitting on his radio, and when that Greek chorus and chariot wheels and legions of Rome all hit high C at once, the vibration knocked the bowl off the radio. Mr. Smith has fish all over his living room floor, and he wants to know what you're going to do about it."

"Now that," said Dick Carrington, reaching for his hat, "is a story."

CHAPTER 13

Our first sportscaster was a gentleman who initially had little to distinguish him from the commonplace save his name, which was Kingsley Abernathy. Barry heard him stumbling over the funny papers for a juvenile audience over another station, and suddenly recalled him as someone he had seen hanging around press boxes at games and calling wrestlers by their first names in dressing-room sessions. He put two and two together and dialed a number.

Kingsley was in our reception room almost before Barry had hung up the phone.

Yes, indeed, he had always wanted to announce sports events, but the station which had engaged his services didn't carry them. No, he had never actually made first team in any of his high school games (Kingsley had never aspired so far as college), but he had always turned out for everything and sat hopefully all season on the bench.

He had worked for some years as a small-town grocery clerk, and had dutifully saved his money to enable him to move his family to a larger town and greater advantages. Believing that his personality was his chief asset, and that radio offered the best medium for presenting that personality to the public, he had managed to secure a job on an even smaller station than ours.

"You're not a good announcer," said Barry brutally. "You

can't read for a damn except the funnies, and then you go miles an hour."

"That's because I want to get them over with," explained Kingsley apologetically.

"I figured as much. The funny thing is we can still understand what you're saying no matter how fast you go. Well, I may be wrong, but I'll play along with my hunch a little way. Come on."

Kingsley, unused to Barry's line of reasoning, looked startled as he reached for his hat, but I knew what was coming. Barry wouldn't buy a pig in a poke. Kingsley had to prove himself.

"Can I go along?" I yelled after them, and Barry paused long enough to shrug his shoulders.

"I don't know why you'd want to. You'll never write any copy this guy can read. He'll have to ad-lib."

My desk was piled with work, and leaving now would mean I'd work late that night. The temptation was too great, however, and I trailed along. It was midafternoon and an off season. Where Barry was going to dig up a sports event for Kingsley to announce was something I couldn't figure out.

Barry had something in mind. Walking briskly, he turned off into the park blocks. There, under the interlocking branches of leafless trees, we encountered two rather dirty small boys shooting marbles.

"There you are," he said triumphantly. "Announce it!"

Kingsley gasped, and the boys left off their game to stand up and give us their full attention.

"Play ball," ordered Barry. "I mean shoot marbles. Don't mind us. We're going to watch."

"Why?" demanded one of the youngsters.

That was a real question, but not one to stump Barry Alden.

"This guy's a sports announcer," he explained. "King

Abernathy. You've heard of King Abernathy, haven't you?"

They shook their heads, which wasn't surprising. Few people had.

"Well, you will," he continued encouragingly. "And he's going to give us a sample of how he does it. He's going to announce your marble game just like he'd do if he was broadcasting on the radio. Won't that be fun?"

"No," said one of the boys. "I just remembered. I gotta go home."

"Not yet," objected Barry. "It's early yet. Here—suppose you play just one game and let the King announce it. And I'll—I'll—"

"What'll you give us?" demanded the other boy with a gleam in his eye.

Barry fished in his pocket. "Two bits apiece. That's big dough. It's all yours, providing you keep right on playing and don't stop, no matter what he says."

Two dirty little paws reached out for the money.

"Now," decided Barry when the deal was concluded. "We'll call this one Butch and this one Slugger. It's all yours, King. Take it away."

King took a deep breath. He squatted on the gravel path beside the youngsters and began to speak.

"Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Here we are in the park blocks about to witness the mig tournament between our two contenders for the championship, Butch and Slugger. The boys are playing Big Ring, and the playing area has been circled with a sharp stick in the loose gravel of the path. The ring is ten feet in diameter, and the thirteen marbles, most of them dough babes, with one or two aggies, are already in the cross position, about three inches apart. The boys are about to lag for play—"

The boys, who had stopped momentarily to stare at him in amazement, blinked, and the larger of the two hastily marked off a lag line on the gravel a short distance from

the ring. Kingsley nodded approval without missing a word.

"It is a beautiful day for a game. There is a bit of the sun showing—not too warm—and with a little breeze. Butch, wearing a blue blazer and jeans, is about to lag first. He steps to the pitch line"—Butch stepped to the line—"stoops down, calculates his distance, and shoots! His taw stops about one inch from the line. A good shot, and one which will be hard to beat. Slugger takes his place on the pitch line. He in turn stoops; he knuckles down; the taw seems to jump from his fingers—it rolls—close to Butch's shooter—it passes the shooter—it's over the line—it's on the other side—it stops! It's close! There's a handkerchief on the play! The judges will have to measure!"

Barry had hastily jumped forward at the word "handkerchief," and now he was on the ground beside the two marbles measuring their distance from the streak in the gravel. The contenders, meanwhile, had taken Kingsley's running fire patter in their stride and were carrying on with their game as though he were not there.

"Slugger's taw is a fraction of an inch closer to the line," continued Kingsley as Barry signaled silently. "So it's Slugger's play. These are real contenders, ladies and gentlemen. Not a thumbnail shot between them. They're real shooters. Now Slugger takes his position outside the circle of play. He knuckles down. The taw leaves his fingers—it ticks a marble—it moves a fraction in the circle—but he doesn't knock it out!"

A small crowd collected in no time at all, but I alone was aware of it. The boys were intent on their game, King was intent on the boys, Barry was intent upon King. Finally, he was satisfied.

"That's enough," he announced, terminating the broadcast if not the game. "That's as good a job as I ever heard. You're hired. Come on back and we'll put you on the payroll."

King Abernathy was a good sports man so long as he stayed on sports, but the station was not financially able to limit him to that. We had to use him as a regular swing man to relieve other announcers, and I shuddered whenever he was confronted with a piece of copy. King, so glib and effortless on ad-lib, simply could not read.

He probably massacred more written words than any other announcer I've ever known, and he could never be taught to leave things alone once he made a mistake. He always had to come back and make another stab. Once he was reading of forty oyster boats which had sailed into somebody's harbor.

"Forty foyster butts," he said first, and realizing his mistake, he tried to correct it. "Orty boyster foats," he enunciated carefully.

Everyone in the studio was trying to wave him down, but he decided it was better to take the audience into his confidence. "Never mind, folks. Let it go," he advised. "I'll come back later and pick it up."

We tried, as much as possible, to give him studio shifts while we were taking network, and he would be called upon to make only station identifications and to read short commercial spots, but it became apparent that this wasn't the solution. King had his mind on other things and couldn't be depended upon to listen to the program coming through. Listening to the radio made him nervous, he said.

He was sitting in the control room one day, officiating at the dials while the teck had run down for a cup of coffee. All of a sudden he was aware that voices and music had ceased. Nothing but silence was coming over the lines. He hadn't heard the cue, but that wasn't surprising since he hadn't been listening. He switched a button, reached for his next spot, one on ant paste, and read it to the best of his limited ability.

Those of us who had been listening to the program through the loud-speaker rushed in just as King switched back to the point of origination.

"We have just observed one minute of silent prayer," said the network announcer reverently.

However, King made up for what he lacked in studio programs by his excellence in his chosen field. Even when he was so drunk you wondered how he could distinguish one player from another, he turned in an accurate and colorful, if sometimes thick and fuzzy, account of the event, and his admirers were loud and legion.

These admirers, incidentally, contributed largely to King's condition, for Barry would search his pockets before sending him out on a remote, and even make sure he hadn't the price of a bottle. King didn't need a bottle. One of his fans always stopped the great man to offer him a drink, after which he would encounter another fan with another drink, and by the time he had staggered up to the broadcast booth he was weaving.

His vocabulary on these occasions grew rich in the kind of old Anglo-Saxon seldom used in formal gatherings today, and we often shuddered at the start of a broadcast for fear he would let loose. It was wasted emotion, for King had a sense of good taste on the air, and never intentionally went over the line. He had some trouble enunciating certain words when he was excited, and finally Barry had to bar all references in basketball games to a player dribbling down the court or pitching from a corner.

King had the same reserve about others offending on his broadcasts, and never was this more forceably brought home than at an Oregon State–Montana football game.

King had a Montana spotter in the booth with him that day, a youngster who had worked hard and earnestly in helping him identify his team, and who was downcast about the score. King was turning in his usual competent job of

reporting plays when he suddenly realized something out of the ordinary was happening on the field.

Popovitch of Montana caught the ball five yards back of the goal. Every Montana man automatically chose an Oregonian and knocked him to the ground. Only Gray of Oregon State and Popovitch were on their feet, and Popovitch began to run with the ball. He had made the forty-five-yard line when Lazovitch, the Montana right halfback, struggled to his feet, blocked Gray, and allowed Popovitch to continue.

The spotter was on the edge of his seat with excitement. He forgot everything but the moment. "That's Popovitch with the ball!" he screamed. "That's Lazovitch tackling—Lazovitch got him—Popovitch is clear—he's running—Popovitch—Lazovitch—Popovitch—sonofabitch—sonofabitch!"

King had already anticipated what was coming. As the spotter reached his climax, the sportscaster thrust the microphone to his own mouth and with every ounce of breath in his lungs began to yell.

"Wow! Wow! Wow!" screamed Mr. Abernathy. It was the only sound which got through the mike.

He was not so successful on another occasion when his guest in the broadcasting box was a newswriter named Joshua Fennel. Fennel was acting as spotter, but his heart was not in the game he was watching. It was, instead, on the Army-Navy encounter being fought simultaneously in the East. Mr. Fennel had a personal interest in this because of a sizable wager he had placed upon Navy, and he was keeping tab on things by means of a messenger who was wearing out good bicycle rubber between Western Union and the ball field. As each new score came in at the local office, the messenger would peddle briskly to the stadium to deliver the news, encased in the familiar yellow envelope,

to the broadcast booth. Josh tore it open and handed it to King, who read it between local plays on the air.

The score was close up to the third quarter, when Army suddenly broke away and made three touchdowns in rapid succession. Josh could hardly wait for each new communication, and grew excessively bitter as they arrived. In the square, impersonal type of Western Union his bet was being obliterated before his eyes. But he was a good loser.

As he leaned over to deliver the last message to King, he said with utter candor and full into the microphone, "Jesus, what a screwing Army's giving Navy."

Every sport has its own hurdle for the announcer, and we came to anticipate some of them. In the excitement of a baseball game, King was sure to herald at least one beginning of a play with "Here's the bitch," and instead of "The pitcher's warming up in the bull pen," he was as likely to startle us with "The bull's in the pitcher's pen."

Where he really earned his money was during fight broadcasts. Wrestlers, boxers, managers, promoters, and even the ringside public all seemed obsessed with the single thought of appearing before the microphone.

He usually had only a chair next to the ringside, and after spotting him as they went into the ring, the contenders managed to do most of their wrestling in the corner next to him. When one of them toppled over the ropes by chance, and sometimes on purpose, the first thing he did was to make a grab for the microphone. If he secured it he talked, and while he often said nothing more innocuous than "Hello, Ma" or "Hello, Flossie," he might just as easily say, "I'll fix this dirty bastard, folks. Don't you worry."

Usually the wrestlers or fighters were on good terms with King, but occasionally one of them took exception to him. One of this number paused in the middle of a fight, pushed his surprised opponent out of the way, and, rushing to the

side of the stage, wrenched loose the telephone which connected KUKU with the auditorium. He heaved it with all the force of his well-muscled arm straight in the direction where King Abernathy had been one second before. If King hadn't seen it coming, KUKU would have lost its entire sports staff at one swoop.

Another wrestler, thrown over the ropes, landed straight in King's lap. He was still swinging as he struck, and one of the blows hit the sportscaster fairly on the chin. The broadcast was immediately concluded due to circumstances beyond our control.

King carried a curious good-luck piece hanging by a chain from his vest pocket, and unless you looked at it closely, you might have mistaken it for an Elk's tooth. It was a tooth all right, but it was of a smaller size than those grown by elk, and King had secured it at a fight broadcast.

Young Firpo, fresh out of Idaho and with an eye on the light heavyweight crown, was meeting Leo Lomsky on that occasion. King had been occupying his usual chair at the ringside, and sometime during the bout Lomsky delivered himself of a resounding smack which caught his adversary full in the face. Young Firpo's rubber mouth guard bounced to the boards with the force of the blow, and he staggered back against the ropes only a short distance from the broadcasting corner.

"His eyes started popping out and going round and round in his head, only each was going a different direction," King told us afterward. "I was so surprised I couldn't say anything. I just sat there, and before I know it, he spit. He spit straight at me, and when I looked down I had a whole lapful of teeth. That's the biggest one there. I had a jeweler string it up for me on a gold chain."

King was a great favorite with the promoters, and when too many acquaintances, or even strangers, poured too many drinks down his willing throat, the promoters were

responsible for taking care of him. Barry had warned them that he always started King out from the station in good condition. If they let him get to the point before the broadcast where he was unable to go on the air, King would be out of a job and the fight would simply not be broadcast.

One evening he came on with as good an imitation of a man having a chill as I ever heard. He obviously wasn't drunk; he was simply afflicted with chattering teeth, and none of us could quite figure it out.

"Maybe he's sick." Worried, Barry reached for the telephone. "If he is, I better send another guy down there to cover, although I don't know who it will be."

The promoter who answered the phone at the armory denied there was anything wrong with King. He wasn't sick. He wasn't drunk. If we'd only leave him alone, he'd be all right. As the broadcast continued he did improve, and by the end he was quite himself. It wasn't until much later that we found out what had happened. King had met too many admirers who wished him to share their refreshments. These varied from the worst kind of moonshine to the most potent of bathtub gin, and when King tilted a bottle, he wasn't fooling. A quarter of an hour before air time he had found himself in a quiet dressing room and silently passed out. He was discovered almost immediately, and strenuous action was taken. Willing hands stripped him of his clothing, and unyielding arms held him beneath an icy shower for twelve minutes by the clock. There was no time for a rubdown, so with teeth still a-clatter and hair streaming rivulets into his collar he was led to the ringside and told to go to work.

Barry always went to bat for his staff, protecting them against all comers, but there were times when King sorely tried the patience of us all. There was always some listener who called up to complain that we had an intoxicated man on the mike, and in all truth we could hardly deny it.

After the Carnera-Sharkey fight, however, no one could say anything to Barry about King Abernathy. He was in.

In those days even the big networks didn't carry championship fights, and on our small chain of four stations it was practically impossible. The big Eastern fights were reported by Western Union to the coast, play by play, but with a saving of words which only Western Union or a radio spot writer could duplicate.

King decided he would build his own fight from these terse facts and went to Barry for encouragement. He got it, for the idea appealed to Barry's sense of showmanship. He even went so far as to hire a special operator from Western Union for the evening. The operator took over one of our offices, set up his equipment, and prepared to take the news direct from the wire.

These accounts as they are received in Morse code are accurate, but lacking in color. They might say: "Second round Carnera scores right to head Sharkey counters left to stomach Sharkey misses with left to jaw Carnera lands right to head Sharkey down to count of three."

It's all there, but it's like taking an aspirin without water. King proposed to introduce the necessary color which went into a ringside broadcast. He'd seen enough fights to do it, he argued. After all, crowds were the same wherever you go; fighters were the same. He couldn't see much difference between Madison Square Garden and the Portland Armory.

He delved into the sound records, so heartily despised by Duncan Abrams, and made his selection: crowds cheering, crowds booing, crowds talking, and crowds blowing their tops. He pressed Duncan into service to provide certain live effects, body blows with padded bricks on leather cushions, vocal grunts, and referee's counts. That, he insisted, was all he needed.

We gave the Eastern fight a little head start so he could

make sure of a couple of rounds ahead, and started in. We didn't actually say we were broadcasting in the East, but neither did we come right out and admit it was from Western Union accounts in a Portland studio. We let our audience draw its own conclusions, and with a background of crowds, King's frequent references to bloody noses, perspiring bodies, and the physical condition of the contestants (none of which was in the reports), our audience concluded as we wanted it to.

Our phones were wild. We even had one call from a local paper wanting to verify their own copy of the wire report with what we'd been receiving on the air.

When it was all over, Barry came into the studio. He had appointed himself messenger to carry the reports from the operator to King, and he had almost worn himself out jumping up and down with excitement.

"King," he said solemnly, wringing the sportscaster by the hand. "You're a swell guy. You're the best damn sportscaster I ever heard. Come into my office. I want to buy you a drink."

Our other announcers turned avaricious eyes on the glory and gifts, largely alcoholic, bestowed upon King, and they cornered Barry with demands that they should have a fling at his job.

Teddy Smythe was coming along nicely, and when King developed laryngitis the opening night of the dog races, Barry decided to give him a chance.

Teddy had never seen a dog race, but he took that into consideration. He went early. He talked with everyone. He asked questions and covered pages with his notes.

The remote began with fifteen minutes of color to get listeners into the mood, and Teddy covered himself with glory. He described the crowds and the rush to the parimutuel windows. He picked up a little of the band. He read the names of the dogs and waxed eloquent over the

brilliant coats and smart appearance of the attendants. Finally the dogs themselves came onto the track. The bugle sounded.

"They're off!" shouted Teddy, and King could not have uttered the two words more convincingly. Then there was a pause and when Teddy spoke again there was amazement in his voice. You could almost see his pointing finger. "Lookit! Lookit! Lookit! Why—it's all over!"

CHAPTER 14

Perhaps the reason everyone gave an inward curtsy at the mention of that hallowed group known as *they* was that *they* were so remote. *They* purposely kept themselves so, and we never knew what *they* were thinking or going to do. We had lost our awe of Chet Minsinger when he labored among us, and perhaps Chet knew this, for he never returned to the station itself. When *they* did appear, it was always Mr. Zerhorst and the chief engineer with whom we had no opportunity to hobnob.

For months on end *they* might remain silent, merely remitting salary checks each week, and then *they* might take it upon themselves to descend briefly in our midst, whereupon anything might happen from the dropping of heads to the laying down of a whole new set of rules and regulations.

When Barry became station manager, he was not allowed to forget for a moment that *they* controlled the purse strings, *they* made the policies, *they* were the highest of the most high.

Now we all sensed that something was about to happen. *They* had been rumbling and grumbling for some weeks up in Seattle, and their correspondence had been weighing down the shoulders of our mail carrier almost as heavily as had that of the Mystic Inner Eye and the Reverend Kramer. Finally Chet Minsinger called Barry from a downtown hotel, summoning him to the royal presence, and we knew it was serious.

Barry was gone all day, and after he had put Chet and Mr. Zerhorst on the Seattle plane, he came back to the studio and gave us the cold, hard facts.

"I don't like it any better than the rest of you," he admitted grimly, "but *they* sign the checks, and this is how *they* want it. First of all, we've got a rate card, and all accounts have to be sold on that basis."

"But they can't do that," protested Harry Fosdyke. "You know yourself the only way we can keep some accounts on the air is by going under the regular rate card. We've got to charge what the traffic can stand."

"Then they'll just have to cancel," said Barry firmly.

"Not even a buck or two under? That makes a big difference to some sponsors. They think they're getting a bargain."

"Not a penny under."

"*They*'re signing our death notice," said Harry sadly, and Barry wouldn't look at him. In Harry's case, particularly, that was probably true.

"Second, all spots are sold on a wordage basis," he continued stubbornly. "We have fifty-word spots and a hundred-word spots. It's up to you to count those words, Woodie, and see that they don't run fifty-two or a hundred and ten."

"But Barry, I haven't time to count them all. And besides, what difference can a couple of words make?"

"You'll find the time. And you'll count them. That's your problem. Sammy, all musical shows that go to the chain have to have music clearance."

"What do you mean, music clearance?" Sammy gasped.

"It means that you've got to send Seattle the names of the tunes you're going to play on each show and who wrote them and who published them. And you have to do it ten days in advance of broadcasting."

"I can't do that, Barry. I don't even make out some of the programs till the day we go on the air!"

"You'll make them out ten days in advance and get the lists in the mail. We're having duplication of numbers on the Portland, Seattle, and Spokane shows that follow each other. *They* want that stopped. And the publishers are beginning to worry about their cut."

"What do you mean, cut? They ought to be glad we're plugging their music."

"I'm just telling you the score. I'm not interpreting the plays," said Barry wearily. "Woodie, any dramatic scripts that we send to net have to be sent up ten days in advance so they can be read by Seattle."

"Read? What for?"

"To make sure you don't say anything that offends the public taste."

"Offends the public taste!" I sputtered indignantly. "I guess I know as much about public taste as *they* do."

"Apparently not. I asked Chet about that, because I knew you'd beef, and he said that in one of last week's shows you had two soldiers talking about a crap game. Chet thinks it would have been better if the boys had referred to it as a game of dice. And along that line, any of you who lets slip a "damn" or a "hell" or any other word of profanity of any kind can just pick up his check from Miss Tolman and keep going."

"They're always accidents, Barry," protested someone.

"You know they're accidents, and I know they're accidents," he agreed. "But *they* make the rules, and from now on there won't be any accidents."

Gloom settled on KUKU for as long as two weeks, but before we knew it, all of us save the sales force were in the swing of the new regime. The salesmen wouldn't give up, and of these Frank Beeman was the most stubborn.

Frank was a portly and imposing individual who wore black rubber overshoes atop high-laced boots which invariably squeaked, and carried a long crook-handled black cot-

ton umbrella. He must have had it built to specifications, for when it was raised, the umbrella formed a canopy which covered one side of the walk to the other. Frank took the middle course, and pedestrians who were unfortunate enough to meet him either ducked under or stepped off the curb. I always felt that his manipulation of that umbrella was symbolic of the workings of his mind.

He sold only spot announcements, and no amount of cajoling would make him aspire to present a program to a sponsor.

"Why should I?" he asked flatly. "To hell with programs. It's easier to sell spots. I don't have to work so hard, and if I sell enough of them, I make just as much dough."

This was, of course, the truth, but Frank was the only salesman I ever knew who came right out and admitted it. Soon after the edict of the word count, Frank brought me a new spot announcement which he had sold and which had been writ by the sacred hand of the sponsor himself.

"I'll have to cut, Frank," I told him, counting rapidly on my fingers. "It's only a fifty-word spot and it runs sixty-two words."

"No, it don't," he argued stubbornly. "Barry already said hyphenated words count as one."

"He was talking about the Walnut Growers Co-operative."

"No, he wasn't. He was talking about a co-educational college. Now, if you count 'co-operative' as one word, and 'co-education' as one word, hyphenated words are one."

"Of course, in a case like that—"

"I explained it all to my client," insisted Frank calmly. "We did all the cutting that's going to be done on this spot. And we hyphenated a few words. You can count 'em, and you'll see they come out exactly fifty."

All adjoining adjectives in his announcements were neatly connected by hyphens, and so were the four words

of the firm's name. We argued about that to no purpose, and finally Frank concluded things by picking up his umbrella and stamping out. I cut the spot to fifty words, expecting a cancellation after the first broadcast, but nothing happened. Frank never gave up, however. As long as he worked at KUKU, he always submitted his copy besprinkled with hyphens which belonged there only because he was saving words for his client.

When he called the staff together that day, Barry hadn't mentioned one of the most drastic changes *they* had instigated. It concerned Harry Fosdyke, and he related it to Harry privately, and later to me. *They* had taken away Harry's retaining fee.

Harry was our trouble-shooting salesman. He was tall and tan, a little dippy but definitely a diplomat. He used his diplomacy on his clients when the boys loused up the copy or when I had used too scanty a hand with the adjectives or put the wrong spot in the file. He used his diplomacy on me when he prefaced with an apologetic laugh the client's demand for a program just like Amos 'n Andy on a ten-dollar talent charge. He soothed Sammy Twohy's feelings when he reported a sponsor's dislike of musical selections with the confidential opinion that the sponsor was probably tone-deaf.

Harry was a better trouble shooter than he was a salesman, and automatically inherited our more difficult accounts. He wasn't so successful in selling new ones, so George McPherson became sales manager. Anyone but *they* would have realized that Harry earned several times over his small retaining fee for maintaining calm.

"I talked till I was purple," reported Barry bitterly. "But it didn't do no good. They say there's no reason why a guy should be paid fifteen bucks a week for doing nothing, and it looks to them like that's what Harry's doing."

"Fifteen dollars!" I was surprised that anyone so well

dressed as Harry could manage on so little. "Is that all he makes a week?"

"No. He gets straight commission, too, and that comes to maybe fifteen more. He can't sell beans, that guy. But that's not what we need him for. You know what'll happen if we turn George and Frank loose on some of the shaky accounts."

"I know," I agreed bitterly. "The client is always right, and heaven help the continuity writer."

"It won't be any worse on you than on anybody else," Barry sighed. "But that's the idea. They'll give a client anything so long as they keep him on the air or make a sale. We've got to have Harry in there to smooth things out and keep an even balance."

"Maybe he can still keep an eye on some of the worst ones."

"I can't ask him any more," said Barry sadly. "If he's working on straight commission, he's got to have all his time to himself for selling new stuff. We can't ask him to dog-rob for us any more."

Harry took the news nicely, because he was that kind of a person. He set his jaw and started out each morning, resolved to bring in a big account, but somehow he never did. We knew he was working, for he was scrupulous to call in at regular intervals and report his whereabouts. Everyone knew about it by this time, and we were all worried.

"Any luck?" we'd call to Vi as she hung up the receiver. It was obvious she'd been talking to Harry, for she had adopted a new protective, half-motherly tone whenever she spoke to him.

"Not yet," she might say frowning, becoming immediately busy with something on her desk. Or perhaps, more rarely, "He sold a spot! Once a week. Daytimes."

Then we'd all celebrate, although a daytime spot cost

only four dollars, and Harry would receive but 20 per cent. As a matter of fact, we had all become rate-card conscious because of his predicament and could have quoted prices as glibly as he. An evening announcement cost ten dollars, a full hour after six was thirty-nine, and before six was fifteen. At 20 per cent it would take him quite a while to make up that retaining fee.

He had started with a backlog of ten dollars weekly, accounts he himself had sold previous to the new regime, and by the end of six weeks, when he had built it up to fourteen, most of us had come to accept things as they were. We were still fond of Harry and entirely sympathetic with his problem, but we had problems of our own.

Vi was the exception. She stopped Barry at her desk one day and demanded point-blank what he was going to do about it.

"About what?"

"About Harry Fosdyke. Can't you see the guy's making himself sick. He works all day long. All night, too. He never lets up."

"Well, he asked for work when he came here," said Barry, not to be smart, but because it happened to be one of his pet phrases. It was too bad he pulled it out of the hat at that particular moment.

"Yes, he asked for work," snapped Vi. "But he didn't ask to be kicked in the teeth. I think you're as bad as *they* are. Every bit as bad. You could do something."

"Hold on a minute," argued Barry, trying to keep his temper. "You know I didn't make the rules. I'm just the guy who has to carry them out. I didn't have anything to do with that order. The whole trouble is Harry's no salesman."

"He is a salesman. He's a wonderful salesman."

"Then he's selling the wrong thing," said Barry shortly, and started for his office.

"There's lots of people worse off than Harry," I tried to tell her. "Lots and lots of people don't have any job. You should see the lines at the soup kitchen. And people on relief!"

"Be quiet," she said. "Barry just gave me an idea. Don't bother me."

The new edge to Vi's voice took me by surprise, and I went back to my desk and sulked. Who did she think she was, I asked myself, to treat me as though I were an annoying child? Just because she had two fur coats and a couple of diamond rings, she didn't have to give orders. No one could stay mad at Vi long, however, and by noon I had forgotten the whole incident.

Few people knew Vi Weathering well, although everyone liked the Vi she permitted us to see. She spoke vaguely of an early marriage which hadn't taken, but it hadn't embittered her toward men. At least a fourth of the calls which came into the studio were Vi's present suitors, and she changed them so rapidly that we had long since given up trying to keep their names straight. She was friendly toward everyone, and before this she had been no friendlier toward Harry Fosdyke than anyone else. Now it was perfectly evident, even to Barry who was usually blind as a mole about such things, that Vi was pursuing Harry.

"I can't figure it out," Barry told me in amazement. "All the guys she's got. Guys with dough. She's thrown them all over for Harry. That's the third time this week she's waited for him to come back, and they left together."

"She's sorry for him."

"There's more to it than that. You can't tell me a gal like that doesn't want something."

"It's evident that I can tell you a number of things," I replied with dignity, resenting his inference toward a member of my sex. "Maybe she's fallen in love with him."

"Love!" snorted Barry. "Never heard of it."

It couldn't have been more than a week or so later when Harry gave us another shock by giving notice.

"I just can't make it here," he said regretfully. "I hate to leave radio, but I've got to think of my future."

"What are you going to do?" we demanded. Nobody quit a job in those days, not even if you had a rich relative in ill health. Even if he died and left you his estate, it was too likely to consist of bankruptcy papers.

"I'm going into business," said Harry evasively. Then, after a moment, "In business for myself."

It was all we could get out of him, nor would Vi, whom we suspected of knowing all about it, say anything more. But she seemed brighter than she had been for a long time as she answered the phones, even more gentle as she handled the public, and downright gushy as she spoke with some of Harry's old accounts who wandered in looking for him. She enjoyed that state of inner glow for several days, and then she exploded with the suggestion that we have a studio party.

Our studio parties took several forms. They might be impromptu affairs called on the spur of the moment and held in someone's kitchen. They might be more elaborate occasions, staged at the Multnomah Hotel when a visiting name band came to town. If this were the case, KUKU would reserve a table close to the orchestra. Everyone would take a bottle to be secreted beneath the table cloth, and we'd get a special discount on setups and cover charge.

Vi suggested neither of these as the scene for our festivities.

"There's a new speak opened up," she announced. "The '217.' It's terribly snooty. And they've got a new special drink called the 'Rosy Anna.' "

"Runs into dough," said Barry darkly. "Four bits a drink."

"But you always get a straight shot on the house when you leave," she reminded him.

"It doesn't even up. One free drink's nothing after you've been dropping fifty-cent pieces all evening."

"Besides, we won't have to pay for food. There's a free buffet."

"We might try it this once," argued Sammy. "Just to see what it's like. If we don't like it, we can always leave and go to my house."

"I'll try anything once," agreed Barry. "But who'll get us in? Who knows the guy who runs it?"

"I do," said Vi. "I'll call up ahead of time and tell them to expect a big party."

The speak-easy was in one of Portland's newer apartment houses. It was much finer and more expensive than the one in which I maintained my small, but adequate, home, and I gazed up and down its yellow brick front admiringly.

A huge party such as ours would never presume to enter in a body. It might attract attention. We wandered in by twos and threes and met upstairs. Vi was waiting just inside the brick entrance by the typed list of names and bells connected to upstairs apartments. She had been stationed there for some time and she was shivering with the cold.

"Where's your mink coat?" I demanded in surprise, for I in my fifty-dollar muskrat was warm and comfortable.

"That old thing?" she sniffed airily, pulling her thin cloth collar closer about her throat and jabbing at the call button. "I'm tired of it. Go on up. It's apartment 217."

We went on up. Someone had been burning incense in the hallway because someone else had been burning cabbage in one of the apartments. The odors didn't mingle, but struck you in individual nauseating gusts. In spite of the fact that Vi had vouched for us, there was the usual moment of uncertainty as we knocked on the door. Maybe the proprietor wouldn't like our looks and would refuse us en-

trance; maybe the law had sneaked in ahead and we'd walk in on a raid.

Neither of these things happened, for when the door was opened, there stood Henry Fosdyke. We fell on him happily. How thoughtful of Vi to station him at one end and herself at the other. And, as we considered it, why should we be surprised to see Harry? It was only natural after Vi's late but apparent feelings that she would invite him to a studio party. We were glad to see him, and Harry was glad to see us.

He took our coats. He led us into the living room of the apartment, furnished as any apartment living room in overstuffed furniture, coffee tables, and occasional chairs. This room, he explained, was reserved tonight for KUKU. The bedrooms and dining room, which were also refurnished with living-room furniture, would be given to smaller parties. *But tonight* this was all ours. What would we have to drink?

A good-looking girl with earrings which touched her shoulders stood waiting to take our order, and we conferred. Each speak-easy had specialties, and it was a mark of sophistication to know which drinks belonged to which speak.

"Pig's Wrist, Holy Cow, Singapore Sling, Honolulu Lulu, Rosy Anna," said Harry glibly reeling them off. "And, of course, the stand-bys—highballs, side cars, Manhattans, Martinis."

"What's in a Rosy Anna?" someone asked, and Harry smiled that old smooth smile which unruffled feelings even while he flatly turned somebody down.

"It's a specialty of the house. Trade secret, and I can't tell. But because it's you, I will say there's sloe gin in it."

One taste would have divulged this secret, but whoever asked the question was convinced that Harry Fosdyke was going beyond the line of discretion in divulging that much. The girl was coming back with our orders just as Vi and

the last group from the station arrived. Harry took their coats and returned just as the girl was collecting for the round.

"No," he said hastily, pushing the bill back into Barry's hand. "You people can't pay for a thing."

"We can't?" demanded Barry, his mouth falling open in surprise. "Who said so?"

"I did," smiled Harry. "Everything's on the house."

"That's right, Barry," agreed Vi. "Because if it hadn't been for you, Harry wouldn't have all this."

"What are you talking about? What does Harry have?"

"This speak. It's his. It belongs to him."

Nobody said a word. There was an audible sipping all around the circle, because that's what everybody needed.

"You mean," said Barry carefully after he had swallowed, "that this is the business Harry went into when he left the station?"

"She certainly does," agreed Harry. "And I'm really cleaning up, too. Two hundred profit last week, and that was the first week. It'll be better from now on. Some difference between that and fourteen, isn't it?"

"Yeah," said Barry weakly. "But how come you give me the credit? I didn't fire you."

"No," said Vi. "But you said he wasn't a salesman because he wasn't selling the right thing. I asked him what he thought the right thing was, and he said in prohibition all people seemed to want was a drink. So—he sells what they want to buy."

"I see," said Barry weakly. "But just how did you finance all this if it's any of my business? This apartment alone must cost you close to a hundred bucks a month."

"Oh," said Harry smoothly, "I found an angel."

He leaned over and patted Vi's hand. The two diamond rings were missing.

CHAPTER 15

While Frank Beeman was solving the problem of the new regulations by ignoring them, and Harry Fosdyke was solving them by starting a speak-easy, George McPherson was continuing on his obnoxious way. He sold more programs than anyone else, but it always seemed to us that he did so on the theory that the sponsor and George were always right, the staff always wrong.

George was a rather stocky individual who gave the appearance of being plump without actually being so. He had bright, rather brownish hazel eyes and thinning hair which began well up on his shiny, well-scrubbed forehead. His clothes were better than average in those years, with ties which exactly matched in shade the protruding handkerchief corners from his breast pocket. Everywhere he went he exuded the fragrance of sickly sweet shaving lotion and shoe polish.

George was humorless and intense about everything he did, and that very intensity helped contribute to his great success as a salesman. He literally wore his clients down with his persistence. Perhaps seeing him as they did at short and infrequent intervals, hard working, always filled with suggestions as to how their advertising might be improved, always willing to help them save a dollar on talent which was not commissionable, they were impressed. Unfortunately these qualities worked the other way with us. We found George plain objectionable.

I objected when George showed up at five in the afternoon with copy for a new show to start at nine the next morning. The announcers objected when he gave them frequent lectures on how to punch their lines. Mike objected because George would sell a half-hour dramatic show, making a talent charge for only two actors, and expect him to create a cast of twenty through doubling. Sammy objected because George, having once served as second tenor in an amateur quartet, set himself up as a music critic. Vi objected because he considered her his private secretary and tried to fill her whole time with his demands, including not only his correspondence and appointment book but his personal shopping as well. His colleagues on the sales force objected because George gloated all the while he outsold them. Even Barry objected—though not too strenuously, mindful of George's sales record—when he constituted himself a committee of one to originate the programs he was willing to sell.

He came into the studio one morning and announced loudly that he had Manion and Flegel nibbling at the hook and was about ready to pull them in.

"Is that so?" said Barry, looking impressed. Manion and Flegel was our biggest department store and so far had had little interest in radio advertising.

"That's right," agreed George pompously. "Just spent two hours in their office going over the details of a program with them. There's just one thing that's holding them back."

"What?"

"An announcer."

"An announcer? We've got announcers. Let them hold auditions if they're so particular."

"You don't understand," smiled George tolerantly. "This is the kind of a show which depends entirely on the announcer. Our boys are fine boys, you understand, but they

don't have quite the touch we need. They can't give it the umph that this calls for."

"What kind of show do they have in mind?" demanded Barry a little amazed, and Bruce, who had come out of the studio to listen to the conversation, assumed the shade of one of Harry Fosdyke's Rosy Annas.

"I'm not prepared to say right now," admitted George. "Only it's good. It'll be the most colossal thing that ever hit Portland radio. When I find the right announcer for the show, I'll write some copy, get it whipped into shape, and we'll have Manion and Flegel down here for an audition."

"You're going to write it yourself?" I asked.

"You're fine for ordinary run-of-the-mill copy, Woodie" —George was being his most maddening self. "But this is special. It takes a little something extra. I'd better do the first one myself. Maybe after the show gets going—but we'll see about that."

"How about music?" asked Sammy. "How big a combo will they pay for?"

"No live music," said George firmly. "Records. On a record you get the best talent in the world. Don't have to depend on local stuff. And once we get going, people will forget they're records, anyway." George had now succeeded in enraging everyone in the studio.

"If you find an announcer you think might handle it, we might hire him on a spot basis," said Barry hastily. "We really don't need an extra man right now, but if you can swing Manion and Flegel it'll be a real feather in our cap."

"I'll find him," said George confidently.

To everyone's surprise he did. He came into the studio one morning with a slight, nervous individual in tow whom he introduced as Winston Steele. Mr. Steele's voice, if not his person, was known to all of us. We had heard him on network programs from the South, and if he was not of top-drawer radio, he was of the drawer directly below the top.

He was newly arrived in town, he admitted on being pressed, and had made no commitments as yet. He was still looking around. He had severed his connections with the network, and murmured vague somethings about the California climate and the vast, invigorating greenness of the Pacific Northwest.

He had met our Mr. McPherson the night before (George was upset when he found that Mr. Steele had divulged this information) at a speak-easy, and because they were both in the trade, they fell to talking. George had asked him to come down and make an audition this morning, and since Mr. Steele was always glad to oblige a friend, he had agreed.

"I'm not like some people that let grass grow under their feet," said George pointedly, "so we'll have the audition this afternoon. I've already notified the department store, and they'll be over to listen. I've picked out the records, and I got the copy I need from this morning's paper. I'll have it put together by one o'clock."

"If you want Woodie to help you," began Barry, but George waved him aside.

"No, she's always crying about how busy she is. Besides, this takes salesmanship. I better do it myself. I will need Bruce and Teddy, though, and a teck to run the records."

"Bruce and Teddy? I thought Mr. Steele was going to announce?"

"He is. And it's his name that's really going to put the deal across to the sponsor. This is no two-bit program. This is a big thing. We'll need three announcers, not one."

Bruce and Teddy preened themselves, and poor Bob McRoberts once again felt discriminated against.

The audition was set for three o'clock and for two hours before, George, his three announcers, and the teck were in studio consultation. Sammy and I were dying to hear what was going on, but Walt wasn't on duty and Perce Green

never turned on the audition panel without being asked. We couldn't ask him without admitting an unbecoming curiosity.

A little before three Mr. Manion and Mr. Flegel of the department store arrived and were met by George, who escorted them proudly into Barry's office and closed the door. Sammy and I stopped our pretense of work, for whatever was piped on audition into Barry's office would automatically fill the speaker in the reception room.

The program started with a fanfare, and before it had blared its last note, Winston Steele's voice, professionally taut and glib, had picked it up.

"You are tuned to Manion and Flegel's Bargain Parade, featuring your favorite network announcer, Winston Steele, with music by the Barbershop Four. We can only repeat these specials once, ladies and gentlemen, so while the boys give out with 'Sweet Adeline,' get pencils and papers ready to jot them down."

At this the teck cut loose with a quartet record, and Mr. Steele, who had said his first piece, was still. He said it again, however, at the conclusion of the record, and this time he was assisted by Mr. Horton and Mr. Smythe.

"Specials from Manion and Flegel's Bargain Basement," announced Mr. Steele crisply, and Bruce, his voice as dramatic as though heralding the declaration of war, broke in.

"Men's long cotton underwear, seventy-nine cents!"

"Women's housedresses, a dollar nineteen," cried Teddy.

"Unfinished bunk beds, complete with ladder, twelve-ninety-five," shouted Mr. Steele.

This was the program. The three alternated reading specials from the full page ad run in the morning newspaper by Manion and Flegel. After twelve or fourteen specials they played another record. Every line was punched as though it were a personal enemy, and their voices rose

a little with each speech. There was no other continuity, and by the time they had finished playing seven records, they had announced perhaps a hundred or so items.

Mr. Manion and Mr. Flegel had never heard such a program. They were enchanted, and agreed with George it was the biggest thing in radio. They signed on the dotted line with the stipulation that nothing be changed. Winston Steele stood around modestly accepting their congratulations, while poor Bruce and Teddy, who had worked themselves up to an equal state of perspiration, hovered unnoticed in the background. They were hometown stuff.

After the sponsors had gone, Mr. Steele cleared his throat.

"About my salary," he said. "I would like a week's advance, if you don't mind. I have money coming in the mail from the South, but you know how mails are these days."

"I'm sorry, Winston," refused Barry affably, "but we operate out of Seattle. All checks come from there, and until they know you're on the payroll, we can't do anything about it."

Mr. Steele stiffened, and George began to flutter.

"There's the petty cash."

"Sorry," said Barry firmly. "No petty cash. *They* make the rules, not me."

"Surely my name is worth credit," persisted Mr. Steele.

"You bet it is," agreed George indignantly digging into his own pocket. "If the station won't advance you a week's pay, I'll do it myself personally. I know a good announcer when I hear one."

"Thank you," said Winston Steele simply, accepting the money. "I'll never forget this, George. You may be sure of that."

Perhaps he didn't, but we could never be certain. That evening Mr. Steele left town. We contacted his former network and learned that he had been discharged for reasons not divulged. They had no idea where he had gone. Neither

had we. With the disappearance of the "name" announcer, Manion and Flegel's bargain basement continued without benefit of radio advertising.

Far from being discouraged at this piece of bad luck, George merely turned his attention to another department. This time it was Duncan's midnight request program.

"What that show needs to make it salable is live talent," he decided. "There are three request programs in town right now at that hour, all playing canned music. If you'll make ours different, I can guarantee you spots."

"Frank's got the show loaded with spots already," objected Barry. "It's not like the days when I did all the selling on it and the announcing, too. Why don't you try to sell some of the shows we have now, George, instead of always trying to build your own?"

"Keep it on another hour," argued George, ignoring the comment and sticking to his original request. "So long as it pays for itself, what do you care?"

"I don't. You show me the business, and I'll keep it on as late as it warrants. But remember Sammy has to get down pretty early for the Early Birds. You better talk to him first before you start promising live talent to clients."

"Sammy!" scoffed George. "Who needs Sammy? I've got a jazz pianist all lined up who can play any tune you can name once he hears it. And he can't read a note of music, either. Besides, I can work a deal on talent. Get him for nothing."

And that's how Buzzy Banks came to work for us.

Buzzy had never studied music, but he was born with enough of it so that study was superflous for his purpose. He leaned toward the rippling style so much in vogue with roadhouse patrons, and that, in fact, was where Buzzy got in his best licks.

He played at one of these establishments each evening from eleven until twelve, whereupon he jumped into his

car, made it to the studio by twelve-thirty and played requests for an hour. After a cordial invitation to all listeners to join him at his regular stand, he hastened back to the roadhouse to carry on till all were exhausted.

George worked out an arrangement of roadhouse plugs on the air so that we got Buzzy's services without charge, and everyone was pleased about the whole thing.

The technician went home at midnight, leaving Duncan in complete charge. Duncan knew enough about monitoring so that he could handle the board, but in order to take telephone calls as well, he made his announcements from the booth while Buzzy played in the studio. There was no time after Buzzy reached the studio to make out a program, so Duncan evolved the idea of doing it as they went along. He read a half-dozen requests at a time, piping his announcements into the studio and allowing Buzzy to make his own choice.

I was sitting home one evening with my radio tuned low so the apartment house wouldn't object when Buzzy came on.

"Here's a request from Hazel and Fern for 'Ten Cents a Dance,'" announced Duncan breezily. "Eddie and Flo want you to play 'The Peanut Vendor' and the Fowler family would like 'Sweet and Lovely.' Jerry and Toots request 'Springtime in the Rockies.' Which one of these do you want to play first for our listeners, Buzzy?"

Apparently Mr. Banks, who never spoke on the program, approved "Springtime in the Rockies," for he began it promptly, rippling up and down the keys with fine abandon. At its conclusion Duncan spoke again.

"That's fine, Buzzy. And here are more requests. Jack and Mildred would like you to play 'All of Me.' Bubbles and the gang want 'Bye Bye Blues'; here's another request for 'Sweet and Lovely,' this time from Don and Frank, and one for 'Springtime in the Rockies,' which you just played,

Buzzy Banks was a hot-jazz pianist with a thirst for more than music

from Bob and Margie, and 'Love for Sale' from Blondie. Which one this time, Buzzy?"

To my amazement Buzzy once again launched forth on "Springtime in the Rockies," playing it through to the end. Duncan was undoubtedly busy on the telephones and didn't notice, but after its conclusion when he announced a third set of requests and again Buzzy played "Springtime in the Rockies," he came to. Without explanation he switched back to records.

"The guy was glassy-eyed drunk," he told us the next day. "He's always three sheets to the wind when he shows up. I never mentioned it before, because he can still play, drunk or sober, but last night his mind worked on that one tune and nothing else. I couldn't do a thing with him."

Barry, when he heard it, dispensed with Mr. Banks's services, and the midnight request program went back to straight records. George McPherson grumbled, but there was nothing he could do. Barry told him he'd have to sell the talent we already had and to stop trying to provide his own.

Immediately George set about instigating slight changes in our present staff. On one of our dramatic shows he decided he could cut the costs for the sponsor by using the announcer on duty as one of the characters in the play. The announcer happened to be Bruce, and because he had had experience in stock, Mike finally agreed to give him a trial.

It was like the clang of sirens to an old fire horse like Bruce. He promised grandly to change his voice for the assigned parts so he wouldn't be recognized as the announcer who gave the commercials, and after listening to him in rehearsal Mike agreed he would do.

The script opened with a regular sign-on and a short dramatized scene from the ensuing play. This filled page one, concluding with the orchestra cue for background to

the commercial copy on page two. On the third page the dramatization began in earnest with Bruce, in his character part, having the first speech.

All went too well in rehearsal, and George, who had attended, rubbed his hands in glee.

"That's five bucks saved for the sponsor," he gloated. "Why didn't I think of this before? That guy Horton is good!"

Bruce heard him and glowed with pride. He'd show us that Duncan Abrams wasn't the only staff member with dramatic ability!

In his eagerness he waited for the short scene on page one, and as it finished, he turned his script to page three, totally ignoring the commercial message which paid for the play on the second page. With great feeling he read his opening speech of the dramatization, and the orchestra, taken by surprise, faded out. The other thespians tried to point out his mistake, but Bruce ignored them. In his enthusiasm he carried them along with their own lines until it was too late to go back. Nor did he once glance at the control room where both Mike and George were gesturing frantically.

The listening sponsor phoned at once, and it was the last time that our announcer on duty took a dramatic part in the same production.

George was never happier than when he was driving a bargain for a sponsor, but there were times when he used one client for the sake of another.

He had a flour account which was unhappy about radio. They couldn't trace direct sales to their advertising, but when George suggested a give-away for test purposes, they refused to spend the extra money. George was glum for several days. Then one morning he appeared a different person.

"Change all flour copy," he told me eagerly. "Offer a beautiful, attractive, handy set of cake testers free to anybody who sends in the label off any-size package of flour and five cents to cover postage."

"Cake tester? What kind of cake tester?" I demanded suspiciously.

"You know. Dinguses women stick into cakes to tell when they're done," he explained vaguely. "Every package of cake testers is beautifully tied in pink ribbon. You might put that in, too. Fix it up. Make it sound good."

I did my best even though I was unable to pin him down more concretely, and the response was sufficiently gratifying to satisfy the account. They renewed their contract. It was not until much later that we discovered the true story of the cake testers. George had gone to another of his accounts, a broom company, and asked for their scrap straw. These he had boiled clean, tied with his own hands in pink ribbon, and offered to the flour company as a give-away.

There was one small way we could get back at George for the slights he was always dealing out to our respective prides, and that was to keep him off the air. He had a singularly raspy voice, not evident to himself apparently, and an overpowering ambition to inflict it on the airways. We took pleasure in keeping him off. This was all the more gratifying because George made no secret of his desire. Whenever he was not on the streets selling time, he was hanging around the studio, enviously regarding those who were allowed to speak before the microphone.

He was thus occupied one day while a musical program was in progress, and the teck gave a signal to Sammy that we were having technical troubles and were temporarily off the air. George was standing with his nose against the glass door as Sammy received the signal, but he didn't realize what had happened. Sammy whispered to Bob McRoberts, who scribbled something on a scrap of paper. No

one was more startled than George when the door was opened and the paper thrust into his hands. I saw it later when someone retrieved it from a wastebasket.

"We're off the air," Bob had written. "Can't leave the studio. Please get teck to open key, and you make announcement that we'll be on again as soon as difficulties repaired."

George sprang into action. He dashed into the control room. He gave orders to the teck in a clarion voice, and the teck going along with the gag, threw open the dead key.

"Ladies and gentlemen," announced George pompously. "Due to circumstances beyond our control, we are off the air, and—" Here the realization came to him that his voice was blossoming unheard. He glared into the studio where the cast was reduced to hysterical laughter. The teck swore that George kicked at him as he left.

It was probably George's personal wish to appear on the air which led him to create the Man on the Street broadcast, and find an immediate sponsor for it. This was a remote broadcast which originated on a busy downtown corner during a quarter hour of noonday rush. At that time an announcer accosted innocent passers-by, inquiring their names and confronting them with a question more often ridiculous than otherwise.

There were no prizes for correct answers, and the only recompense for appearing was the chance that a friend of the speaker might be tuned in and recognize his voice on the air. That, George insisted, was reward enough.

He would have liked to appoint himself curbstone interviewer, but when Barry refused this request, he had to content himself with being the assistant who lined up interviewees for the regular announcer. Things went along as smoothly as could be expected on a program of this type until one day the police chose that period to run in a drunk from the street directly opposite the place of broadcast.

The dramatic possibilities were more than George could bear. Things were happening before his eyes, and he felt that a description of them would enhance the value of the Man on the Street. Grabbing the microphone away from Teddy Smythe with one hand and holding him firmly back with the other, he proceeded to deliver himself of that description.

"At last, ladies and gentlemen," he declared, pushing determinedly against Teddy's chest, "the police in this town have been stirred to action. And high time, I should say. High time they do something besides walk around tagging the cars of respectable citizens who have overparked only five minutes or parked in a loading zone because there was nowhere else to park!

"Three of our noble police are dragging that violator of the Volstead Act to the curb. He is strong! He resists! He does not wish to get into the paddywagon, and who would? That vehicle is a disgrace. We vote money for improvements, you and I. We expect that money to go to keep up patrol cars, to maintain clean jails and law enforcement. But does it go for that? I think that it does not. It goes into a pocket of a blue uniform. It is not used for the purpose intended for that tax dollar. It is time that we had a reform in this city, and the reform should start with our law enforcement.

"The officers of the law outnumber that intoxicated citizen three to one. Three policemen to one undersized, intoxicated individual. Bah! You or I could do it with one hand, but we have not grown soft with easy living—"

Teddy said there was much more, but the stunned technician came to by that time and shut George off the air. Barry had to promise a lot of availabilities to be devoted to the measure for the policemen's pension fund come the next election before he could get us out of that one.

CHAPTER 16

It was just a typed business letter, perhaps a little more gracious than the run-of-the-mill, but to me it was more startling than would have been a shady story from the Reverend Kramer. Such a letter in those days was a rare thing indeed. It was the offer of a job!

I read it three times to make sure, then carried it to Barry's office and shut the door.

"What's this?" he growled irritably. "Read it to me. I don't feel so good this morning."

"You'll have to read it yourself. You wouldn't believe me."

He glared a little, but his frown faded to amazement as his eyes went down the page.

"Good God!" he gasped. "San Francisco. You ain't that good!"

San Francisco was, to Northwest radio in those days, the pinnacle of success. Production was already beginning to move to Hollywood, but we ignored that. San Francisco was where we all wanted to go. San Francisco was where we would go as soon as they heard of us and recognized our talents.

The job which had been offered me was not in radio but in an advertising agency. I was to write copy, and the salary mentioned was more than I was now getting. I could tell by Barry's expression it was more than he thought I was worth.

"You know anybody in this outfit?" he demanded suspiciously. "Where'd they get hold of you? You been putting in applications at different places?"

"No, I haven't been putting in my application anywhere," I denied indignantly. A moment before I had felt very meek, considerably awed about the whole thing, but now he was putting me on the defensive. "And the only way they could possibly have heard of me was through that Prunette campaign they ran up here a couple of months ago. Prunette is one of these people's accounts. Don't you remember? They sent their Mr. Miller up here then. I worked with him on copy."

"That's right," remembered Barry thoughtfully. "Miller had a shifty eye, but he knew his business. That must have been where it came from, all right. Well, when you leaving?"

"Do you think I ought to go?" I asked timidly, changing sides again. Only a moment before I had been prepared to do battle for my right to leave if he made any objection.

"Of course you ought to go!" he exploded. "You don't want to stay forever in this godforsaken dump, do you? What's the matter with you, anyway? This is opportunity knocking at your door. You're not deaf, are you?"

You don't leave a place just like that, not after you've been there long enough to put down tentative roots, and without my even noticing it three years had slid by since I had taken that first audition.

I had to break in a new writer to take my place. I had to give notice at my apartment and dispose of articles too large and useless to accompany me on my move. I had to say good-by to everyone.

"The bands you'll get to hear," sighed Sammy enviously. "Fio Rito's playing at the Palace. Phil Harris is at the St. Francis. Horace Heidt has a different stage show every week at one of the theaters."

"Go take a look at the Blue Monday Jamboree," said Barry. "I've been thinking maybe we could put on something like it here. You can write and tell us how they work the gimmicks."

"You'll be there when prohibition's repealed," sighed Vi. "Let us know how it is down there. It's going to put people like Harry out of business."

"Go down to Fisherman's Wharf and eat yourself some abalone for me," ordered Frank Beeman.

"If you hear of any openings for a good announcer," said Bruce, with a lift of his eyebrows, "you know who to call —collect!"

There wasn't a person on the staff who wouldn't have changed places with me, and I knew it. There were so many detailed instructions as to what I must do when I arrived that I had to make notes. I was to sit on Fisherman's Wharf and consume crab cocktails by the dozen. I was to go to Coffee Dan's and week-end on Russian River and cross the ferry to Sausalito, being especially watchful for sea gulls. I was to go to Telegraph Hill and the Presidio and the Cliff House and Chinatown. There was no end to the things I could do in San Francisco. I was the luckiest girl in the world.

A train would have been quicker, but it seemed more romantic to arrive by sea. The staff saw me off on the "Admiral Peoples," a tub of a boat that bounced along the coast line, cautiously remaining in sight of land the whole course. Confetti flew and a band played, for Sammy and some of the boys had thoughtfully brought their instruments, much to the amazement of my fellow travelers.

It took us three days of jostling up and down with every inch we nosed forward to make it, but San Francisco didn't let me down. It was everything I had expected it to be—huge and glamorous and exciting.

I was ensconced in an apartment on a hill, which I

reached each evening after a breathless ride on a cable car. Miss North, who was Mr. Miller's secretary, found it for me.

"You'll have a wonderful view of the bay when there isn't fog," she assured me. "And it's so nice to have your private entrance, isn't it?"

"It certainly is," I agreed gratefully, although the private entrance had originally been designed as a fire escape. The apartment was in an old mansion converted into flats. It was smaller than my old apartment at home and more expensive, but it had atmosphere and was, Miss North assured me, on the right side of the street. This was something we didn't have to consider at home, and I was grateful to my wise and generous advisers for steering me so correctly.

My first day at the agency was an eye opener indeed. I purposely arrived a little early, anxious to make a good impression, and waited alone until nine. Promptly on the hour, and not one second before, the general staff—copy writers, artists, layout men, stenographers and secretaries —arrived. Miss North took me in tow and introduced me to everyone before she showed me the desk which would be mine. It was in a small office of its own which could be closed off to ensure greater privacy and quiet. This seemed a little unnecessary since the whole establishment was already so quiet that an unexpected cough sounded as loud as one of Duncan's sound effects. People spoke in low voices; they walked quietly; the well-oiled doors swung closed without a sound; even the typewriters were noiseless.

Miss North closed my office door to ensure greater calm and handed me a folder of papers.

"These are tear sheets from ads we have run in the past for one of our accounts," she said softly. "Mr. Miller would like you to familiarize yourself with them."

"I'll be glad to," I agreed, trying to modulate my voice to a lower key.

"They have signed up for a series of radio spots, fifty words in length. Mr. Miller thought, since you have been working in radio, you might have time to start on them today."

"Of course. How many would he like?"

"I think he said four would be all right," she smiled reassuringly. "Of course, if you don't get them done today, the radio contract doesn't start until next week."

"Oh, I'll do them this morning. And after that?"

"I doubt if you will have time for much else your first day." She looked surprised. "It's all Mr. Miller has outlined for you. But, of course, you can ask him yourself when he comes in. The account executives are always here by ten or ten-thirty."

Working in a conservative agency such as this, I soon discovered, was much different from working in a radio station. In the first place, I, who was used to turning out three to five thousand words of copy a day, couldn't understand how they could be satisfied with an output of three to five hundred. No one ever raised his voice to me, and my mistakes were pointed out in a low voice, not a loud bellow. Not once was the formal Miss dropped as a prefix to my name, and I found I had acquired unaccustomed dignity.

I arrived promptly at nine each morning, and just as promptly closed my typewriter at five, except on Saturdays, when it was covered at noon. Late evening assignments were unheard of.

With so much leisure time I hastened to fill the extra hours with all the instructions of my friends at home. Fraternizing among employees after office hours was discouraged at the agency, but fortunately I made friends outside.

San Francisco is a friendly city as well as an exciting one, and its native and adopted sons and daughters are anxious to show it off. Portland can't compare with it for entertainment or atmosphere. Along Portland's waterfront there are no tables where one can sit in the sun and watch the fishing fleet all the while he forks up crab or shrimp cocktails fresh from the nets. In Portland there are no vendors of flowers who invite you to select gardenias or violets or roses from trays, and when you do the charge is only a dime or a nickel. In Portland there are no cable cars on which passengers must hang tight as they round a curve, and if there were such a car and it did get away, conservative Portlanders would never run for blocks to climb aboard and enjoy the ride as I saw San Franciscans do. We hadn't a limitless number of restaurants where one could enjoy the delicacies of a dozen different nations, but you could eat yourself around the world at dinnertime in San Francisco.

San Francisco never let me down. I realized again and again how lucky I was to be there, how fortunate I was to have a job in which I seemed to be giving satisfaction, and a job which was giving me not only prestige but promised a future.

I'm not sure when I began to change. Perhaps it was one evening when I was listening to a name band and found myself thinking aloud.

"Who are Sammy and Sylvia?" asked my escort in surprise.

"Some people I used to know at home," I answered in embarrassment. "If they could hear this band, they might pick up some new effects. I guess it's lost on me."

The next day as I swallowed a mouthful of abalone I thought of Frank Beeman, and the bite stuck in my throat. When a dictionary appeared discreetly on my desk one morning, with not one word of verbal censure, I cried. It

brought to my mind the scathing remarks with which Barry would have made such a presentation.

I was acting like a child, I told myself, but I couldn't help it. Prohibition was repealed and liquor was advertised openly. We had one of those accounts that generously offered free samples of their product. I chose that moment to go on the wagon; the fun had been taken out of it. The gardenias I bought on the street for a nickel apiece smelled worse to me than skunk cabbage, and my atmospheric apartment became overnight dark and old-fashioned and uncomfortable.

I came into it one evening and pulled at the string which illuminated the center light still in its original gas-jet fixture. My landlady had slipped my mail under the door, and I stood on an envelope with the familiar KUKU in the corner. As soon as I had sopped up the tears with a bath towel, I settled down to read the news. Everyone had written a few lines, and the usual hodgepodge had resulted.

Sammy said things were about as usual, and wanted to know if I had heard any good bands lately. He'd sure like to get in with a big name band, but there was little chance in Portland. King Abernathy told me KUKU was going to release the Stanford-Oregon game, and a station in San Francisco would hook up for the broadcast. If I knew any influential radio people, be sure they listened to his sportscasting.

Sylvia said she had heard a new quarter hour from the South on which a girl sang and played her own accompaniment. Sylvia herself didn't think the girl was very good, and maybe the networks were hard up for talent. What did I think? The "think" was heavily underlined so I wouldn't miss her meaning. Vi reported that Harry was looking for a new job, and how were opportunities in San Francisco? Of course, if he pulled up stakes, she might as well come

South herself. She was a crack stenographer, and stenographers never had any trouble anywhere.

Frank Beeman reported briefly on the sale of some new spots and said that he was having trouble with the new writer who couldn't count words right. He had written the announcements himself finally, and what was I getting to eat? He'd sure like to come to San Francisco and make the rounds of the eating joints. There was nothing fit to eat in Portland.

Miss Tolman wrote discreetly that *they* were considering the purchase of a radio station in San Francisco, and if *they* did, perhaps she might see me one day. George claimed he had heard rumors that business was starting to improve in California. Probably the new Administration was doing it. He wondered sometimes if he wasn't wasting his talents on a hick town.

Bruce said we had a new show for which he had won the audition. If KUKU came in that far, be sure to have someone listen to him. All he needed was someone to hear him, and he'd be in San Francisco on the next train. Bob complained that people never gave him a break in Portland. Did I know of any good openings down South? Teddy said he had had his twenty-first birthday and was going to break away from mother's apron strings. Did I think I could help him make a connection in San Francisco.

Barry concluded the letter with one line. "Up to my ears. The new writer's lousy."

It took me a long time to reach a decision, perhaps as long as a minute and a half. Then I went to the phone and called Western Union.

The heavy lump which had been lodged in my stomach for two weeks dissolved as I gave my message, and I flipped to the back of the book for the classified section. Steamships and trains I ignored. A plane would get me there quicker. I was going home.