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A NOVEL BY ALLAN JEFFERY'S AND BILL OWEN



X

TRIPPING

The LSD was getting into his system. DJ felt sleepy, started to doze, then was suddenly awakened by a ribbon of violent red that weaved and undulated before his eyes. Nausea bubbled in his stomach. The horrors came on. He begged the Stones, "Please . . . please. Stop it. Take me back . . . Please . . . turn it off."

Moments later, his feet were gone. Instead there was a tail. He was a trout! The girl, Cynthia, appeared, naked. She massaged every part of his body. "You have beautiful gills," she said.

Now, arms sprouted where he'd had only fins. He kissed Cynthia and fell instantly in love. Spasms of desire flooded his body.

He heard a clap of thunder and saw the earth beneath him dissolve into dust . . .



DJ

A NOVEL BY ALLAN JEFFERYS
AND BILL OWEN

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*To The Disk Jockeys . . .
Past, Present and Future*

The characters in this book are fictitious and any resemblance to any actual person, living or dead, is purely coincidental, as are radio stations WMBE, KMBE, WPO and WCOO. None of these stations has any connection with and does not represent any actual broadcasting facility with the same, similar or different call letters.

BOOK ONE

Basil

CHAPTER 1

The clock radio turned itself on with a soft click. A few seconds later Herman's Hermits blasted into the bedroom with, "I'm Henry VIII, I Am." As two sets of feet hit the floor a deep, sonorous voice came in over the last two bars of the song.

WMBE rock time: 7:22. This is your ever-lovin' Daddy-O. May I be the first to say good morning.

"Eccchl" answered Millie Kelcke as she padded her way into the kitchen.

Basil Kelcke, the owner of the other set of feet, picked up a small transistor radio, tuned it in to the same station and headed for the bathroom. Moments later, the sound of the shower blended into a hard rock number. The rushing water has more melody, thought Millie as she re-entered the bedroom.

"How do you want your eggs?" she yelled through the bathroom door. She waited a bit and then thrust her head into the bathroom.

"Hey!" shouted Millie. "Turn something down."

"What?" asked Basil, turning the water off.

"I said," replied Millie, turning the radio down, "how do you want your eggs this morning?"

"Turn that back on," demanded Basil. "Make them soft-boiled. I'm going on a new diet."

WMBE music time: 7:29. News coming up. Then your Daddy-O will be back with the number one song on the WMBE round-the-town survey.

The staccato bleep, bleep, bleep of the news signature cut in over Daddy-O's voice, followed by an announcer with a delivery as staccato as the bleeps. Basil turned the radio down as he started his electric shaver. News was not his bailiwick. As program director of radio station WMBE, his main concern was music and deejays. Besides, he could always find out what was happening in the world with a quick glance at the tickers when he arrived at the station. Except today. Today promised to be busy. And, if Basil guessed correctly, unrewarding. He dressed quickly and walked into the kitchen for breakfast. Alongside his orange juice were three pills. He gulped each one down.

"You forgot my vitamin E, Millie."

"Nobody's ever proved vitamin E is good for anything," she answered sarcastically.

"It increases a man's sex drive, and when you're past forty you need all the help you can get."

Millie raised an eyebrow. "Oh?" she said. She opened the refrigerator door and removed a dark brown glass jar. She unscrewed the lid and bounced two amber capsules on Basil's plate. "In that case," she added, "take two. Unless, of course, you're using these doohickies to satisfy some of those teeny-bopper fans of WMBE."

"They only go for young deejays," Basil said drily. "Aging program directors don't turn them on."

Millie placed his eggs in front of him. "I still think you waste your time with all those vitamins," she said. "What you need is more fresh air."

"Now don't start that this morning," Basil replied.

"Honey, I'm thinking of me as well as you," Millie said. "We've got to get out of this apartment. Do you know that the Goldbergs down the hall were robbed the night before last, and Eve Smith was darn near raped in the elevator and . . ."

"I know, I know . . . you told me," said Basil.

"Then why do we stay here?" inquired Millie, warming to a familiar argument. "Your beloved Daddy-O lives in Darien, the general manager of the station lives in Manhasset and half of our friends have moved to Westport. Why can't we?"

The little transistor suddenly blurted out as though it had been goosed: *WMBE traffic time: 7:47. Let's go up to Hugh Conway in the Merc-a-copter and see how Charlie Commuter is making out today. Are you there, Hugh?*

Right here, Daddy-O. And I'd rather be up here than down on the ground. It's only the beginning of the rush hour but it's already building up. The Long Island Expressway is backed up for over a mile near Manhasset because of two stalled cars in the outer lane. It looks like one big parking lot down there. We also have a jam-up on the B-Q-E and folks driving in from Jersey are liable to be a half hour late for work because of an accident on the George Washington Bridge and construction in the Lincoln Tunnel . . .

Basil turned the set down. "That's why we don't move to Westport," he said.

"Well, what about the train?" persisted Millie.

Basil turned the set up.

So much for the driver's dilemma. Now, about the trains. Well, the Long Island Railroad is admitting to half-hour delays and the Penn Central says its trains are running a little behind schedule too. Subways are okay, except for the Seventh Avenue IRT which had a flooding problem due to last night's spring shower . . .

"Okay, okay," Millie interrupted. "I get the message."

Basil stood up and put his arms around her. "One of these days," he said, "I promise you . . . one of these days I'll get you that little rose-covered cottage."

"I don't want a little rose-covered cottage," replied Millie. "I want a big, fat mansion with a circular driveway winding through a lawn that would make the cover of House Beautiful."

"On a program director's salary?"

"That's another thing. You run that station. You made that station. You should be general manager. You should have been made general manager three years ago."

"Program directors seldom make general managers. Sales managers become general managers."

"Hmph," snorted Millie. "Drunks become general managers."

"Now don't start that again," warned Basil.

"Well, it's true," answered Millie, "and you know it. Our esteemed vice-president and general manager may not be a drunk, but I don't think he's drawn a completely sober breath since he was sixteen."

"Ah, George is okay."

"George Barnstead is a stupid schmuck . . ."

"Millie!"

"He's a seventy thousand dollar a year schmuck. Arnie Spaulding was a schmuck, too, but he was a smart schmuck. Barnstead is just a drunk. And he hates your guts."

Basil rose from his chair and walked over to the calendar on the wall. He stared at the date, Monday, March 22, 1965. Still studying the sheet, he said, "What makes you say that?"

Millie leaned forward on her elbows and said to his back, "Because you do everything he'd like to do and can't. Because the station was number one when he got here and it's still number one. Because it was sold out and it's still sold out. Because, dumb as he is, he's still smart enough to know that he'd be dead without you. And so he hates your guts."

WMBE rock time: 8:12 . . . time for a Daddy-O special . . . our hymn of the morning . . .

"Oh my God," moaned Millie.

"You say that every morning," declared Basil.

"Well, you yourself admit that damn hymn drives you up the wall," Millie argued. "You've said a hundred times that there's no place on a Top Forty station for a hymn."

Basil shrugged. "He's still the top disk jockey in the country."

"I still say you should make him stop it. It spoils my breakfast."

"Maybe I won't have to."

"Won't have to what?"

"Make him stop it. Not that I could. It's part of his contract that he gets to play a hymn every morning. At any rate, the whole thing may be academic after this month. I think he's leaving."

Millie held her coffee cup in mid-air. She stared at Basil with a slack-jawed expression.

"Daddy-O asked to see me right after he gets off the air this morning. When he called me, he wouldn't say what it was all about but he sounded serious. Right after he hung up, his engineer poked his head into my office. He obviously didn't want to betray anything, but it finally came out that Daddy-O has been talking to him about pulling up stakes for the past two months."

Millie set her coffee cup down on the saucer with a soft 'ping.' "What are you going to say to him this morning?" she asked.

Basil gulped down another multi-vitamin capsule and walked over to the kitchen sink. He took off his plastic glasses and began to wash them in running water. As he dried them, he stared at the brick wall across the court. Finally, he turned toward his wife and uttered a soft sigh.

"I don't know. I've been racking my brain since Friday afternoon and I can't seem to come up with a good argument. Money isn't the answer. I know that. The big guy's been stashing it away ever since he came to WMBE. Even if we offered him a fifty thousand dollar raise, I still think he'd leave, although for the life of me, I can't imagine a thirty-nine-year-old radio star walking out of a hundred thousand dollar a year job just to go back to Minnesota and teach his kids how to catch walleyed pike."

"Do you think some other station's after him?"

"I know other stations are after him. I know of two of them that would give their call letters to get Daddy-O on

their schedules. But that isn't the problem. If it were, we could handle that. No . . . I'm afraid this time he's determined to pull out of the whole business. Oh, I'll turn on the charm and plead for more time. I'll talk of loyalty to WMBE and to me, but the truth of the matter is we owe Daddy-O much more than he owes us. And he knows it."

Millie started to stack the breakfast dishes in the dishwasher.

"Is he really that important?" she asked.

"He's the most important guy at the whole station. If we lose our audience in the morning, we go downhill all through the day. WMBE has been number one for almost three years, but don't forget that Daddy-O was number one a full year before the rest of the jocks caught up. With WABC and WOR snapping at our heels all the time, it just takes one little slip for us to fall on our face. And losing the best morning man in town can be that little slip."

"You talk like he's the only one who could possibly do the job," said Millie.

"Of course he isn't. There are dozens of deejays around who could fill his shoes."

"Then what's the problem?"

"Time. Daddy-O's contract is up in four weeks. If he gives me notice today, I have to move fast. I won't have time to go through three thousand stations across the country listening to ten thousand disk jockeys. I have to come up with one in less than a month, teach him our format and promote him all over town. And when I locate him, I'd better be right . . . or it's my neck."

Millie's dark eyes flashed angrily as she whirled away from the dishwasher and faced her husband. "Why your neck? If it weren't for you, that station would still be a joke."

"You're forgetting Barnstead. I know I tell you not to knock him, but a large part of what you say is true. He does hate my guts and he'd like nothing better than to rub my nose in defeat. If I blow this one . . . I'm out. Period."

"Even after all you've done?"

"Nobody in the broadcasting business is interested in what you did yesterday All they care about is *now*. It's a *now* business and the only ones who survive are *now* people."

WMBE rock time: 8:19. Beatle time. John and Paul wrote this one . . . the number two song on the WMBE round-the-town . . .

"Turn that goddam radio off," groaned George Barnstead as he buried his head in his hands.

"Aren't you interested in your own station?" asked his wife as he poured his coffee.

"All I'm interested in this morning is my head. It feels like it's in orbit."

"Speaking of orbit, is the station covering the Gemini flight tomorrow?"

"I don't know . . . I guess so," said Barnstead in a disinterested tone. "It won't make any difference to me. I'll never make it through today."

"I told you to take it easy on the martinis last night."

"Now don't start bugging me again about martinis. I can handle martinis. I think it was the lasagna."

"Lasagna doesn't settle in your head," Alma Barnstead said smugly.

"Well, my stomach doesn't feel so hot either."

Barnstead reached an unsteady hand for the coffee cup and wobbled it toward his lips. He took a sip, grimaced and began thumbing through a copy of Yachting magazine. He paused at a full page ad and began to scrutinize it. His wife placed a Bloody Mary at his elbow and leaned over his shoulder to see what he was reading.

"That's the third time I've caught you looking at that sloop," she said. "If I recognize the symptoms, you're thinking of buying it. Don't. We can't afford a new boat."

"We also can't afford to be seen at the club sailing that stupid little Blue Jay. It looks silly for a grown man to be herding one of those toys around Manhasset Bay. It's bad for my image."

"Maybe we can swing it next year."

"We could have swung it this year if you hadn't in-

sisted on buying this big barn of a house. The goddam garden service alone costs a fuckin' fortune."

"Georgel Watch your language."

"Well, it's true."

"In my opinion, a lovely home is far more important for your image than some sailboat. Now drink your breakfast."

WCOO time: 8:23. Weather for the Grand Rapids area today promises to be partly cloudy with a chance of snow flurries in the afternoon.

Freda Hoffert yanked the covers from the bed in one sweeping motion. "All right, Mr. Disk Jockey," she said with mock severity. "Rise and shine. You're on the air in exactly one hour and thirty-seven minutes."

"Just five minutes more, honey," pleaded Daryl Hoffert as he groped for the missing covers.

"Now!"

"All right," said Daryl in a sleepy voice as he swung off the bed. "But you're going to be sorry next month when you have to get up every morning at five o'clock and make my breakfast."

"Five a.m.!" exclaimed Freda. "Are you taking over the morning show?"

"Nope. I still have the same schedule. But next month, my good woman, the trout season opens. I thought everybody in Michigan knew that. If you'd listen to my show once in a while, you'd know it too."

Freda drew herself up to her full five-foot-one-inch height. "I, kind sir," she said in a giggling attempt at haughtiness, "am your most loyal and dedicated fan."

"Don't be too sure about that. A girl called me at the station just the other day. She had the sexiest voice and . . ."

He broke off abruptly, just in time to dodge the pillow Freda hurled at him.

KMBE time: 6:09 on one of the most beautiful days we've had in Los Angeles in more than a month. Not a trace of smog . . .

"Ev," called a melodious voice.

"Out by the pool, dearest," answered Ev Dowling.

Vera Dowling emerged from the low-slung Spanish ranch house and moved gracefully across the patio. "Contemplating a sunrise swim?" she asked her husband.

Ev slipped his arm around her as he replied, "Not exactly. I just wanted to engrave the view on my memory. Everything is so lovely and green."

"New York will be greening up soon, too."

"I know," said Ev, "but I still wonder if we're doing the right thing. We've been so happy here."

"Happiness is people. It has nothing to do with geography. Besides, we'll never know whether its right or wrong unless we try. Are you all packed?"

"Everything but my razor and toothbrush."

"Then no more backward looks. From here on out, we keep our eyes on the horizon of the future."

Ev took his wife's hand and led her back into the house. As he looked down at her upswept silver hair, he said quietly, "You are my future . . . now and forever."

WMBE time: 9:14.

Rex Blair stepped out of the shower and began to towel himself dry. As he rubbed the terry cloth over his body he walked back to the bedroom and stared down at the woman still asleep in the bed. She moved and the sheet slipped to the floor. Amazing, thought Rex. She's older than I am, at least thirty-five, and yet her belly and her breasts are gorgeous. That's the beauty of the older gals. No bullshit. They want it as much as you do and they're not afraid to admit it.

She had come to his regular Friday night party on the arm of an ad agency producer, but she made no secret of the fact that she was strictly unattached. Normally he steered clear of an agency producer's private stock but when he learned that Erin Whitman was the head casting director of that same ad agency, Rex moved in. It had been the beginning of a wild weekend. He glanced down again at the tousled head on the pillow. Sensing

his gaze, Erin opened one eye. "What time is it?" she asked.

"About a quarter after nine."

The woman sat upright. "My God!" she exclaimed. "Why didn't you wake me? I'm going to be late."

"Relax. You've got two assistants. They can hold off the hungry actors until you get there." He dropped the towel and leaned over to kiss her.

"Wait'll I brush my teeth," she said as she leaped out of bed and headed for the bathroom. She grabbed the toothbrush and smiled at her image in the mirror. She took a deep breath and watched her breasts rise. Not bad for a gal of forty-one, she said to herself.

A few minutes later she was back in his arms. He felt her breasts pressing into the hair on his chest as he bent her back on the bed. He pulled his lips away from hers and dropped his head to her breasts. His tongue snaked out and began to stroke her left nipple. He felt it grow hard and he moved his attention to the other one. This time he took the nipple between his teeth and bit down gently. Erin groaned softly. Her body began to tremble.

Rex placed his right hand under her buttocks and let the fingers of his left trail across her navel. Erin reached for his penis but he twisted out of reach. She moaned again as he cupped his hand over the tender part of her clitoris. She opened her legs. She reached for him again but he slipped from her grasp and stood up.

Erin's eyes widened in amazement as she watched him begin to draw on his shorts. "What are you doing?" she gasped.

"Getting dressed," he replied. "I've got a ten o'clock audition."

Erin jumped from the bed and grabbed the shorts. "You dirty son-of-a-bitch!" she hissed. "You get me so hot I could scream and then you spring this audition!"

They continued the tug of war with the shorts. Rex grinned. "Gotta keep the pipes in shape, baby. The agencies dig deep voices and you need healthy balls for a big voice."

"Clang, clang," sneered Erin.

"Clang," added Rex. "All good announcers have three balls."

She gave the shorts a final tug and ripped them off. Triumphant she placed her hands under his testicles and bounced them. "You *are* well hung, Rex, but do you know what to do with it?"

"Didn't you find that out over the weekend?"

"Uh-huh. That's why I want an encore now."

"Honey, I'm serious about the audition. I gotta keep the bread rolling into this pad."

"What's the product?" she asked.

"A new cigarette."

"That means a test market campaign. All you'll get out of that is nickels and dimes." She lit a cigarette and took three drags on it before continuing, "How'd you like to win the Oat Crunchies account?"

Rex looked at her carefully. Was she bluffing? Was the account up for grabs? It was one of the choice accounts in the breakfast cereal field and that meant big money.

"When's the audition?" he asked.

"The official one is this afternoon. For appearance's sake you'll have to show up and read. But the real audition is right here. Now."

"What do I have to do to win it?" he asked.

She smiled as she answered. "The commercial calls for a guy to eat Oat Crunchies on camera. How are you in the eating department?"

"Try me."

CHAPTER 2

WMBE coffee time: 9:59.

Engineer Saul Kalaman slammed in a cartridge and a jingle screeched out the message that WMBE had the most music, the most news and the most listeners. Two-thirds of the claim was true. He pushed the button for another cartridge and the bleep, bleep of the news theme echoed across three states. The announcer rattled off a few headlines, then Saul threw another switch that brought in five minutes of network news.

Daddy-O leaned back in his chair and sighed, "Well, ol' buddy . . . this is the moment."

"Are you really going through with it?" asked Saul.

"Nothing and nobody could stop me," answered Daddy-O. "Amy and I have talked it out, in, up and down. In five minutes I tell Basil and in one month it's back to Minnesota. As soon as school's out, Amy and the kids will join me."

"I guess you know what you're doing," said Saul, "but you'll be missed and not only by the audience."

Daddy-O eased his two hundred fifty-three pounds from the vinyl chair, waved at the deejay who relieved

him and slowly moved up the hall toward Basil Kelcke's office.

Kelcke's secretary, Jeannie, watched Daddy-O's approach. She buzzed Basil to alert him. She knew something was up but wasn't sure what it was. Basil had said nothing. Only his actions betrayed him. Ordinarily, her boss spent the first hour of his day routinely skimming through the newspapers and his mail. But this morning, the routine was altered. The newspapers and mail remained untouched and his daily coffee grew cold as it squatted beside the telephone. The telephone itself was silent. Basil had instructed Jeannie that he would not accept any calls.

At three minutes past ten, Harry "Daddy-O" Evenson walked into Basil's outer office. Jeannie motioned for him to go right in.

Basil stood up and hurried over to greet Daddy-O at the door. The personable deejay thrust out his fleshy hand and pumped the PD's arm with gusto. "Basil, ol' buddy, you're lookin' great, as always."

Basil managed a weak smile. "I'll look a lot better if you tell me what I want to hear."

Daddy-O plopped himself into the imitation leather armchair next to Basil's desk. "Basil," he began earnestly, "I hope you'll make this easy for both of us. I've been intending to leave for a long time, but just couldn't bring myself to give up the loot. Now, I can. Our Jimmy is fourteen . . . the other kids will soon be up there. They mean more to me than all the cabbage this town can offer. We're not happy with the friends they have, the education they're getting, or not getting, and all this talk about teen-age dope addiction scares us."

Basil threw up his hands in an exasperated gesture. "Ah, that's a lot of talk," he said. "Somebody's always crying wolf about kids getting into trouble."

"This 'wolf' bites," said Daddy-O. "I've been looking into the statistics. So far, the press has played it down, but an alarming number of kids are hooked. And some of them are dying. What really hits me in the gut is that I

think we're fostering a lot of it. Some of the new records on this week's list are hardly subtle."

Basil frowned. "Don't make a mountain out of a molehill," he said.

"I'm not," answered Daddy-O. "I honestly am not. But I'd sure hate to think that I had anything to do with a kid experimenting with drugs. Suppose it were my son?"

Basil's eyes narrowed as he studied the big man sprawled in the chair in front of him. "How come you've never said anything about this before?"

"Maybe I was blind to it. Or maybe I wanted to be blind. Maybe I'm a hypocrite or maybe I'm just another whore. Whatever the reason, I'm saying it now."

Basil stood up and walked over to a gleaming white filing cabinet. He opened a drawer, flipped through the tabs and took out a folder.

"So you think you can just run away from trouble, do you?" Basil asked. "Let me show you something. This is a list of the top records around the country for the last six months." He spread the reports out. Daddy-O swiveled his chair around so he could see them. "Take a good look," continued Basil. "And notice the dates. If you study them carefully, you'll discover that all we do here at WMBE is follow trends. New York radio stations never have made hit records. Hits are made in Philadelphia, Cleveland, Baltimore . . . all we do is play the winners . . . *after* they've won. You see? You can't hide. Anywhere you go in the country, you'll find our kind of music. It's contemporary. It's a 'now' sound. Every little hamlet in America plays the same stuff. If it really stirred up the kids and sent them down the road to hell, don't you think somebody would have said something before this? It doesn't hurt them at all. It's just a healthy outlet. What we do is good for them. It keeps them *out* of trouble."

"Maybe you're right, Basil. I hope you are. My conscience could use a bit of salve. But it's more than the music. Just about everything in New York gets me down. Basil, it's tough to live in, and tougher to work in."

"All the more reason why you should stay," put in Basil. "This town needs you. You make it a lot less tough to live here. People depend on you to get them off to work and school in a happy frame of mind. You're the one they turn to for traffic conditions, weather, school closings . . ."

"Basil." Daddy-O held up his hand to stop him. "Anybody can do that."

"Not the way you do it." Basil was warming to his speech. "It's not *what* you tell the listeners, it's *how*. The little friendly asides, the corny jokes . . . why, folks even look forward to your hymn every morning."

"I thought you hated that hymn."

"What I think doesn't count. It's what the listener wants. And the listener wants Daddy-O. If you leave now, you'll not only be letting the station down, you'll be letting hundreds of thousands of listeners down."

Daddy-O looked down at his hands. He turned them over and stared glumly into the massive palms.

"Look, Harry," continued Basil. "You're still young. You're not even forty yet. Give it a little longer. Just a year. I promise you that when the year is up, I won't try to hold you. We'll start a quiet search for a replacement right now. It won't be easy, but I guarantee we'll find one in a year. That's all I ask, one year."

Daddy-O transferred his eyes from his hands to his shoes. He put his foot out in front of him and twisted it from side to side, as though he were seeing it for the first time.

"Four weeks from today," said Daddy-O quietly.

"Harry, Harry, Harry," groaned Basil. "You can't do this."

"My contract says I can. I have to give you four weeks' notice today or sign for another thirteen weeks."

"Okay. I won't ask for a full year," said Basil in a strained voice. "Just thirteen weeks. One more cycle."

"That makes seventeen weeks counting the four I have left on my contract. That's four months. It means going through the whole summer and then trying to move into a new house and get the kids entered in a new school in

the fall. It's no go, Basil. We've got to pull out as soon as school is over."

The two men were silent, each staring at the floor, afraid to look at the other. Basil reached for his coffee cup, took a sip and made a wry face. "Coffee's cold." Daddy-O made no comment. Basil stood up and walked over to the window. He gazed down on Sixth Avenue, but failed to see anything but a blur of motion.

Breaking the silence, Daddy-O said, "You won't see anything down there but pollution. You can't hear anything down there but noise. You can't breathe the air, you can't use the parks, you don't dare walk the streets after sundown and the odds are ten to one your apartment will be robbed at least twice a year. Basil, honestly now, do you blame me?"

Basil remained silent, unable to answer. "I'll tell you what," said Daddy-O. "Amy'll want to shoot me for saying this, but I'll give you six weeks. Believe me, that's the best I can do."

Basil turned slowly from the window. He started to reply, then changed his mind and just nodded grimly.

"Six weeks from today," said Daddy-O firmly. "I'm sure you don't want any mention of this on the air for a while."

"Please don't, not until we have your replacement lined up," answered Basil as he strolled back to his desk. He shoved his hands deep in his pants pockets. "Somehow, WMBE has to come up with a big winner to take your place, but it can't be someone who sounds just like you. No matter how good he was, he'd inevitably be haunted by comparisons with Daddy-O."

Daddy-O nodded sympathetically. "I see your point," he said. "If you mount a big publicity campaign for the new guy and promote a 'new' sound, he'll probably be accepted quicker. I was going to suggest Rap Hundley from WMCA, but he'd give you the same kind of chatter I come up with, and there'd be nothing new for you to crow about."

The deejay and the program director chatted for another fifteen minutes, tossing names of disk jockeys into

the air but none struck a responsive chord. Finally, Daddy-O looked at his watch and said he had to leave. Basil smiled and extended his hand cordially, grasping Daddy-O's huge paw in his own as he wished him luck. The smile slipped from his face as soon as Daddy-O left, leaving a glum-faced Basil sitting at his desk.

CHAPTER 3

When Basil Kelcke was brought in from Milwaukee to revamp WMBE's format, the station joke was that the only lower Nielsen ratings were police calls. Kelcke's first appearance did little to convince the station personnel that any change for the better was on the agenda. He was about five-feet-eight inches tall with a pasty complexion, accentuated by his receding hairline. He wore glasses that looked as though they had been plucked at random from Woolworth's and he dressed in a nondescript style that had never been in and never would be.

Estimates by veterans of the station as to the duration of Kelcke's regime at WMBE ranged from one to six months. At the time, even top management on the thirty-seventh floor would not have covered their bets. The station had been shaken up seven times within a decade. Nothing had worked. WMBE had tried using only deep, booming voices for a while. The audience greeted that maneuver with all the enthusiasm of a past due bill. Then they had conducted a city-wide talent contest and used the teen-age winners on the air . . . a total disaster.

One program director tried playing virtually uninter-

rupted music. Another spent a fortune on live, big band music. But the shortest-lived PD of all was a self-proclaimed "genius" from Oregon. His gambit was to have the announcers refer to microphones as "Sound-Posts." All on-the-air personnel were furnished four-by-five cards with instructions reading: "This is (ANNOUNCER'S NAME) at WMBE Sound-Post Twelve . . . now back to (ANNOUNCER'S NAME) and his beautiful music from Sound-Post Two." The announcers and deejays gritted their teeth and played their roles, but only the program director himself seemed to grasp the significance of all this. The station's few listeners never did. Rumors were that the owl-faced Oregonian would receive a ten thousand dollar bonus if he could double WMBE's ratings within a year. Nobody was ever able to learn what his reward had been for cutting the ratings in half in less than a month.

When Basil Kelcke came on the scene, he was sized up as just one more traveler through WMBE's revolving door. For one thing, he was too quiet. Other than a mumbled "good morning," he seldom said anything to anyone during his first week. He made few requests and no demands. Each morning he would arrive promptly at nine o'clock, walk briskly into his office and shut the door. He had asked for a small refrigerator, a tape recorder and a radio. There was some speculation that the refrigerator was for storing beer, but a midnight foray into his office by a curious engineer quickly dispelled that theory. The refrigerator contained three containers of yogurt, a bottle of vitamins and four hard-boiled eggs. That, at least, accounted for his never going out for lunch.

During his second week on the job, the wheeler-dealers tried to move in. They pegged him as an easy mark and figured they could use him to their advantage. A deejay slot was worth at least thirty thousand dollars a year at a big station and even if the station was never going to get anywhere, they wanted to cash in on a good thing. Everybody suddenly seemed to become either a talent agent or talent. What if this clod did get his walking

papers within six months? By that time a smart operator could have himself an unbreakable five-year contract on a gravy train. So a line formed outside Basil's door every morning. Song pluggers, record pushers, would-be disk jockeys, announcers, press agents, talent agents, pimps and hookers, they all waited impatiently for their try at the brass ring. Only one succeeded.

Her name was Jeannie Draves, a tall, slender beauty with just a hint of a Southern accent. She could be a model or an actress or a highly paid prostitute. She was none of these, she was a secretary. What's more, she liked being a secretary. To Jeannie, being a good secretary was second only to being a good wife. Since she had not yet met anyone she wanted to marry, she concentrated on being a secretary. Her one weakness was radio. She collected recordings of oldtime radio programs, could rattle off the names of almost everybody who had ever starred on any show, and wanted little more in life than to be around a radio station.

When Jeannie first entered Basil's office, he groaned inwardly. He was not immune to her beauty, but three days of pressure pitches had steeled him against even this kind of blandishment. Because he was, by nature, cool and calm, he had politely but firmly turned away each pitchman. However, this woman standing before him looked as cool and calm as he. He invited her to sit down, and waited for her to make the first move.

"I'm here to apply for the position of your secretary," she said.

"I have a secretary, and we have a personnel department. Have you talked with them?"

"I'm not interested in working for anyone but the program director of the local radio station. If I apply to personnel, they'll put me in the pool or send me to television. I don't like television. I want to work for you."

Basil was puzzled and suspicious. Most office people preferred television, especially beautiful ones. Beautiful people usually had delusions of grandeur. They were willing to take any job in television on the theory that once they had a foot in the door, the gates of glamour

would swing open. Then, they would no longer be secretaries or office boys but stars, producers, directors and swinging executives. It never worked that way, but the beautiful people kept trying. Which is why broadcasting companies continued to get away with paying the lowest salaries in town.

Basil gave Jeannie a long, level stare. It was returned in kind. Finally, she said, "Are we playing 'who blinks first?'"

Basil smiled for the first time. "Just why do you want to work for me?"

"Because you're going to make this the number one radio station in the country, and I want to be here when it happens."

"How do you know I'm going to do that?" he asked.

"I have a cousin who married an advertising man from Milwaukee. She wrote me about what you did for that station there."

"I still don't get it," Basil said.

"Most people turn radio on. Radio turns me on," she explained.

"I'm married . . . and I don't play around."

"That's the second reason I want to work for you. I have no desire to spend every afternoon being chased around the desk by some martini-soaked jerk who thinks he's God's gift to women. I know you don't play around. I checked on that, too." She stood up. "Look, Mr. Kelcke. I said radio turned me on. It does. It's my thing, I guess. But I'm not a little teeny-bopper who's going to flip for the first deejay I meet. On the air, radio people send me. Off the air, they're just people . . . and I'm very discriminating."

Hiring Jeannie Draves was Basil Kelcke's first official move at WMBE. There was some static from the personnel department about going through proper channels, but a quick telephone call to Ben Killian, the president of Mercury Broadcasting Enterprises, soon ended any problems.

Basil had insisted on two conditions when he accepted the post at WMBE: (1) complete authority to alter the

format and replace personalities and (2) a half million dollar promotion budget. Ben Killian had blanched when Basil first presented his demands before the station brass in the thirty-seventh floor conference room. But Basil won over the entire brigade of executives when he promised quietly, "Gentlemen, I did it in Milwaukee and I can do it here. In two years, WMBE will be New York's top radio station."

Arnold Spaulding, the vice-president and general manager of the station . . . and George Barnstead's predecessor . . . was the only one in the room who hesitated. He had his eye on a network vice-presidency and figured he would be out if Kelcke turned out to be a failure like the previous three program directors. But Kelcke won him over and it was agreed that programming would be Basil's baby and everyone submitted to a hands-off policy.

The key to a successful radio station is its morning man. There had been a time when listeners switched stations from hour to hour as they sought their favorite programs. Television changed all that. By the mid-1950's, most of the soap operas and big variety programs had either converted to video or were slowly fading into the limbo of memories. Music and news. That was the name of the radio game. Gradually all radio stations came to the realization that if they wanted their share of the advertising pot, they had to get with it.

Disk jockeys were, of course, hardly new. However, with the exception of a few big independent stations, deejay shows were merely necessary "fills." The huge radio networks still had sixty-five musicians on staff. Under a union contract, they had to pay them whether they used them or not; therefore, most of the networks had a few live programs. Since arrangements cost money and scripts need writers, these live shows were merely warmed-over efforts. The arrangements were vintage 1930 and the scripts were mimeographed from year to year . . . changing only the names of the announcers and songs. After all, what difference did it make? Radio was dead, wasn't it? Or was it?

Kids growing up wanted a sound of their own. That, too, was hardly new. Ragtime, jazz, swing . . . all had been brought onto center stage because kids demanded something new. In the mid-50's, they found it. Never mind that it wasn't *really* new. It had been around for years under the name of rhythm and blues. Tune in almost any Negro-oriented radio station and you could hear it. All it needed was a push. It got that push from the Basil Kelckes of the country. They souped it up and called it "rock and roll."

Just playing it wasn't enough. Nothing sounded sillier than an announcer filling the air with pear-shaped tones as he introduced an Elvis Presley number. If the music rocked, the deejay had to rock, too.

A radio station no longer had programs. It had a "sound." If it had the right "sound," it was a winner. The "sound" began with the morning man. Get the audience hooked with him and you were off to a running start.

A funny thing happened on the way to the studio this morning. Remember, I told you about taking the better half and the kids skiing over the weekend? Well, this morning I got up at 4:30 . . . you know . . . like I do every morning . . . and . . . oh, by the way, it's now about quarter to nine. Anyway, I was telling you about this funny thing that . . . what? . . . wait a minute, folks. My director is signalling me. We have a what? Oh, a commercial Okay. Well . . . ha . . . ha . . . ha . . . guess I'll have to finish that story tomorrow . . .

Jeannie walked into Basil's office with a cup of coffee. "He's been trying to get that story in all morning," she said.

"I know," said Basil. "I've been ready to throw up for two hours."

"And what's this bit about his better half and the kids?" laughed Jeannie. "I understand he divorced his fourth wife two years ago and never had any children."

Basil shrugged. He was now in his third week at WMBE. The station people had settled back in their old

ruts. There was no longer a line outside his office. Jeannie had turned half the wheeler-dealers away. The other half had been politely put down by Basil. They were getting the message. Even the staff gossip was dying down. Two announcers and three salesmen had made a play for Jeannie, but all were quickly shot down.

"Did you get an answer from that fellow Daddy-O in Milwaukee?" Jeannie asked.

"Yes and no," replied Basil. "Yes, I got an answer, but it was no. He's afraid of New York. All I can guarantee him is thirteen weeks and he said he can't take a chance on blowing everything he's built up in Milwaukee for something that can go down the drain here."

Jeannie walked over to the monitor. "Had enough of lover-boy?"

Basil shuddered and nodded. She turned the monitor off and switched on the radio. Quickly spinning the dial, she stopped at the frequency of a station in New Jersey. Frank Sinatra was winding up "If You Are But a Dream."

Basil gave her a quizzical look. "What are you trying to do, lull me to sleep?"

"Wait a minute," she said. "Listen."

The song ended and a voice came on. Basil listened for a full minute, then turned back to Jeannie. "Who's that?"

"His name is Harry Evenson."

Basil listened for another minute. He began to doodle on a pad, sipped some coffee and then stood up.

"It might work at that," he said. "How'd you stumble across him?"

"Just that," she answered. "I stumbled on him one day. Then I found myself tuning in more and more often. He has something. I'm not sure what. Sort of a father image, and yet, contemporary."

"Like a Daddy-O?"

Jeannie smiled.

"Set up an appointment with him," said Basil. "Not here. Make it for lunch. Somewhere in the Village."

It took all of Jeannie's telephone charm to get Harry

Evenson to join Basil for lunch. He had never heard of Basil Kelcke, but he had heard of WMBE. And he wasn't impressed.

Basil headed for the men's room. Rounding a corner, he brushed against Marvin Marshall. Marshall was WMBE's current morning man . . . the deejay Jeannie had referred to as "lover-boy."

"How's it going, kid?" cracked Marshall.

Basil looked up at him. "Okay, I guess," he said quietly.

"Keep up the good work, kid. Ol' WMBE'll make it yet." Marshall grinned as he said it and then stepped into the down elevator. Basil stood staring after him for a moment, shrugged and continued into the men's room. As he dried his hands and adjusted his tie, he thought about Marshall's deal with WMBE. Marshall had been wooed away from the city's leading independent station when the network decided to steer its local radio operation into the music and news stream. He had an unbreakable five-year contract at one hundred fifty thousand dollars a year. Studio 3A had been refurbished to his specifications and 3B had been converted to office space to house Marshall, his personal secretary, director and engineer. The set-up was rivalled only by the old Amos 'n' Andy studio at NBC. There was one difference. Amos 'n' Andy had virtually the entire nation listening nightly. Marvin Marshall's microphone might as well have been wired into a rusty tomato can for all the audience he brought WMBE. A few sponsors stayed with him, mostly out of loyalty to the days when he was the top jock in New York, but it was still a losing proposition. A big loser.

That five-year contract still stuck in the craw of Mercury Broadcasting. It was one of the reasons Basil could offer no more than a thirteen-week deal to anyone he brought in. The executive "brain" who had signed Marshall's "sweetheart" contract was long gone, but the Marshall contract still had two years to run. It was a sticky thorn in Basil's plans.

Basil was the only one at Mercury who understood why Marshall had failed at WMBE. At first, his huge

audience had faithfully followed Marshall over to his new spot on the dial. Then the ratings started to dwindle. In the past year they had plummeted. WMBE was ninth in the market. Kelcke realized that Marshall was only part of the problem. The station had no "sound." It was pure mishmash. Sundays were filled with one ranting religious program after another. They offered little more than a never-ending pitch for money to keep them on the air.

The rest of the week offered little respite. Each program had a director who was responsible for picking the music. A few did their jobs conscientiously; a couple simply grabbed a stack of records; and one or two played only what they were paid to play. The "pay" came from the half dozen record pluggers who scurried through the halls each week. The station did one five-minute and one fifteen-minute newscast every hour. WMBE had newswriters, but they were not much more than tack-up artists. As the news came off the tickers, it was ripped into page size and stapled on white bond. Anything else interfered with the twenty-four hour poker game that went on in the engineers' lounge.

Slow and sloppy. This was the audio trade-mark of WMBE. A disk jockey program was still a carry-over in operation from the days of the big network radio shows. It took two engineers to play one record. One controlled the volume; the other cued up the record. When a deejay introduced a record, he cued the director who, in turn, cued the engineer. The whole thing was a study in dead air.

This was the mess that Basil Kelcke inherited when he became program director. And wholesale firing was not the answer. A couple of hundred union contracts said that was a no-no. The key, however, remained Marvin Marshall. As morning man, he set the stage for the day. And Marshall's "stage" had 1948 scenery that nobody was buying.

All of this ran through Basil Kelcke's mind as he stepped into the down elevator headed for his luncheon date with Harry Evenson.

Now WMBE brings you Noontime with Nellie, an adventure today in cooking Hungarian style.

Basil gritted his teeth as Nellie's saccharine voice gushed from the elevator monitor. The door finally opened on the lobby floor and he bounded out to Sixth Avenue. He hailed a taxi to a little Greenwich Village restaurant Jeannie had recommended.

Harry Evenson attacked his food like Patton's Seventh Army. He shoveled in a dozen oysters, tackled an enormous steak and topped it all off with pie a la mode. Basil eyed him with wonder. Finally, Evenson leaned back with a contented smile.

All of the talk had centered around the Midwest. Each man had a tale to tell of his boyhood in "God's Country." Each admitted he had only come to New York for money. Each promised he'd get out of this rat race as soon as he could. Half of what was said was true. Basil had been born and brought up in the Bronx. His only experience with the Midwest was a three-year stint with the station in Milwaukee. He was now part of New York and never intended to leave it again. However, he sized up Evenson quickly and knew that his only hope was pretending to be a kindred spirit.

"Basil, ol' buddy," began Harry. "You didn't bring me down here to rehash the good times we had as kids. Let's get down to cases, shall we?"

"Okay. I'll make it short and sweet. I want to hire you to be WMBE's morning man."

Evenson chuckled. "I've heard your station. It's going nowhere in a hurry."

"It's already nowhere," admitted Basil, "but things are going to change."

"I'm afraid I've heard that before. Every program director in the country guarantees change."

Basil's voice retained its quiet. He could barely be heard above the lunchtime din. "Pick up the phone this afternoon and call Jack Thorpe in Milwaukee. He'll tell you about me. Ask him what I did for his station."

Harry paused. "I already did that. I called him right

after your secretary called me this morning. That's why I'm here. I'm interested. I wanted to play hard to get, but I guess that's not my style. I'm too honest for New York games. I'm leveling with you because I think we're on the same wave length. But, I'm still not sold. What are you going to do with the station?"

"It's going to rock . . . and it's going to have the tightest format in town."

"That's what I thought. That's why I'm not sold. I'm like an old shoe on the air. I never have been and never could be a rock jock."

Basil pulled out all persuasive stops. He reminded Evenson that his take-home pay from the New Jersey station would never be enough to enable him to return to the Midwest in comfort. He pointed out that the big money in radio went to the top deejays and that meant the rockers. He promised Harry that he could still play his morning hymn, but that the rest of the music would come from a station list . . . a list only Basil would control. He conned Evenson into accepting the name Daddy-O. Harry balked at this until Basil explained that, by calling himself Daddy-O, he could still be old shoe Harry Evenson at home. The clincher came when Basil offered fifty thousand dollars a year. That was four times what Harry made in New Jersey.

The morning after Basil's lunch with Harry Evenson, he received a call from Ben Killian's secretary. She apologized that Mr. Killian did not call personally, but he was tied up at a meeting. The courtesy practically melted the receiver as she went on to suggest that Mr. Kelcke join Mr. Killian for lunch . . . if Mr. Kelcke was free, of course. As he listened, Basil wondered what would happen if he told her that he was too busy to have lunch with the President and Chairman of the Board of Mercury Broadcasting. It was purely a transitory thought. Matching the girl's courtesy, he informed her that he would be honored and delighted to accept.

At 12:25 p.m. Basil entered the down elevator on the seventh floor. At 12:26 he crossed the lobby to the express bank of elevators marked 20-40. The white light

blinked on with a soft chime as a door opened. As the elevator munched to a stop on the twenty-fourth floor, he pondered the invitation. It was too early for compliments. Killian could hardly know about signing Evenson. Nothing had as yet been put on paper. On the other hand, it was too early for complaints. WMBE was still in the sad slump it had suffered through for the last nine years. Why then, this invitation?

Basil gave his name to the receptionist. Seconds later, Ben Killian's secretary stalked out to meet him. She looked like a prototype of all high executive secretaries. Every hair was in place . . . every bit of make-up carefully blended. She was a study in beige, tall, lithe and attractive . . . but not beautiful. She blended into the decor of the thirty-seventh floor, just as she could blend into a high level conference. In five minutes the conferees would forget she was there, but when the conference was all over, Ben Killian would have a complete transcript of everything that was said.

"Hello, Mr. Kelcke," she said warmly. "It's so nice to see you again. Mr. Killian asked me to take you right into the dining room. He'll be there in a minute."

The thirty-seventh floor had two executive dining rooms. One seated twenty, while the other had a table for six. Basil was escorted to the smaller, more intimate room. Thirty seconds after he entered, Ben Killian joined him.

"Hello, Basil," oozed Killian. "It's a pleasure to see you again. I must apologize for keeping you waiting, but I was on the phone to the Coast."

He placed his arm around Basil's shoulder and gently guided him to a leather-covered armchair at the head of the table. Killian headed for a teak cellaret. "Let me mix you a drink," he called over his shoulder. "Or would you rather have wine? I have an excellent Chateau Lafite that's been breathing for over an hour."

"That sounds marvelous, Mr. Killian," said Basil.

"Ben, Basil, Ben. After all, you're part of the family now."

Killian poured the wine and then pressed a hidden

buzzer. Instantly a white-jacketed man glided through the door leading to the kitchen that served both dining rooms. A paté was placed in front of each man, followed by a tournedos that rivalled anything Basil had ever eaten. In keeping with the New York business lunch tradition, all talk during the meal remained small. Killian regaled Basil with the exploits of some of the network's television stars and talked at length about the problem of getting gardeners for his estate in Connecticut. His daughter, it seemed, had become quite an equestrienne and delighted in galloping across the two-acre lawn in front of the Killian country home. Basil listened enviously as Killian described the irate gardeners' reaction to what horses' hooves did to Merion blue.

After coffee, Killian lit a cigar and, beaming at Basil, asked, "Well, how's it going downstairs?"

"It's still a little early," Basil smiled back.

"It's never too early," said Killian, still beaming. "It's often too late but, in the broadcasting business, it's never too early."

Basil suddenly noticed that Killian's eyes were not smiling. His even white teeth glistened, but the eyes remained cold. Basil started to reply when the intercom buzzed.

Killian picked up the phone. "I thought I left instructions that we were not to be disturbed," he said. There was a pause as he listened to the voice on the other end. "Okay, put her on." Turning back to Basil he said, "It's my wife . . . excuse me. (PAUSE) Oh, hello, my dear. No, you haven't interrupted anything. You know you can always call me. (PAUSE) This Saturday? I don't see why not. What's the occasion? (PAUSE) By all means. Tell them to set up the paintings in the library. (PAUSE) No, I think it's still too chilly for an outdoor exhibit. Let's keep it indoors. (PAUSE) No, dear, I'm not at all upset. I can still get eighteen holes in before they arrive and, besides, we have a duty to the Arts and you are Chairwoman of the Committee. Oh, that reminds me. I'll be late tonight. I have to attend a meeting of the Opera Board. (PAUSE) I know, but with the demands

of the musicians' union, we have to double our efforts to raise money or there won't be a season next year."

As he unavoidably eavesdropped on the conversation, Basil remembered that Ben Killian was a leader in the Arts. He was on virtually every committee in the city that concerned itself with Theatre, Opera, Symphony and Painting. No one was more dedicated to culture.

Killian completed his call. "Now," he said to Basil, "where were we?"

Basil paused before he answered. He knew he had two years in which to turn WMBE into a winner but, considering Killian's love for Fine Arts, perhaps a compromise was in order. Besides, it would never hurt to score a few Brownie Points with the President of Mercury. It was one of the few times Kelcke made a mistake.

"Perhaps," began Basil, "WMBE could do something to stimulate interest in the plight of the opera. We could schedule three hours on Saturday afternoon for a complete broadcast . . ."

Kelcke never finished. Killian's eyes began to narrow at the first mention of an opera on the air.

"Fuck the opera," interrupted Killian.

Basil was too startled to reply. Killian reached into his pocket and drew forth a ratings book.

"Numbers. That's the name of the game, Kelcke," he said coldly. "Numbers. That's all Mercury's stockholders care about; that's all the advertisers care about; that's all I care about; and, if you want to stay with Mercury, by God, that's all you'll care about. Numbers. How many people tune in WMBE. It's all here. This is your Bible."

"I thought . . ." began Basil.

"Don't think," said Killian. "No, forget I said that." His voice again took on the soothing tone of the luncheon. "Of course you have to think. That's your job. Just don't think about esoteric values. Think only of numbers. I know you can do it. That's why we hired you. And Mercury knows how to show its appreciation. Make WMBE number one and I guarantee you, you won't regret it."

"I'm sorry, Mr. . . . uh . . . Ben. I got out of line for a moment," said Basil. "Believe me, it won't happen again."

Killian smiled. "I'll handle the opera," he said. "You handle WMBE. Which brings up another sticky point. What are you going to do about Marvin Marshall?"

"That is sticky, Ben. He has an unbreakable contract, hasn't he?"

"There's always a way to break an unbreakable contract."

"What about the legal department?"

"That's out. We've checked and double-checked. There's no legal way to break it. But it can be broken, and it must be. That jerk is costing us a fortune. You had nothing to do with signing Marshall; it's one of the problems you inherited with the job. But, he has to go." As Killian spoke he put his arm around Basil's shoulder again and started to guide him toward the door. "You have two years, Basil, to take WMBE to the top. I am confident you can do it, but we both know you'll never bring it off with Marvin Marshall in the stable. And we don't want to buy him out. I'm afraid it's your baby. It won't be easy, but I'm sure you'll find a way. Thank you for joining me for lunch. I've really enjoyed our little chat. We'll have to do it again . . . and soon."

They reached the door. Before he could answer, Basil found his hand shaken and then suddenly he was staring at a closed door. Luncheon was over. It would be two years before he would find himself in the executive dining room again.

On the anniversary of Basil Kelcke's first month as program director of WMBE, a two-page memo was stuffed into the mail pigeon hole of each of the station's directors:

To: Directors and Record Date: 4/12/60
Library

From: Basil Kelcke Subject: See below
Beginning next week, only those records on the accompanying list will be played on WMBE. The record librarian is hereby instructed to pack all records not on this list and place them in dead

storage. Any director deviating from these instructions will meet with disciplinary action.

Page two of the memo listed forty records.

Russ Hopkins, Marvin Marshall's director, perused the list and smirked.

Al Burke, another director, had just finished reading the list. He walked over to Hopkins. "What's this shit?"

"It seems," reflected Hopkins, "that our little boy program director has delusions of grandeur."

"I've never heard of half of these songs," declared Burke.

"I wouldn't worry about it," murmured Hopkins. "When Marshall gets through with Kelcke, you can use those lists for gin rummy scorepads."

At one minute after ten, Marvin Marshall stormed into Kelcke's office, brushing a protesting Jeannie aside in the process.

"What's this shit?" he bellowed, waving one of the lists.

"That 'shit,' as you call it," answered Kelcke evenly, "is the beginning of the new sound of WMBE."

Marshall sat down without waiting for an invitation.

"Look, kid," he said patronizingly. "It's okay with me if you want to play program director. Every station has to have one and I guess WMBE is no exception. But this isn't Milwaukee. This is New York . . . the big time. In this town, buddy, the deejay is king. And I am the king of kings." He waited for a protest from Basil. Hearing none, he continued. "I know I sound like I'm blowing my own horn, but a fact is a fact. I'm the guy who started this whole business. Miller, the Dorseys, James . . . I made those bands! I still get Christmas presents from Sinatra and Doris Day. They remember! Even if people like you don't. Did you ever listen carefully to my theme song? That's Count Basie, kid. He cut it especially for me . . . paid for the arrangement and everything."

As Marvin Marshall spouted on, Basil did remember. He had been just a teen-ager when it started, but he could still hear it in his mind. A small New York radio

station was broadcasting that famous marijuana trial from a little town in Connecticut. What was the name of the accused? Ricardo something or other. It didn't matter. The star of the trial became Marshall. During lulls, they cut back to the studio in Manhattan and told Marshall to play records. He did more than that. He introduced each one in such a manner that it seemed like a live remote . . . with the biggest singers and bands all participating. Marshall's smooth, sophisticated voice wove in and out of each song . . . a mellifluous bridge that tied everything together. Thus was born the disk jockey. In the years that followed, Marshall truly did become the king of kings.

Marshall was still ranting. "My audience would throw up if I ever played the shit on your silly little list. The streets of this town would be an inch deep in vomit. You hear that, friend? Vomit! That's what you have on this list. Vomit music!"

Basil toyed with a little four-by-nine booklet on his desk. He picked it up and scratched his ear with it. Marshall paused as he noticed the title: A. C. NIELSEN RATINGS FOR FEBRUARY 1960.

Marshall continued, "Don't wave a ratings book at me, kid. They're all a pile of shit. How many people do they survey in a week? Two hundred? There are eight million people in this city, buddy . . . fourteen million in the WMBE listening area. These crummy bastards talk to two hundred and try to con everybody into thinking their figures represent an audience."

Basil thumbed through the ratings book. "According to these 'crummy bastards' you were ninth in the market last month."

Marshall remained silent.

Basil went on, quietly. "You ran a contest last week to pick the band of the year. How many entries did you get?"

Marshall gave no answer.

Basil reached for a paper on his desk. "You got seventy-four," he said. "You have a contract that pays you three thousand dollars a week. Do you know how

much your sponsors paid the station last week? Seven hundred twenty dollars. Before agency and salesmen's commissions."

Marshall's voice suddenly matched Basil's in quietness. "What's all that prove?" he asked.

"It proves," replied Basil, "that something has to be done to yank WMBE out of the red." He stood up and walked over to the window. Looking down seven floors, he could see the traffic easing up on Sixth Avenue. The morning rush hour was over. For the next hour and a half, until the lunch crowd poured out of the buildings, you could even get a cab. His eyes lifted from the street. Almost directly opposite, he could see the great gray tower of the CBS building. A little to the left, the brownish giants of ABC loomed into the sky. Five blocks down, the aging RCA building with its NBC sign sparkled in the spring sunshine.

Basil turned back to Marshall. "I'm not trying to sabotage you, Marvin. Good God! I've been a fan of yours for too long. All I ask is that you go along with me for a while. Try the list. If it works, we'll all be in clover. If it doesn't, we'll be no worse off than we are now. I'll make a deal with you. Follow the list except for one record every half hour. That one you pick. It can be anything. Sinatra, Ella, Basie . . . you name it."

Marshall stood up. "You know, kid, you're really not a bad guy. Okay. I'll go along with your gimmick for a couple of weeks. But if it doesn't pan out . . . don't say I didn't warn you."

"Thanks, Marvin," said Basil. "I knew I could count on you."

Marshall started to leave.

"Oh . . . one more thing," said Basil. "I've been thinking about your time slot. I think we're wasting you from six to ten in the morning. That's a rushed, hectic time for listeners. You know. They're flying around getting showered and shaved . . . dashing for the subway. They really don't have time to sit still for the radio. Your program is too good for that scene. I think we should move you to ten a.m."

Marshall started to protest.

"Now, wait a minute," said Basil. "Hear me out. At ten o'clock, the girls have time to breathe. They like to sit down and have a quiet cup of coffee and listen to Marvin Marshall. The only trouble is that Marshall is off the air by that time. That's why I'm suggesting a ten o'clock start. Why, half the women in New York got their first jollies just listening to your voice. This would be a treat for them. No husbands or kids around. Just them . . . and Marvin Marshall."

Marshall pondered the thought and then, with a devilish gleam in his eye, said, "Maybe you've got something there. It might be a lot of fun whispering into the mike and knowing that a million babes are creaming in their drawers just from hearing my voice."

"Good," said Basil. "Let's start it two weeks from today."

"Okay, fine," Marshall agreed. "What are you going to do about my time slot?"

"I don't know yet, but we'll have to think of somebody good," replied Basil.

Marvin Marshall had been born Marvin Moskowitz fifty-seven years prior to his meeting with Kelcke. As a Brooklyn teen-ager, he showed no signs of greatness. He was quick and ever-alert, but so were hundreds of other kids in Flatbush. He could dart in between the pushcarts that dotted the streets and emerge with an armload of apples or tomatoes before the hucksters were aware they were robbed. A constant winner in the penny-pitching contests at sixteen, he handled a deck of cards like a professional dealer. These things, however, were sidelines. Marvin's passion was music. Every Saturday afternoon he hustled across the East River and headed for Manhattan's Fourteenth Street. There he talked his way into the second act of a musical. Even then he was glib enough to con a tough stage manager into letting him stand in the wings. During school vacations, Marvin scampered through the music publishing offices in Tin Pan Alley. At first, he was summarily thrown out, but soon convinced the publishers that he was harmless and

occasionally useful. Marvin was a born "go-fer." Let a coffee cup become empty and Marvin's quick hand was there with a fresh one.

At sixteen, Marvin quit school and left home. His father looked up from his pants pressing job when he heard the news, and sighed. He wasn't surprised, because he had pegged his son early in life as a drifter. Marvin's mother wailed, predicting an untimely end for her beloved son, but this was an act. Secretly she was proud of her son's peregrinations. Postcards arrived intermittently from faraway places like New Orleans, Memphis and Chicago. Marvin was succumbing to the lure of Orpheus. Strangely, he never learned to play an instrument. He tried to master the piano, then made a feeble attempt to learn the banjo, but his ear told him he would be second-rate. So he contented himself with listening and following the budding giants of jazz.

He was twenty-seven before he got a steady job. He had barely managed to scrounge a living during his eleven-year adventure by playing poker and blackjack. When bad luck hit him, he augmented his income with petty theft. Then, suddenly, everybody was talking about radio. It had worked its way out of the experimental crystal stage and was becoming a fixture in households across the country. One of Marvin's musician friends touted him on a job opening at a small station just outside of Chicago that needed an announcer.

"An announcer is a cat who talks," the musician said, "and you talk better than anybody I know. Go see the man who runs the station. Tell him I sent you."

In a competitive audition, Marvin would have stood little chance of landing the job. However, "the man who runs the station" was a smalltime hoodlum connected with one of Chicago's biggest mobs. The musician was a first cousin of one of the mob's lieutenants. From such tiny relationships, auditions became unnecessary. Marvin became an announcer. The station manager made only one request: "Drop the Moskowitz," he said. "It sounds too Jewish. Call yourself . . . let me see . . . call your-

self Marshall. You know . . . like a sheriff." The hoodlum roared with laughter.

At the end of a year, Marvin was really an announcer . . . in ability as well as name. The smooth delivery that was to make him a household word was now firmly entrenched in his style. His voice developed a mellow quality, and he no longer mispronounced three-syllable words. Within three years he had worked his way through four radio stations . . . each time moving east.

Finally, he located himself with an independent station in New York. Four years later the big break came with the famous Connecticut marijuana trial and the beginning of the disk jockey.

Within a year after that fortuitous beginning, Marvin Marshall was in the big money. Sponsors flocked to buy time on his programs. The top names in the music business fell over themselves to present Marvin with tickets to hit shows, dinners at "21" and tiny envelopes filled with cash. Only Walter Winchell had a more favored spot in the Stork Club "Cub Room."

When a new bill opened at the Capitol, it was Marvin who introduced the acts. The management wasn't always sure whether the bobby-soxers were swooning over "Frankie Boy" or Marshall. It was a toss-up. Never lacking for female companionship he had his pick of the most voluptuous creatures in New York . . . each willing to outdo herself to please him in every way possible. Marvin enjoyed every way possible. It was rumored that he invented the one man orgy. Usually three girls vied with one another to give him an orgasm. He had a custom made round bed eight feet in diameter. It was located in a bedroom with mirrors on every wall and on the ceiling. Just outside the room was a dressing alcove. Inside there were no closets. No closets were needed because no clothes were ever worn in the bedroom.

The girls loved the room. Marvin would lie on the circular bed, his throbbing organ pointed at the ceiling, while the girls jumped up and down on either side of him. The springs of the bed, which were renewed every

six months, gave it a trampoline action. Just before the bouncing made Marvin explode, the pace slowed down and six breasts caressed him. Then, three eager tongues darted forth to tangle with every inch of his now feverishly hard penis. Finally, it was his turn. Thrusting himself into one girl, fondling a second and expertly using his tongue on the third as he humped, Marshall made the circular bed give birth to a quadruple climax.

Marshall tried marriage too. Four times. He entered each alliance determined to make a go of it. Secretly harboring a desire for a home and children, he did his best to play the role of devoted husband and, for a while with each wife, succeeded. But it was a lost cause in every case. After a few months, he would feel the urge to go on a sexual spree. At first, the wife of the moment would be tolerant of his need to have dinner with name singers or bandleaders, but after a half dozen solitary meals, each wife would become suspicious. Discovering that Harry James was playing a date at Hollywood's Palladium the night he was supposedly dining elsewhere with Marvin Marshall, she would start checking. Then the private detective agencies would be brought in. The result was divorce. Now, Marshall paid out two thousand dollars a week in alimony. Add to that agent's commissions, a business manager's take, and his three thousand dollars a week dwindled considerably. He was still far from starvation, but he found it hard to save a buck . . . and time was running out.

Marvin Marshall would never have become as big as he had if he had not been able to read handwriting on walls. Basil Kelcke's smooth compliments didn't fool him for a moment. Marvin realized the move from morning man to the ten o'clock spot was an attempt to ease him out. It was for this reason that he agreed to Kelcke's suggestions so readily. He needed time. His contract had two more years to run. Maybe then he could wangle a spot on the Coast. None of his ex-wives gave a damn about his career or money problems.

There was no fun in life anymore and that was the big trouble. Marshall lived alone in a three room apartment on Central Park South. Gone were the circular bed and

the mirrored bedroom. They would have been pointless anyway, thought Marvin. I can't even get it up anymore. His present bedroom had a huge closet which bulged with his wardrobe. He had always dressed in style. A little too Broadwayish, perhaps, but still in style. Few people were left who appreciated his wardrobe. The Stork was gone, along with the Diamond Horseshoe. With the demise of the big bands and with most of the oldtime name singers living on the Coast or in retirement in Florida, few of Marvin's old cronies were left in town. All that remained to him was his music . . . and now that little prick Kelcke wanted to change that. Well, he'd go along . . . for a while. Then, wham! He'd nail Kelcke to the wall. Once Kelcke was out of the way, Marshall would be back on top . . . where he'd always been . . . where he belonged . . . on top.

All of this ran through Marvin's mind as he walked through the springtime air to his apartment. He paused at Fifty-Seventh Street for a light and found himself standing next to a cute girl carrying a model's hatbox. Marvin gave her an invitational grin. She stared right through him for a moment and then, as the light turned green, quickly outdistanced him. Marvin shrugged. Bitch! There was a time when you would have begged me for it.

Kelcke was pleased with himself. He knew that the minute he sent the memo with a music list, Marvin Marshall would be the first person to storm through the door. He dreaded the confrontation. He *had* been a fan of Marshall's ever since high school days. He knew instinctively that Marshall was finished when he heard him again for the first time in three years. Still, he hesitated. It had taken the luncheon with Killian to bring the facts out. He wondered if Killian had sensed this weakness. He had to admit that Killian's timing was flawless.

Basil deliberately did not make changes during his first two weeks at WMBE. He wanted time to listen and size up the problems first. However, he stalled for almost a week before Killian invited him upstairs. That meeting

prodded him into action. He couldn't forget Killian's pointed remarks about Marvin Marshall. He could not fire Marshall but maybe he could make him quit. Whatever tactics he used had to be subtle. Marshall was nobody's patsy.

Basil buzzed Jeannie. As she entered the office, he marveled at how quickly she had assimilated herself with WMBE. She got along with everyone, male and female, including the men who'd made unsuccessful passes at her. She knew the schedule cold and could rattle off personal statistics on the whole staff. This morning, however, she looked a little harried.

"I'm sorry about that bit with Marshall," she said. "I tried to keep him out, but he pushed his way in."

"Don't worry about it," said Basil. "A Green Bay Packer couldn't have stopped him. We can forget about him, however. He's agreed to go along."

"Wow!" exclaimed Jeannie. "Which arm did you twist?"

"Neither, as it turned out," said Basil with a grin. "He was surprisingly easy."

"Well, that's a relief," sighed Jeannie. "I've been blocking for you all morning. Everybody, but everybody, wants your scalp."

"They'll have to catch a fast plane to get it," laughed Basil. "I'm flying to Dallas this afternoon. Get me a reservation, will you?"

Jeannie jotted it down in her book. "May a personal secretary be so personal as to ask why Dallas?"

"Two reasons. They have a hot jingle factory going down there. This station is going to play a jingle between every record and every commercial. We're going to din WMBE into the ears of the audience until they forget there is any other station in America. The other reason is a disk jockey. Dallas has a rock jock who is setting the town on its ear. If he's as good as I'm told he is, you're going to see some new blood around here."

"Hey, boss man, when you move, you move," said Jeannie.

"You haven't seen anything yet," replied Basil. "Before

I go, make out a new schedule, effective two weeks from today. Daddy-O goes in from six a.m. to ten a.m. Marvin Marshall moves to the ten to noon slot."

"Don't you mean ten to two?" asked Jeannie.

"That's what Marshall thinks it's going to be. No, I mean ten to noon. He'll split the time slot with the staff announcer who's been in there . . . I can't remember his name. Not that it makes any difference. He won't be playing disk jockey very much longer anyway."

"Marvin Marshall?"

"I didn't say that, you did. No, I mean the staff man."

Jeannie rose.

"One more thing," Basil said. "I don't want to be bothered with any disk jockey or director for the next two weeks. Set up a meeting for the Tuesday after Daddy-O arrives. Make it for four p.m. and make sure Marshall is there."

Jeannie left, shutting the door behind her. Basil leaned back in his chair, a contented grin on his face. They were rolling. Given a few breaks, in a short while they would be rocking as well.

CHAPTER 4

Since, from his arrival, Kelcke had kept his distance from the on-the-air personnel at WMBE, his first absence would probably have gone completely unnoticed had it not been for his edict about the music list. Everybody knew Marvin Marshall had stormed into his office, but nobody could find out what had transpired. Marshall had walked out with a knowing smile on his face, but he had disappeared too quickly for interrogation. With most minor executives, the simple expedient would have been to pump the secretary. But Jeannie had already proved to be an enigma. She was friendly and readily contributed to the usual requests for donations for baby, bridal and going-away showers, but she clammed up like the CIA when questioned about the goings on of the program department.

Nothing, of course, stopped the rumors. The first one came about twenty seconds after Marshall went down in the elevator. It originated in Master Control. The engineer on duty there never explained how he came to know; he merely hinted that he had been an eyewitness. Careful analysis of his schedule would have quickly scotched this possibility. He had been on duty only

thirty minutes prior to the Kelcke-Marshall confab. He had neither sought nor received relief . . . being too busy switching air control from one studio to another, taking plate current and modulation readings on the transmitter and logging everything that went on the air for the FCC Master Log. He had, in fact, been too busy to even answer a phone call from his wife. Nevertheless, it was the engineer in Master Control who gave everyone the first clue as to what had taken place in Kelcke's office. Those who had seen Marshall enter the office had seen the door close behind him. Even though they had strained their ears, they could hear nothing. The office had once been a broadcast studio and, although the microphone cables and control boards had been removed, the soundproofing remained. Only the air conditioning vents prevented it from being as tight as a tomb. None of this, however, entered the minds of those who offered attentive ears to the words of the profound philosopher of Master Control. All he needed was an audience. And there is no more eager audience than that which is nibbling at the bait of a rumor.

"What did Marshall say?" gasped the audience in unison.

The sage of Master Control took his time re-lighting his pipe. Slowly he shook the match out. Slowly he puffed the aged briar into a glow. Slowly he spoke. "Nothin'. He didn't say nothin'. He just walked over to Kelcke, took a long look at him and then smashed him in the mouth. That was it. Then Marvin walked out."

Nobody did any arithmetic. Nobody questioned the fact that Marshall had been in the office for at least fifteen minutes, whereas the action just described could not have taken over sixty seconds. Nobody wanted to argue. Everybody wanted to believe. And everybody wanted to see Kelcke's face before he got the blood cleaned up, so they all trooped to his office. When Jeanie informed them that Kelcke had gone out of town for a few days, there was jubilation in the halls. By the time the rumor reached the fifth person, it had been embellished to near slaughter. Kelcke had been beaten to ham-

burger. An ambulance had had to be called (several people remembered having seen it pull up in the street below) and Kelcke would be hospitalized for at least three weeks. A collection was quickly taken, two secretaries were dispatched to the liquor store two blocks away, sandwiches were ordered from the Sixth Avenue Delicatessen and WMBE embarked on the best party it had had since Christmas Eve. It reached its climax when a temporary secretary disrobed and gave up her virginity to a smiling salesman to the accompaniment of a recording of the McGuire Sisters singing "Something's Gotta Give." The applause and cheers of the assembled drunker crowd urged them on with obscene shouts as they reared and bucked on the floor.

Since the general manager and sales manager were both attending an affiliates' meeting in Bermuda and since Jeannie was closeted in Kelcke's office transcribing notes from his dictaphone, all of this gaiety went unreported.

There were a couple of minor problems on the air but, since very few people were really paying attention, these were soon forgotten. During one record, both the turntable engineer and the board man ran out for a quick taste, stayed for a second and completely forgot about the spinning disk. When the song finished there was the unmistakable sound of a needle going back and forth in the out groove, but that only lasted for about thirty seconds. An announcer wandered in, heard what was going on and lifted the arm. Another engineer, seeing him do it, made noises about taking union action but he too was mollified by a paper cup filled with bourbon. It was just as well. The announcers' union had its little grievance too. It seems that the announcer on duty had completely forgotten about doing a five-minute newscast. The engineer on duty yelled out into the hall for someone to come get on the air. A youthful copy boy rushed into the breach, grabbed a five-minute news summary from the UPI wire and dashed into the studio amid dreams of becoming an overnight Walter Cronkite. He got through the first sentence and panicked. His voice had only re-

cently changed, so the few listeners were treated to a squeak, a gulp, a gasp for air and three quavering words. Finally, he was rescued by an announcer who had been whispering lewd suggestions into the ear of a girl from Traffic as his hands cupped her breasts when he was yanked from his attacking position by the sage of Master Control and dragged into the studio . . . thereby saving the young copy boy from one of the youngest heart attacks in medical history. That was about all that was saved. The newscast continued minus squeaks, gulps or gasps, but the words continued to quaver and whiskey slurs were added. By the time he finished, someone had entered the record library and returned with fourteen minutes of Rhapsody in Blue. When that ended, a new shift arrived and things slid back into normal.

Between nine and ten a.m. the following morning, a sobering-up staff staggered into the offices and studios of WMBE. They were all quite subdued; the exuberance of the preceding afternoon and evening activities was something most preferred to forget. Especially those young ladies who had been turned on by watching the lovers and permitted themselves to be carried away into dark offices and hidden cubicles. It would be difficult in the future to turn down the daily leering invitations to cocktails from Salesman A when you'd been seen with your dress up to your neck and your panties around your ankles as Salesman B prepared to insert his . . . (Oh, my God! Why did I let him *do* that to me? How can I face everybody?) The solution, of course, was not to face anybody. So nobody did. Everyone went around with eyes averted. Necessary conversations were carried on with the same courteous formality used by nations about to declare war.

Secretly, everyone vowed never to touch another drop of booze. This sacred vow lasted until lunch for the sales department and five p.m. for the rest of the personnel. Each girl also made a personal vow of chastity, although none fled to a nunnery. This vow lasted far longer than the first vow. The earliest recorded fall did not occur

until nine p.m. that night. Some of the others lasted almost three days.

The most interesting aspect of this aftermath was that none of the sales, traffic, continuity, clerical or public relations people of WMBE had the slightest recollection of how the party began. Half of them had not even heard of Basil Kelcke. Nor did the music policy of the station concern them. Sales were down to rock bottom anyway, and this affected the work of every other department. None of these people ever listened to the station, so who gave a damn about what records, if any, were played?

The deejays cared, that's who cared. Their reasons were: *Pride, Power and Money* . . . not necessarily in that order. Some really did take pride in their shows. They were proud of the music they played, proud of their knowledge of the sidemen featured in each band, proud of their ability to pour out facts about each song . . . when it was written, who wrote it, if it came from a show or movie, which show or movie. All of them enjoyed the power they had: the invitations to cocktail parties given by record companies, movie firms and big stars; the free tickets to screenings of major movies; the catering they received from song and record pluggers, press agents and music publishers; the adulation of their fans. They refused to believe that their fans numbered only in the hundreds. After all, a studio couldn't hold more than a dozen people at once and there were usually that many jammed around each man while he worked. With a full live house like that, who could believe that millions more were not hanging on every precious word as they gathered around their radios. (Nobody in broadcasting who has a low rating believes in ratings.) Last, but far from least, was money. A couple of the deejays were out-and-out on the take. To get a record played on their shows, money had to pass under the table. Whether it went to the director or the deejay himself was immaterial. It was usually split down the middle anyway. Fifteen dollars a week from this plugger . . . twenty from

that artist . . . it wasn't much but it added up. It was not unusual for a guy who played the payola game well to rack up a couple of hundred extra dollars a week . . . tax free.

The deejays were divided into two categories: those hired strictly as contract personalities and staff announcers who had been given a time slot. Each of WMBE's contract deejays had a guarantee of only four weeks' employment. They all signed two-year contracts, but these were typical broadcast contracts. You couldn't leave the company for two years, but the company could leave you on four weeks' notice. Staff announcers were different. Their employment with the company was guaranteed by seniority with an overall AFTRA (American Federation of Television and Radio Artists) contract. They could only be fired for drunkenness, dishonesty or insubordination. They could, however, be dropped from their deejay shows on five minutes' notice.

A few years prior to the Basil Kelcke era, the staff announcer was on top at the big networks. He read the news; introduced the big bands broadcasting live from the Hotel Pennsylvania, the Astor and the Roosevelt; he read the commercials, billboarded the soap operas, acted as second banana on the big comedy shows, and covered the remotes. He was revered, respected and stuffed with money from sponsors, packagers and producers. With all this, he still had the security of a full-time job. Some got big enough to quit their staff jobs and free-lance. However, many of these soon found themselves back at the networks trying to rejoin the staff. It was a much-sought-after job that offered prestige, security and big money. Stars came and went in thirteen-week cycles, but staff announcers went on forever.

By the middle of the 1950's, however, that "forever" began to seem like a euphemism for "thirteen weeks." Tape was the first villain. Instead of bringing in a radio show "live" and complete with organist or orchestra, actors, sound effects and chorus, it came in on a roll of tape . . . complete. Instead of hours of rehearsal, which permitted the staff announcer to double back and forth

between two shows and two different studios which were a sixty-second walk apart, programs were "canned" in different parts of the city and, in some cases, in different cities. Television took its cue from the motion picture business and turned to film. The high costs drove single sponsors away from having their own programs. Everybody began to buy spots. You didn't buy a whole show . . . you bought a minute commercial.

The final puncture in the staff announcers' balloon came in the form of the "specialist." Suddenly there were air personnel called "newsmen." Some among this new breed went out, gathered the news and returned to the studio to write it before they went on the air. However, most of them did just what announcers had done for years: they read the news into a microphone that somebody else had prepared. Still, "newsmen" sounded more journalistic than staff announcer. And deejay sounded more musically authoritative than staff announcer. So the staff announcer found himself relegated to an ever lowering place on the totem pole. Some staff announcers, realizing this, became specialists themselves. However, becoming a newsmen meant not doing commercials. And deejays were creatures who bounced from station to station like ping-pong balls. It was no career for a man with a wife and two kids. Unless you hit it BIG. So, most staff announcers stayed put. They still did some news, some record shows, some commercials, some billboards. Some staff men still took home forty to fifty thousand dollars a year. And those who didn't waited patiently for the day when the wheel would come around to their number.

Whether you were a staff announcer deejay or a contract personality deejay, you still had your chance at the *Power-Pride-Money* brass ring at WMBE. Until Basil Kelcke arrived. Now the ring threatened to become eaten away by green rot overnight. Which brought Rumor No. 2.

The euphoria created by the first rumor which told of Marvin Marshall bashing Basil in the mouth was short-lived. On the morning after the brawl, Jeannie placed a second memo from Kelcke on the bulletin board:

To: All directors and deejays
From: Basil Kelcke

Date: 4/13/60
Subject: See below

Beginning Monday, April 18, Harry Evenson will take over the six a.m.-ten a.m. slot. On the air, he will be known only as "Daddy-O." I am sure you will all join me in making Daddy-O feel welcome at WMBE. He has an exciting style which promises to be the start of a new era of success for WMBE.

Effective Monday, April 18, Marvin Marshall will move his show into the ten a.m.-noon period. This move, too, promises to be the start of a new era.

On Tuesday, April 19, at four p.m., there will be a meeting of all deejays. This meeting is a *MUST!* No one will be excused. The director of the program on the air at that time will please make arrangements to pre-record the show for that date only.

Jeannie placed the notice on the bulletin board at 9:45 a.m. When Marvin Marshall got off the air at ten, there was a small cluster of people gathered around the board reading the memo. Marshall started down the hall for the elevator, glanced at the group, paused and then backtracked to join them.

"Hey, Marvin," said a director. "Congratulations. I hear you told Kelcke off in spades yesterday."

Marshall stared at him curiously, then went back to reading the bulletin board.

"How come you're changing your shift?" asked another director.

By now, Marshall finished digesting the memo. Turning and heading for Kelcke's office, he said, "I'll talk to you guys later."

That's all he said. But it was enough to trigger Rumor No. 2. By the time his answer had moved from five mouths to ten ears, the word was out that Kelcke planned to replace all of the deejays with sound effects. Record number three on the list would be heralded by a

wailing siren . . . etc. There would be no news, no weather, no time checks.

The engineers listened solemnly to Rumor No. 2 and read into it their own version of what the fates had in store for WMEE. Their version became known later as Rumor No. 3: Kelcke planned to do away with all turntable and board men. All engineers would be replaced by an automated computer which would search out and find each sound effect and play it, then search out and find the scheduled record on the list and play that. It would all be done like a giant juke box.

Hearing this, the sound effects men got together and pored over their contract. According to this little piece of collective bargaining, no sound effect could be played from a record unless a sound effects man played it. Clearly, this was a violation of the highest order. Strike placards were hauled out of closets and dusted off.

A representative of the deejays was hastily elected. Said representative placed a frantic telephone call to the Executive Secretary of the New York local of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. The phone at AFTRA rang eleven times before it was picked up. The operator informed the representative of the deejays that the local Executive Secretary was in conference. She realized this call was vital, but so was the conference. No, his secretary was not there. Yes, she would definitely have the Executive Secretary call him back. When? Soon.

When the Executive Secretary had not called back by one p.m., the representative placed another call. He was informed that the Executive Secretary was out to lunch. Yes, she had told him about the representative's previous call. Yes, she had told him it was important and urgent. Yes, she did know that his dues paid her salary, but he needn't get so huffy. No, she did not know when he would be back from lunch. Why not call back at 3:30? No, she did not think that was an excessively long lunch hour.

The representative of the deejays was on the air at

3:30 so he did not have an opportunity to call the union again until 4:30. Then he was informed the Executive Secretary of the Local had left for the day. Why didn't he try again in the morning . . . say around eleven a.m. She thought the Executive Secretary should be in by then. The Executive Secretary usually tried to get an early start so, unless he ran into traffic, he should be in by eleven a.m.

Hurried conferences were called in the engineers' lounge. There was some mumbling about the noise by members of the never-ending poker game, but the poker players were quickly squelched when they were informed of the emergency. It was decided by all present that midnight meetings were in order. Frantic telephone calls were placed to the Directors' Guild, the Engineers' Union and the Sound Effects Brotherhood.

Despite the fact that a total of seventeen telephone calls were placed and six telegrams dispatched, no executive of any of the unions was reached. There was some muttering about good golf weather and some veiled threats about replacing all union leaders when the next elections came up but, gradually, the groups dispersed . . . the poker game resumed and people went back to work.

Meanwhile, Marvin Marshall was marching to Basil Kelcke's office. He accosted Jeannie, and drawing careful aim, he prepared to give her both barrels. Then, suddenly, he changed his mind. Turning on an oily smile, he asked calmly, "Where's Kelcke?"

"Out of town," replied Jeannie coldly. She was still smarting from the preceding day's onslaught by Marshall.

"Then maybe you can help me," Marshall said, still wearing his ingratiating grin. "There seems to be some mistake in today's memo."

Jeannie reached in her files for a copy of the memo. She read it and looked at Marshall. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

Marshall leaned over her shoulder. Pointing, he said,

"Right there. It says my new time will be from ten a.m. to noon. It should read ten a.m. to two p.m."

Jeannie flipped the pages of her shorthand notebook. Stopping at the right page, she scanned the squiggly lines. "No, that's exactly what Mr. Kelcke dictated. Ten a.m. to noon."

"My time on the air is four hours per day. Change it to ten until two."

"I'm afraid that's something you'll have to take up with Mr. Kelcke."

"Well, when he gets back, you tell the little prick that Marvin Marshall wants to see him . . . fast."

"Mr. Marshall, I am not paid to listen to your vulgar language. If you can't keep a civil tongue in your mouth when you speak to me, please leave."

"I've been watching you, honey, since you came to work here. You act like you have a golden cunt. Believe me, you haven't. What you need is a good . . ."

Marshall never finished. Jeannie threw a half empty cup of cold coffee in his face. The tan liquid dribbled down his chin and ran into his brand new twenty-five dollar Sulka tie. Marshall's grin froze. He started to say something, then turned on his heel and stormed down the hall. Two engineers tried to stop him, but he brushed them off and continued toward the elevator. A deejay, flushed with the prospect of a union meeting, ran after him but he too was pushed aside as Marshall entered the elevator.

Jeannie walked into Basil's office and shut the door. Sitting on the couch, she gave in to tears and uncontrollable sobs and collapsed on the couch. It was almost an hour before she dared leave the office.

Despite the cool, aloof mien she normally displayed, Jeannie Draves was a frightened little girl. She had grown up in Arlington, Virginia . . . the only child of a regular Army officer. He met Jeannie's mother in San Francisco. They had a short courtship because Jeannie's father was determined that he would never be shipped back overseas again as a bachelor. Two days after their marriage, he received orders transferring him to Wash-

ington, D.C. Jeannie was born ten months later.

An Army captain in the pre-World War Two days was still a somebody on a Midwestern base. But he was not then, is not now and never will be anybody but a nobody in Washington, D.C. Even in the era prior to that five-sided maze called the Pentagon, colonels and generals in Washington were a dime a dozen, and captains were looked upon by one and all as glorified orderlies. As a result of this class prejudice, Captain Thomas Draves, U.S.A., spent most of his waking moments plotting ways to get out of his den of triplicates. He finally succeeded on December 11, 1941.

With a war on, it was decided that Mrs. Draves and her four year old daughter would stay in Arlington. Thus, Jeannie lost out on the typical Army Brat's tour of the world. There were two years during which the Draves family pulled a tour of duty in Germany, but Jeannie was too young to appreciate it. When she was ten, the now Lt. Col. Draves was re-called to the Pentagon. This time, he did not fight the move. In fact, since he desired a normal home life for his wife and daughter, he courted an extension of his tour. The result was that Jeannie remained in Arlington until she was eighteen and ready for college.

In some ways, her teen years were fun. With the beginning of the Eisenhower administration, Washington became the golf capital of the world. Seven public courses in the metropolitan area offered a variety of fairways, greens and traps that beckoned even the lowly duffer . . . all for as little as seventy cents. Jeannie became an excellent golfer, fairly good rider and acceptable tennis player. She swam, rode and bicycled ten months of the year. Only one thing was missing: dates. At fourteen, Jeannie was five-foot-five and totally devoid of curves. Every part of her body was a sharp angle. Boys liked her . . . as part of a team. But at prom time her telephone was silent.

When she was eighteen, she entered the University of Maryland. At first, she commuted. But the long trek from Arlington to College Park began to take its toll, so Jean-

nie moved to a sorority house on campus after six months. During her freshman year, the sharp angles began to soften. A hint of her future beauty began to shine through. But no boys took the hint.

Jeannie thought she was doomed to an old maid's destiny. She became reconciled to a date with her tape recorder on the night of a big dance. She had become intrigued with radio when she was ten. Her father bought her one of the first tape recorders on the market. Then, exercising his Army contacts, he obtained recordings of the big radio programs of the past. By the time Jeannie was sixteen, she had a collection that would have been the envy of the Library of Congress.

Gradually, however, boys began to discover that she was a girl, and not merely a golf or tennis partner. She began to have dates. She was kissed for the first time when she was nineteen. It was a complete failure. She offered her lips primly to her hot-blooded escort, but stiffened when he worked his tongue into her mouth. The boy chalked her off as a cold fish and never asked her out again. Jeannie was puzzled but, being used to a life on the shelf, retreated to her old radio programs and pretended it did not matter.

Listening to her sorority sisters, Jeannie heard tales of experiments in back seats of cars and fumbings on the lawn. These stories stirred feelings within her that she never knew existed. By the time she was twenty, she was fully blossomed and in demand. Now, kissing became second nature. Nor was she unaware of the masculinity of the boys she dated. The first time a boy kissed her good-night standing up, she felt his hardness pressing against her and pulled away. But her embarrassment gradually disappeared and she began to press back.

In her junior year, she began to go steady. The boy was a senior . . . president of his class and quarterback on the varsity. Despite his BMOC status, Bob was basically shy. He treated Jeannie as though she were made of crystal. He seemed hesitant to touch her for fear that she might shatter. Thus, it was Jeannie who made the first overture. After six months of innocent hand-holding

and gentle kisses, she rebelled. On the way home from the Senior Prom, she asked Bob to take her for a drive in Rock Creek Park. At her suggestion, he parked. They talked for a while and then he lifted her chin and kissed her. Filled with a fire she could not explain, Jeannie darted her tongue between his lips. Bob was startled but quickly matched her ardor. His fingers found their way inside the front of her gown and pulled away her bra. For the first time in her life, Jeannie knew the feeling of a man's hand on her breast. She dropped her hand to his groin and grasped his now rigid organ. Bob moved her hand away, unzipped his fly and thrust the pulsating member into her palm. Jeannie squeezed it and groaned as Bob began to stroke her inner thighs. Suddenly, he stopped.

"I love you, Jeannie," he said. "I won't do it this way."

The confession arrested every motion and emotion of Jeannie. She opened her hand and began to smooth down her gown, all the while staring straight ahead through the windshield.

"We can wait until we're married," Bob said.

"Take me home, Bob," she replied.

"Wait a minute," he said. "I just asked you to marry me!"

She began to cry, sobbing incoherent words about being unworthy of him or any other man . . . being ashamed . . . what kind of girl she was in his eyes. No man could love a girl who tried to rape him . . . how did he know she wouldn't turn into a prostitute . . . she never wanted to see him again.

Bob tried to comfort her, but she refused to let him touch her. He mumbled things about not understanding women . . . he would marry her tomorrow . . . or sleep with her tonight . . . right now, in fact . . . he would never look at another girl as long as he lived . . . it was all his fault . . . he would die if he never saw her again.

Bob did not die, but he never dated Jeannie again. He tried virtually every night for the rest of the term. But Jeannie steadfastly refused to see him. He graduated

that June and, when Jeannie last heard, had married a girl from his home town.

The following June, Jeannie graduated. She was elected Homecoming Queen, but she was still a virgin.

As she dried her tears and put on a fresh face, Jeannie thought ruefully that, at twenty-three, she was still a virgin, she was probably the only twenty-three year old virgin in Manhattan. No! In the entire world! Why had she treated Bob that way three years ago? *Why? Why? Why?* She could have been married and living in the suburbs by now. They would have had a child, perhaps two. Instead, she lived alone in a one and a half room apartment on New York's West Side. And she worked at a radio station peopled with antagonistic lechers. Where was the camaraderie, the joy of creating that had lured her to WMBE? She liked Basil, but apparently no one else at the station did. They seemed determined to sabotage his every effort.

She crossed over to the window fronting Sixth Avenue. Maybe it would all work out, she thought. After all, she had only been at the station a few weeks. She picked up a ratings book. WMBE was number nine in the market. She glanced idly at the program schedule. There was a fifteen-minute newscast every hour on the hour. On the half hour, there was a five-minute newscast. Otherwise, the schedule read:

6:00 a.m.-10 a.m. MARVIN MARSHALL
(this was scratched out
by pencil with Daddy-
O's name scribbled in)

10:15 a.m.-12 noon BILL THOMS (a staff
announcer whose name
was also scratched out
and replaced with
MARVIN MARSHALL)

12:15 p.m.-12:30 p.m. . . . NOONTIME WITH NEL-
LIE

12:35 p.m.-1:00 p.m. . . . DR. CORLISS WAR-

- WICK (a psychologist who took telephone calls from listeners)
- 1:15 p.m.-4:00 p.m. KEN BORDEN (staff announcer)
- 4:15 p.m.-6:00 p.m. CHUCK LAWSON (contract deejay)
- 6:15 p.m.-6:30 p.m. SPORTS WITH FRITZ WILSON
- 6:35 p.m.-7:00 p.m. AROUND MANHATTAN (interviews, public service announcements, etc.)
- 7:15 p.m.-12 midnight LITTLE JOE WEAVER
- 12:15 a.m.-6:00 a.m. RAY VALLÉ

Jeannie perused the rundown thoughtfully. Some of the people weren't bad, she thought, but she had a hunch few, if any, would still be on WMBE when Basil finished his revamping. The big trouble was a lack of consistency. The station was a mishmash of miscellany. Marvin Marshall concentrated on a big band sound . . . Ray Vallé leaned heavily on the lush mood music. Jeannie liked both kinds of music, but realized that a change was in order.

Good afternoon, this is Dr. Corliss. What is your problem?

Hello. Is this WMBE?

Yes, this is WMBE, and this is Dr. Corliss.

Oh. (Pause) Oh. I thought I would never reach you. I've been dialing you every day for over a week, but the line is always busy.

Well, you have me now. Do you have a problem?

It isn't me, Doctor. It's my son. He's only nineteen and he has started running around with a woman of twenty-eight. I've told him she's too old for him. She's a tramp, that's what she is. Anyway, he won't listen. He says he's old enough to know what he wants and he wants this girl. Well, Dr. Corliss, no mother in her right mind is going to sit still and watch her only son throw away his

life on a tramp. But . . . I'm at my wit's end. What can I do?

The first thing you must realize, my dear, is that your son doesn't really love this woman. He is seeking a mother substitute. He wants to break away from your apron strings, but is afraid to stray too far. As a result, he . . .

Jeannie turned the monitor down. Maybe that's what I should do, she thought. Pour out my troubles to Dr. Corliss Warwick. Then she smiled to herself as she conjured up a mental picture of Dr. Corliss: short, dumpy and hairy. Dr. Corliss had never been married. How could she possibly understand what it meant to be afraid of sex and yet eager to be wed? Jeannie quickly dismissed any notions of talking to the good doctor.

"I'll see that and raise you half a buck."

"I'm out."

"Call."

"I'll see it."

"All blue."

"No good. I've got a filly."

The poker game in the engineers' lounge was in full flower. Two tables were surrounded by chairs dragged in from half the offices on the floor. Three men stood behind the players at each table . . . waiting for an open seat. It was one a.m. Announcers, engineers, directors, newsmen and salesmen long off duty made up the group. Coffee cups and beer cans were strewn about the room. On the couch, were the remains of a half-eaten Danish and a wilted corned beef sandwich.

"You guys all ready for the new music policy?" asked a newsman.

"You can take that music and shove it up your ass."

"It won't fit."

"When I get through with it, it will."

"I'm thirty bucks behind and you jerks are yammering about music. Shut up and deal."

"Okay, farthead, this one's for you. Seven card. High-low."

Russ Hopkins, Marvin Marshall's director, was ahead seventy dollars. He knew he was doomed to go without sleep. He was due in the studio with Marshall less than five hours from now. However, he wanted to stay ahead, so he was stalling. He dealt everyone two cards and paused.

"I'll tell you one thing," said Hopkins. "There's more than one way to skin a cat. We're going to play that shit on the Marshall show, but when we're through Kelcke will wish he'd never put out a list."

"How do you plan to manage that?"

"Simple. The engineer will 'wow' every record and Marshall will introduce each group like he was doing a broadcast at Carnegie Hall with the Philharmonic. You wait and see. WMBE will become the laughing stock of this town. As soon as Ben Killian gets wind of it, Kelcke will be out faster than a whore with diarrhea."

"Not a bad thought," said Little Joe Weaver. "Maybe, if we all do it, we can dump Kelcke before summer."

"Would it be asking too much of you geniuses to deal a third card? This is *seven* card stud, isn't it?"

Jeannie had plans to leave the office early on Friday. With Basil away, she had no trouble catching up with her work by noon. It seemed like a good time to spend a weekend with her parents in Arlington. Marvin Marshall had studiously avoided her since the coffee-throwing episode, but his foul-mouthed remarks still rankled her. The cherry blossoms were in bloom and she was homesick to see them again. She had a reservation on the six o'clock plane out of LaGuardia. Hoping to beat the rush hour traffic to Long Island, she closed up her desk at 4:15 p.m. and started down the hall. She had only traveled five feet when she heard her telephone ring. Thinking it was another disgruntled deejay, she started to ignore it. But the persistence of the instrument drew her back like a magnet.

"Hello . . . Jeannie?" said the voice.

"Yes, this is Jeannie."

"This is Basil. I'm at LaGuardia. I just got in. Look, I

hope I'm not spoiling plans for your weekend, but could you possibly wait for me? I have a lot of things to put in the hopper before Monday and we'll have to put in some overtime to get them done."

Jeannie paused for a split second. "I . . . I have no plans for the weekend and . . . and I can use the overtime. How did things go in Dallas?"

"I'll tell you when I see you . . . which, if I can get a cab, will be in about forty-five minutes."

The phone went dead. Jeannie resignedly dialed the Washington tie-line. The operator at Mercury's Washington affiliate, connected her to her number in Arlington. Jeannie explained the situation to her mother and promised to fly home for a weekend within the next couple of weeks. It was a promise Jeannie was destined to make and break eleven times within the ensuing year. Basil, she would learn, knew no clock or calendar when he was molding a radio station to a new format.

At 5:15 p.m., Basil strode into his office, his arms laden with packages. He dumped them on the couch and turned to Jeannie. "Well, how has everything been here while I was gone?"

Jeannie hesitated. She thought about her confrontation with Marvin Marshall, but decided against going into detail. "WMBE is still on the air, if that's what you mean," she said. "I posted the new schedule and set up the meeting as you requested. Oh . . . Marvin Marshall stopped by and asked to see you as soon as you returned."

"Did you tell him I didn't want to talk to any of the deejays until after the meeting?"

"Well . . . no. I'm sorry. I guess I forgot."

Basil looked at her strangely. "Okay, I'll see him Monday when he gets off the air."

Jeannie stared at the couch. "What's with all the bundles?" she asked. "Presents from Neiman-Marcus?"

Basil grinned. "Not exactly. But I did bring you a present . . . a new disk jockey."

Jeannie laughed. "Which package is he in?"

Still smiling, Basil answered, "He'd almost fit in one."

He's only five-feet-two. That's a little short for you but I think you'll like him."

"You trying to play matchmaker, boss?"

"Only if I can keep everything in the WMBE family. I have no desire to see you swept off your feet by some out of townner. Good secretaries are too hard to find. And you, Jeannie, are a good secretary."

Jeannie curtsied.

"What's the name of this lady-killer?" she asked.

"Pedro Juan Alvarez Domingo."

"What?"

"Don't worry about it. He calls himself Pete Sunday. He was born in Piedras Negras, Mexico, but he likes to think of himself as one hundred percent American. It seems his father crossed the border illegally back in 1938. He never got caught, but Pete still looks over his shoulder. I assured him I'd keep his secret. Of course, confidential secretaries are exceptions."

"How come he told you all of this?"

"He didn't . . . at first. The program director of his station in Dallas, an old friend, tipped me off about Pete when he heard I was looking for deejays. The station is going into an all-news format, so Pete would have been out. Anyhow, the PD knew part of the story, and it wasn't too difficult to talk Pete into telling me the rest."

"When does he start here?" asked Jeannie.

"May 9th. Oh, that reminds me. Call legal and ask them to draw up a standard contract. And use the name Pete Sunday."

Jeannie jotted it down in her book as Basil opened the packages on the couch. One contained a stack of ET's, sixteen-inch records that radio stations used for commercials in the days before cartridges. Another, a half dozen reels of seven-inch tapes. Inside still another were four-inch squares of plastic with bits of recording tape wound on them. The final box contained a small machine-like device.

"What's that?" asked Jeannie.

"It plays these cartridges," replied Basil, placing it in a

closet. "I'll show you how it works later. In the meantime, don't tell anyone I have it."

Basil placed a reel of tape on his machine and played it. It was a series of jingles. A group sang the praises of WMBE in ten, twenty and sixty-second versions. The words varied but the tempo never slackened. It was GO . . . GO . . . GO from beginning to end. The music started at allegro and got faster. It began at forte and got louder. Throughout each jingle there was a thread of never-ending excitement.

Jeannie listened for a while and then said, "Like wow!"

"That's the idea," said Basil. "That's how WMBE is going to sound from now on."

Anyone tuning in WMBE the following Monday would have questioned Basil's statement about "from now on." The new music list was followed religiously, but that was the extent of the Basil Kelcke "sound." Each record was introduced with dripping sarcasm followed by a long pause before the song "wowed" in.

A broadcast turntable is a heavy, gear-driven monster. The engineer cues up a record by listening to an audition amplifier which does not go on the air. The needle is placed on the record and the turntable started. At the first sound of music, the record is stopped and backed up a half turn. When it is time to play it on the air, the turntable is again started but the record is held gently in place. This "slipping" allows the turntable to gather speed before the record is released. The result is instant music. However, if the record is released before the turntable reaches speed or if it is not backed up far enough when cueing it up, the music hits the air with an unmistakable "WWWOW." It is a sound guaranteed to set a listener's teeth on edge. Even the best engineers can wow a record accidentally.

When Basil heard the Marvin Marshall show the first Monday of the new music policy, he knew instinctively that the "wows" were deliberate. He also knew he could never prove it.

Basil stepped off the elevator that morning at 9:05. He noticed that the seventh floor receptionist avoided looking at him. As he walked down the corridor toward his office, he heard muffled giggles and saw hands fly up to cover spontaneous grins. Arriving at his office, he motioned for Jeannie to follow him in.

Jeannie was incensed. "Have you heard it?"

"Now, just simmer down," said Basil. "I've heard it."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing. If it keeps up, the deejays will begin to sound sillier than the station. And they have too much ego for that. I think, however, that we'll hold off using the jingles for a while."

"Are you still going to see Marvin Marshall this morning?"

"If he still wants to see me. Relax and don't worry. We'll win. You'll see."

As Marvin Marshall left the studio and headed toward the elevator, she called him.

"Mr. Marshall," Jeannie said sweetly. "Didn't you want to see Mr. Kelcke?"

Marshall halted. "Does he want to see me?" he asked suspiciously.

Still dripping sweetness, Jeannie replied, "Not necessarily. You were the one who requested the appointment. If you still wish to see him, he's in his office."

Marshall hesitated, then walked into Basil's office.

"Good morning, Marvin," said Basil, matching Jeannie's honeyed tones. "What's the good word?"

Marshall stared at him for a moment. He debated whether to ask Basil if he'd heard the show, but decided against it. "I wanted to ask you about my schedule change. It reads ten a.m. to noon. You know I've always had four hours on the air since I came to WMBE."

Basil swiveled around in his chair to face the window. "I know," he said. "And I'd like to keep it that way. The trouble is we're locked in with Noontime with Nellie and Dr. Corliss. That means you'd have to split your show."

Basil swiveled back to face Marshall as he continued, "I think you'll agree that continuity is important, so I hope you'll go along with this temporarily. If a longer slot comes up, we can always move you again."

"Let's not do any more moving," Marshall said quickly. "I like working mornings. It gives me a chance to get out on the golf course in the afternoons. Let's leave it this way. Okay?"

"Anything you say," replied Basil. "Believe me, if it weren't for the fact that WMBE needs Nellie and Corliss, you'd have your four hours right now."

After Marshall left, Basil called Jeannie in and dictated a note giving both Nellie and Dr. Corliss four weeks' notice.

That afternoon the Mercury Broadcasting limousine sped from Idlewild Airport to Manhattan. Vice-president and general manager Arnold Spaulding and his sales manager, Duff LeRoy, were back from the affiliates' meeting in Bermuda.

"Man, Bermuda was sure a fine place for a meeting," said LeRoy.

"Yeah," echoed Spaulding. "Next time we should take our wives."

"You're kidding, of course," laughed LeRoy.

Spaulding looked out at the row upon row of development houses that zipped past the window. "Every one of those clods should be listening to WMBE," he said.

"Hmph," snorted LeRoy. "That'll take a miracle, and this fellow Kelcke doesn't impress me as a miracle maker."

"You never know," mused Spaulding. "He didn't impress me either at first, but you have to admit he did quite a job in Milwaukee."

"What's he plan for WMBE?"

"He claims the first step is a new music policy. Then there's this Daddy-O character he's just hired. I'm letting him have his way but, frankly, I don't know about Daddy-O and rock music. That reminds me. This is the day the new music starts. Let's hear it."

LeRoy turned the radio on and spun the dial to WMBE.

The time is 1:45 on a beautiful afternoon in New York. Ken Borden here, folks, with WMBE's Afternoon Jamboree. Now, it gives me great pleasure to introduce a new ensemble appearing for the first time before the WMBE microphones. We have, as you must have guessed, a new music policy on WMBE. No more trash like Sinatra, Doris Day, Ella Fitzgerald and Bill May. No sir! Now, we present the epitome of the music scene. Notice, as you listen to this group, the diatonic dissonance . . . the caustic cacophony they offer. Think, as your eardrums are assailed: could Beethoven and Wagner offer more? Not in a million years. Nope. Only WMBE could find singers like these. Here now, oh friends, the glistening glissando of (FANFARE) the Gloop!

There was a long pause. Then, with a wow and an r-r-r-r-, the record began:

*Gimme that thing.
Shake it 'round, my love.
Gimme, gimme, gimme.
Ooh, my honey dove!*

"What in Christ's name is that?" exploded Spaulding.

LeRoy reached for the knob and started to search across the dial. He twiddled it back and forth, but it soon became evident that they were tuned to WMBE.

Spaulding leaned forward and furiously turned the radio off. He picked up the mobile telephone and asked for WMBE's number. Reaching the Mercury operator, he started to demand Kelcke's office. Then, changing his mind, he called for his own extension instead. He barked orders to his secretary for a staff meeting to be called promptly at nine a.m. the following morning. He wanted the exact lyrics from the opening of the song just played. He hung up and rolled down the window between the front and back seats.

"Take me home, Jimmy," he ordered the chauffeur, "and then drop Mr. LeRoy off at his place. We're not

going back to the station today." He rolled the window back up. Turning to LeRoy, he said, "I think I'm going to throw up."

They rode in silence for the rest of the trip.

Seven men gathered around the conference table the next morning. In addition to Spaulding, LeRoy and Kelcke, the news director, advertising and p.r. director, chief engineer and business manager all sat silently sipping coffee. One look at Spaulding's face put a damper on any idle chatter.

"Gentlemen," said Spaulding between clenched teeth. "I'll come to the point of this meeting. Yesterday afternoon I returned from the affiliates' meeting and tuned in the station. I don't think I have to elaborate on what I heard. I want to know what the hell is going on? Basil, suppose you answer first."

Basil stood up. "Rebellion and sabotage," he said. "It would seem that WMBE's engineers, directors and deejays disapprove of our new music policy."

"I'm not sure that I disagree with them," interrupted Spaulding. "The first record I heard yesterday was a lewd thing about shaking a man's cock around. Believe me, Kelcke, a couple more like that and we'll have the FCC on our tail."

"I think you're referring to the Gloops' new hit," said Basil. "There is no mention in that record of shaking a cock, sir."

Spaulding reached in his pocket for a notebook. "Don't hand me that crap!" he shouted. "I wrote it down. Here it is. Listen! Gimme that thing. Shake it 'round, my love."

"They said 'thing'," replied Basil. "Not 'cock'."

"Well, goddamit, they meant cock and everybody who listens will know it."

"I'm sorry to disagree with you, sir," said Basil calmly. "But if you listen carefully to the end of the song, you'll discover that the 'thing' they are singing about is a malted milk shake. It's a story about a girl who has a craving for malteds. Her boy friend works at a fountain and likes to tease her by holding the malted just out of her reach. Believe me, sir, the record is selling like hot-

cakes. The kids love it and only a teen-ager with a filthy mind would read anything dirty into it."

"Are you suggesting that I have a dirty mind?" asked Spaulding.

"No, sir, not at all. I said teen-ager. Most adults aren't tuned in to the same wave lengths as their youngsters."

"That may be so," interjected LeRoy, "but do we want WMBE to appeal strictly to kids? From a sales angle, I have to say that could be a disaster. We have enough trouble trying to keep commercials on the air. If the word got around Madison Avenue that our whole audience was made up of teen-agers, we couldn't sell five spots a week. Bubble gum manufacturers don't advertise on radio."

"I disagree with you, Duff," said Basil. "These kids have a lot more money and buying power than any of us did when we were young. They are the buyers of soft drinks, cosmetics, clothing, records, TV sets and gasoline today. Tomorrow they'll buy automobiles, cigarettes, beer and wine. As the twig is bent, you know. Plant the advertising seeds now, and you'll have them in your corner when they're ready to buy the big stuff. Besides, if the kids tune in WMBE, the parents can't help but hear it."

LeRoy reflected on that for a moment, then said, "Maybe you have something there. If we can get the 'numbers,' we should be able to sell the station."

"It does have a lot of promotion possibilities," added the p.r. man. "And we can play down the demographics."

"What about those lyrics and the FCC?" asked Spaulding.

"I guarantee you we'll have no trouble with the FCC," replied Basil. "I will personally listen to every record that goes on the air. If there are really objectionable lyrics, it won't get played."

"Okay, Basil," said Spaulding. "It's your tee shot. However, something has to be done about this rebellion. The way the deejays are introducing these songs makes them seem worse than they are. And what about your engi-

neers, Nick? They're wowing every record and playing half of them at the wrong speed."

Nick Guarnieri, the chief engineer, frowned. "The trouble is, Arnie, I can't prove they're doing it deliberately. I called two of them in on the carpet yesterday. They apologized for goofing, but swore up and down that everything they did wrong was an accident."

"May I say something about this?" interrupted Basil. "There are going to be a lot of changes in the deejay and director set-up around here, but we have to live with the engineers. So let's do just that . . . live with them. It'll take a while, but I'm convinced we can get them on our side. I'd like to show you gentlemen something I found in Dallas."

Basil left the room briefly, then returned with his cartridge machine. He plugged it into a wall socket, placed a cartridge in it and pushed a button. Instantly, a jingle flooded the room. It ran for ten seconds and then stopped automatically. Basil pushed the button again and the same jingle was heard.

"Hey, that's quite a toy," said Guarnieri. "I read about that thing, but this is the first time I've seen one."

"It's more than a toy," said Basil. "It's the way stations around the country are beginning to operate. You can't wow it and you can't play it at the wrong speed. It's fool-proof. No engineer can louse it up . . . accidentally or on purpose. It's the secret of a tight operation. One man can run a board and still play ten-second jingles followed by ten-second . . . or thirty-second . . . or sixty-second . . . or whatever commercials followed by a record. All you need is a bank of these things and you're in business."

"It's a great theory," said Guarnieri. "But the engineers' union will never sit still for a one man operation. If we put that machine in the control room, they'll demand three men instead of the two we have now."

"Not if we prove to them that no man will lose his job," answered Basil. "Look at it this way. The telephone operators were scared stiff when the dial phones went into operation. But look how many thousands of new em-

ployees the telephone company has had to hire. The way I see it, once we start putting records and commercials on cartridges, we'll have to hire three more engineers to do nothing but dub."

"I'll buy that," said Spaulding. "Nick, get together with Labor Relations and see if you can work this thing out with the union. Make concessions if you have to, but get these machines into the control room and cut the engineers down to one."

"We need two other things to tighten up the operation," said Basil. "We have to get the deejay and the engineer in the same room."

"You mean eliminate the control room?" asked Guarnieri.

"Right," replied Basil. "There's too much delay in hand signals. The deejay has to be able to hand the engineer the cartridge and talk to him while a record is on."

"But we've always had glass separating the engineers and the talent," argued Guarnieri.

"We need them in the same room if we're going to make this thing work," persisted Basil.

"But what about the directors?" asked Spaulding.

"That's the second thing," replied Basil. "We have to get rid of the directors."

CHAPTER 5

Basil's prognostication about the deejays proved more accurate than he anticipated. By mid-afternoon on Tuesday, everyone had taken a shot at sarcastic, pseudo-classical intros to the rock and roll records. Not only were their egos suffering, but they were mentally worn out. The toil of dreaming up alliterative adjectives for every disk was more trouble than the deejays cared to take. Gradually they slipped back into their easygoing grooves.

The engineers followed suit. They had their own egos to contend with and when the expected rage from management failed to materialize, the spice of conflict lost its bite. Taking Kelcke's cue, the chief engineer studiously ignored the wows and wrong speeds. The long pauses between the intro and record remained but that had long been SOP at WMBE anyway.

As Kelcke had stated, part of the trouble did lie in the separation between the deejay and the control room. Engineers who once faced the exciting challenge of placing microphones in just the right places to achieve a perfect balance for a big band now did little more than ride herd on one man and one record. Directors who had

once been stimulated by live actors in live dramas now carried records from the record library to the control room and back again. The edge was off the job. The bloom had faded from broadcasting. All that remained was lackluster routine.

The deejay sat alone in a studio large enough for the full cast of a soap opera. The aging Hammond organ collected dust in one corner. In another corner, the paraphernalia of sound effects huddled together. An automobile door on a portable frame. Was this the one that had slammed its metallic crunch into a microphone as The Green Hornet leaped into his car? Was this the garden gate that swung open to welcome Henry Aldrich? Could these coconut shells represent the hooves of The Lone Ranger's horse, Silver? If the on-duty deejay ever gave thought to those ghosts, he kept it to himself. His major concern lay in attracting the attention of the man in the control room.

The two engineers and the director seldom looked at the deejay. They looked at each other, for how else can you solve the aches and pains of the world except through a face-to-face discussion. "Politics and Pussy." That is what these men called their daily colloquies. There was no need to look at the deejay unless they heard silence. Silence. This most beautiful soundless sound is the deadly enemy of the broadcaster. As long as the VU needle kicks . . . as long as a sound bubbles from the speaker, all is well. However, let the needle die on its pin and the control room jumps to attention. A glance into the studio alerts the director that the disk jockey has finished his introduction. Action is in order. Politics and Pussy must await the dictates of radio.

"Go!" barks the director.

"Now?" asks the turntable man.

"YES, DAMMIT, NOW!"

The record finally starts to spin. The board engineer opens the "pot" and the audience hears the song the deejay has been touting.

Basil was determined to break down the archaic sys-

tem. If everyone was in the same room, there could be no distractions. Quietly but firmly he pressed his point with Spaulding and Guarnieri. Both the general manager and the chief engineer expressed their doubts. What if something happened to the equipment? How could you fix it in an on-the-air studio? Basil reminded them that they had more than one studio. They could always switch. What about the program preparing to go on the air from the next studio? All programs would come from the same studio. The extras would be used for emergency and recording purposes only. What about . . . ? Basil had an answer to all objections. Spaulding and Guarnieri gave in.

"Three to the pair of aces. Could be high or low! Seven to the possible straight. Needs an eight. No help for you. Four little hearts. Aces bet."

"Aces bet half a buck."

"And a half."

"That's a come bet, Hopkins. You ain't got no straight."

"Then put up your money."

"Fuck it. I'm out."

The cards were dealt and the betting continued. When it was all over, Hopkins took both high and low. A straight for high and a seven low. He scraped in the money and added it to his already heavy stack.

Little Joe looked over at Hopkins' pile of money. "Let me have ten until payday, Russ," he asked.

"You owe me twenty now," replied Hopkins.

"I know that. You don't have to remind me. You know I'm good for it. C'mon. I need ten."

Reluctantly Hopkins counted out a five and five ones. He pushed it over to Little Joe. "That's thirty," said Hopkins.

Little Joe threw a dollar in the center of the table. "Everybody ante a buck. This'll be draw. One winner," he said.

"High only?" asked an engineer.

"I said one winner, didn't I?"

"I couldn't hear you for all that hammering."

Hopkins glanced at the clock. "It's two a.m.," he said. "What the hell's all that hammering for?"

Ray Vallé's director walked into the engineers' lounge just in time to hear the question. "You mean you don't know?" he asked. "They're tearing down your studio."

Hopkins' head jerked up as though it were on a string. "What?" he asked.

"Go take a look."

Hopkins scooped up his money and strode out of the lounge. He hurried down the hall to studio 3A. All the equipment had been removed from the control room and the glass was gone from the wall that separated the room from the studio. Plaster dust rose in little spirals from a half dozen places on the floor.

"Hey!" yelled Hopkins. "What the hell are you guys doing? We have to go on the air in this studio in less than four hours."

The two carpenters ignored him.

Hopkins stepped over a tool box and marched into the studio. He grabbed a hammer from one of the carpenters and started waving it in the air.

"Better take it easy, son," said the bigger of the two carpenters. "You could hurt yourself with that hammer."

Hopkins sized up the carpenter and decided that a retreat was in order. "Would you mind telling me what's going on in here?" he asked.

"Not at all," replied the carpenter. "Since you've stopped yelling. We're rebuilding this studio."

"At two o'clock in the morning?"

"It's a rush job. And the overtime is pure gold."

"Who the hell gave the orders for this?"

The carpenter reached in his pocket, took out a slip of paper and squinted at a name. "Nick Guar-nar-ee," he replied, handing the slip to Hopkins.

"That's Guarnieri," said Hopkins, half to himself. "This still doesn't tell us where we're supposed to do our show from."

The other carpenter spoke up. "I heard a guy by the

name of Kelcke say all shows would come out of studio 5C starting tomorrow."

"Jee-sus," moaned Hopkins. "Wait'll Marshall finds out about this."

He returned to the game. In the next four hours Hopkins managed to lose back all of his winnings and twenty dollars of his own money.

Studio 3A had been a disk jockey's dream. When Marvin Marshall came over to WMBE, he had been given carte blanche to decorate his own personal studio. Although it was not part of his written contract, it was tacitly agreed that no one else could broadcast from 3A. Walnut record cabinets lined the walls. A walnut-faced refrigerator blended into one corner . . . ever ready to dispense milk, orange juice, soft drinks and beer. A gleaming automatic coffee urn burbled softly in the background. Soft leather chairs surrounded a kidney-shaped table. When Marshall put a guest on the air, the guest felt relaxed and free to reveal his innermost secrets in this club-like atmosphere. Marshall himself sat comfortably ensconced in a custom built lounge chair that tilted smoothly in every direction. A superbly counter-balanced boom supported the mike, which could be brought down to Marshall's lips at the touch of a finger. Marshall could lean back, swivel around, stretch out or hunch forward and still never be out of mike range. High up above the control room window were two huge Altec Lansing Voice of the Theatre speaker systems. Marshall could control the monitor volume of his records from his chair. He also had a dimmer set-up that permitted him to vary the lighting to his slightest whim. No glaring fluorescent harshness permeated 3A. All was subdued and soft.

At 5:45 a.m., Marvin Marshall stepped off the elevator and strolled toward 3A. Halfway down the hall he paused, then reversed his tracks and went into the men's room. Emerging, he turned right and headed for 3A in a direction opposite to his normal route. As a result, Hopkins failed to head him off. Marshall rounded the last

corner and stopped dead in his tracks. His beloved record cabinets were piled in a heap in front of the studio. His chair was upturned on the kidney-shaped table. Milk and orange juice dripped from the open door of his refrigerator. Marshall hurried toward the studio. It was stripped clean. The control room was empty and the glass that separated it from the studio was propped up against a wall. The odor of broken plaster filled the room. Marshall groaned and started to collapse just as Hopkins appeared on the scene.

Hopkins grabbed Marshall and steadied him against the wall. "It's just temporary, Marv," lied Hopkins. "We have to do the show from 5C for a while. Believe me, Marv, I'll see that everything is put back in shape. They've been having some engineering problems and they're going to re-wire the entire studio, that's all. Then everything will be back to normal."

Marshall turned slowly and stared at Hopkins. Hopkins was shocked at his appearance. Marshall's eyes were glazed and his color drawn. Suddenly Marshall started to heave. The vomit spewed down Hopkins' sleeve and ran across the floor to mingle with the milk and orange juice. Shaking himself free, Marshall began to run. He fled down the hall . . . started for the elevator . . . and rushed down the fire stairs. That morning, the staff announcer on duty did the Marvin Marshall show. He explained to the listeners that Marshall was bedded down with a mild virus.

Manhattan had one of its rare "just-washed" looks that morning. A spring shower had moved across the city like a silk balloon, spraying buildings and streets with a cleansing rain. The sidewalks glistened as the sun peeked around a cloud. At six a.m., New York is at its best. A rare car or taxi can be seen moving swiftly up the Avenue of the Americas or down Broadway, but the honking horns are stilled and the scurrying pedestrians are absent. The town is quiet . . . a pianissimo prelude to the roar of commerce and industry that is just around the corner.

As he burst through the door of the Mercury Broadcasting building, Marvin Marshall was in no mood for a stroll. Nor was he aware of the pristine appearance of his favorite city. He saw nothing . . . heard nothing. Gathering energy he had forgotten he had, he raced north. A cruising cab slammed on its brakes as the distraught disk jockey dashed across Fifty-Seventh Street against the light, but Marshall was out of hearing before the cabby could unleash his curses. He rounded the corner of Central Park South at a gallop, pushed aside the startled doorman of his building, and fled into the elevator.

When he was safely inside his apartment, Marshall finally collapsed in a great gasping-for-air heap. He didn't move for an hour. Even after he had caught his breath, he remained in a chair . . . staring at the ceiling.

At seven a.m., the telephone shattered the silence in Marshall's apartment. It went unanswered. At eight a.m., there was a knock at the door. That too went unanswered. Marvin rummaged through his desk and found a Do Not Disturb sign he had borrowed from a hotel years ago. He hung it on his door and then went around the apartment turning off every telephone. The New York Telephone Company had balked at putting switches on the phones, but Marvin finally persuaded them that he was an early morning deejay who needed his rest, so they had given in and installed the switches.

By nine o'clock, Marvin had calmed down enough to analyze the situation. The more he thought of it, the more he became convinced that Kelcke was out to get him. He greeted this newfound knowledge with a seething rage that motivated him into hurling glasses and vases and ashtrays at the wall. This catharsis soon ended his fury and he became quiet again. He gathered the broken fragments of glass and placed them in the incinerator in the hall. Glancing down at himself he noted the flecks of vomit still on his suit. He stripped and showered. Then, in a bathrobe, he made another trip to the incinerator hurling his clothes into the gaping fire.

He thought about calling Kelcke but decided he was not up to another confrontation with that "smiling

spider." He made a pot of coffee, but the memory of his coffee urn in 3A acted as a barrier between the cup and his lips. He poured two fingers of Scotch and set it down untasted.

He reached for a book and caught himself re-reading the first page four times. He tried the *New York Times* crossword puzzle but kept printing Kelcke in every six-letter space. Finally, Marvin fell asleep.

Marshall awakened at eight p.m. He staggered out to the kitchen and started to look for something for dinner. Finding his refrigerator nearly empty, he considered going out to a restaurant. However, he rebelled at the thought of running into anyone he knew. Leaving the kitchen, he walked into the living room and turned the hi-fi set on. Then, crossing over to an immense record cabinet, he began to thumb through the thousands of albums he had collected through the years. When he arrived at the Benny Goodman section he paused. Marshall pulled out Columbia CL 820 . . . "The Great Benny Goodman." He bent the cover so he would not scratch the record and placed side two on his turntable. Gently placing the stylus on the record, he turned the hi-fi volume control up full and went into his bedroom. There he cut in another pair of speakers and cranked them up to wide open. The soft jazz of the quartet came through the speakers in that inspired version of "Avalon." Then, as the needle hit the second cut, the exciting "Bugle Call Rag" blared forth.

In the next apartment, Lt. Brad Carey of New York's homicide department, looked up from reading the *Journal-American*. He smiled as he heard the Harry James and Ziggy Elman trumpets.

"Hey, Mae," called Carey. "Listen to what Marshall's playing."

His wife came in from the kitchen, still wearing an apron. She paused and listened. A grin creased her face as she started to sway in time with the music.

"Remember that?" asked Carey.

"I even remember your violent attempt to do the Lindy," she replied.

"Oh, I wasn't that bad."

The music shifted to "Don't Be That Way." Marvin took off his robe and lay down on the bed. He was nude. As the needle moved into the next to last cut, Marvin slid open the drawer to his night table. He reached for something and placed it on top of the table . . . within easy reach. The quartet played "Moonglow." Next door, Brad and Mae Carey started to dance.

Finally, the album unveiled the pièce de résistance . . . the fabulous Carnegie Hall version of "Sing Sing Sing." As the Gene Krupa tom-tom started, Marshall began to fondle himself. A minute later, the tom-tom segued into the undulating wail of the orchestra. The music and fondling had the desired effect. Marshall had achieved an erection. He kept playing with himself as he listened to the music. Halfway into the song, Harry James joined Krupa in an electric triple-tonguing display of musical fireworks. As the arrangement built, Marshall's passion built with it. He was now masturbating in exact tempo with the drum. Gone were the memories of studio 3A. Gone were thoughts of Kelcke. On his face was a beatific expression that had not been seen since the days of the round bed and the mirrored ceiling.

When Benny Goodman's piercingly clean high notes heralded the climax of the number, Marshall was at his ecstatic peak. Finally, the song ended just as Marvin reached his climax. He lay back on the bed . . . completely spent. He breathed deeply for a few moments and then stretched out his hand toward the night table.

"Boy, that was some arrangement," said Carey. "They sure knew how to make music in those days." He picked up his pipe and started to fill it.

"What was that?" asked Mae.

Carey hesitated before answering.

"That was a shot, wasn't it, Brad?"

Carey slowly put down the pipe and started for the door. As he entered the hall, he picked up speed. He rang the bell of Marshall's apartment. Hearing no reply, he started to bang on the door. Turning to his wife, who

had followed him, he said, "Get the super to bring a pass key. Hurry!"

Three minutes later, Mae was back with the building superintendent. He opened the door and started in the apartment.

Brushing past him, Lt. Carey said, "Let me go first, please, Mr. Gold."

Carey looked around the living room and then raced into the bedroom. He took one look and swung around to block his wife from entering.

"Don't come in here, Mae," he ordered. "And, Mr. Gold, you stay out too. This isn't a pretty sight."

"What is it?" asked the superintendent. "Is Mr. Marshall sick?"

Carey gently pushed the super and his wife away from the bedroom door. He stepped out in the hall, closing the door behind him. "Marshall is dead," he answered.

His wife covered her mouth with her hand. "Oh, my God," she gasped. She crossed herself quickly, then sat down in a chair.

"Mr. Gold," said Carey, "I'll have to ask you to keep everyone out of this apartment except the people I authorize. I'd also appreciate it if you didn't mention this to anyone."

"Sure, Lieutenant," said Gold. "But what'll I tell the neighbors?"

"Don't tell 'em anything. I don't think anyone else heard the shot. If they did, tell them Marshall was experimenting with a new sound effects record. Even if they don't believe it, that should keep them quiet for a while. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a lot of work to do."

Gold left reluctantly. He wanted to look inside the bedroom, but Carey blocked the door. He wanted to ask if it was murder, but Carey's expression denied questions.

After Gold was gone, Carey turned to his wife. "Maybe you'd better go back to our place, honey," he said quietly. "Things are going to be noisy and hectic around here pretty soon."

"If you don't mind, Brad, I'll stay until the police get

here," said Mae. "Maybe there's something I can do." She glanced at the bedroom door. "Should I help clean up?"

Carey shook his head. "We can't touch anything until the photographers come."

"Was it suicide?" asked Mae.

"Looks that way, but you can't be sure."

"How soon will the police get here?"

"Oh, for Pete's sake," said Carey. "I'm sure a fine cop. I forgot to call them."

Carey reached for the phone and dialed the nearest precinct. Identifying himself, he gave a rapid report and said that he'd wait until the police arrived. Then, he too, collapsed in a chair.

"Somehow," reflected Carey, "I feel partially responsible for this."

"Why you?" asked his wife.

"Don't you remember?" replied Carey. "I okayed Marshall's pistol permit."

"Don't be a ninny," said Mae sharply. "That was a long time ago and, besides, Marvin never even showed the slightest tendency toward violence of any kind."

They sat in silence for a few moments.

"What do you suppose made him do it?" asked Mae. "Trouble with one of his ex-wives?"

"You never know," said Carey. "He always shrugged off his marital problems. But they could have been eating away inside him for some time."

"He didn't have any trouble with his job, did he?"

"Not that I know of. Ever since we've known him, he's been a big name disk jockey. I understand he's made a pile of money."

"That reminds me," said Mae. "Don't you think we should notify his boss?"

Carey pondered the question for a moment. "I don't see any harm in that," he said. "Yes, I guess we should. The newspapers will have the story soon enough anyway. I'll call the radio station."

He thumbed through the phone book until he found the number and called WMBE. The station operator gave him Basil Kelcke's name but refused to divulge

Kelcke's home phone number. However, when Carey identified himself and stressed the importance of the call, the operator agreed to phone Kelcke and patch the lieutenant in.

Basil Kelcke was just finishing a late dinner at home when the WMBE operator reached him. He agreed to speak to Carey.

"Mr. Kelcke? This is Lieutenant Carey of the New York police department. I wonder if you would mind coming over to Marvin Marshall's apartment."

"Has something happened to Marshall?" asked Kelcke.

"I'd rather not discuss anything over the phone," replied Carey. "I'd appreciate it if you'd come over here."

Kelcke protested mildly that he was in the middle of dinner, but Carey was adamant. Finally, Kelcke agreed to get over to the Marshall apartment as soon as possible. He gulped down his coffee, promised his wife he would return quickly and walked out into the hall. While waiting for the elevator, thoughts and plots raced through his mind. Kelcke had already decided that he was going to ignore Marshall's absence from his show that morning. Studio 3A was being torn apart. That was all Kelcke cared about. Marshall's anger, frustration and hysteria were his problems. Unless this telephone call was a slick maneuver on Marshall's part to serve Kelcke with a subpoena. No, it couldn't be that, thought Kelcke. A subpoena could be served in his office. Besides, a subpoena for what? Nothing that Kelcke had done was a violation of Marshall's contract. Anyway, Hopkins' description of Marshall's actions and appearance when he saw the studio in shambles was probably an exaggeration. But why this call from the police?

Wanting to think and compose himself, Kelcke flirted with the idea of walking the twenty blocks that separated his apartment from Marshall's. However, a cruising taxi crawled up to him just as he left his building. Basil hailed the cab and directed the driver to the Central Park South address.

Mae Carey answered Kelcke's knock. When he introduced himself, she swung the door wide and invited him

in. He had to sidestep to avoid two policemen who brushed by him as they left the apartment. He heard one of them mumble something about "fresh semen stains on the sheet." Out of the corner of his eye he caught the bright burst of flashbulbs coming from a room down the hall. Two reporters he vaguely recognized were bombarding a police lieutenant with questions. One of the reporters spotted Kelcke and crossed over to him.

"Hey," said the reporter. "Aren't you from WMBE?"

Kelcke stared at him with a look of puzzlement. He started to answer when Carey interrupted.

"Are you Basil Kelcke?" asked Carey.

Kelcke nodded. Grabbing him by the arm, Carey steered him into the kitchen and told the reporters they could talk to Kelcke later.

Carey then gave Kelcke a full report of the death of his leading deejay. As he rattled off the details, he watched Kelcke carefully. The program director's face was an emotionless mask. A faint flicker of dismay crossed it when he learned of the Benny Goodman recording and the evidence of masturbation but, otherwise, Kelcke's face was immutable.

When Lt. Carey finished his story, Basil's only comment was a request to use the bathroom.

"You're not going to be sick, are you, Mr. Kelcke?" asked Carey.

"No," replied Kelcke. "I'm all right. I just want to wash my hands."

CHAPTER 6

The newspapers had a field day with the suicide of Marvin Marshall. The tabloids played it up on page one, dwelt heavily on the sexual overtones and hinted broadly that Marshall was a latent homosexual who had been spurned by an unidentified bandleader. Kelcke saw to it that the newspapers had an ample supply of pictures of Marshall . . . all prominently featuring a WMBE microphone. He also managed to unearth several photographs of studio 3A as it was before the carpenters tore it apart.

Basil Kelcke was quoted liberally: his "deep sorrow at the loss of a personal friend and co-worker" . . . the "plans WMBE had for Marshall—more time on the air and an extension of his contract with a lifetime income." Kelcke spoke in hushed tones as he described the changes Marshall had suggested for his show: "a new music policy . . . already in effect." "A 'now' sound was on the agenda for WMBE." All of this, according to Kelcke, had been Marshall's idea. Not once did Kelcke promote Kelcke. He spoke only of WMBE and, Marvin Marshall. He pointed out that "Marshall had been the dean of the nation's disk jockeys and it was inevitable that Marvin Marshall would be the first to come up with

a new approach to New York radio . . . his was an irreplaceable loss."

"Fortunately . . . (Kelcke's voice choked with emotion as he spelled this one out) . . . fortunately . . . one of Marvin's dearest and oldest friends . . . a man known to his associates and listeners alike as Daddy-O . . . has volunteered to step into Marvin Marshall's shoes. It was purely out of dedication to a great disk jockey that Daddy-O had altered his retirement plans." Kelcke just happened to have a picture of Daddy-O handy. "He will be on the air Monday morning."

Daddy-O, née Harry Evenson, almost dropped his coffee cup when he read about postponing retirement. What retirement? he thought. And when had he become one of Marshall's "dearest and oldest friends." He had never even met the man. Daddy-O was dumbfounded at what seemed to be a blatant attempt to capitalize on tragedy.

Jeannie was also perplexed about Basil's statements to the press. However, the small thoughts of hypocrisy which were beginning to gnaw at her were quickly forgotten when she began to help Kelcke make the funeral arrangements. Obviously Basil was determined that Marvin Marshall would be remembered as the man he had once been . . . not the has-been he had become.

Jeannie spent hours on the telephone. Every singer, every bandleader, every sideman she could reach was invited to participate in the funeral. A chartered plane was dispatched across the country to pick up those people who had left New York. Kelcke insisted that WMBE pay the tab for everything.

The Capitol Theatre was chosen as the most fitting place for the funeral. A forty-piece band comprising the top musicians in the world played a subdued medley of the hit songs Marvin had introduced. New York's senior Senator gave an oration which recalled with affection the many hours of pleasure and amusement Marvin had afforded the people of this state. The Mayor spoke of the loss of one of Gotham's greats. The American Federation of Television and Radio Artists sent a delegation that in-

cluded many of the union's charter members. AFTRA National Executive Secretary Elston St. Claire hailed Marshall as one of the union's founding members. He avoided mentioning the fact that Marshall had not attended a union meeting in fifteen years.

Seemingly everywhere in the vast crowd was Basil Kelcke. If one of Marshall's ex-wives needed steadying, Kelcke was at her arm. If a name bandleader or singer said something complimentary about the deceased, Kelcke made sure that a reporter got an exact quote. WMBE had sent a huge floral display in the shape of a microphone with tiny tea roses spelling out WMBE. Kelcke saw to it that the photographers and TV cameramen had easy access to the celebrities. Coincidentally, he made sure that the WMBE floral display was prominently featured in each picture. Sipping champagne on the sidelines, one columnist remarked to another that it was a magnificent funeral . . . rivalled only by the Chicago gangster funerals of the thirties.

The day after the ceremony, a brown inter-office envelope arrived on Kelcke's desk. The memo inside was from Ben Killian. On it was one word: CONGRATULATIONS!

Despite his total involvement with the funeral and the press, Basil did not neglect WMBE's operations. Beginning at 6:15 a.m. the day of the funeral, each disk jockey was instructed to dedicate his program to the memory of Marvin Marshall. A hurried edit session placed all of the new jingles in each control room. Engineers and directors were dispatched to hotel rooms, airports and the Capitol Theatre to capture on tape short tributes to Marshall from the assembled big names. Kelcke wrote out short statements for each of the music stars to read. He advised the directors to offer each star the privilege of rewording the statements if they wished. Most of them read the tributes exactly as written, thereby weaving the WMBE call letters into nearly every recording.

Sandwiched in between each tribute and record was a jingle which dinned WMBE into the ears of the listeners

on an average of once each two minutes. At breakfast that morning, Arnold Spaulding's wife remarked to her husband that the jingles struck her as being in rather bad taste. Then the general manager of WMBE started to answer her, but could think of nothing to say.

The mood around the station itself was subdued for about half a day. No one who worked for WMBE had really known Marshall well. He arrived for work hours before the bulk of the personnel and disappeared within minutes after his closing theme. There was, of course, much speculation on the cause of the suicide, but only his director zeroed in on the real reasons.

"That sonovabitch Kelcke is a murderer!" declared Hopkins.

"How do you figure that?" asked Marshall's engineer.

"He drove Marshall to suicide. That's how I figure that," replied Hopkins.

"Oh, come off it, Hopkins," interjected another director. "You said yourself that Marvin could handle Kelcke."

"First the music! Then the time change! Then tearing down studio 3A!" shouted Hopkins. "That filthy cocksucker pulled the pins out from under Marvin's whole life!"

Hopkins hurled his accusations in the direction of anyone who would listen. But nobody agreed. Nobody cared. Marshall's death was just another macabre incident in a city long inured to an average of three homicides a day. It was a page one story on Wednesday, page three on Thursday and forgotten on Friday.

Kelcke recognized this, so he had to act swiftly. If Marshall was Page One, so was WMBE. If Marshall was forgotten on Friday, it was imperative that WMBE be remembered on Saturday. Basil ordered a full page ad in every newspaper for Monday. The ad contained a huge picture of Daddy-O sitting in front of a WMBE microphone. The caption stated simply:

The New Morning Mayor of Manhattan Takes Office
Today at 990 on Your Dial. Tune in Daddy-O 6:00-

10:00 a.m. every day on WMBE.

Surrounding the caption were hundreds of WMBE logos.

The funeral was held on Thursday. On Friday, under orders of Basil Kelcke, no mention of Marvin Marshall was made. Instead, dozens of jingles about Daddy-O were scattershot into the air.

Daddy-O, Daddy-O, Daddy-O . . . Double . . . U . . . Em . . . Bee . . . EEE

Basil called Dallas, explained the situation and arranged for Pete Sunday to be released three weeks earlier than the original plan. It was agreed that Sunday would start at WMBE on the Monday following Daddy-O's debut. Another call was made to his old station in Milwaukee. After fifteen minutes of cajoling, he talked his former afternoon deejay into moving east and signing with WMBE. The deejay expressed amazement at Kelcke's timing. How had Basil known the deejay's contract was up for renewal? Kelcke swore it was just coincidence that he called at such a time. But, as he hung up, Basil smiled to himself. He didn't believe in luck or coincidence.

Kelcke called Jeannie and dictated a memo switching the schedules of directors Russ Hopkins and Al Burke. Then he called the chief engineer and requested a change in engineers for the morning slot. He explained that it would be better if a whole new team joined Daddy-O. Any carry-overs from the Marvin Marshall era might prove to be troublesome. Guarnieri agreed and assigned Saul Kalaman to be Daddy-O's engineer.

Basil signed the memo Jeannie brought him and said, "Oh, one more thing, Jeannie. Have a contract drawn up for Turk Myers. He'll go into the two to six slot four weeks from Monday."

"Will do," replied Jeannie. "Anything else?"

"Nope," said Basil with a smile. "I'm taking the afternoon off. As soon as you're finished, why don't you do the same? It's been a busy week."

Jeannie just stared at him as he rose and started for

the door. It was the first time she had ever known Basil to leave before six p.m.

Lt. Carey's doorbell rang. Carey, who had been drowsing in front of the television set, blinked his eyes open and slowly raised himself out of the chair.

"You expecting somebody, Mae?" he called to his wife.

Mae Carey peeked around the doorway to the kitchen. "Not a soul, dear," she replied.

Carey reached the door just as the buzzer sounded again. Opening the door, he confronted a slender young man about thirty years of age.

"Yes?" queried Carey.

"Lt. Carey, I'm Russ Hopkins," said the young man.

Carey looked puzzled.

"Marvin Marshall's director," added Hopkins.

"Oh . . . yes, of course . . . I met you at the funeral," said Carey. "Come in."

Carey held the door open and Hopkins entered the room.

"How about a cup of coffee?" suggested Carey.

"No, thank you, sir. I won't be staying long," replied Hopkins. "I . . . it's just that . . . well, there is something I think you should know."

Carey gestured toward a chair and Hopkins sat down. The lieutenant walked over to another chair and seated himself as well.

"Go on, son," said Carey gently.

"I . . . well . . . okay, I'll say it right out. Marvin Marshall didn't commit suicide. He was murdered."

Long years on the homicide squad had taught Brad Carey the value of a poker-face when someone spouted a piece of startling information. He digested Hopkins' remarks as he slowly filled and lighted his pipe.

"That's a pretty strong statement, Mr. Hopkins," said Carey. "I presume, since you chose to come to my home to tell me about it, that what you're about to say is off the record . . . for the moment."

"I apologize for coming to your home but, since you were a friend of Marv's . . ."

"I was a neighbor of Marshall's," interrupted Carey. "We were friendly, but I can't call myself a close friend. Be that as it may, what makes you think he was murdered? Remember, I was right here when it happened. We checked that apartment from top to bottom. There was no indication of any kind of foul play. Nor did the doorman see anyone enter or leave the building within thirty minutes of the shot."

"Oh, I'm sure Marv pulled the trigger," said Hopkins. "But he was driven to it."

Brad Carey listened carefully as Hopkins described the events leading up to Marshall's death. When he finished, Carey rose and crossed over to the imitation fireplace. He stood by the mantel, staring at a seascape for a few moments. Then he turned and faced Hopkins.

"How long has this fellow, Kelcke, been with WMBE?" inquired Carey.

"A couple of months . . . why?"

Carey's voice took on a hard edge. "Do you honestly believe that a man of Marvin Marshall's stature could be driven to . . . suicide . . . in a mere two months?"

Hopkins wanted to retreat, but he had both feet in it now so he continued. "Lieutenant, Marvin Marshall was an artist . . . a sensitive individual. His entire life centered around music. Can't you realize what Kelcke did to his ego? I saw Marvin the day he killed himself. That man was destroyed . . . long before he pulled the trigger. And Kelcke did it. Kelcke did everything *except* pull the trigger."

Carey pulled a hassock over in front of Hopkins and squatted down on it. "Do you have any idea how many people commit suicide every year in this country?" he asked.

"No," answered Hopkins.

"Twenty-five thousand," retorted Carey, laying the words out. "It's the tenth leading cause of death in this nation. Twenty-five thousand, Mr. Hopkins. Marvin Marshall's death was hardly unique."

Hopkins began to bristle, but the lieutenant stayed his reply with a wave of his hand. "Suicide is not a spur of

the moment act," continued Carey. "It builds slowly in the mind. Some people linger on for years . . . always on the brink, but never quite able to do the job. Others nurse their imagined and real hurts until some little thing trips the switch and BAM! It's over. And nobody really knows why."

"But I worked with Marvin Marshall. Until Kelcke showed up on the scene, Marv never gave the slightest indication of being bothered by anything. He had it made. He had a ball with life."

"Did he?" asked Carey. "How do you know? Did you pal around with Marshall outside the studio?"

Hopkins shook his head.

"Just how big a disk jockey *was* Marshall?" asked Carey.

"The biggest in the country," replied Hopkins.

"I don't mean yesterday," stated Carey. "I mean today. How big was his audience?"

Hopkins protested that ratings don't mean a thing, but Carey persisted until Hopkins was forced to admit that Marshall's glory was decidedly on the wane. At this admission, Carey stood up.

"Mr. Hopkins," said Carey. "Even conceding that Basil Kelcke pressed Marshall . . . perhaps even nudged him over the brink, you have to recognize the fact that Marshall got himself up to that brink . . . and he did it long before Kelcke came. I think you'd better forget about it. And, if you're smart, you'll be mighty careful in the future before you accuse anyone of murder. The law is pretty strict about false accusations."

Hopkins left Carey's apartment in a daze. He was still convinced that Marshall was driven to suicide by Kelcke. But he knew he was flailing away at windmills. He never mentioned murder again.

Carey gazed thoughtfully at the wall after Hopkins had gone. He too thought Kelcke was guilty, in a sense. But he knew that this kind of guilt was rampant in New York City. It was an unprovable guilt. And a guilt that, according to the rules of the game, must never, never be voiced.

At six a.m. on the morning of April 18, 1960, Daddy-O made his debut on WMBE. Taking into consideration all of the promotion and publicity that preceded his first broadcast, it was hardly an auspicious event. Or so thought those Mercury Broadcasting officials who had arisen early for the occasion.

This one's just for you, Mom. I know you're listening, Mom. . . thousands of you out there in WMBE land. The kids and Dad are still snoozing and you feel lonely all by yourself in the kitchen. Well, your Daddy-O's here. And I'm going to shoo away all that loneliness.

Arnold Spaulding was sitting on the bed holding his head when his radio poured out those less than immortal first words of Daddy-O. He raised his head slowly, shaking it gently in an effort to clear the alcoholic cobwebs that had been spun by a Sunday cocktail party he had given. The card had read five p.m. to seven p.m. but four people had lingered until midnight.

Turning toward his still sleeping spouse, Spaulding whispered, "Have you been listening to this clod?"

"Hmmp?" answered his wife.

Across Long Island Sound in Connecticut, Ben Killian was just coming into his tack room from a pre-dawn gallop. He stopped in his tracks as he heard Daddy-O say:

All right, lovely people. Time to join the commuter caravan. It's 7:24 WMBE time. (A jingle sang out the glad news that WMBE had the time . . . time . . . time . . . ti-i-mmm:ne.) Guide them out the door, Mom. And you and your Daddy-O will settle back and have our own special cup of coffee. While we're at it, how about some special WMBE music to sweeten the scene.

Ten thousand "Moms" in New Jersey smiled benevolently at the thought. Ten thousand New Jersey husbands snorted and reached for the dial. Ten thousand teen-agers yelped, "Hey, leave that on . . . that's the Gloops' new record." Ten thousand New Jersey radios stayed locked into 990 KC.

Across the river in Manhattan, the same scene was repeated. It was duplicated in Queens, Rockland,

Westchester, Nassau, Richmond, Bronx and Kings counties.

Ben Killian sat down on a stool in his kitchen and jotted a note to himself to call Kelcke and raise hell. This Daddy-O character sounded like a country bumpkin, scribbled Killian. If this was Kelcke's idea of a joke . . . Daddy-O certainly doesn't fit the music. Killian's hand trembled slightly as he wrote the word "music." Even his friends at the country club were beginning to chide him about the new music policy of WMBE. He paused and then began to add to the note when his daughter strode in slapping her riding crop against her thigh.

A WMBE jingle screeched into a strident melody that hinted broadly that only WMBE knew what the weather was *really* going to be like.

Oh, we're in for a treat today, my friendlies. Fair skies are in store for us, with temperatures in the seventies. Spring is in full flower . . . a time for dancing. C'mon, gals. Nobody's looking. Let your hair down and kick up your heels!

Ben Killian's daughter walked over and turned up the volume on the radio. She removed her riding hat, pulled a ribbon from her hair and began to twist to the music.

"Hey, Dad," she said. "That guy's good. What station is that? And how come you're not tuned into old stick-in-the-mud WMBE?"

Killian just looked at her as he slowly tore up his note.

In schools throughout the tri-state area that day, tens of thousands of students told hundreds of thousands of other students about their new discovery: Daddy-O. He was cool! The following morning, WMBE moved up the ratings ladder.

As he prepared for the meeting with the disk jockeys, Basil Kelcke was unaware of WMBE's increased audience. The April ratings had just been released. According to the charts, WMBE was still in ninth place.

The word "meeting," when it appears on a memo at a metropolitan radio station, means something different to various categories of employees. To a secretary, it usually evokes no visible reaction . . . just a quickly jotted down note to remind herself that a coffee break may be slightly curtailed that day. To an ambitious young executive, it means an opportunity to score some points with the boss if he agrees with him at the propitious moment or comes up with the right cliché. To on-the-air performers, the word "meeting" is never welcomed. For only through a benevolent coincidence can a meeting fall at a convenient time for them. The night men, for example, must juggle their sleeping schedules. The morning men must linger past quitting time. The afternoon men may have to make arrangements to check in early. Announcers who have days off in the middle of the week (which is most of them) find that meetings frequently mean losing part of a precious day off and rearranging previous plans. Thus, Basil Kelcke's meeting with the WMBE disk jockeys was awaited with all the eagerness of a dental appointment.

Basil was aware of this lack of enthusiasm. He had discovered early in his career the futility of frequent performer meetings, learning that a brisk memo carries more respect and compliance than a tedious conference. One of the purposes of a meeting is to exchange ideas and Basil was not interested in hearing any but his own. Nonetheless, this meeting was important. Seeing all of the men together might give a clue as to which deejay might be taught to fit into Basil's overall plan for WMBE. That is . . . if any of them were teachable.

At ten minutes before four, Basil strolled toward the now idle studio 3A. He glanced through the small square glass in the door, hesitated, then turned the dull silver knob and swung his weight against the heavy, white door. Stepping inside, he saw that Jeannie had arranged everything according to his instructions. Two rows of four, blue-cushioned folding chairs faced the door and a sturdy mahogany lectern. His roving eyes stopped as he

noted Mercury Broadcasting's ancient symbol embossed on the front of the lectern. It was a capital "M" sitting awkwardly astride an old "Mary Pickford" microphone. That trademark has to go, decided Basil. God! I've inherited an electronic cobweb!

Jeannie had questioned the extra chairs when Basil ordered eight for six disk jockeys. She had asked if one of them was symbolic of the absence of the late Marvin Marshall. Basil had explained succinctly that Marvin Marshall had been replaced by Daddy-O and need never be mentioned again.

"No, Jeannie," added Basil. "There's another reason. I hope this doesn't sound sadistic, but there's something about the sight of an empty chair that keeps people on their toes. I remember in freshman chemistry . . . inorganic . . . organic . . . darn it, I can't remember what they teach freshmen . . . anyway, there seemed to be one more empty seat each day as the course got tougher and the instructor more demanding. I honestly believe I would have flunked if I hadn't seen those empty chairs around me where friends used to sit. It was my incentive to keep plugging. I don't expect to call any more meetings for a long while, but when I do, I'll ask you to add another chair. It'll give our boys the sensation that they have survived another station shuffle."

Basil realized that Jeannie *had* taken it as a bit sadistic as he looked about the room. A clean ashtray under each chair along with tiny notepads and slender, freshly-sharpened pencils were Jeannie's additions. Basil was satisfied with the state of preparedness. He walked briskly from studio 3A and headed directly for the men's room three doors away.

Basil needed no cigarette as a substitute for his mother's nipple. He did not have to chew gum, nor did he need liquor to overcome tension. Basil Kelcke felt secure when his hands were clean. What a disgrace, he often thought, that a man can dress in the latest fashion and walk around with filthy hands. Isn't every school child shown under a microscope the filthy, crawling organisms that infest the dirt under a fingernail? Basil had been

thoroughly impressed that morning years ago in eighth grade science when Mr. Hannum brought little Jonah Barnett to the desk and asked him to contribute fingernail dirt for the edification of his tittering classmates.

There wasn't a better dressed, cleaner-looking kid in the whole school than Jonah, so, when Basil saw those ugly vermin of all shapes stretching and squirming under the microscope, he vowed silently never to have dirty hands . . . not in his whole life. Think how often a person touches himself with his hands . . . how often one touches another person . . . or an object to be handled by others. Having clean hands was an obligation everyone owed to himself and his associates.

As these thoughts ran through his head, Basil pushed the soap dispenser button forcefully and felt a sense of elation as he chased millions of potential killers down the drain.

Emerging from the men's room smelling strongly of soap, Basil walked quickly to his office. Jeannie greeted him as he entered. "Five minutes to four, Mr. Kelcke."

Basil smiled as he replied, "Thank you, Jeannie. I think we'll let them get settled before I go in. You should always give men a few minutes to tell a few jokes and curse the boss before you get started."

Chuck Lawson and Ray Vallé arrived for the meeting first. Lawson held down the 4:15-6:00 p.m. slot; Vallé did the all-night show.

"You're the only one this meeting times out right for," yawned Vallé. "Who's doing your show?"

"I pre-taped it," replied Lawson. "Although I'd rather go live than listen to Kelcke's crap."

Lawson and Vallé sat down in adjacent chairs in the front row just as Little Joe Weaver, the seven to midnight deejay, walked in. Little Joe was as cynical in person as he was happy-go-lucky on the air. Lawson and Vallé's chorused greeting of "Hi, Joe" was met with a grunted "Up yours."

As Little Joe, a five-foot-four-inch former professional banjoist, sat down, he angrily grabbed the pad and pencil under his chair and flung them together toward the

tall trash barrel in the corner. The pad made it, but the yellow pencil glanced off the overhanging plastic liner and dropped noiselessly on the beige carpet of 3A.

At that moment, Daddy-O pushed through the door. "You couldn't be a basketball player even if you were two feet taller, Little Joe. Ha, ha, ha," kidded the huge new wake-up man.

"Maybe not, but if I were, I'd stuff you into the garbage can head first with that cornfed asshole sticking out, you hick."

"Why, Little Joe," chided the amiable morning man. "You don't talk like that to your listeners. I know . . . they both told me . . . ha, ha, ha."

"Have you two met?" asked Valle.

"Not officially," answered Daddy-O. "I recognized Joe from his picture in the lobby."

"And I'd know this clown anywhere . . . by the wheat germ dribbling down his chin."

"That's Minnesota wheat, son," boomed out Daddy-O. "The best wheat there is."

Ken Borden, the staff announcer currently doing the one to four show, glided through the door and unobtrusively took a chair. Daddy-O bent over to pick up a pencil as the door opened again. Basil walked in greeted by Little Joe's rigid middle finger, intended for the stooping Daddy-O.

"Oh, uh . . ." began Little Joe.

"Relax, gentlemen," interrupted Basil. "I'm here to find out how we can make something of this station. But that doesn't mean we can't have some fun while we're working."

Little Joe stared thoughtfully at Kelcke. He was grateful but perplexed that the new PD had taken him off the hook. Gracious acts were not in keeping with Kelcke's growing reputation for tough action. Basil met Little Joe's gaze with a bland expression. Finally, Little Joe shrugged, nodded his thanks and shifted to the adjacent chair where he found another pad and pencil. He picked them up without comment.

"Let's see, who's not here?" began Basil, who knew very well who was missing.

"Bill Thoms said he might be a little late," said Ken Borden. "He had a three o'clock audition at BBDO."

Basil's face remained a studied calm, but inwardly he was seething. He had issued specific orders that no one was excused from this meeting. He was not surprised, however, at Thoms' absence. Bill Thoms was a staff announcer who held down the ten-fifteen to noon period. Basil resented Mercury's staff announcers. He had learned to his astonishment that it would be impossible to control the hiring and firing of them. They were hired by the network and assigned for a few hours per week to WMBE as the announcing office saw fit. Basil was particularly disturbed to discover he could not even request specific announcers whom he found compatible with the new sound.

Basil was also irked at the thought that, except for Ken Borden and Bill Thoms, the staff announcers didn't want any part of WMBE. They made their money doing commercials on the network. Borden would be disposed of in due time, Basil decided, but Thoms was versatile and adaptable. Although he had done deejay shows through four or five previous regimes at WMBE, he was still capable of making a smooth transition to a new format. Basil recognized in Thoms a talent worthy of being nurtured. When he made the original change in Marvin Marshall's schedule, Basil had called Thoms into his office and offered him a six-hour stint on the weekend to compensate for the loss of his daily program to Marshall. He was taken aback when, instead of the expected ready acceptance, Thoms said casually that he'd think it over for a few days. He liked his weekends free . . . but maybe he'd do it.

Basil wanted to slam his fist against Thoms' protruding Adam's apple so he couldn't work for anybody. But he restrained his instincts and told Thoms he'd hold the spot open. I'll take care of you and your featherbedding golden-throated bunch later, thought Basil as he grasped

Thoms' hand and pumped it vigorously. Now, however, the whole affair was academic. Marshall's suicide forced Basil to keep Thoms in the daily morning slot . . . at least until Pete Sunday arrived.

"I'm sure Bill will be along shortly," beamed Basil. "In the meantime, let's get started so we don't hold you fellows up longer than necessary. First, forget any worries that we're going to make a regular thing of meetings. I don't believe in holding them unless the circumstances are extraordinary . . . which they are at this point in the long history of WMBE.

"Gentlemen, we are going to stand this town on its radio ear. I don't want any part of a second rate station, and I'm sure you're tired of being identified with a loser too."

Little Joe broke in, "I don't think of myself as a loser, Mr. Kelcke."

"It's Basil to you fellas, please. Now, don't misunderstand me. I think you guys are all great individually. What we're trying to build is a *sound*. I know there'll be a lot of new things to adjust to. I realize the engineers have had trouble hitting the new jingles right on cue, but we have a remedy for that too.

"The first thing I want you to know is that silence is your mortal enemy. There must always be something going on. Talk . . . music . . . laughter . . . a jingle . . . or a commercial. Anything but silence. No more three second waits between your intro and the record. No more two second waits. No more one second waits. No more split second waits. No silence . . . Ever!"

"I always try to talk over an instrumental intro," interrupted Ken Borden. "But some records begin with the vocal. Unless we allow a hair of a pause before the record begins, we run the risk of stepping on the first line."

Basil's eyes were burning with an inner fire as he turned to face Borden. "There is nothing sacred about the lyrics of a record. But on WMBE, *the absence of silence is sacred.*"

"Are you suggesting," asked Vallé, "that, even if we have nothing to say, we should still say something?"

"You will never be without something to say," replied Basil. "After this meeting, you will find a list of new slogans in your mailboxes. Duplicates of these slogans will be on a Rolodex wheel next to the microphone. Use them whenever you're not sure what to do next. Throw in three or four of them in a row if necessary, but keep talking . . . keep doing something!"

Lawson raised his hand politely and asked, "Do you want us to rotate using them or pick out the best?"

"Use them all . . . we'll start eliminating the ones that don't make it and replace them with new ones. You'll be getting hundreds of slogans in the next few weeks," replied the enthusiastic PD.

Little Joe squirmed in his chair.

"You have something to say, Joe?" asked Basil.

"Mr . . . uh . . . Basil . . . WMCA and WABC use a lot of slogans. What if some of ours happen to be the same as theirs?"

"Use them!" barked Basil. "Use them. Use them. Use them. Do you think I'm afraid of being sued by those people? They probably stole them in the first place from some out-of-town station. When we get to the top, nobody's going to know how to find WMCA or WABC on the dial. I want New York to think of Mercury . . . WMBE . . . WMBE . . . WMBE . . . us . . . us . . . us!"

"Ai, this guy can't be for real."

"Hoo, boy."

"Is this a put-on?"

"Shades of Knute Rockne."

"Ai-yi-yi-yi-yi."

So went the silent comments as each man sat politely refraining from saying anything out loud. Daddy-O struggled inside himself to say something appropriate to lessen the widening gap between boss and deejays . . . a gap that seemed unbridgeable judging from the terse comments about new programming policies and the obvious attempts by the jocks and engineers alike to sabotage Basil Kelcke's toy. However, Daddy-O could not think of a slogan or jingle to make a joking remark about. So he kept silent.

"We're not trying to educate anybody . . . or inform them . . . or even entertain them as far as I am concerned," went on Basil. "We just want to get people's *attention*. We want them to turn on WMBE without considering any other spot on the dial. We want them to feel they'll be missing something if they're not with us. Gentlemen, this kind of radio is not new. It may be to some of you . . . but it's worked all across this country. Old radio is dead. I know how some of you feel. We had the same kind of diehard resistance in Milwaukee but, excuse my boastfulness, I turned a loser into the biggest thing to hit Milwaukee since beer was first brewed. New York is just a big Milwaukee. If I'm wrong, it'll be my rear end and you guys can laugh about it; but I assure you, I'm not leaving this place until we're on top. And when we're number one in New York, each and every one of you will be proud to be a part of WMBE."

Daddy-O glanced at the faces of the other deejays and wondered how many of the "each and every one of you" would still be there when WMBE got moving.

The heavy, white door opened and WMBE's general manager walked in.

"Hi, gang," said Arnold Spaulding. "I thought I'd drop in on your meeting." Smiling at Basil, he added, "Unless, of course, it's a closed session."

Spaulding's entrance caught Basil at the peak of old-time revival meeting enthusiasm. He had just opened his mouth to continue his fervent sermon when Spaulding interrupted. Kelcke stood transfixed at the lectern, his eyes gleaming, his finger outstretched ready to impale his next point. All of his normal calm was gone. He had lost his cool. He also lost the opportunity to answer Spaulding.

Whether by accident or design, Spaulding's arrival was like a gush of air conditioning in a steam bath. Although there were only six men in the studio, Kelcke's speech was delivered like a Fourth of July politician's address to an assembly of hundreds. Spaulding was thus welcomed with relief by every deejay except Daddy-O. They rushed to shake his hand as they chorused "Long

time, no see," "Glad you dropped in," "You look great." Kelcke was ignored. To the deejays, Spaulding was a Lafayette who had arrived just in time to thwart the enemy. He was not only their boss . . . he was Kelcke's boss too. Now, an end would be put to this nonsense about pat catch-phrases on an index wheel. Now, a halt would be called to this idiotic music. Hopefully, Kelcke would even get his comeuppance.

Spaulding was aware of the real reasons for this sudden adulation. However, he was not ready to cross swords with Basil Kelcke. Spaulding, too, had a boss . . . in fact, several. And the boss of all the bosses, Ben Killian, had laid it on the line that Kelcke was to be left alone . . . for a while. However, it would do no harm to remind the assembled deejays that Spaulding was a nicer person than Basil Kelcke. It never hurt to have the on-the-air people on the side of top management. Obviously, Kelcke had not yet learned that, thought Spaulding. Still, he had to live with Kelcke, perhaps he should ingratiate himself with both sides. Arnold Spaulding had not become a vice-president and general manager without learning that little management ploy. He waved the deejays back to their chairs with a smile and turned to the now subdued Kelcke.

"Basil, I hope you'll forgive me for interrupting, but I just got some good news that I wanted to share with everybody."

The few minutes of phony backslapping had given Kelcke a chance to regain his composure. He smiled warmly at Spaulding as he replied, "Not at all, Arnie. I'm only sorry you couldn't be here at the beginning. I think we've had a good exchange of ideas."

The disk jockeys glanced at each other and rolled their eyes heavenward. Neither motion escaped the notice of Spaulding or Kelcke.

Spaulding addressed himself to Kelcke but made a point of taking in the disk jockeys with his eyes. "Basil, I just got a call from Guarnieri. He and the labor relations people have worked everything out with the engineers' union. We've agreed that no man will be dropped and

they've agreed that from here on out, it's okay to use the cartridges and there's no need to have an extra engineer in the studio."

Kelcke beamed. "Arnie, that's great. We can shift into high gear within one week."

"Did you tell the boys about Pete Sunday and Turk Myers?" asked Spaulding.

Basil frowned slightly as he replied, "No, Arnie. I thought we'd hold off on that for a day or so."

"Okay," said Spaulding. "Your ball is on the green. It's your putt."

Kelcke smiled his thanks silently. He was grateful Spaulding did not pursue the subject of the two new deejays. Basil had no desire to answer questions about who might be leaving and what the new schedules would be. Let everybody think things would remain status quo . . . for the time being. He quickly changed the subject as he described the operation of the now legal cartridge machines and the ease of working in close proximity to the engineer. When one of the deejays raised the question about what the directors would be doing, Basil dismissed it with a shrug. There was no harm in starting a rumor that the directors would soon be phased out. Maybe they'd take the hint and get jobs somewhere else, thereby avoiding the problem of a labor dispute.

Little Joe spoke up. "Arnie," he said, again ignoring Kelcke, "there is something I think should be brought up at this meeting. I've been getting a number of letters from listeners complaining about the new music policy. Mind you, I'm not fighting it . . . but I think you should know about them."

The other disk jockeys picked up the cue and echoed Little Joe with tales of their own letters of complaint.

"Hey . . . whoa," said Spaulding. "Slow down. Now, one at a time. Ray, what complaints have you had?"

Ray Vallé stood up and began slowly. "Well, Arnie, as you know, an all-night show appeals to a different breed of cat than the normal deejay program. In the wee small hours they want to hear music like Sinatra, Gleason,

Mantovani . . . you know, soft and soothing. The letters I've been getting say that our new music jars their nerves. They're trying to relax . . . or sleep . . . or make love . . . and we hit them with a harsh, raucous sound."

"I wasn't aware that WMBE's purpose was to put people to sleep," bristled Kelcke.

"I didn't mean it that way," said Vallé petulantly.

"Hang on just a minute," interrupted Spaulding. "Let's try a five iron shot on this subject and see if we can't get near the pin. What about you, Chuck? You've got an afternoon audience. Are they complaining too?"

"In spades," replied Lawson. "And I've been getting phone calls too. People are saying that if this keeps up, they'll find another station."

"What do you think, Basil?" asked Spaulding, turning to the PD. "We're at the bottom of the ratings pole now. We can't afford to lose any more audience or we'll be getting a minus ten."

"That's just the point," answered the program director. "We *are* at the bottom. And the station has been there for years . . . playing just the music Ray is talking about. Let *me* ask a question. How many letters have you fellas received? A thousand?"

Nobody answered.

"Can anybody here produce even fifty letters of complaint?"

Again there was silence.

"Then that's the first thing we all have to learn," continued Kelcke. "Never listen to a few malcontents. Let them find another station. We're not interested in fifty thousand happy listeners. We're after a million. And we're gonna get 'em."

The cloud of mistrust again filtered through the door. There was sullen silence. The men looked at Spaulding for deliverance, but the general manager now seemed reluctant to get involved.

Basil walked back to the lectern. "Gentlemen," he said, "it's been a most rewarding meeting for me . . . and I hope for you. If no one has anything else to say, the meeting is adjourned. Thank you all for taking time out

to be here . . . and thank you too, Arnie. Especially for the good news."

Kelcke turned and walked out of the studio. As he entered his office, he glanced back. He could see the deejays gathered around Spaulding gesticulating and talking feverishly. Basil walked over to his desk and took out a pad. He scribbled the names of the WMBE disk jockeys on it. Then, methodically, he crossed out the names of every one except Daddy-O.

CHAPTER 7

Millie Kelcke had made a special effort to see to it that the dinner contained every one of Basil's favorites. She had made two trips in one day to the health food store because they were out of organic lettuce in the morning. Basil's favorite drink—a concoction of brewer's yeast—was bland to the eye, but Millie served it in glistening crystal. Candlelight cast its soft romantic glow across the lace tablecloth and the highly polished silver reflected the flickering yellow light.

Millie herself was radiant. Her clinging hostess gown emphasized her well-endowed womanly figure. Chanel No. 5 scented her clear, white shoulders and her dark hair sparkled with blue highlights from her careful brushing. She started to put on some soft, soothing music but changed her mind when she remembered Basil's obsession with listening to WMBE.

The object of all this attention now sat facing her, listlessly toying with his food. His morose expression indicated either a resentment of her efforts or an unawareness. Millie chose to believe the latter.

Breaking a ten-minute silence, Millie said, "How did the meeting go today, darling?"

Basil looked up at her, glowered and then bent his head over his plate again.

Another ten minutes of silence dragged its feet across the table.

Finally, Basil shook his head and said, "They don't understand, Millie. They think I'm against them. I tried to tell them how good everything was going to be. I tried to inject some of my enthusiasm into them
. . . but they just sat there"

Millie rose and walked around the table to Basil. Putting her arm around him, she let her hair brush gently against his cheek.

"Honey," she said. "Forget them. They're temporary. You're permanent. You know you can bring it off without them. Forget them. Forget all of it." She kissed him and then added, "Forget everything tonight except us."

Basil continued to stare at his plate as Millie backed away from him.

A moment later, she called, "Basil . . . turn around."

Basil turned slowly in his chair and raised his eyebrows as he faced his now totally nude wife. His eyes travelled down past her full breasts and paused at her pubic area.

"Why . . . ?" he began, startled.

"It's been a long time," interrupted Millie. "I know you've been wrapped up in your work, but there's always time for love. You seem to have forgotten about it. I thought this might remind you."

She knelt at his feet, her breasts caressing his knees. "I want you," she said, as her fingers reached for his zipper. Quickly she unzipped his fly and pulled out his still limp penis. She bent her head over it and started to stroke it with her tongue. Then, as her passion increased, she suddenly took it into her mouth and began to suck it.

Basil was aghast. "Millie," he cried. "What are you doing? Only whores do that! STOP IT!"

Millie pushed him away abruptly and turned her face in shame.

"That's filthy!" shouted Basil. "It's the most unhealthy act people can do. I'm shocked. What came over you?"

Millie whirled on her husband, tears in her eyes.

"I felt a surge of love! That's what came over me! I wanted you. And I wanted you to want me. I was willing to do anything to you to make you get hard. I was hot for you," she cried bitterly. "I wanted to be fucked. I wanted to feel your cock inside my cunt right up to the balls."

Basil's jaw dropped and his eyes tried to pop out of their sockets. He stared in dismay at his wife. He zipped up his trousers, fighting for control, then strode out of the dining room. Moments later, he returned.

"Never," said Basil coldly, "never has either one of us uttered an obscenity in this house. We have always agreed that vulgarity was the property of the uneducated boor. It was unnecessary, uncalled for and unclean. Now you have soiled our home. You may even have destroyed it. I want to know why. I want to know where you learned those words."

Millie began to cry. "I'm sorry," she sobbed in a tiny voice. "I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me. I didn't even know I knew those words. Oh, Basil . . . forgive me. I promise . . . I promise . . . I'll never do it again."

It was one hour before Basil answered her. Then, with obvious reluctance, he agreed that her abnormal outburst could be construed as an accidental moment of madness. He accepted her apology and promised never to mention the incident again.

That night, in the bedroom, the twin beds might well have housed corpses they were so motionless. Basil, purged of his shocked anger, fell asleep immediately. Millie remained awake . . . staring up at the dark ceiling. Finally, she too escaped her misery as sleep released its merciful anesthetic.

Breakfast the next morning was eaten in an atmosphere of extreme politeness. It was as though two strangers had been forced to share the night and were now embarrassed about it. Basil left for the studio thirty minutes earlier than usual.

Millie cleaned up the breakfast dishes and went in for

her shower. As she was drying herself, the doorbell rang. Hurriedly throwing a dressing gown over her still moist body, she ran to answer the door. She flung the door wide and then quickly drew her gown together as she confronted a delivery man.

"Oh," said Millie. "I'm sorry. I thought it was my next door neighbor."

"That's okay, ma'am," said the delivery man. "I guess I am a little early. You ordered a case of bottled water, right?"

For the first time, Millie noticed the case of bottles on the man's shoulder. She also noticed the way his biceps bulged on the arm that held the case. He was in his mid-twenties, about six-feet-two and obviously in superb physical condition. His body had the hard trimness that can never be achieved through weightlifting. A swimmer, thought Millie.

"Well," said the man with just a hint of amusement in his eyes. "Shall I bring it in or would you rather carry the case yourself?"

Millie stood back to let him in and gestured toward the kitchen. The man placed the heavy case on the counter as though it was a paperback book. Turning toward Millie, he noticed that her hand was no longer clutching her gown quite so tightly, although she remained covered.

Millie, in turn, was studying him. She stared at his tight pants. Too tight, she thought. You can see the bulge of his private parts. God! I'll bet he's huge. She forced her eyes away. Her body began to throb. Millie had never known any man sexually except Basil. They had both been born in the Bronx, he in 1923, she in 1925. They were in high school together before they dated. Millie had had a crush on him for years, but Basil never noticed her until he was a senior and she was a sophomore. Suddenly, he began to call her for dates. She never found out that she was his fourth or fifth choice. Other girls avoided Basil. It was his parents who forced the issue with young Millie Greenberg. The Kelckes and the Greenbergs were close friends, members of the old

school who believed that the best thing that could happen to friends was for their children to marry. It was arranged and subtly manipulated so that Basil and Millie would be married. At first, Basil was unimpressed. As a senior, he was embarrassed to be seen with a mere sophomore. However, Millie matured early. By the time she was eighteen, she had developed a womanly body with firm full breasts. Now, PFC Basil Kelcke could not wait to get home on leave to see her. They would climb up to the last row of the balcony of Loew's State and fondle each other into a mutual climax. Basil wanted Millie desperately. He begged her to go to bed with him, but they could never seem to be alone in either apartment.

Cpl. Basil Kelcke got leave from the Army's Special Services on his twenty-first birthday. He arrived home at noon, gave his mother a quick kiss and phoned Millie at Macy's where she worked part-time. After a few minutes, she succumbed to his whispered entreaties and agreed to feign illness and leave work early. Two hours later, Millie gave Basil his birthday present in a room in the Hotel Taft: her virginity. It was an anti-climax for both of them, over in twenty-three seconds.

Millie wanted to get married immediately, but Basil protested. He wanted to be able to offer her a decent life . . . far from the confines of a Bronx apartment. It was eight years before she pinned him down with a marriage license. Eight years of quickies, thought Millie. Eight years before they actually shared a bed of their own.

Basil's excuses for postponing the wedding were always convincing. First, he claimed he had to get a degree before he could become a teacher. When he graduated from CCNY, Millie thought she smelled orange blossoms, but Basil had a new plan. His brief army career with Special Services had placed him in constant touch with Armed Forces Radio. The idea of making radio a lifetime vocation preyed on his mind all through his senior year in college. These thoughts led to graduate work at Syracuse University. There, of course, he had no room for a wife.

When he finally finished his schooling, the elder

Kelckes and Greenbergs entered the act. Millie was now twenty-seven and over-ripe for the wedding canopy. A dowry was quickly arranged and, before Basil had time to invent another excuse, he found himself a bridegroom.

He started marriage and radio at the same time. Neither one had an auspicious beginning. Once Millie was his legally, the forbidden sexual fruit began to lose its flavor. He developed a mechanical approach to the act that was to characterize him. At first, Millie was too content to have finally snared her man to notice.

Basil's first job in radio was as an announcer at a small upstate New York station. Within two weeks it became apparent to both him and the manager that on-the-air work would never be Basil's forte. The manager was trying to figure out an easy way to let Basil go. Small town radio people fall into one of two categories: those who stay forever, and those who leave without warning. The program director of Basil's first radio station was one of the latter. He picked up his check on Friday and telephoned collect from Missouri on Monday to announce his resignation. The manager was delighted. He was spared the unhappy task of firing Basil by the simple expedient of naming him program director.

Basil was ecstatic. To a young man with "ideas," this was a big opportunity. Unfortunately, it didn't turn out that way. The manager insisted on making every programming decision. Basil was little more than a glorified clerk.

Another opportunity seemingly presented itself in 1956. One of Basil's blind ads in Broadcasting was answered and he was hired as program director of a station in Delaware. All went well until he tried to instigate rock and roll. Confident that rock was the answer to his and the station's future, Basil marched into the station on a weekend with a box full of records. At his insistence, the deejays threw out their regular shows and proceeded to play nothing but rock and roll. On Monday, Basil was called into the front office and dismissed.

Millie went back to work while Basil sat home answering every ad in Broadcasting and writing every sta-

tion in the country. Seven months later, his break finally came. A former Syracuse classmate became general manager of one of his father's radio stations. He remembered Basil as a fervent proselyte of a new sound for radio . . . a man who had no interest in television. A much forwarded letter caught up with the young Kelckes just in time to thwart another move to a cheaper rent district. Basil became PD of the station in Milwaukee. This marked the real beginning of his career. For the first time, a radio station gave him free rein. Basil was on his way.

As he became more and more involved in his career, Basil became less and less involved as a husband. Millie was thoroughly understanding. Sex had never been the mainspring in her life anyway. Nonetheless, as the months stretched into years, she could not help but notice that her coupling with Basil became less and less frequent. Nor was it a violent, passionate joining when it did occur. It was almost as though he suddenly became aware of his obligation. Then, it was methodically planned and carried out. First the laborious handwashing, then a sprinkling of after-shave lotion. Millie would enter the bedroom and find him dressed carefully in clean pajamas, sitting expectantly on *her* turned down bed. When she emerged from the bathroom, she would discover the lights off. That, she learned, was her cue. Stripping quickly, she would join him in her bed. He was always ready: nude and erect. The act was performed in silence. Only heavy breathing accented the steady rhythm of his movement. When it was over, Basil left her bed immediately. She would hear him in the shower as he scrupulously scrubbed every last vestige of her body from his. Then, he would slip quietly into his bed and be fast asleep within minutes.

Sex, between Millie and Basil, never took place in the daytime. Nor was a light ever turned on. Neither one ever disrobed in front of the other.

None of this had ever bothered Millie, until last night. She was still not certain why she had acted as she did. Both her emotions and her actions were still puzzling her

when she realized the delivery man was still standing in the kitchen. In her reverie, she had forgotten him. Now, she looked up with a start to find him staring at her . . . the glint of amusement still in his eye.

Millie's voice took on a pseudo-aristocratic edge as she asked, "Is there something else, young man?"

The young man grinned. "I think we both know what 'else' there is."

Millie's tone became icy as she said, "I beg your pardon."

Taking a step closer, the young man answered, "Come off it, honey. You know damn well what I mean. You've taken my picture twice in the last thirty seconds. Now it's time to develop the film."

"Whaaaat!" blurted Millie.

The man's eyes traveled down to the vee between her legs. Following his look, Millie saw that her gown had fallen open below the belt.

Smiling broadly, the man said, "That cute little pussy has been winking and blinking at me every since I came in here . . . and you know it."

Millie's face went scarlet as she clasped the folds of the robe and pulled it around her.

"Get out of here," she hissed.

"Not till I see if it tastes as good as it looks," he answered.

He stooped quickly and pulled her hands away. As he did, the gown fell open again. Falling on his knees he pushed his face into her pubic area. Millie started to cry out. My God! she thought. I'm going to be raped! Before she could scream, she felt the man's tongue probing her vaginal lips. Then she groaned as his tongue darted in and out and found her clitoris. She backed into the kitchen table and arched her body so she could receive the full ecstasy of an experience she had only read about before. Slowly she placed her hands around the delivery man's neck and pressed his head into her. His hands reached up under the gown and began to caress her legs and thighs. Millie began to moan, shaking her head from side to side. Then, it happened. For the first time in her

thirty-five years, Millie knew the meaning of the word "orgasm." She screamed as tides of the most incredible joy rocked her body.

As Arlene Goldberg stepped off the elevator, she heard moans and groans coming from the Kelcke apartment. Dropping her packages, she ran down the hall. Finding the Kelcke door wide open, she stepped quickly inside and followed the sound of her neighbor's voice. She dashed into the kitchen, fully expecting to find Millie in agony. The tableau that met her eyes drew her up short. Neither Millie nor the young man was aware of her presence. Arlene covered her eyes and started to back away, but as she did, Millie suddenly emitted a long, low half-sob. Arlene dropped her hands from her eyes just in time to see Millie collapse back on the table. This time Arlene stared in wide-eyed wonder.

The young man rose to his feet, unzipped his fly and took out the largest male organ Arlene had ever seen. He spread Millie's legs, placed his hands on her buttocks, and inserted his huge penis.

"No . . . oh, no . . . no more," cried Millie.

Arlene started forward to protect her friend.

"Oh, God . . . oh, God," moaned Millie. "I can't."

"Yes, you can . . . and you will," breathed the young man.

"But I came . . . I came."

"I know, honey, but that was just a preview. This is the main feature." As he said it, the man slowly rammed himself into Millie.

"Oh, darling . . . darling, darling," sobbed Millie. "Fuck mel Fuck mel"

Arlene turned and fled.

Jeannie walked into Basil's office with a batch of newspaper proof sheets.

"Here are the ads for next week, Mr. Kelcke," she said. "The Sunday edition deadline is today, so we need your okay this morning."

Basil glanced quickly at them, shuffled the sheets back in order and said, "They're fine, Jeannie."

"What about Pete Sunday? He starts Monday. Are we

going to do a special promotion . . . like the one on Daddy-O?"

Basil pondered the question for a moment. "Nooo . . . no, I don't think so. No. We'll stick with the campaign on Daddy-O. The morning man is still our cornerstone, Jeannie. If he goes to the top, the rest will follow. Which reminds me . . . ask Bill Thoms to drop in as soon as he gets off the air, will you?"

Jeannie started to leave but turned back as Basil added, "And would you get my wife on the phone, please."

Millie was lying down in a state of exhaustion when the phone rang. Next to her on the bed was the young delivery man.

On the fourth ring, the man said, "Your phone's ringing, honey. Aren't you going to answer it?"

Millie picked up the telephone.

"Hello. Mrs. Kelcke? Mr. Kelcke is calling."

Millie started to protest, but Basil was on the line before she could say anything.

"Hi, Millie. I hope I didn't interrupt anything."

Millie glanced at the nude man by her side. "No, of course not," she answered. "What makes you say a thing like that?"

"I was just kidding. I thought maybe you and Arlene were in the middle of a kaffee klatsch . . . taking potshots at the neighbors' reputations."

"Well, you're wrong." Millie was regaining her self-control. She kept her voice light and bantering. "Besides, Arlene and I are above lurid gossip."

"Ha, ha . . . I'm sure you are. Look. That isn't why I called," said Basil. "I want to apologize for last night . . . I . . ."

"Basil, don't," cut in Millie. "I'm the one who should apologize."

The young man reached for Millie's hand and placed it on his penis. Millie frowned and drew her hand away.

"Well, anyway," continued Basil, "I wanted you to know I'm sorry. I guess I have been a little hard to live with these past weeks. Too much pressure, I suppose. At

any rate, I think we're over the hump. Why don't we pretend last night never happened? Let's have another candlelight dinner tonight."

Again Millie felt her hand being placed on the massive organ that lay between the young man's legs. Again she glared and snatched her hand away.

"Millie, are you still there?"

"Yes, Basil. I'm here."

"Well, what do you say?"

"If you're suggesting what I think you're suggesting, I'm afraid we're a day too late."

"Oh? When did you start?"

"This morning."

"Aren't you early this month?"

"I guess nature just decided to be erratic for a change. I'm sorry."

"Look . . . it happens. Well, we've waited this long. I suppose another week won't hurt."

"We can still have the candlelight dinner."

"Not if you're under the weather. You take it easy. I'll pick up something from the deli on the way home. We'll have a picnic in the living room. Oh, by the way. I ordered some bottled water. Did it arrive?"

Millie paused before she answered. "Yes . . . yes, it arrived."

"Good," said Basil. "Put some on ice and we'll split a bottle when I get there. See you around seven."

Millie slowly placed the telephone back on the night table.

"My name's Andy," said the young man. "What's yours?"

"Millie."

"Come here, Millie."

"I think you'd better go . . . Andy."

"I'd rather come. Who was on the phone?"

"My husband."

"I thought so. Look, I'd like to get him a present for being so generous with his wife. What size horns does he wear?"

Millie stood up, oblivious to the fact that she was to-

tally nude. "That was uncalled for," she stated haughtily.

Andy grinned. "You do have a habit of climbing on your high horse." He reached out and grasped Millie's arm. Pulling her down next to him, he said harshly, "Listen, baby. You asked for this. You wanted it so bad you'd have raped anything in pants that walked in here. You were ripe and ready. And you got lucky. You'd have taken on a sailor with a dose of clap. Instead, you got me. And I'm the best. Admit it. You loved being fucked, didn't you?"

Millie looked away in confusion.

"Didn't you?"

Her answer was an almost inaudible "Yes."

"Then prove it." Andy swung around until he was sitting on the bed . . . facing her. "Get down on your knees, baby. I think it's time you learned the technique of a good blow job."

Millie tried to pull away, but Andy was too strong. He pulled her down to her knees.

"Eat it," he commanded.

CHAPTER 8

Bill Thoms breezed into Basil's office, flopped down on the couch and propped his feet up on the glass coffee table.

"You wanted to see me, top-cat?" he asked.

Basil tensed up and gritted his teeth. The arrogance of this staff announcer was getting to him. He toyed with the thought of firing him on the spot, but decided against it. He could use Thoms. Until WMBE was completely staffed with Basil's own choice of disk jockeys, Thoms would be useful. When the time was right, he would be out in an instant. And, if Basil had his way, he would be off the announcing staff as well.

"Have you given any thought to taking over the weekend shows?" asked Basil.

Thoms looked surprised. After Marshall's suicide, he thought he was locked into the morning slot across-the-board. He played for time before giving an answer. Thoms had no desire to work weekends, but he could not afford to give up being a disk jockey. Having tied himself in with WMBE, he had been unavailable for any auditions as a staff announcer. His deejay work coupled with his salary as a staffer brought his income up to a lit-

tle over seven hundred dollars a week. And Thoms lived every cent of it.

"May I ask who is going to take over the ten a.m. spot?" inquired Thoms.

"We're bringing in a new jock from Dallas. A fellow named Pete Sunday."

"What about putting him in on weekends?"

"We think he'll fit better in the morning show following Daddy-O." Basil's voice took on a tinge of sarcasm as he added, "Of course, if you had been able to make the meeting yesterday, you might have a better understanding of our overall plan for WMBE."

Thoms' feet slid quietly off the coffee table. He sat a little straighter as the arrogance drained from his face.

"I'm sorry I couldn't make it yesterday. I wanted to, but this thing came up at BBDO, so I . . ."

"Did you win the audition?" broke in Basil.

"I haven't heard anything so I guess I lost it."

"Too bad. Maybe if you'd been here you would have won the one we held."

Thoms' face fell again. "I didn't know you were holding auditions here," he said.

"It was sort of an unofficial audition," declared Basil, smiling. "In any event, you haven't answered my question about weekends."

"Well," said Thoms. "If I'm out in the morning, I guess I really don't have much choice. Weekends it is."

"Good. I'm glad that's settled. I'm sure you'll be happy there and do a good job. Thanks for coming in." As he said this, Basil stood up and walked Thoms to the door. It was a little trick he had learned from his visit with Ben Killian.

That afternoon, a subdued and ashamed Millie took a load of laundry down to the basement machines. There she encountered her best friend. Arlene had recovered from her initial shock and was eager to hear the details of Millie's affair.

"Hi, Millie," said the attentive Arlene. "Nice to see you up and around."

"What do you mean 'up and around'? I haven't been sick," said Millie.

Arlene made an attempt to leer lasciviously as she answered, "I know that, darling. But after the morning you had, I thought you'd be knocked out . . . or should I say knocked up."

Millie turned crimson. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Arlene planted herself in front of her neighbor. "I'm talking about that blond giant with the long love muscle. He was really hung."

"How did you . . ." began Millie.

"Darling, if you ever decide to carry on like that again, remember to shut your front door. I ran in when I heard you moaning because I thought you were in trouble. What I wouldn't give to have such trouble."

Millie collapsed on a drier. "Oh, my God," she said. "Oh, Arlene, Arlene. I'm so ashamed."

Arlene put her arm around her friend. "Now, now . . . take it easy. I'm sorry I needled you. C'mon. Forget the laundry. Let's go have some coffee."

Arlene led the sobbing Millie to the elevator.

Hola, amigos. Pete Sunday here. Sunday on Monday. Tomorrow it'll be Sunday on Tuesday. That takes talent. And this is where you find the mostest talent in town . . . right here on (JINGLE: DOUBLE-YOU-EM-BEE-EEE) Si, si, amigos. WMBE . . . the home of the mostest music in the whole wide world. To prove it . . . give a listen this WMBE Diamond Dilly. Remember when Elvis Presley made this biscuit?

Listening on the monitor in the office, Basil and Jeannie heard the "Diamond Dilly" . . . a memory lane rock record . . . blast forth right on top of Sunday's last word.

"Good!" said Basil. "That's what I call a tight one."

"He's smooth," admitted Jeannie.

Basil smiled and nodded. "Yeah," he said. "He fits right in. Like he was born to it."

The telephone rang. Jeannie started for it, but Basil picked it up first.

"Kelcke here."

"Basil, this is Arnie," said the voice of WMBE's general manager. "Your new jock sounds great."

"Thanks, Arnie. I'm glad you like him, and I'm sure you'll like Turk Myers just as much when he starts next month."

"I'm sure I will, but that's not why I called you. I've been giving some thought to the memo you sent me this morning and I'd like to kick it around. Can you come down for a few minutes?"

"On my way."

Basil flicked off the monitor, handed Jeannie a list of records to be typed and headed for Arnold Spaulding's office. Halfway up the corridor he was joined by Ed Wilford, WMBE news director.

"Why the sudden meeting?" asked Wilford.

Basil shrugged as he fell in step with the news director. Spaulding's secretary met them at the door and ushered them into the general manager's office.

"Gentlemen," said Spaulding, waving them toward chairs. "Thanks for coming down on such short notice."

Basil and Wilford sat down and waited for Spaulding to continue.

"Ed," began Spaulding. "Basil here has a proposal that I think you should know about. He thinks we should cut the fifteen-minute newscasts down to five. What do you think?"

Wilford stared first at Spaulding, then at Kelcke. "I think you should have discussed this with me before you popped off with a brainstorm like that," said Wilford to Kelcke.

"I had no intentions of stepping on your toes, Ed," replied Basil. "But this is more than a news decision. It is something that affects the whole WMBE programming."

"We're not talking about 'the whole WMBE programming' . . . we're talking about news!" shouted Wilford. "One of the few things around here Mercury Broadcasting has to be proud of is the news department."

"I realize you've won some top awards, Ed. But the

facts remain that you have not won an audience," answered Basil.

Spaulding leaned back in his chair and let his glance flit from one antagonist to the other. He enjoyed listening to his two department heads argue.

Wilford was irate. "Maybe we'd *have* an audience if you didn't cater to the lowest common denominator. It's ridiculous to expect anybody to tune in an award-winning newscaster if they have to wade through a half-hour of bubble gum music to get there."

"That's just the point, Ed," said Basil calmly. "The people who want fifteen-minute newscasts are nobody's audience. There just aren't enough of them to warrant programming a fifty thousand watt radio station to satisfy their whims. WMBE's been proving that for years."

"You seem to forget that this is the flagship station of Mercury Broadcasting," interjected Wilford. "And that means we have standards to live up to. We're not some Mickey Mouse independent station playing games with kids. So what if we lose money? The network makes it up in TV. So what if we don't show up with big numbers on the ratings sheet? We have stature. We can hold our heads high at City Hall and we command respect in Washington. And, mister, that's worth a lot more to Mercury than a bunch of hopheads with transistor radios glued to their ears."

"I think you would be quite surprised," interrupted Basil, "at the demographic breakdown of my old station in Milwaukee."

"I'd *really* be surprised if any of them were able to read."

Basil threw up his hands. He stood up and began to pace while Spaulding looked on with amusement. Then, gaining control of himself, he turned to Wilford and said, "Ed, I'm afraid you misunderstand me. I'm not trying to do away with news. Nor am I trying to tell you how to run your department. You're the best news director in New York, maybe the country. All I'm suggesting is that we recognize the fact that fifteen-minute news-

casts are archaic. Most stations dropped them years ago. Let's face it. Most of the time you have trouble finding enough stories to fill fifteen minutes. And having them every hour means repeat . . . repeat . . . repeat."

"Isn't that what you're doing with your records? Repeating them over and over?"

"That's different."

"All right, gentlemen," put in Spaulding. "You've both hit your shots into a sand trap. You were fine off the tee, but now you need a wedge to get on the green. Ed, you make a lot of sense in everything except one point. It DOES matter to Mercury that we're losing money. And we can't pull WMBE out of the red without an audience. That's where Basil comes in. We don't really know whether his programming ideas are going to work or not. But one thing we do know: they don't mix with fifteen-minute newscasts. So, for now at least, I'm going to have to go along with cutting the news back to five minutes."

Ed Wilford stood up and said resignedly, "Okay, Arnie. Maybe you're right, but I still want to go on the record as opposing this move."

"Objection noted," said Spaulding. "And I'll be the first to apologize if we're wrong."

"Nope. I will," said Basil, extending his hand toward Wilford.

Wilford stared hard at Kelcke for a long moment. Then he took the proffered hand and gave it a perfunctory shake. The two department heads left together, but immediately separated in the corridor.

Millie Kelcke was dressed to go shopping. Macy's was having a pre-season sale on summer clothes and, although she did not expect to go on vacation, she was determined to get to the sale early. She was still a little ill-at-ease with Arlene, but she knew it was vital that she get over that feeling. Otherwise, Basil would begin to cross-examine her.

It was now exactly one week since her escapade with Andy. Arlene had promised not to ever mention the incident again and, so far, had kept her word. Millie had

vowed solemnly that this was one slip that would never be repeated. Now, all that remained was to slide back into the easygoing relationship with Arlene. This morning's shopping trip offered a chance to do that.

Millie was putting the finishing touches on her make-up when the doorbell rang.

"It's open, Arlene," called Millie. She heard the door open and close. "I'm just finishing my face. I'll be right with you."

"I like your face the way it is."

Millie whirled to face Andy.

"What are you doing here?" she hissed.

"It's Wednesday," answered Andy blandly. "I'm delivering your weekly order of bottled water."

"Where is the water?"

"In the kitchen."

Andy made no move to leave. Millie started to say something, but changed her mind. She looked into Andy's eyes, then quickly looked away. She felt the color rising in her face as her eyes traveled down toward the bulge between his legs. He was wearing another pair of tight, revealing pants.

"Let's stop kidding," said Andy, drawing her toward the bedroom.

They stepped swiftly out of their clothes. Andy flopped down on the bed and motioned for her to join him. Millie moved toward him and was about to climb into bed with him when the doorbell rang again.

"Oh, God," she gasped. "I forgot all about Arlene."

"Get rid of her, whoever she is," said Andy.

Millie threw a robe around her and dashed for the door.

"Hi. You ready?" asked Arlene. "Millie, you old sleepy-head! You're not even dressed yet! Well, it doesn't matter. I have something to show you. Remember the material I told you about for your bedroom curtains. I found it! Look. Here's a swatch. Wait'll you see it against your wallpaper. It's perfect."

As Arlene bubbled on, she moved toward the bedroom so quickly that Millie had no time to stop her. Waving

the swatch, Arlene strode into the bedroom and marched to the window.

"There," she said, holding the material against the window. "Doesn't that just . . ." As she turned toward Millie, she saw Andy for the first time. He was lying nude on the bed.

"Hi, honey," said Andy with a grin. "You must be Arlene. My name's Andy."

Arlene was transfixed. She stared at Andy with a mixture of shock and fascination. He continued to grin as he clasped his hands behind his neck and arched his body. His penis was beginning to grow. As the erection became more pronounced, Arlene's eyes remained riveted to the organ. She had never seen a penis so large.

"Don't tell me you've never seen a cock before," said Andy. "Or maybe you've never seen one uncircumcised. You can come closer. It won't bite." He paused for a moment, then continued. "Well, honey, what are you going to do . . . just watch? Or join the fun. I have enough for both of you."

Arlene looked around for Millie. She discovered her in a half-faint, on the floor.

"It's all right, Millie," said Arlene. "It's all right."

"Maybe if you took *your* clothes off," said Andy, "Millie wouldn't be so embarrassed."

Arlene looked at him.

"I'm serious," he went on. "She's mortified that you saw us. Well, misery loves company. Only, in this case, I guarantee you it won't be misery. Come on, Arlene. You know you're drooling for a little yourself . . . and you'll be helping Millie. I'll fuck you like you've never been fucked before."

Arlene looked at Millie, then back at Andy. Andy got off the bed and came over to Arlene. Arlene reached for Millie's hand nervously. Andy slid his hand slowly under Arlene's dress and began to finger her. Arlene groaned and placed her other hand on Andy's penis. It was huge and hard. Millie's vagina began to tingle with anticipation. She tore off her robe. Then she began to undress Arlene and feel her as Andy tongued her. The three of

them aroused each other to a frenzy as Andy alternated his tongue and his penis between them. He never seemed to tire. Thus began a ménage à-trois that lasted for seven months.

Basil Kelcke sat alone in his office rubbing his hands together in silent glee. Spread open before him were the New York ratings for May. WMBE had moved up from ninth to seventh place in the New York area. What was more important, the morning show was fourth in its time period. Daddy-O was in.

There was a soft knock at his door and Jeannie glided in. Basil looked up, grinned and waved the ratings book in the air.

"Have you seen it?" he asked.

Jeannie smiled and nodded. "I couldn't resist taking a peek when it came in this morning. I think it's marvelous."

"It's only the beginning. Now do you believe we'll be number one?"

"I never doubted it. Remember? That's why I wanted to come to work here."

Basil looked back at the ratings. "We still have problems, especially in the afternoon and evening, but cutting back the news should help . . . and I'm banking on Turk Myers to hypo the afternoon."

"Well," said Jeannie, "if you can conquer six a.m. to six p.m., that's half the battle."

"The easy half. There's still the clutter between six p.m. and seven, and then we have to buck TV prime time. Somehow, we're going to have to bridge that gap. I think these ratings will help a lot. Maybe once he sees them, Spaulding will go along with my ideas."

Spaulding did. At least, he went along with part of them. He agreed to cut out the 6:30 p.m.-7:00 p.m. "Around Manhattan" segment, despite the strong protest of news director Ed Wilford. Wilford argued that the interviews, public service features and pocket political documentaries were vital to the WMBE image. He stressed the importance of public affairs to the FCC, reminded

Spaulding of the upcoming license renewal and pleaded for an extension of at least thirteen weeks for "Around Manhattan." But the May ratings, coupled with Basil's persuasiveness, tipped the scales. Spaulding was adamant. "Around Manhattan" was dropped from the Monday through Friday schedule.

To placate Wilford, and to keep up appearances with the FCC, Spaulding agreed that "Around Manhattan" would remain a part of the WMBE programming. Henceforth, the show would be heard on Sunday nights . . . from eleven-thirty to midnight.

So, Kelcke won a half-hour. But he could not sway Spaulding on the six p.m. to six-thirty slot. Spaulding was convinced that six o'clock meant news . . . fifteen minutes of news. He reminded Kelcke that he had gone along with a cutback on every other hour of the day. But six o'clock at night had always been the time when people turned on the radio to be brought up to date on what was happening in the world and the city.

And 6:15 p.m. was traditionally sports time. Basil argued that "traditional" was a synonym for archaic, but Spaulding refused to budge. Nor would he budge on a change in sportscasters. Fritz Wilson was another tradition and traditions were sacred.

No mention was made of Turk Myers until the night before he went on the air. At 4:15 p.m., fifteen minutes after Ken Borden finished his shift, Basil called the supervisor of announcers and calmly informed him that Ken Borden would no longer be needed as a WMBE disk jockey. Effective immediately. Borden could henceforth be scheduled as a staff announcer at the supervisor's convenience. It was an effective move which prevented Borden from delivering what Kelcke referred to as "one of those tearful on-the-air farewells." This move was not an ending (except for Borden) . . . it was a beginning.

When Chuck Lawson got off the air at 6:00 p.m., he found Basil waiting for him outside the studio door. Basil suggested they go downstairs and have a drink. Lawson said he had a date. Basil retorted that he had

something important to discuss with Lawson. Lawson wanted to know if it could wait until the morning. Basil said it couldn't. Lawson said that if it was that important, perhaps it had better be discussed in Kelcke's office. The implication was clear that drinks were things shared by friends. Basil shrugged and held his office door open, motioning for Lawson to precede him. Basil waved Lawson to a chair, but the deejay shook his head and remained standing.

"Okay, Basil," said Lawson. "Let's have it."

"Chuck, you're one of the best disk jockeys in New York, I think you have a great future."

"But not here. Right?"

Basil looked surprised. "What makes you say that?" he asked.

"I can give you the answer in two words," replied Lawson. "Turk Myers."

Basil looked even more surprised.

"You don't really think you can keep a secret in this business, do you?" asked Lawson. "I've known about Turk Myers coming into this shop for two weeks. The only thing I didn't know was when and in what time period. Now, I even know that. You want to slot him in from two p.m. to six."

"Who told you a story like that?"

"Come off it, Kelcke. Don't be naive. And don't play me for a jerk. The deejay world is small. Everybody in it knows who's moving up and who's getting screwed. Two weeks after you showed up we all got the word about you. You're tough, unscrupulous and don't give a damn about anybody that works for you. So let's cut out the horseshit and get down to the nitty gritty. I'm out. When?"

Basil stared at Lawson's unwavering eyes for thirty seconds. At length, Basil was forced to lower his eyes. He stared at his desk for another full thirty seconds before he answered.

"You just did your last show," said Basil.

"That's what I thought," replied Lawson. "Mail my severance check to my home, prick!"

Lawson turned on his heel and strutted out, leaving the door open behind him. Basil started for the elevator, changed his mind and retreated to the wash room, where he gave his hands the best scrubbing they had had in days.

Turk Myers slid into place easily. There were three letters questioning the whereabouts of Ken Borden and seven who wanted to know what had happened to Chuck Lawson. Otherwise, the transition went unnoticed.

The June ratings showed a slight overall gain, but WMBE remained in seventh place. Spaulding acted a little concerned about the lagging pace. When WMBE finally pried itself out of the mud of ninth place, he believed that inertia would take over, resulting in a speedy upward swing. Seventh was admittedly better than ninth, but far from first. And Kelcke had promised that the station would be first.

Basil was unruffled by the ratings. Up was still up and, as long as the trend was in that direction, he knew that he had proved New York to be made of the same clay as Milwaukee. All the clay needed was a little molding. Spaulding asked if Basil had any ideas for stepping up his timetable. Basil admitted that he had some plans, but they were still germinating. Spaulding pressed. Basil balked. Spaulding persisted. He felt he was finally on a winning horse and wanted to go to the whip. Basil argued that it was too early. Wait until we are in the stretch, he pleaded. Spaulding continued to nag.

Finally, Kelcke gave in. He had a contest in mind, he told Spaulding. He had planned to wait until he had all of his deejays lined up, but maybe now was the time.

Spaulding had backed Basil into a corner. However, he soon discovered that he had backed himself into the same corner. When Basil outlined the contest and demanded a first prize of ten thousand dollars, Spaulding could do little more than gasp. Basil's attitude said that, if this is what you want, you'll have to pay for it. Spaulding issued a few feeble protests, but Basil ended the dis-

cussion by reminding him that they were after the big one and nobody in the audience was going to pay attention to a contest which offered a couple of tickets to a dying play. Finally Spaulding agreed to the ten thousand dollars.

One week before the contest went into effect, Basil splurged a large chunk of his advertising budget for the year to promote it. He took out full-page ads in every newspaper in the city. Subway car cards and virtually every New York City bus was emblazoned with a WMBE Pot O' Gold sign. Billboards on every major artery leading into the city shouted the news that WMBE was giving away ten thousand dollars to the person who could locate the pot of gold. Where do you start to look? Listen to WMBE for clues.

The first clues were deliberately vague. All that was disclosed was that there really was a pot and that it really did contain gold . . . a gold plaque that could be exchanged for ten thousand dollars in cash. Then, before the July ratings were taken, the clues were stepped up. Now, listeners could discover that the pot was located near water. And it could be found within the city limits.

Every hardware store within a twenty-mile radius suddenly was swamped with orders for picks and shovels. People descended on Central Park like lemmings. Armed with every conceivable kind of digging device, they devastated the area around the park's lakes and pools. The once tranquil vista began to look like a World War I no man's land.

A Long Island contractor arrived at a building site to discover his backhoe had been stolen. The police found it digging merrily away on a Coney Island beach. New Jersey farmers swooped down on the grassy strip that bordered the Hudson River with plows, mechanical trenchers and cultivators.

City Hall and the Parks Commission howled in protest. They ordered WMBE to cease and desist. "Cease and desist what?" replied WMBE. The station pointed out that not one clue had even hinted that the pot of gold was *buried*.

No more ads were necessary. The newspapers now featured front page photos of the digging public. Local television newscasts led off their shows with montages of the latest ingenious methods of seeking the treasure.

The Mayor called Ben Killian. Killian called Spaulding. Spaulding called Kelcke. Kelcke called a friend in Harlem. That afternoon a little old lady from One Hundred Twenty-Eighth Street strolled up to the fountain in front of the Plaza Hotel. Plunging her hand into the spraying water, she fished around for a moment and then gave a gleeful yelp as she pulled out an old copper pot. A passing WMBE-TV camera crew which "just happened to be in the neighborhood" quickly set up its equipment and filmed an exclusive interview. How had she happened to think of searching the fountain? She saw it in her tea leaves. Was she accustomed to walking by the Plaza Hotel? This was the first time she had been south of One Hundred Tenth Street in fifteen years. She was on welfare and couldn't afford the bus fare. What was she going to do with the ten thousand dollars? Get drunk.

That night Basil Kelcke signed his Harlem friend on as WMBE's first black disk jockey. He would take over the all-night show as soon as he could get out of his contract with WLIB.

The July ratings came out. WMBE had leapfrogged into fifth place. Spaulding agreed to cut back the six p.m. news to five minutes. He balked, however, at replacing Fritz Wilson. Wilson would remain, but his time would be shortened. Sports would now occupy the 6:05 to 6:15 period. Kelcke had won another fifteen minutes. Wilson toyed with the idea of protesting, but recognized the odds. Kelcke was King . . . for a moment. However, it had cost a fortune to move WMBE into fifth position. How long could it stay there? If one station held a huge contest, the leaders would follow suit. Where did it end? If a ten thousand dollar contest made news in July, it would take a one hundred thousand dollar contest to top it. And no station, including WMBE, was willing to go

that route. No, thought Wilson, this was not the time to protest. But his time would come.

The other stations *did* fight back with contests, but WMBE remained firmly entrenched in fifth place. Basil explained it to Jeannie:

"It's like the old story about the fellow who hit the mule over the head with a two-by-four," he said. "First, you have to get his attention. That's all our pot of gold contest did, get their attention. Now, we'll find out if we've got the right format."

The atmosphere around WMBE underwent a subtle change during that summer of 1960. Clerks, salesmen, engineers and secretaries began to move more briskly. Their eyes were brighter and their quips less tinged with sarcasm. They were also quick to defend WMBE. Let an acquaintance complain about the station's raucous, wailing sound and the now loyal WMBE employee would quickly point to the ratings. It wasn't the stuffy BBC . . . which gave the public what it felt the public *should* hear. WMBE was in the business of *servi*ng the public . . . and that is what it was doing.

But the staff announcers and news people remained malcontents. They resented the decline in the use of their services and bemoaned the steadily decreasing stature of the station.

Ray Vallé and Little Joe were released from their contracts early in September. Ex-Harlem disk jockey Jamie Lawrence took over the all-night show and ex-Philadelphia deejay Brad Webster was given the reins of the 6:15 to midnight shift.

At 9:47 a.m. on the third Monday in September, Basil buzzed for Jeannie. As she entered his office, dressed in a new fall outfit, Basil studied her carefully.

"New dress?" he asked. She smiled. "Yes."

"You look like you just stepped out of a fashion magazine," said Basil. "It's very lovely."

"Thank you," Jeannie said, with a mock curtsy. "I didn't know you cared."

Basil grinned. "I care enough to worry about losing you."

"What makes you think you're going to lose me?"

"For one thing, you're too pretty to stay single. For another, I'm about to throw you to the wolves."

Jeannie frowned slightly as Basil went on, "I have a request for our services from the top brass. The television network is throwing a huge brawl to announce their new fall programming. All of the affiliates and agency people will be there. We've been asked to help out."

"Why?" asked Jeannie. "We're radio."

"We're also part of the Mercury Broadcasting family. The whole staff has been enlisted as hosts and hostesses. Our job is to make two thousand guests feel at home. I can't order you to do it, but I am asking."

"What do I have to do?"

"Just smile a lot and look pretty. If you see somebody with an empty glass, get him a refill. Of course, if he's from an ad agency, it never hurts to toss in a good word for *WMBE radio*."

"That sounds painless. When is this big bash?"

"Friday evening at the Waldorf. By the way, you can get yourself a long gown and bill the station. You might as well get something out of this. I only hope you don't get snared by some enterprising TV executive."

"Have no fear," laughed Jeannie. "I'm still married to radio."

Mercury Broadcasting pulled out all stops for its fall presentation. The Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria was bedecked with huge garlands of autumn flowers and foliage. Seven bars were scattered around the room and three mammoth tables groaned under hams, turkeys and roast beef. Waiters scurried around with oversized trays of hot and cold canapes. The cost of the boiled shrimp alone could have fed a family of four for half a year. Behind the curtains on stage, actors and actresses were given last minute instructions for their part in the presentation. Three large screens were ready to be lowered in place at just the right moment. Ben Kilian stood in the wings sipping sherry as he read his welcoming speech.

As the guests filed in, Jeannie and fifty other attractive secretaries checked off their names, and filled their hands with drinks. They pinned corsages on the ladies and boutonnières on the men. A fourteen-piece band beat out an invitation to dance.

During a lull in the parade of incoming guests, Jeannie listened to the orchestra play a song from "My Fair Lady." Unconsciously she began tapping her foot in tempo to the music. She had not heard music like that since she came to work for WMBE. She had forgotten how much she missed an infectious melody. She was about to turn back toward the door to greet more guests when she found herself whirling around with the dancers. Two strong arms held her and she was aware of a deeply tanned face looking down at her.

"Little lady," said the face. "I think *I* could have danced all night if you were my partner."

The man was tall . . . at least six-feet-three. He had an open, friendly face and an easy grin that made it impossible for her to protest. Besides, she hadn't danced in a long time, so she allowed herself to be led around the floor in a wordless waltz.

When the music ended, the tall man released her, bowed from the waist and asked, "May I have the next dance, ma'am?"

Jeannie began to laugh. "Now you ask me," she said.

"Well . . . may I?" he smiled.

"But, sir, we haven't been introduced," replied Jeannie with a feigned coyness.

"An oversight that can be rectified in an instant."

Taking her arm, he steered her to a group of men standing at one of the bars. Singling out the Mercury Vice-President in charge of Station Relations, he confronted him.

"Tom," said the tall, bronzed man, "would you be kind enough to introduce me to this young lady?"

The Vice-President peered at Jeannie's nameplate and then said, "Miss Draves, may I present Mr. Rhodes? Mr. Rhodes, Miss Draves."

Rhodes bowed and Jeannie curtsied.

"There," said Rhodes. "See how easy that was. Now, may I have the next dance?"

"I'd be delighted, Mr. Rhodes."

After five dances, Jeannie tried to beg off. She was, she explained to Rhodes, hired help. Her job was to act as hostess for the honored guests.

"But I'm an honored guest," protested Rhodes. "And I insist on my rights. I demand to be hostessed."

Jeannie danced three more dances and then pleaded fatigue. Rhodes led her over to a buffet table and piled her plate high with food.

"Hey, whoa," laughed Jeannie. "That's enough for an army."

"You're a growing girl," answered Rhodes. "And you need your vitamins. Where I come from, this is just a snack."

"And just where do you come from, Mr. Rhodes?"

"Arizona. And don't you think you're carrying the *Mr.* Rhodes too far? We Westerners believe in first names. Why don't you call me . . ."

"Don't tell me," interrupted Jeannie. "It just has to be 'Dusty'."

Rhodes roared with laughter. "Now how did you ever figure out a little ol' thing like that?"

"I guess I'm just psychic," laughed Jeannie.

"Well, anyway, you're right," said Rhodes. "I used to hate it. It sounded too phony . . . like something out of a Zane Grey novel. My real name's Larry, but I've been 'Dusty' since grammar school . . . so I guess I'm used to it. What's yours?"

"Jeannie."

"You don't mind if I call you Jeannie?"

"Of course not . . . Larry."

Rhodes looked at her soberly. "That's the nicest thing anybody's said to me in years."

As they ate their dinner, they learned a great deal about each other. Jeannie found him easy to talk to. Soon she poured out her life story, oblivious to the din of two thousand other diners and that they had been joined at their table by eight other people. Everybody talked at

once and no one heard anything that wasn't said to them directly.

Rhodes, it turned out, owned a television station in Phoenix, also a ranch outside of town. He was thirty-nine years old and a widower with a four year old son. He had been a pilot in World War Two and still flew his own plane. He had, in fact, flown his Bonanza across the country just for this affiliates' meeting and presentation. He . . .

The lights dimmed, the band struck up a fanfare and Ben Killian walked on stage. Killian thanked the guests for coming, gave a rah-rah speech guaranteeing that MBE would knock over ABC, CBS and NBC in the upcoming season and then introduced the head of the television network. Said leader gave a rah-rah speech and signalled for the show to begin.

When the presentation was over, half of the guests headed for the exit. Those who remained grouped themselves around the bars, determined to complete the process of getting stoned on the free liquor. Kelcke came over to Jeannie, thanked her for her help and told her that she was free to leave whenever she liked. Jeannie introduced Kelcke to Rhodes and then Basil left to find Millie and go home.

"That your boss?" asked Rhodes.

"Uh-huh."

"Is he a nice guy?"

Jeannie hesitated before she answered. It was a question no one had ever asked before. "Yes," she said. "He's good to work for."

"I didn't ask you if he was good to work for," said Rhodes. "I asked you if he was a nice guy. However, I'll settle for the diplomatic answer. Let me ask you another one. How would you like to work in Arizona?"

Jeannie laughed. "My boss warned me about people like you."

"I don't blame him," said Rhodes. "Okay, we'll let that pass for a while. One more question. Have you seen 'Bye Bye Birdie'?"

"No . . . why?"

"Because I have two tickets for it for tomorrow night and I'd like to take you."

"I'd love to see it, Larry, but . . ."

"No buts. I'm sure a girl like you has a date for Saturday night, but I'd appreciate it if you could break it. I have to leave early Sunday morning, so it's the only chance I'll have to see you again."

"Well . . ."

"Please say you'll come, Jeannie. I promise I'll be a perfect gentleman. I'll even meet you at the theatre, if you insist."

Jeannie looked at Larry carefully. Although he was much older than she, he had a little boy look of innocence that warmed her to him. She agreed.

As promised, Larry was the perfect gentleman. After a quiet dinner at Sardi's they strolled over to the Martin Beck Theatre. After the show, Larry suggested a night-cap, but did not argue when Jeannie reminded him that he had a long flight in the morning. He took her home in a cab, had the taxi wait while he escorted her to her door, kissed her good-night on the forehead and was suddenly gone.

Jeannie removed her new evening gown and carefully folded it up, although it would be sent to the cleaners on Monday. She slipped into pajamas and began her nightly chore of converting the couch into a bed. She sat down on the edge of the bed and looked around her apartment as though she were seeing it for the first time. Should she have invited Larry up for coffee? He had not even hinted for an invitation, yet she felt remiss in her failure to even make the suggestion. Why? He was just a casual date, one of dozens she had had since she arrived in New York. She had never invited any of the others to her apartment. Why should Larry be any different? Because he *was* different, she decided. Maybe she should move. This little one and a half room flat was neat and comfortable, but it was not a home. Would a larger apartment be any more of a home? No, she admitted to herself. No apartment could ever be home for a single girl.

Flying through the still pre-dawn sky, Larry Rhodes'

thoughts were of the girl he had just met. She was the first woman who had interested him since his wife died in childbirth four years ago. But Jeannie wasn't really a woman, he thought. She was still a girl. He was sixteen years older than she. And there was his son. Larry banked the plane slightly to correct his course, checked his watch as he passed over a little town in Pennsylvania and marked his chart. This is ridiculous, he thought. You've just met her.

Jeannie received a Christmas card from Larry on the 23rd of December . . . too late for her to reciprocate. On the card, Larry had scribbled simply: "Wish you were here." Standing at the bus stop and turning her head to avoid the cold December wind, Jeannie wondered what Christmas in Arizona would be like.

Saul Kalaman inserted a key into his locker and opened the door. He reached for his overcoat and then remembered his rubbers. Replacing the coat, he sat down on a bench and began pulling the rubbers over his shoes. He groaned at the effort of bending over.

"That's what comes from trying to keep up with Daddy-O and all that Danish pastry. You're putting on weight."

Saul looked up and saw Nick Guarnieri grinning down at him.

"I wish I could think up a smart answer for that crack, but you're right," said Saul. "So what else is new?"

"Not much here," said the chief engineer as he sat down beside him. "I heard some upsetting news on the outside, though. Didn't you once work with Ev Dowling?"

"I did some shows with him back in the forties. I haven't seen him in years."

"Not many people have," said Guarnieri. "He's had a real battle with booze. And I guess he hit rock bottom last night. He was busted for being drunk and disorderly."

"Oh, no!" said Saul shocked. "He was such a nice guy, too. Anything we can do to help him?"

"I don't think so. A friend of mine over at NBC called me about it this morning. He paid Dowling's fine and offered to try to get him a job there, but Ev turned him down. It seems Ev is determined to leave town."

"What a shame," Saul said. "He was the best announcer in town. What's he going to do now?"

Guarnieri shrugged. "Who knows? I'm afraid he's too old to try for a comeback. And I guess he didn't save his money. Anyhow I thought you'd want to know. Maybe you could tell the story to Daddy-O. In case he has any delusions of grandeur."

"You don't have to worry about that. Daddy-O has both feet on the ground, and I'll give odds they stay there."

The Monday morning sales meeting started, as it had since anyone could remember, precisely on time. It was not out of coincidence that the meeting had begun promptly at ten a.m. all of these years. It was rather through the compulsion of sales manager Duff LeRoy to do everything in life punctually. There had been occasions when he was the only one present . . . like that March day in 1948 when a blizzard halted nearly every other operation in the huge city. Even then, when the second hand swept past the appointed moment, Duff accorded his English-made cigarette on the same ashtray he had used for twenty-five years and called the meeting to order.

Blizzards, transit strikes, tropical storms and heat waves meant nothing to LeRoy. Not even a summons to answer his former wife's alimony default action in court could deter Duff LeRoy from entering the meeting place at least fifteen minutes early.

Basil Kelcke was impressed with Duff LeRoy from the moment they met. Not because of the sales chief's fetish for punctuality. There are more important things in this business than showing up at sales meetings on time, Basil mused when he heard of Duff's reputation. But, upon meeting Duff, Basil recognized a human machine . . . dedicated to sell . . . sell . . . sell.

Duff had sold time over WMBE around shows Basil had nearly forgotten: quizzes, detective mysteries, band remotes, variety hours. He had sold time over WMBE through the big band era, pitching Glenn Miller, Charlie Spivak and the Dorsey Brothers. Later, he convinced sponsors of the value of buying Percy Faith, Mantovani and Stanley Black. He had pushed Broadway music, songs from Hollywood and the lush choruses of Gordon Jenkins and Ray Charles. And then, at precisely the moment Basil Kelcke arrived at Mercury Broadcasting, LeRoy had lit up one of his English cigarettes and begun to interest himself in the brief history and market values of rock and roll. He had, of course, made a feeble attempt to fight the move, but only because his precise mind resisted change. Duff did not really care what WMBE put on the air . . . so long as it would sell.

He and Basil understood each other. Each regarded himself as having a mission in society . . . to utilize their respective talents to serve radio audiences, to adapt to new standards of entertainment, to make Mercury Broadcasting prosper and to keep themselves at a safe distance from unemployment.

It was a cold, rainy January morning, twenty-five minutes before the Monday sales meeting, when Duff LeRoy and Basil Kelcke shook hands in the program director's office.

"I hope Fritz will understand."

"Duff, after thirty years of having things his own way, it's high time Fritz Wilson put WMBE ahead of his own career. I don't care whether he understands or not. We will not carry the Yankee games and that's that. I finally talked Spaulding into cutting the news back to sixty seconds an hour and we're number three in the market. If we break our format now, we're dead."

As the scarlet sweep hand inched toward the black numeral 12 on the conference room clock, half a dozen conversations were going. One moment later, Duff LeRoy's voice quieted the assembly.

"Gentlemen . . . and Miss Price," he added in deference to a slender, attractive redhead on his left who was

furiously scratching on a stenographic pad. "We have a couple of items to discuss first. The J&B air conditioning contract is now firm. They will be running sixty-second carts in a number of the jock shows for thirteen weeks. Renfro Hardware has agreed to buy in Daddy-O's slot. As you remember, they wanted to buy the 1:25 and 2:25 p.m. newscasts and expand them to a full five minutes each, but we're holding firm. Only sixty seconds of headlines each hour. We're selling music, gentlemen."

On went Duff LeRoy, through notes reporting matters of lesser importance. One breakthrough, he was delighted to say, had been in selling a Connecticut furniture dealer who had never used radio. He was set for twenty-six weeks. The picture was bright. WMBE had raised its rate card three times in the last eight months and commercial availabilities were eighty-five percent sold out.

At 10:40, Basil Kelcke slipped quietly into the room and unobtrusively settled himself in a chair near the door. He had attended sales meetings occasionally in the past but usually to deliver a talk at the outset. It was obvious that he was not here today to exhort the salesmen.

"Any other business to bring up, gentlemen?" asked LeRoy.

A hand flew up. "Yes, sir," began a salesman wearing a proud smile. "I am happy to inform all of you that the Yankees will be carried on WMBE this year. I closed the deal with Strauss Breweries Friday evening. They're picking up the tab for all 162 games plus ten exhibitions."

"Why didn't you tell me?" asked LeRoy.

"I'm sorry, Duff," the salesman said. "We didn't wrap it up until 6:30 on Friday and by then you'd gone. Besides, it's the biggest order in the history of WMBE and I thought it was worth keeping as a surprise for today's meeting."

LeRoy looked over the heads of the salesmen to Kelcke.

"You want to tell him, Basil?" asked LeRoy.

"It's your meeting, Duff," replied Kelcke.

LeRoy shrugged and turned toward the salesman. "We're not carrying the Yankees, Bill," he said quietly.

The salesman bounded out of his chair. He looked at LeRoy, then at Kelcke. In a shaky, unbelieving voice he said, "I don't get it. Fritz Wilson told me Friday afternoon that it was all set."

"I wasn't aware that Fritz Wilson was running this station," said Basil.

"But," sputtered the salesman, "he's head of sports."

"Which comes under programming," cut in Basil. "Gentlemen, we must remember that we of WMBE are not in the business of selling baseball . . . or football . . . or news. We are in the business of selling *music*. *Contemporary music*. Better yet, *a sound . . . a sound of today*. Baseball is, unfortunately, incompatible with the sound of today."

"I can't buy that," argued the salesman. "New York always has been and always will be a baseball town. Aside from the sizeable amount of money involved, there is also the consideration of serving the public . . ."

He wasn't allowed to finish. Without a sense of intimidation, rather simply presenting a thoroughly thought out statement of fact, Basil made a move to close the discussion.

"Public service . . . we have plaques we haven't uncrated yet testifying to our public concern," said Basil. "That is the last consideration we have in drawing up a sales contract."

"In other words," said the salesman, "the public be damned."

"Now, Bill," interrupted LeRoy, "don't get carried away. I know what it means to lose a big commission, but you're one of our best salesmen. You'll make it up. You and I will get together for lunch with the people from Strauss Breweries. With a little luck, we can switch them into a buy on the all-night show . . ."

"Fuck the all-night show," exploded the now furious salesman. "And fuck you and WMBE too. All you want

us to sell is shit. Well, if I'm going to have to sell shit to make a living, I'm going to work for a manure manufacturer. At least he's honest."

On those words, the salesman stormed out of the room.

"Too bad," said LeRoy. "Bill was one of our best men. He could have made a fortune here. Now I doubt that he'll be able to get a job in New York."

This was pure propaganda for the benefit of the other salesmen in the room, and they knew it. Within one week, Bill landed a job at WCBS. However, WMBE never felt the loss. The station was riding high and still moving up. Advertisers were beginning to recognize the fact that, if they wanted in, they'd better buy now, before the station was completely sold out.

Fritz Wilson called on Basil in mid-afternoon. Fritz had reported sports on half a dozen New York stations after working as a news and sports reporter for newspapers and radio stations in Tennessee, Indiana and Pennsylvania. Now fifty-eight years old, financially secure and considerably overweight, he found it increasingly difficult to keep up with the pronunciations of all the new athletes, especially the many baseball players of Latin extraction. Try as he might, Angel, for example, came out as it looked, although every wire service reminded sportscasters over and over that it was pronounced AHN-HELL. But Fritz Wilson's listeners really didn't care how he pronounced names. They respected him for his tenacity in fighting the big money men of sports . . . the owners and gamblers; for his fearless, penetrating interviews with rarely heard personalities from the sports world; for his knowledge of the intricacies of the major sports; for his endless stories of the old days in boxing, baseball and football; and for his personal warmth.

"Hi, big fella" was his standard greeting. This was the way he opened the Monday afternoon conversation with Basil. "I just heard you're scrapping plans to carry the Yanks. I thought it was all set."

"I'm sorry, Fritz," said Basil. "I've been meaning to consult you but you know how hectic things have been. We really had planned to carry the games or we wouldn't have fooled around with a bid. In fact, as of last night, I was still uncertain. Duff and I settled it this morning. It's reassuring to know the club wanted us as their New York outlet . . . but business before pleasure, right?"

Basil smiled. He had never intended to carry baseball. The negotiations were only a ploy to gain publicity and set Fritz Wilson up for a fall.

"It's a mistake, big fella," said Wilson.

Basil waited. He was ready to refute Fritz's claims one by one. And, as Fritz argued, Basil would lead him into making hot-tempered accusations against WMBE. A row would develop. In approximately ten minutes, Basil would call Jeannie and hand her a memo to type up . . . a memo he had already written in longhand and which now lay restlessly in the top drawer of his desk.

"Yessir, it's a mistake." With no more words to say or desire to hear the PD's explanation, Fritz suddenly pulled himself up to his full six-feet-two and extended his huge right hand.

"Uhhh, just a minute. Let's discuss this further," began a discomfited Basil.

"What's to discuss? You're the program director. It's your decision."

Basil sensed a need to change tactics. "Look here, Fritz," he said. "I'm open to reason. If you'd like to talk some more about it, feel free."

But Fritz was out of the office before Basil could finish the sentence.

Basil sat at his desk with his jaw hanging slack as he fingered the memo directing the dismissal of Fritz Wilson.

Six months went by before WMBE's program director was able to find sufficient reason for not renewing Fritz Wilson's contract. True, he could have dropped Fritz at the end of any thirteen-week period, but Mercury's reputation would suffer if there were too many abrupt firings.

And he surely did not want the legion of New York sports fans boycotting WMBE. There had to be a reasonable excuse.

In mid-July, a letter came to the station criticizing Fritz Wilson's mispronunciation of a ballplayer's Spanish name. The letterwriter himself had misspelled five words out of the sixty-three he had written. Basil had the letter photostatted and mailed one copy to PROUD . . . Puerto Ricans Of United Determination. PROUD was a small but vocal group of militants who delighted in causing whatever chaos they could. For the most part, they were unsuccessful since Puerto Ricans were encountering less and less prejudice in New York, thanks to stringent new anti-discrimination laws as well as genuine acceptance by most New Yorkers. However, PROUD had been able to extract an apology from a major newspaper for a slanderous editorial about the group's role in welfare reforms; succeeded in disturbing transportation for two hours during a Times Square rally; and had held up the start of a game at Yankee Stadium to protest the failure of the Yankees to have a single Puerto Rican player on their major league roster. But these small triumphs of PROUD had been forgotten. They wanted the public to know they were still in existence.

PROUD received the letter on Friday. On Monday, two letters appeared in newspapers attacking Fritz Wilson for lack of sensitivity in dealing with athletes with Spanish names. On Tuesday, when the Yankees played a home date against the White Sox, twenty-four members of PROUD carried picket signs outside Yankee Stadium denouncing RACIST FRITZ WILSON. On Wednesday, Fritz lashed out at the organization on his 6:05 show, calling it a vicious, dangerous and thoroughly un-American un-Puerto Rican (the leader, he pointed out, was a Cuban) and unwelcome group.

On Thursday, Basil demanded Fritz's resignation. He would be personally heartbroken he said, at losing his services, but the pressure of the militants was becoming unbearable. Already someone in the Mayor's office had phoned, communicating the Mayor's displeasure and

fear. Fritz said that he understood and Basil replied that he would reluctantly draw up a memo notifying all concerned.

As Fritz left the room, Basil opened his top desk drawer and removed a slightly crumpled memo, wrote the word July over January in the space marked "date" and buzzed for Jeannie.

The following Monday a half-page ad in all newspapers hailed the hiring of Bo Rozkewicz as the new WMBE sportscaster. Prominently displayed in the ad was a picture of Bo decked out in a New York Giants football uniform. He was hunched down over a football and was glowering at the camera. The ad boasted that WMBE . . . always first in music . . . was now first in sports too. Only a professional athlete could bring listeners the true insight into sports. Only Bo could make the audience feel the tightened muscles and hair-crawling exhilaration of a winning athlete. If you haven't played the game, said the ad, you couldn't broadcast it. No mention was made of the fact that the noble Bo Rozkewicz would only be on the air for two and a half minutes a day. Also hidden was the fact that WMBE was forced to hire a highly paid ghostwriter for the ex-football hero. Bo could not write a simple sentence. Nor did he know anything about baseball, basketball, hockey, tennis, golf or horse racing.

CHAPTER 9

Jeannie picked up the phone on the second ring. "Mr. Kelcke's office."

"Have you seen 'Carnival'?"

"No, I hav . . . who is this?"

"Don't tell me you've forgotten so quickly. I'm crushed."

"Larry?"

"Give the lady a silver dollar."

"When did you get to town?"

"I landed ten minutes ago. I'm at Teterboro airport."

"What are you doing in New York?"

"I came in to see 'Carnival' And you. I have two tickets for tomorrow night. Will you join me?"

Jeannie sat staring at the phone for a full minute after she hung up. She was disturbed that Larry Rhodes could excite her so much. Stop it, she told herself. He's just a casual date. Then her thoughts dissolved into the usual "what'll I wear . . . what'll I say . . . what'll I do." She took a deep breath. This is ridiculous. I *know* what to wear, say and do.

During the intermission, Jeannie and Larry walked across Forty-Fifth Street to escape the crush of the audience out on the sidewalk in front of the theatre.

"Like the show?" asked Larry.

"It's marvelous."

"You know, you remind me a lot of that girl up on the stage."

"Anna Maria Alberghetti?"

"No, Lili . . . the character she plays. You have that same lost waif quality."

Jeannie turned away from him and looked down the street toward Broadway. A brief shower had left the pavement glistening with water. The automobile lights danced with the reflections of the neon signs. Jeannie shuddered inwardly. The whole city seemed unreal. The people standing in front of the theatre were transformed into marionettes. She looked back at Larry. Was he a knight on a white charger? . . . or a puppeteer?

Larry took her hand. "Something wrong, honey?" he asked.

"No . . . I'm all right. What made you say that?"

"About being a lost waif? I'm not sure. I guess I'm still under the spell of the show. Come on. Everybody's going in for the second act."

After the final curtain, Larry and Jeannie skipped east on Forty-Fifth Street, arm in arm. Giggling like children, they played hopscotch with the few remaining puddles on the sidewalk. At the Booth Theatre, Jeannie lost her balance and fell into Larry's arms. The giggling and laughing stopped. They seemed to be arrested in mid-air. They gazed deeply into each other's eyes and slowly came together for a long kiss. The few pedestrians stepped around them with barely a glance.

As he drew his lips away from hers, Larry studied Jeannie's face intently.

"You're a lovely girl, Jeannie. How I envy the guy who finally calls you his own."

To Jeannie, it seemed like a strange statement to make. There was a note of finality in his tone, as though he were seeing her for the last time.

Breaking the serious mood, she said lightly, "Sardi's beckons. Are you going to buy me some coffee or not?"

They walked briskly through Shubert Alley to the theatre's favorite restaurant. Larry ordered eggs Benedict and a bottle of Chablis. They ate in silence. They had almost become lovers. Now, they were strangers.

At last, Larry made a stab at conversation.

"'Carnivall' has been running over six months. How come you haven't seen it? Don't your boy friends give you a choice in where to go on a date?"

Jeannie ignored the question. "Tell me, what are you really doing in New York?"

"I come in about twice a year to see my New York rep and make the rounds of the agencies. Don't forget, I run a television station. If we don't sell time, we don't stay in business. You know . . . like radio."

"How long will you be in town?"

"Four days. Four busy days, I'm afraid. But I'd like to squeeze in another dinner with you, if you're free."

The evening ended like their first date. Larry escorted her to the lobby of her apartment building, kissed her on the cheek and disappeared, leaving her perplexed. A week later, she received a letter from him. He apologized for not having called her before he left town, bemoaned the fates that prevented them from having dinner together and pleaded for another date on his next trip to New York. His New York rep had booked him solid for the balance of the visit just concluded, he explained. Business lunches had melted into business dinners. He had returned to his hotel at night exhausted. He would have telephoned her at home, but he did not know her number . . . nor could he find her listed in the book.

Jeannie was a little angered when she read his letter. Was there some code that prevented him from asking her to join him at one of those business dinners? On reflection, she admitted to herself that there was such a code. A real business dinner meant men only. Even wives were excluded. Still . . . he might have called. Surely he could have gotten her number from the station. Again, she admitted the error in her thinking. She

had been bothered by too many men calling her at home when she first started to work at WMBE. The result was a change in her phone number and her insistence that WMBE not disclose her unlisted number to anyone.

Jeannie wrote Larry four letters and tore them all up. Why was she so concerned? This was only the third time she had seen him, and there had been long months between dates. She was obviously no more than a convenient New York date to him. But why had he told her so much about Arizona and his son at dinner that night? Why had he kept on building up life on his ranch? Was he teasing her? No . . . Larry was not that kind of tease. Was it that kiss that turned him off? Did he think she was too forward? Nonsense! This was 1961. And yet, he had not pursued the issue. What would she have done if he had made a pass?

That winter she moved into a three-room apartment on the East Side. It had a little terrace with a view of the East River, if you stood very carefully in the far corner. It was more than she could afford, but her Christmas bonus would cover the three months security.

Arnold Spaulding sent the ball whistling down the fairway in a long drive.

"Wow!" said Ben Killian. "For a man playing his first round of the season, you look like Ben Hogan."

Spaulding smiled the smug, pseudo-modest smile of a man who has just hit a great golf shot. "I cheated," he said. "I took a week of my vacation this winter in St. Thomas."

"That's still one hell of an April tee shot."

Killian teed up his ball, waggled his hands as he addressed the little white object and swung. The ball soared out in a drive just short of Spaulding's.

"Looks like I'm not the only one who went south for the winter. That's a fine shot, Ben."

The two men climbed into the electric golf cart and moved silently toward Killian's ball. Killian hit a three wood that fell just off the apron of the green. Spaulding's four iron faded into a sand trap.

"That's going to cost you a dollar," smiled Killian.

"Don't count your money too fast," replied Spaulding. "I might just get mad enough to hole out a wedge shot."

"Not if you want to stay a vice-president of Mercury."

They continued the round, tossing the easy banter back and forth. Both men were evenly matched, playing the effortless golf that only years of practice can develop. Neither of them had ever had the talent to make the pro circuit, but each had a shelf of trophies that attested to his prowess in the country club set.

"How are things at the station?" asked Mercury's Chairman of the Board.

"Smooth as silk," replied Spaulding. "The only problem I see on the horizon is our morning man. I understand WNEW has been making overtures toward him."

"How much do you pay Daddy-O?"

"Fifty thousand a year."

"Double it. We can't afford to lose him, and a man will think a long time before he chucks away a sure one hundred grand for a pig in a poke."

After the ninth hole, they parked the cart, left their clubs in it and strolled into the empty men's lounge. A waiter took their luncheon order and disappeared.

"We must be the only people on the course," remarked Spaulding.

"I saw a couple of women teeing off while I was waiting for you," replied Killian. "But that's all. Of course, it's early spring and Tuesday, but we never really get crowded here. We keep the initiation and dues just high enough to keep the peons out."

"Well, it sure is a beautiful club. It makes my home course look like a cow pasture."

"I could fix it up for you to get in, if you're interested."

"I'm afraid it's way out of my class."

"Don't be so sure about that. Of course, it wouldn't pay you to belong here, unless you moved away from Long Island and joined the white folk who live in Connecticut. Which might be a good idea.

"Arnie, I asked you up here to play a little golf because I wanted to talk away from the office. The Board

of Directors has had its eye on you for some time. We think you've done a whale of a job with the local radio station. WMBE has been number one in the market for almost three months now. And it looks like it will stay there. It's time you moved up to the network."

Spaulding smiled and looked down at his martini.

"Ben, I don't know what to say . . . or how to thank you."

"There's no need to thank me. You're the one who did it. You are the general manager of the most listened to radio station in the whole country. If you weren't the best GM in the country, you could never have done it. And I want you to know that Mercury Broadcasting always shows its appreciation for a job well done. Especially if he's a low handicap golfer."

The two men grinned at the last sentence.

"Beginning June first, you're elected to be Vice-President of Station Relations for the television network . . . and that's just the beginning."

"What about Tom Schipper?" asked Spaulding, referring to the current VP in charge of Station Relations.

Killian frowned at the question. "He's out," he said.

Spaulding dropped the subject immediately. Killian outlined his new duties and laughingly promised Spaulding a crack at the best golf courses in the nation.

"Of course, you don't dare beat our affiliate owners too often," added the beaming Killian.

"What about my old job?" asked Spaulding.

"That's the second reason you're here. We have to come up with a damn good man to replace you. Any suggestions?"

Spaulding mulled the question over in his mind. Was Killian kidding? Was he really trying to pick his brains? Or did he have someone already in mind?

"I'm sure you've considered the people at WMBE itself," began Spaulding hesitatingly. "There's the program director, of course, and the sales manager."

"Duff LeRoy?" snorted Killian. "He's an old fuddy-duddy. He's been around Mercury longer than God."

Nope. Not a chance. If he had anything on the ball, he'd have made it long ago."

"What about Kelcke?"

Again Killian snorted. "No class. He's strictly a ribbon clerk. Oh, he has a certain animal shrewdness which makes him useful to us, but have you ever seen him on a golf course?" Spaulding shook his head. "And you never will. He wouldn't even know which fork to use at the annual dinner. I checked him out. He doesn't drink, he doesn't smoke . . . he doesn't ride or sail or go to the theatre or even play tennis. I don't think he fucks."

Spaulding laughed. "I'll tell you one thing he does well. He does a great job of washing his hands."

Kelcke's fetish for clean hands had become a standing joke around WMBE. When Killian looked puzzled at Spaulding's statement, Spaulding explained. Killian roared with glee.

"That's the funniest thing I've heard all week," said Killian. "The man's favorite hobby is washing his hands. Well, that ties it. He is definitely not our man. He's only good in the job he does. And that's where he stays."

"He may think he's earned a crack at the general manager's job."

"How?" answered Killian. "What's he done? Picked some rock and roll records and hired a couple of disk jockeys? Listen, Arnie. I've never admitted this to a soul before. But I can't stomach the tripe that station plays. It's vulgar, obscene and nerve-wracking. The only reason I've gone along with it is because there are obviously enough sick creeps who like it to make us the number one station. And that spells money. As long as we can keep the FCC at bay, we'll pour out that crap. I don't give a damn if it turns every twelve year old into a two-bit whore, as long as it makes a buck. But that doesn't mean I want any part of the people who stir the pot. Kelcke belongs down in the mud. You and I are different. We're clean."

*Shoot me full of love, bab-e-e
In and out and up and down.*

*Fill me full of love, bab-e-e
Make me and I'll lose my frown.*

Jeannie entered Basil's office just in time to hear the latest hit blasting from the monitor. She paused at the door as she listened to the lyrics. She frowned, and continued her walk toward Basil's desk. He too was listening. But in Basil's case, no frown creased his face. He had a smile on his lips as he tapped out the beat with a ballpoint pen. Noticing Jeannie, he twisted his chair to face her.

"How about that, Jeannie," he smirked. "We're the first station in town with that one. I'll bet every PD in the city is tearing his hair out with jealousy.

"I'm sure they are, Mr. Kelcke," said Jeannie primly.

"Something bothering you today?"

"No, nothing."

The telephone rang. Jeannie picked it up, listened and handed it over to Basil.

"Mr. Killian's secretary is on the wire."

Basil took the instrument and smiled broadly as he heard the invitation to join Mr. Killian in the thirty-seventh floor dining room. Ah, thought Basil. Lunch with the Chairman of the Board can only mean things are looking up for the Kelckes.

Killian was waiting for Basil at the elevator.

"Good to see you again, Basil. It's been a long time. I'm sorry I couldn't greet you in my office, but I have some people waiting for me there. Let's go into the dining room where we can chat."

Killian took Basil by the arm and led him into the executive dining room. Basil wondered how they were going to have a leisurely lunch if Killian had people waiting for him in his office. He soon learned that luncheon was not on the agenda.

Killian leaned back against the table. "Well, Basil, it's time for congratulations. You promised us that you could make WMBE the number one station in the country within two years. You beat your own timetable by four

months. I wanted to be the first to tell you how grateful the company is. And I want you to know that Mercury Broadcasting always shows its appreciation for a job well done. And not just in words."

He handed Basil a brown envelope. Basil started to open it, paused and looked at Killian. Killian nodded. Basil tore the envelope open and slid out a check for ten thousand dollars . . . made out to Basil Kelcke.

Killian beamed like a proud father. "Just a little bonus to say thanks for a job well done. And there's more. As of right now, your salary is increased by ten thousand dollars a year."

Basil was dumbstruck. He started to say something, developed a frog in his throat, cleared it and tried again. Killian interrupted him.

"No need to say anything, Basil. I know how you feel. You're pleased and proud. And so am I. I'm proud that you're part of the Mercury team. It's people like you who make this business tick. Keep up the good work. That's all we ask. And I'm sure you will. Now I ask you to forgive me. I had hoped to sit down for another lunch with you, I was looking forward to it. But it'll have to wait for another day. These people in my office are from the Coast. They popped in unexpectedly and I'm afraid I'm stuck with them. Part of my job is to entertain the visiting firemen. You understand."

"Uh . . . how's your daughter?" asked Basil, reluctant to break off the interview so abruptly.

"Eh?"

"Is your daughter still riding?"

"Oh. Why, yes, of course, Basil. Of course." Killian made no effort to elaborate. Gently he took Basil's arm and escorted him to the door.

"Thanks again for dropping up, Basil. Sorry we couldn't have a longer chat, but feel free to come in anytime. My door is always open."

But for now, the door was closed . . . right behind Basil. He stood staring at it for a moment and then, still

clutching his check, pressed the down button for the elevator.

Killian's smile evaporated as soon as he closed the door. He headed for the men's room, to give *his* hands a good scrubbing.

CHAPTER 10

MERCURY BROADCASTING ENTERPRISES

For Immediate Release

May 7, 1962

ARNOLD SPAULDING PREDICTS GREAT FUTURE FOR
RADIO IN ADDRESS AT OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

An overflow crowd of graduate students of Ohio State University today heard Arnold Spaulding hail radio's new era as he described the planning that transformed WMBE from the ninth station in New York City to the number one station in the country.

"It took time, talent and hard work," said the Vice-President and General Manager of Mercury Broadcasting's flagship station. "We at Mercury began to lay the foundation for the new format two years before we put the plan into effect. When we were ready to roll in the spring of 1960, we knew exactly what to do. I had long felt that the secret lay in contemporary music. We had to appeal to youth. I was determined, however, not to lose the middle adults . . . the buying public. By maintaining our

high standards of news and public service, we managed to capture a broad spectrum of the listening public. WMBE's listeners are comprised of the best educated and highest income groups in the nation. Lest you think this was a one-man effort, I hasten to point out that WMBE's success resulted from teamwork. I was merely the man at the helm. My job was simply that of a decision maker. Others . . . many others . . . activated those decisions."

MERCURY BROADCASTING ENTERPRISES

For Immediate Release

May 8, 1962

ARNOLD SPAULDING ELECTED VICE-PRESIDENT OF MBE-TV

Ben Killian, Chairman of the Board of Mercury Broadcasting Enterprises, today announced the election of Arnold Spaulding as Vice-President in charge of Station Relations for the Television Network. The appointment will take effect on June 1. Spaulding replaces Tom Schipper, who has resigned for personal reasons.

In making the announcement, Killian said, "The Board of Directors and I have felt for some time that Arnold Spaulding was one of our most brilliant executives. In the last two years, he has more than justified our convictions. The success story of WMBE is well known throughout the industry. Arnold Spaulding is the man responsible for that success. In keeping with Mercury's policy of promoting from within the company, I am proud and pleased to welcome one of the company's best team workers to the 37th floor."

Spaulding is married to the former Laura Hepworth. They have two children and currently reside in Manhasset. In July, they plan to take occupancy in their new home in Westport, Connecticut. Spaulding is an avid golfer with a handicap of 6.

MERCURY BROADCASTING ENTERPRISES

For Immediate Release

May 8, 1962

GEORGE BARNSTEAD NAMED GENERAL MANAGER OF WMBE

Effective June 1, George Barnstead will become the new Vice-President and General Manager of Radio Station WMBE. He replaces Arnold Spaulding who is moving up to the Television Network (see separate story).

For the last three years, Barnstead has been sales Manager of Mercury Broadcasting's Los Angeles affiliate KMBE. Prior to that, he spent four years with MBE Spot Sales, rising to General Manager of the Detroit office.

Barnstead is married to the former Alma James. They have three children aged 11, 7 and 4. All of the Barnsteads are active sailors. They will reside in Manhasset.

Basil Kelcke re-read the three press releases for the fourth time. Then he reached for the telephone and dialed Ben Killian's number. Killian's secretary greeted him warmly and asked him to hold on for Mr. Killian. A full minute later she returned to the phone and apologized for the delay. She had thought Mr. Killian was free but apparently he wasn't. Mr. Killian was in conference and could not be disturbed. Yes, she had given him the message. Mr. Killian would return Mr. Kelcke's call at his earliest opportunity. The opportunity never developed.

Basil hung up the phone and re-read the press releases for the fifth time. None of the words had changed. His door opened and Duff LeRoy walked in.

"I've come to offer my condolences, for whatever they're worth," said LeRoy. "You earned that job and everybody knows it."

"Everybody except Ben Killian," replied Basil bitterly.

"Oh, he knows it all right. What that press release doesn't say is that Barnstead is Killian's wife's first cousin."

Basil looked up sharply. "What really bothers me, Duff, is the speech Spaulding made. I never figured him to be a credit grabber."

"You amaze me, Basil. For a guy as sharp as you are, you can be incredibly naive at times. What Spaulding did is part of the game. Every executive is faced with two choices. Either he devotes himself to doing the job . . . or he devotes himself to advancing his own career. There aren't enough hours in the day to do both."

"What about you, Duff? If they were determined to give the top spot to a sales manager, why not you?"

LeRoy smiled wryly. "I swallowed my ambitions years ago. I'm happy where I am. I make a lot of money and nobody bugs me. Face it, Basil. The general manager's job at a big radio station is just temporary duty. The day you walk into that spot, you're on your way up . . . or out. I'm not interested in going up and I sure as hell don't want to be out. So I sell time and stay put."

"I guess I'm stuck with the same deal."

"Don't knock it. You got a fat raise, didn't you?" Basil nodded. "Okay, enjoy it. You still run the station. You still have the real power. Let the GM's come and go. You're safe as long as we get the numbers. I've been through eight general managers. You get used to it after a while."

Millie Kelcke could not get used to it. She was elated when Basil showed her the check for ten thousand dollars. She bubbled all through the weekend. This was just the beginning, she told Basil. The Kelckes were on their way. Next stop: general manager . . . then head of the network and finally Killian's job itself.

It was a weekend that made up for the honeymoon they never had. Basil found himself in bed making love to his wife five times during the two days. He could not believe it. He was unaware that he was being seduced each time, but he was not unaware of Millie's new-found

sexual talents. Where had she learned these things? Finally, he chalked it up to the new wave of erotic novels and lay back and enjoyed it.

Millie pretended ignorance of any change in her sexual appetite. She had always felt this way, she informed Basil. The only difference lay in the way Basil felt. Of course, she admitted a woman in her late thirties probably did have more desire and fewer inhibitions. Basil accepted that explanation, although he secretly remained convinced that Millie had been reading dirty books.

Millie didn't need dirty books. She could have written them. Andy had been followed by Ralph who had been followed by Irv who had been followed by Len. Each had contributed to her growing dexterity in bed. Arlene's husband no longer traveled as much as he used to, so Arlene dropped out of the matinee club after Irv. Now, Millie was between lovers.

When Basil came home on Tuesday evening bearing the three press releases, he found Millie dancing around the kitchen in a sheer negligee as she prepared dinner. She obviously had plans for a special kind of dessert. Perhaps, she thought, we can even have each other for an appetizer. Her ardor was quickly dampened, however, when she read the releases.

"Those filthy turds," said Millie.

For once, Basil did not chastise her for the expletive. His depression had left him meek. At this point, Millie took over. She became a wife and mother. She nursed Basil's ego back to its confident peak. Although she did not realize it, Millie had taken her last lover.

Daddy-O murmured, "Excuse me, please," and edged to the front of the crowded elevator. When the doors glided open he strode out, turned to the right and pushed open the massive plate glass doors that guarded a reception room. A mammoth brass plaque spelled out HASSELL & BLICKETT ADVERTISING in flowing script.

Daddy-O approached a desk and said quietly, "Daddy-O to see Mrs. Fitch in casting."

The attractive receptionist smiled, handed him a sheet of copy and invited him to be seated as she checked off his name on a list. Daddy-O began to read the audition copy as he moved toward one of the foam rubber chairs scattered around the room.

"No fair practicing," said the other occupant of the room.

Daddy-O looked up from the script and broke into a smile as he recognized the speaker. "Rap, how are you?" asked Daddy-O. "I wouldn't have bothered showing up if I'd known you'd be here. I can't compete with a hot property like you."

"Sure," laughed Rap Hundley as he stood up to shake hands.

"The only audition I've won in the last six months is for a regional beer in Indiana. It won't even pay my cab fares. You're the one who's hot. You must have about eight spots running at once."

"Well, I have been lucky lately," Daddy-O admitted.

Both men paused in their conversation to watch a tall young man as he walked up to the receptionist.

"Who's that?" asked Rap.

"Never saw him auditioning before. Must be new."

The young man glanced quickly at the copy. He sat down, laid the sheet in his lap, lit a cigarette and reached for a copy of the New Yorker. He studiously ignored his competitors.

Daddy-O and Rap studied him. He looked up idly and caught them staring.

"My name's Daddy-O," said WMBE's morning star, "and this is Rap Hundley from WMCA. Since we're here for the same reason, we might as well get acquainted."

The young man ignored Daddy-O's outstretched hand. His features were angular. He appeared to be in his late twenties but his eyes were glazed with a brittle coldness that made him seem much older than his years. Finally, he spoke. "I'm Rex Blair," he said. He returned to his magazine.

"You new in town? We haven't seen you at any other auditions," Daddy-O persisted.

Blair laid the magazine on the coffee table with deliberate slowness. Swinging himself around to face the two men, he said coldly, "Maybe you haven't been called to all of the other auditions."

"Know anything about this product we're shooting for today?" asked Rap, taking a different tack.

"I couldn't care less what the account is," answered Blair in the same cold tone. "I don't have to use it . . . or even like it to sell it. How much does it pay? That's all I give a damn about, gentlemen . . . money."

"Well, I won't do cigarette commercials," said Daddy-O.

Blair raised an eyebrow and curled his lip in contempt as he replied, "Friend, if this agency wants to package a pound of shit, I'll do their commercials . . . as long as they come across with the scratch."

The WMBE tape room was busy. This was hardly unusual. The tape room was always busy. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, the little room ground out cartridges like sausages. This Wednesday afternoon was no different. Two engineers occupied themselves at the machines. One spooled bits of tape into the rectangular plastic boxes in a variety of lengths: ten seconds for jingles . . . thirty seconds for commercials . . . and two minutes for records. The other engineer was methodically transferring records to cartridges. Both men looked up as the door opened and director Russ Hopkins entered.

"Hi, farheads," said Hopkins. "I dropped in to say goodbye."

"You going on vacation?"

"I'm going on permanent vacation. I'm leaving WMBE."

"Yeah? How come?"

Hopkins perched himself on a formica-top table, shoving a pile of cartridges out of his way. "What's the point of hanging around here now that the poker games have been broken up? All you pigeons do nowadays is make your little cartridge toys."

"Don't the announcers play anymore?"

"Nobody plays cards in this joint. Everybody's either working his ass off or wants to spend as little time as possible in these hallowed halls. It's academic, anyway. The directors are through. We're all leaving."

The work stopped. "You mean there won't be any more directors?"

"That's the bit," said Hopkins. "Our beloved union sold us down the river. Why should they give a shit for half a dozen local radio directors? There's so much more gold in television and movies. We're out. The fuckin' union gave up all jurisdiction over local radio."

"Jesus, that's too bad, but I guess no union can fight automation. Our union gave up a lot too, but it paid off for us. We had to hire three more engineers just to handle all the recording. And I made three thousand bucks in overtime last year. What are you guys going to do?"

"Two of the boys went to network, and local TV took a couple. But I guess that prick Kelcke saw to it that nobody wanted ol' Hopkins. I'm going to try to get into an agency."

"Well, lots of luck. Drop by when you're in the neighborhood."

"Sure. I'll do that."

Hopkins waved his hand and walked quickly out of the room. The men went back to work.

"Tough break," said one of the engineers after a couple of minutes.

"Yeah, I guess so, but let's face it. Those directors haven't worked a damn bit for the last couple of years. The deejay picks the cartridge from a rack behind him and hands it over the console to the engineer on the board. Kelcke picks the music and a computer keeps the log. There's nothin' for a director to do."

"I know. You're right. But I don't think you had to rub it in with that bit about making three g's in o.t. last year."

The spooling and recording continued for another five minutes minus conversation. Then the first engineer

perked up his ears and turned up the volume on the recording monitor.

"Hey, listen to this one," he said. He removed the finished cartridge from the record slot and placed it in the playback opening. An amber light glowed to signal that the cartridge was cued up and ready for playback. He pushed the start button.

*I'm comin', comin', baby
I'm there, I'm there, oh, babe.
You're so great, my gorgeous doll
I want it all, I want it all.*

"Wait'll the kids get a load of that one. They'll cream just listening."

"I don't think we should play that stuff on the air."

"What's the matter? You some kind of prude?"

"I've got an eleven year old daughter who listens to this station. I don't want her to get any ideas."

"But you still take the three thousand in overtime, don't you?"

BOOK TWO

Jeannie

CHAPTER 11

Spring came quickly to Manhattan trailed by a more lethargic summer. Crisp blue skies dissolved into yellow glare. Those New Yorkers who could afford it (and some who could not) fled to the Catskills, Jersey beaches and New England. The mass exodus did little to change the population, however, as droves of tourists descended on the town Christopher Morley had referred to as "the nation's thyroid gland."

Jeannie was at loose ends. She turned down two swimming invitations because she dreaded the two-hour drive to Jones Beach. It was hot. Too hot for tennis . . . too hot for golf . . . too hot for riding . . . too hot for anything. She thought the years she had spent growing up around Washington should have inured her to muggy summers, but New York had its own brand of August torture. It wasn't the humidity, it was the dirty humidity. That was the difference. Washington was clean. It lacked the factories and incinerators. Ten minutes on a New York street and your make-up was caked and dirty. It was inescapable.

Jeannie knew this was only part of the problem. WMBE was another part. And Larry Rhodes still an-

other. The station was riding high, number one. But Jeannie kept wondering whether she belonged with this kind of winner. Small doubts kept stinging her thoughts whenever she listened carefully to one of the songs. Had WMBE raced to the top of the heap? Or had it slithered? Besides, the absence of crisis brought with it the absence of challenge. The long hours she spent with Basil poring over ratings and listening to audition tapes were no longer necessary. Her once exciting job had become routine.

Larry had written her in May inviting her to spend her vacation in Arizona, pointing out that they would be well-chaperoned. She wondered if the chaperone part of the letter had anything to do with her decision to refuse the invitation. Damn it, she admitted to herself, I don't want a chaperone. I don't need a chaperone. I'm a grown woman, not a schoolgirl. Why won't Larry recognize that? Was it because of the difference in their ages? If so, why did he bother to see her at all? He has a son. Is he also looking for a daughter? Well, I'm *not* his daughter. What then am I? I'm still a virgin, that's what I am.

Jeannie began to worry about being a virgin. For a while, she feared that she was some kind of a latent lesbian. She considered psychiatry but discarded that quickly. She knew she was not attracted to women. She also knew that she *was* attracted to men. It wasn't prudery that kept her hymen intact, it was discrimination. Time and again she tried to let herself go. Twice she found herself in a man's apartment ready to give in. On each occasion, she allowed herself to be plied with martinis, relaxed with wine and stirred with kisses. She did not fight when the man's hands fumbled with her bra and caressed her breasts. She even opened her legs when his fingers probed her vagina. Once she went so far as to permit a man to undress her. But when she felt his hard, erect penis against her thigh, she balked because she had no emotional feeling for him. She couldn't explain it to the frustrated man. As she hurriedly threw on her

clothes, she begged him to understand and forgive her. She could still see the look on the man's face as she told him, through tears, that she was a virgin, and scared. She knew she wasn't making sense, but she could not stop herself. Thinking back on it now, she realized how ludicrous the scene would have seemed to anyone watching. She standing in the bedroom fully clothed and he standing there stark naked, his penis slowly losing its erection.

No, thought Jeannie, I'm not a lesbian. I have a lot of passion to give to the right man. But he has to be the right man. Was Larry? She wasn't sure. She would never know unless she tried. Would she balk if Larry took her to bed? Maybe. And then again, maybe not. At night, she often imagined Larry lying beside her. In those moments, she knew she would give herself to him eagerly. Nonetheless, she turned his invitation down, pleading the need to spend her two-week vacation with her parents. He wrote back that he understood and hoped to see her in the fall.

In late October, Larry flew into town and, as usual, called Jeannie from the airport. This time the invitation was for the Broadway musical "She Loves Me." Later, he took her dancing in the Rainbow Room. As they sat toying with their late supper at a table by the window, they both gazed down on the lights of the city spread beneath them.

"This is the spot where you're supposed to look out over New York and say 'Look out, Manhattan. You may be big and tough, but Larry Rhodes is here and I'm going to conquer you'," said Jeannie.

Larry laughed. "It does look innocent. Not big and tough at all. But we know better. Besides, I have enough trouble trying to keep my head above water in Phoenix."

This time Jeannie laughed. "I'll bet you do," she said. "But I still think you should come stand this town on its ear."

Larry's laugh faded. "I'd never be happy living here," he said seriously. "And one of these days, you'll tire of it too. What keeps you here, anyway?"

Jeannie shrugged. "What else?" she said resignedly. "If you're a career girl, you have to go where the careers are."

"Just what is your career?"

"You sound a little patronizing."

"Forgive me, Jeannie. I didn't mean it that way. It's just that . . . well, I can understand a girl who wants to be a singer or an actress or a model wanting to live here. She has to. But you don't want any of those things."

"I happen to think being a good secretary can be just as rewarding and important a career as any of the things you mentioned."

"It is. Don't misunderstand me. I'm not knocking your job. But you could be an executive secretary to the president of the company if you wanted to be. Don't tell me this program director has that much of a hold on you. What is he? Some kind of Svengali?"

Jeannie smiled. "Hardly. I honestly don't know what keeps me there, Larry. Maybe it's inertia. Besides, as long as we're on the subject of ambition . . . you could be president of the network if you put your mind to it. Maybe then I'd want to be that executive secretary." Her eyes twinkled impishly at him.

"No dice, honey," he said. "I have everything I want, except for one thing." As he uttered the last four words, his eyes locked themselves on Jeannie's. She waited for him to go on, but he said no more. Again, the hint was there, but it remained unvoiced.

"Why haven't you remarried, Larry?" she asked.

"Is that a proposal?" he asked with a grin. "Seriously, Jeannie, I'd like to remarry. I'm the marrying kind. But I have a son. He's very dear and very important to me. Somehow I can't bring myself to ask the kind of girl I go for to begin a marriage by sharing me with someone else. I'm old-fashioned where marriage is concerned. I believe it should be a total giving on the part of each of the persons involved. And I can't offer my half of that bargain. I can't exclude my son from that partnership and I can't see the girl going along with half a loaf."

Jeannie started to argue, but changed her mind. This was obviously something Larry had to come to grips with alone. Perhaps, she thought, if I took the offensive . . . but she knew that would only drive him away.

A gray sky hung over WMBE's building as Friday dawned. Daddy-O was holding out the hope for his audience that the forecast might change for the better but *If we're stuck with a gray day, let's brighten things up with music from beautiful WMBE.*

Traffic was no better and no worse than on any other day. Taxi service was normal, meaning you had to be lucky to find one between 8:30 a.m. and 9:15 a.m. At 9:15, seemingly on cue, a third of the cabdrivers flicked on their overhead light, signifying they were now for hire.

Basil phoned Jeannie at 9:45 to report that he would stay in Dallas an extra day and that she would flip over the new batch of jingles he was bringing back.

At 12:31 p.m., with most of the hall desks deserted, Jeannie phoned for a cheese sandwich and black coffee to be delivered to her office.

At 1:36, Pete Sunday stepped out to visit the men's room after intro-ing The Drifters with "I'll Take You Home."

In the WMBE newsroom, news director Ed Wilford was on the phone arguing with an offended listener who claimed she'd heard an unspeakable word on the eleven a.m. news. It took five minutes for Wilford to convince her that WMBE had no news at eleven that morning or any other morning.

"Well, maybe it was some other station. But I did hear a word I can't repeat. Even if it was some other station, you should check into it."

Ed smiled patiently and set the phone in the cradle as writer Bob Goodwin casually called to him inquiring if the false arrest story from Mineola had been covered sufficiently.

Ed leaned back thoughtfully and glanced at the clock.

"M-mm, I'd say yeah," he replied indecisively. "Yeah, it's been on at least four times. We can use the time for later stuff."

The clock indicated 1:34 p.m.

Bells jingled on the UPI teletype machine.

"What's up now, Ron?" asked Wilford.

Ron, the on-duty copy boy, took a quick swallow of coffee to wash down a bite of corned beef on rye and jumped up from his chair.

"Let's see . . . here it comes . . . from Dallas."

"Message from Kelcke to all rock stations?" laughed Goodwin.

Wilford smiled.

"My God . . . no!" cried Ron abruptly.

Wilford's smile faded. Goodwin whirled in his chair.

"What is it?" they chorused.

The copy boy ripped the yellow sheet from the machine and handed it to Wilford. Goodwin leaned over Wilford's shoulder as they read:

"Three shots were fired at President Kennedy's motorcade today in downtown Dallas."

The taxi carrying Kelcke back to his hotel stopped for a red light.

"Listen to your radio much?" asked Basil.

"Sure," said the driver. "But the thing's been acting up. I've got to have it fixed. A passenger told me last week he figured it was a diode, whatever that is. Cuts out every once in a while, so I haven't been turning it on much."

The driver twisted the on-off switch to on. "Well, whadda ya know. It's working," he laughed. A lush treatment of the old Cole Porter standard Night and Day was playing.

"Ever listen to rock music?" persisted Basil as the light turned green.

"No, sir. Not if I can help it. Why do you ask?"

"I'm with a station in New York involved in modern sound. We find a good many adults listen once their kids turn them on to it."

"We got plenty of rockers here, if you care to listen," offered the driver. As his right hand moved toward the radio, an announcer broke in dramatically.

Here is a bulletin. There are reports President Kennedy's car has been fired upon. No further details are available. We repeat. There are reports President Kennedy's car has been fired upon. Stay tuned for further details.

The driver turned white. His foot moved involuntarily to the brake pedal as he steered the car alongside a parked auto. He had to catch his breath. Not a word was spoken for a full twenty seconds.

Basil broke the silence. "Turn over to that rock station, would you please? I'm curious to see how they handle the bulletin."

The driver turned toward Basil slowly, unbelieving. "Mister, I'm sorry, but I feel a little sick. Could I let you out here? It's only four blocks to your hotel."

Basil complied. He tipped the driver fifteen percent and walked to his hotel.

When he entered his room, Basil took off his suit coat and hung it carefully, smoothing a number of wrinkles in the back. Then he turned on the bedside radio, ignoring the handsome new RCA television set resting on its plastic ivory-colored swivel platform. As the old radio's innards heated slowly, Basil picked up the phone and asked for room service.

Before he could get in his request, a feminine voice answered, "I'm sorry, sir. There'll be no room service because of a bit of confusion here due to the assassination."

"Oh, they got him, huh?" asked Basil. "That's dreadful."

"I'm very sorry, sir," drawled the voice.

As the reports came in relating to the tragedy of November 22, 1963, Basil was troubled. How would they be handling this at WMBE? Had they been the first to break the news? That would be a coup. Impulsively, Basil picked up the phone again and asked for long distance. He was irritated that it took fifteen minutes to get through.

When he finally heard Jeannie's voice on the phone, he grumbled, "I thought it was only New York that had lousy telephone service. This is terrible." Hearing no response from Jeannie and fearing she had been cut off, Basil said, "Hello . . . hello . . ."

Jeannie was sobbing. "Oh, Mr. Kelcke. Isn't it horrible? He's dead. I can't believe it!"

"It's unspeakable," sympathized Basil. After a moment's pause, he added, "We'd better hold off on the hard rock for a while. Doesn't seem appropriate. What are we playing now?"

"Well, the newsroom has taken over. No music since the first reports came in. Everybody's a little bewildered."

"Okay. Better dump all commercials, much as I hate to. Call the network music library and get some serious music. Heavy stuff . . . Sibelius . . . Beethoven . . . they'll know. Play it till midnight, then back to the list. Let the newsmen break in when they must."

"I'll take care of it," replied Jeannie.

"Oh, listen. Get hold of Pete Sunday. He's from Dallas and can help the newsmen quite a bit with his knowledge of the city."

"All right, Mr. Kelcke," replied Jeannie, still sobbing audibly.

"I might have to stay down here until Tuesday. I imagine this is going to snafu the whole town of Dallas."

When he hung up, Jeannie ran into the studio, relayed the message regarding music for the balance of the day, located Pete Sunday who had remained in the newsroom, wrote and distributed a memo regarding the serious music and left for her apartment. She couldn't take any more. As she slipped on her raincoat, she thought Basil didn't sound concerned about the tragedy.

Pete Sunday joined Bob Goodwin and Ed Wilford at the microphone at 2:43 p.m. The President had been dead for forty-three minutes. Pete was authoritative . . . commenting on the fact that he had often passed by the Texas School Book Depository where the shots seemed to have originated. It would take an expert marksman, he suggested, to have been so accurate from such a dis-

tance. Pete stayed at the microphone for five solid hours.

In Dallas, Basil thought back over a hectic day. A lot of revenue down the drain . . . but, by golly, the FCC can't deny we've rendered a public service. There's more to this business than just making money. Besides, the ratings probably went up. Too bad, though, about the President. So young. Glancing at his hands, Basil strolled into the bathroom to wash up and prepare for dinner.

CHAPTER 12

The tiny fly soared out over the stream with a soft whoosh. As the line straightened out, the man holding the rod checked its advance and the fly settled gently on the water. For a moment, it drifted aimlessly downstream. Suddenly a silvery flash broke the surface and the fly disappeared. The four ounce split bamboo bent double as the man felt a strong pulsating tug. Stepping carefully around a submerged rock, he gave the fish its head while still keeping pressure on the line. The trout dived and shook, leaped and twisted. Finally, exhausted and resigned to its fate, the trout allowed itself to be steered toward the bank. With a deft motion, the man flipped the fish on the bank and bent over to remove the hook.

While this drama played itself out, another man, wearing the badge of a Michigan State Game Warden stood quietly watching.

"Only a show-off would refuse to use a net," the game warden said.

The fisherman looked up with a startled expression. Recognizing the warden, his face broke into a smile. "Hi,

Jeff. When did you sneak up? You scared me out of half a year's growth."

"For that, I can only apologize," answered Jeff. "You could use another inch or two." He walked over to the grassy bank and looked down at the fish. "Nice looking rainbow, Daryl. It should go almost two pounds. What fly did you use?"

"Quill Gordon. It's a favorite of mine this time of year," replied Daryl as he began to clean the trout.

"I'll remember that, although I'll never be able to handle a flyline like you. You missed your calling. You should have been a fishing guide."

Daryl tucked the cleaned trout into his creel and sat down on a rock. He took out a thermos jug and poured two cups of coffee. He handed one to the game warden. "Maybe I still will, one of these days. Freda and I are planning to buy a fishing camp as soon as we can save enough money."

"Like the one Bill and Mary LaFollette run up on the Pere Marquette River?"

"That's our favorite. We'd give anything to own it, but Bill and Mary will never sell. You know we spend every vacation up there, don't you?"

"Yeah, you've told me. I don't blame you. It's a beautiful spot and the fishing's great." Jeff lit his pipe and settled back against a tall pine tree. "You off today?"

Daryl glanced at his watch. "Holy cow!" he exclaimed as he leaped up. "I'm going to be late for work if I don't get cracking. I'm on the air at ten o'clock."

"You better get with it then," said Jeff. "You can't afford to be even a minute late in your business."

"Don't I know it," answered Daryl, as he gathered his gear and raced for his car. "See you later, Jeff."

Daryl swerved his ancient Dodge into the WCOO parking lot at 9:51. Made it! he told himself as he headed for the station.

The WCOO studios were located on the second floor of an aging brick building in downtown Grand Rapids. A shoe store and a haberdashery shared the ground floor. The third floor, humorously referred to by its occupants

as the penthouse, housed offices peopled by two lawyers, two accountants, one dentist and an ever-varying number of Electrolux vacuum cleaner salesmen. On any given Monday morning, promptly at nine the vacuum cleaner salesmen could be heard singing their way into the confidence needed to confront a resistive public. The lawyers, the accountants and the dentist hated the weekly singing sales meetings. Nonetheless, the lawyers, the accountants and the dentist had each been sold a vacuum cleaner, at full price.

Daryl Hoffert took the stairs leading to the studios two at a time. He burst through the door of the station at exactly 9:53:30. Tossing his creel on the desk of the startled receptionist, he continued down the hall at a dead run, pausing only long enough to call back over his shoulder, "Harriet, honey, be a doll and sneak my fish into the boss's refrigerator, will you?"

Harriet Roth smothered a smile as she shouted after him, "Hey, wait a minute. I'm the receptionist, telephone operator, secretary and bookkeeper. I refuse to add fish to my duties around here."

Daryl heard only the first three words. By the time she had finished her speech, he had entered a room proudly labeled NEWSROOM. It was not really a room . . . being only slightly larger than a closet. Inside a lone teletype machine clattered away. With a battered wooden ruler, Daryl ripped the Third World Roundup from the UPI radio wire. Gathering the yellow sheets into a bundle, he shuffled them in order and walked into WCOO's control room. Buddy Rush, the morning announcer, disk jockey, newsman and sportscaster, was behind the U-shaped console.

"Whew," said Buddy, glancing at the clock. "I was afraid you weren't going to make it."

He said no more; it was time for a station break. Buddy flicked the switch on the console which opened the microphone and gave the call letters followed by a thirty-second commercial. At exactly ten o'clock he hit a cartridge which poured out the same tired news theme that WCOO had used for over a decade to alert its lis-

teners that news was coming up. Buddy turned off the mike and slid out of the chair. He pulled his stomach in to allow Daryl to slip by and moved away from the console. It took less than five seconds. Daryl tossed his news copy on the eighteen-inch ledge in front of the console, reached for the pot which controlled the theme, faded it down and opened the mike. WCOO news was on the air.

Announcers learn early in their careers not to run to their assignments. Even a short sprint can leave the average broadcaster breathless enough to permit the sensitive microphone to amplify short gasps into roaring sighs. Daryl Hoffert was an exception to this rule. Barely five-feet-nine inches tall, he was in superb physical condition. Long years of trekking through woods and fields had built up a stamina that belied his stature. The fact that he neither drank nor smoked only added to his ability to dash between the control room and the news closet while a thirty-second commercial was being played. He took great pride in this accomplishment and lost few opportunities to regale his associates with his tale of having once raced up the hall and down the stairs to retrieve his forgotten car keys during a two minute and thirty-four second Tony Bennett record. He made the round trip with six seconds to spare and went on the air sounding just as though he had never left the microphone. This, he informed his fellow announcers, was a tribute to total abstinence from nicotine and alcohol. From anyone except Daryl, these proclamations would sound pompous and stuffy, but Daryl was incapable of being a smug crusader. His unmanageable shock of blond hair, the freckles that dotted his face and the ever-present twinkle in his faded blue eyes gave Daryl a look of innocent mischief that enabled him to say practically anything without giving offense. He appeared to be Peck's Bad Boy, Tom Sawyer and Till Eulenspiegel all rolled into one.

Grand Rapids was not his hometown. He grew up on a farm near Bismarck, North Dakota where he spent a typical country boy's childhood. He had happy memories

of traipsing through the fields after his father as they headed for a dawn rendezvous with a river. Daryl was barely five years old when he was given his first fishing pole and, though he had to take three steps to his father's one, he bounced eagerly along whenever the fish were biting. He received a twenty-gauge shotgun for his twelfth birthday and soon learned the smooth swing that weapon demands.

Daryl never tired of the outdoors. When he graduated from Bismarck High School, there was no hesitancy in his mind about his future career. He entered college determined to achieve a degree in forestry. Money, however, became a problem when his mother and father died within a year of each other. Daryl quickly discovered that the family farm was mortgaged to the hilt and only by giving up school and returning to the farm could he hope to eke out a living. He debated this for several weeks before he finally decided to sell the farm and continue college. The money ran out just as he ended his sophomore year.

Fortunately, a part-time job at the college town's local radio station became available. Daryl had fooled around with acting in school plays and had done a little bit of announcing on the campus radio station. Since the big network radio shows had been phased out gradually in the 1950's, he could barely remember them. But he had spent many hours in the school library listening to recordings of Charlie McCarthy, Jack Benny, Burns and Allen, Tom Mix, Lights Out and Jack Armstrong. He found himself increasingly fascinated with oldtime radio. When a friend recommended him for the part-time job, he grabbed the opportunity for a chance to work his way through college and still be close to his second love, radio.

The little radio station was impressed with Daryl from the beginning. He was glib, responsible and energetic. His voice lacked the sonorous resonance of the typical radio announcer, but such voices were beginning to be phased out, so Daryl came along at just the right time.

For a while, all went well. Then, the station ownership changed hands and Daryl came to another fork in his career. The new owners liked his work, but were averse to part-time announcers. Daryl was given a choice: work full-time, or give up the job. He tried frantically to find another position, but part-time jobs were at a premium in the middle of a semester. He decided to leave school temporarily.

Six years later, he was still in radio, temporarily. He no longer entertained any hopes of a career in forestry but always in the back of his mind lay the dream of doing something in the outdoors. The dream was given wings when he met Freda Burber.

People meeting Freda and Daryl for the first time often took them to be brother and sister. Freda had the same mop of blonde hair, the same melange of freckles, the same blue eyes. She was a five-foot-one bundle of friendly energy, quick to smile and easily transformed into a spate of giggles. As a high school cheerleader, she attracted as many fans as the team itself. Boys flocked around her like moths to a candle. She treated them all alike. She loved to dance, swim, bowl, go to the movies and ice skate, but any boy reaching for her hand in a darkened theatre found his palm filled with popcorn instead. His protests were met with giggles that quickly melted his ardor. Despite her constant parrying, Freda never lacked for dates. She remained the most popular virgin in Michigan. In an era long past the point of permissive petting, Freda Burber was still untouched. She did not object to boys who made passes, she merely blocked. But there was one point on which she was adamant. Freda had an aversion to liquor that bordered on being an obsession. She could tolerate other people drinking at a party, but refused to go out with a boy who drank while he was with her. Men who were attracted to her reconciled themselves to an evening of soft drinks when they dated her.

Freda's closest friend was Harriet Roth. They had grown up together, gone to school together, ridden bikes

together, given pajama parties together and shared their innermost confidences and dreams. It was thus inevitable that Harriet should be the one to introduce Freda to her husband-to-be.

Harriet worked at WCOO as Girl Monday through Friday. The big networks might employ several thousand people to get their programs on the air, but WCOO squeaked by with a roster of twenty-three people . . . including the janitor. Everybody did at least double duty. The general manager was also the sales manager. The announcers doubled as engineers and part-time salesmen. Harriet kept the billings straight, answered the phone, took dictation, ran out for coffee, served as receptionist and kept an eagle-eye out for a husband. Like Freda, she never lacked for dates, but the first prime husband material she spotted turned out to be just the right man . . . for Freda.

When Daryl Hoffert walked into WCOO to begin his first day's work, Harriet Roth took one look and began to scheme. She waited one month to be sure, then invited a dozen young people to her home for a party, carefully arranging it on a Wednesday night when Daryl would be free.

Freda was sipping a ginger ale when Daryl was introduced to the gang. Harriet immediately asked him what she could bring him to drink. Her eyes darted over to catch the expression on Freda's face as Daryl replied, "Just a Coke or 7 Up, thanks."

Harriet was not disappointed. Freda's eyes narrowed perceptibly. She studied him for a fraction of a second, then volunteered to get the soft drink for him.

Freda and Daryl hit it off from the beginning. The party was made up of singles, but Freda and Daryl paired themselves off as though they had been instructed to remain together. Daryl always claimed his memory was hazy but Freda never did forget, to her embarrassment, her very first question to Daryl.

"What church do you go to?" she had inquired.

She never denied it was a stupid, rude, awkward ques-

tion, atypical of her normal, easygoing friendliness. Nonetheless, she was strangely relieved to hear Daryl reply, "I'm one of the big swingers. I'm a Methodist."

Feelings of relief and excitement surged through her when she heard his reply. She came from a sturdy Presbyterian family and, although prejudice was alien to her, she had to admit that she had always hoped she would never have to face the decision of a mixed marriage. Such thoughts bothered her, but Freda was honest enough to realize that she preferred life to be safe from even the tiniest problem.

Since practically everyone except Daryl and Freda had to get up the next morning and go to work, the party broke up early. Daryl offered to drive Freda home. She said she preferred to walk but, if he could stand the pace, he could walk her home.

"What do you mean 'if I can stand the pace?'" he teased. "Young lady, I can outwalk you any day in the week. Don't be misled by my size. Or have you forgotten about David and Goliath?"

"Your pardon, noble knight," replied Freda. "It's just that I live so far from Harriet."

"How far?"

"Across the street," giggled Freda.

They sat down in an old-fashioned glider on the big, wide porch of Freda's home. Although they had been chattering all through the party, they still found dozens of subjects to discuss. Suddenly Daryl looked at his watch.

"Wow," he said. "Where did the time go? I'd better get some sleep. I have a heavy date tomorrow."

Freda arched her eyebrows as she said, "Oh?"

Daryl grinned. "With a trout. Want to come along?"

At dawn the next morning, they found they had something else in common. Both loved the outdoors. As he skillfully built a fire next to the stream, Daryl confessed his longing for a life other than radio. He dreamed, he told Freda, of running a fishing and hunting lodge. One of these days. If he could only save enough. Freda

moved the coffee pot away from the flames and placed a frying pan over the burning coals. Daryl handed her the cleaned trout and she tossed them into the smoking pan. Minutes later, she touched the fish with a fork. The meat came apart in flakes.

"Breakfast is ready, Izaak Walton," she said.

Daryl tasted the fish and smiled broadly. "Freda, you're a woman after my own heart," he said. "Most girls would overcook a freshly caught rainbow. This is perfect."

As they sat and talked over coffee, they kept discovering things in common. Freda, too, was no stranger to the woods and streams. As an only child, she was given a good schooling in the art of handling a fly rod by her fisherman father. They had been very close, she told Daryl. When her father passed away, she thought she would never again be interested in tramping through the woods at dawn. Daryl brought back pleasant memories. She was glad she had come.

They cleaned up the pan, burned the paper plates and poured water over the fire together. As he watched her, Daryl fought back an urge to take Freda in his arms. She had been a stranger yesterday. Now she seemed like someone he had known all his life. They packed up the gear and trudged back toward his car. Daryl placed the key in the ignition and started to turn it. Then he stopped and turned toward Freda.

"I have something to say to you, Freda. Promise you won't laugh," he said quietly.

Freda looked steadily at him as she answered, "You sound serious. Okay. I'll be serious. I promise I won't laugh."

"I . . . uh . . . I . . ." began Daryl. "For a guy who makes his living talking without saying 'uh', I'm having a lot of trouble. I'll start over. Look. No, don't look. Listen. Please. On the air, I come on strong. But off the air, I'm pretty shy. It takes me a long time to get up courage to say something like this. I mean . . . well . . . I should wait. But I may not get the nerve again. I know this is

too soon but . . . darn it, Freda, I'm asking you to marry me."

Freda stared at the windshield in front of her. For over a minute she was silent.

"I'm sorry, Freda," Daryl said. "It was stupid of me. Please forgive me and forget I said that. You don't know anything about me and . . ."

"Daryl."

"I had no right to say things like that. I . . ."

"Daryl."

"What?"

"Daryl, I won't forget what you said . . . because the answer is . . . yes."

Becky was born one day before Daryl and Freda's first wedding anniversary. A year of ecstatic happiness was suddenly increased threefold.

CHAPTER 13

Daryl finished the newscast, did a station break, pushed a cartridge for a commercial and started a tape machine which put a public service program on the air. As he leaned back and stretched, he looked up into the face of Al Heinemann, WCOO's general manager.

"Hoffert," said Heinemann with mock severity. "There's a dead fish in my refrigerator. What do you know about it?"

"That, sir," replied Daryl, matching his boss's somber tones, "is not a dead fish. That is a magnificent trout, which has given up its life only after a valiant struggle against a superior adversary."

"That superior adversary may very well find himself out of a job . . . unless, of course, he deigns to forfeit the trophy to his general manager."

"What you are suggesting, sir, smacks of bribery . . . a kickback to management."

"Exactly."

"Well, if you put it on those terms, of course you can have the fish. I planned to give it to you all along."

"On second thought, it's too small. Sally and I expect

you and Freda for dinner tonight and we can't feed four people on one fish."

"Gee, Al, we'd love to come, but I'd better call Freda and see if she can get a babysitter."

"All taken care of. Sally called Freda this morning. We'll see you around seven. Okay?"

"That'll be fine. Thanks, Al, I'll call Freda before the tape runs out and tell her the time."

"You won't get an answer. She's outside gassing with Harriet. I think they're planning to have lunch together. Which reminds me. Why did she want to borrow a copy of Broadcasting? You're not planning on looking for another job are you?"

"Not as long as the fishing's any good in this state and you feed us free dinners."

"There is no such thing as a 'free' dinner with your boss . . . as you'll find out if you work here long enough," laughed Heinemann as he left the control room and headed back for his office.

Daryl stapled together the sheets of news copy he had just broadcast and tossed the pack into a box marked NEWS. He took a final check on the audio level of the tape recording that was spinning out the current on-the-air program, turned up the monitor so he could keep an aural check on it and slid out of his chair. He walked over to the 500 watt transmitter that glared down from its rack-mounted position and took readings on plate current and modulation levels. Then he crossed over to the record cabinets that lined the wall and started to pick records for the 10:30 "Morning Melody" segment of his shift. He chose four for the first quarter of an hour and stacked them neatly on top of the console.

As he turned back toward the record cabinets, he glanced idly into WCOO's lone studio. It was a seldom used room about twenty-five feet square. In one corner two microphone booms embraced each other. An aging Baldwin grand piano sprawled across another corner, its ivory keys set in a permanent grin. Two felt-covered tables, four music stands and an assortment of folding chairs completed the decor of the room. Most of the

broadcasting took place from the control room. However, there were occasions when a public service show originated from WCOO. On such occasions, the studio was pressed into service. Normally, it remained empty. This morning was an exception. A freckled, grinning face was pressed against the glass that separated studio from control room. Daryl did a doubletake and then grinned back at the face. Even after two years of marriage, his heart still pumped an extra beat whenever he beheld his wife's face. He motioned for Freda to come into the control room.

"To what do I owe this honor?" asked Daryl with a deep bow from the waist.

"I didn't come all the way downtown for a bow. I want a hug," demanded Freda as she put her arms around Daryl.

"Hold, fair maiden; ye have entered the jousting field. 'Tis where knights do battle. No sex is permitted."

"Silly," giggled Freda as she released him. "I came down to have lunch with Harriet. And I brought yours." She handed him a brown paper bag.

Daryl opened the bag, sniffed its insides and peered in.

"Methinks I detect the succulent aroma of peanut butter."

"One peanut butter, one egg salad and one apple. I put a pint of milk in Al's refrigerator. Next time, don't fly out of the house without your lunch."

Daryl walked around the console and sat back in front of the microphone. "I'm sorry, princess. I was in such a hurry to go fishing. I clean forgot. I did remember to take a thermos of coffee. Hey, that reminds me. Wait'll you see what I caught."

"I saw it when I put the milk away. It's a beauty, honey, but I don't know what we can do with it. Harriet and I are having lunch downtown and we're going to the Heinemanns' for dinner. I know. I'll give it to Mom when I go home. She's babysitting with Becky."

Freda and Daryl chatted until it was time for him to go back on the air. Since he had a disk jockey show to do

plus the eleven o'clock news, Freda knew he would be too busy to carry on much more of a conversation. As Daryl faded in the theme for "Morning Melody," she blew him a kiss and disappeared down the hall.

The Hofferts pushed the Heinemanns' bell promptly at seven. Al ushered them into the living room and filled their hands with ginger ale-filled glasses. Sally Heinemann plunked down a wedge of Wisconsin cheddar cheese and excused herself to finish dinner. Freda started to help her but was shooed back into the living room. A half hour later, they sat down for dinner.

"I hope you like pot roast," said Sally.

"That's a fine question," giggled Freda. "The last time you served it, Daryl acted like he hadn't eaten for a week. This time you have to give me the recipe. All I heard for days was how great your pot roast was."

Dinner progressed smoothly. Although Al Heinemann was general manager of WCOO and had the power to hire and fire Daryl, the two families were good friends and enjoyed an easy relationship that precluded any labor-management problems.

The meal ended on the happy note of homemade apple pie with vanilla ice cream. Daryl accepted seconds over Freda's giggling protests. Al just stared in envious wonder as Daryl downed the oversized portions.

"I have to say that I bitterly resent the way you can eat and not gain weight," said Al. "I can gain a pound just watching a Jell-o commercial on TV."

"Aren't you just a little bit ashamed to admit that you watch television?" asked Daryl. "I thought you took your job seriously."

"I do," replied Al. "That's why I don't listen to you guys any more often than I have to. That way I can rave about you to clients without losing my scruples. If I really listened carefully, my conscience would make a sales pitch stick in my craw."

"It's good to know my work is appreciated."

"Seriously, Daryl," continued Heinemann. "How far do you hope to go in this business?"

Freda looked intently at her husband as he pondered the question.

"I honestly haven't given it a whole lot of thought," replied Daryl. "You know, of course, that Freda and I have never made any secret of the fact that, one of these days, we'd like to own a hunting and fishing camp. But that's a long way off in the future, I'm afraid. In the meantime, we save what we can and don't think too much about tomorrow. Why do you ask?"

"Because you're good," said Al. "As your boss, I shouldn't say this, but I think you could make the big time. Detroit, Chicago . . . maybe even L.A. or New York."

Daryl paused before he answered. "I'd be less than honest if I didn't admit that I've thought about working for a big network, but I really don't think it's for me. You know, it's like that trout I caught this morning. There he was, swimming away free as a feather. Then he spotted my fly. All of a sudden, he was hooked, and no matter what he did he couldn't get loose. I'm sort of like that trout. Right now I'm free. But I'm afraid if I ever get to a big city I'd be hooked. Maybe I'd make more money, but I'd lose my freedom. And without that freedom, my dreams, our dreams of getting that fishing camp would go up in smoke. No, Al, I don't think Detroit's for me."

"Well, naturally, I'm glad to hear you say that," said Al. "We like your work here in Grand Rapids and hope you'll stay. But I did want you to know if there's ever anything we can do to help you up the ladder, just say the word. I promise you WCOO will never stand in your way as long as I have anything to say about it."

On the way home, Freda and Daryl rode in silence . . . Daryl's thoughts were those of a contented man. He had enjoyed the evening with the Heinemanns and basked in the knowledge that his job was secure. He let his mind build a log cabin castle-in-the-air. A thin curl of smoke reached its finger toward a cloud that resembled a small mouth bass. The moat surrounding his castle sparkled and raced across rocks and bubbled past grassy banks. He saw his daughter send a paper boat across the

stream and then, suddenly transformed into a teen-age replica of Freda, paddle a canoe skillfully through the white foam of tiny rapids. Daryl smiled happily.

Freda's thoughts were more mundane and perplexing. She wondered about Al Heinemann's remarks tonight. Was it just a coincidence that Al had almost echoed Harriet? At lunch, Harriet had posed the same question: how far did Daryl want to go in broadcasting? Harriet, too, thought Daryl was ready for a top market. Freda's conscience twinged as she wondered if she were being disloyal to Daryl. Should she push him? Or should she remain a dutiful wife, hovering in the background?

Daryl's salary was \$130 a week. Since the station was non-union, there were no fixed commercial fees. However, Heinemann's policy was to give each of his announcers a talent fee for special work whenever he could convince an advertiser that such a fee was a necessary part of the cost of a program. As a result, Daryl averaged a little better than \$150 a week. It wasn't too bad for a young family. But Freda realized that they might eventually have more than one child. What about college? And what about the fishing camp? Could either one of these goals be realized on what he earned and might hope to earn in Grand Rapids? For herself, Freda would be happy to stay in her hometown for the rest of her life. But what about Daryl?

Daryl steered their five year old Dodge sedan up the sloping driveway leading to the tenant's garage and glided easily into his spot inside at the left of the doorless, unattached structure. He hopped out of the car and sped around to the passenger's side, opening the door for Freda. They raced each other up the stairs to their apartment. Freda went into the bathroom while Daryl was changing. She emerged a few minutes later wearing a new, short nightgown that was sheer enough to arouse him at once. He loved the shape of the body that was outlined so clearly under the blue nylon.

"Hello, lover," Daryl said as he took her enthusiastically into his arms.

Freda and Harriet met often in the ensuing weeks. Harriet was intrigued with the idea of helping Daryl's career. She sneaked a copy of Broadcasting from the station every week and pored through the ads. The major market stations seldom advertised for announcers and disk jockeys, but every once in a while there was a blind ad that piqued the girls' curiosity.

At first, Freda was reluctant to get involved in any conspiracy to bump Daryl up the broadcasting ladder. She argued with Harriet that Daryl not only failed to express an interest but specifically rejected the thought of being part of what he called "the rat race." He was a contented young husband and father putting away a few dollars each week. A man enjoying his work. As for Freda, nothing sounded more distressing to her than the prospect of living in New York or Philadelphia or Boston or even Detroit.

Harriet countered the arguments by pointing out that not every announcer had the talent to move to the top. It would be a disservice to Daryl, she insisted, if he were held back. She persisted in her belief that, subconsciously, Daryl really wanted to move up. Innate modesty, argued Harriet, kept Daryl from admitting it even to himself. Besides, she pointed out, at the rate they were going, Freda and Daryl would never get the fishing camp. Unless Daryl made it in Detroit or Chicago or some big market, the Hofferts were destined for a life of mediocrity in Grand Rapids.

The last argument was the clincher as far as Freda was concerned. Although she still felt slightly subversive, she went along with Harriet's schemes and proposals. As time went on, she lost her ambivalent feelings and plunged into the project with a zealous determination. The two girls borrowed a copy of Radio and Television Year Book for the addresses of dozens of the top stations in metropolitan areas around the country. In the beginning, they concentrated on major markets in the Midwest, but their letters and tapes soon began to head toward stations on both coasts. With each letter of inquiry

they enclosed a picture of Daryl, a resume and a tape. The tape was a dub of an air check Daryl had made of his "Morning Melody" show. Harriet herself did the dubbing after the station had signed off for the night.

Daryl, of course, was kept in the dark. They used Harriet's return address. In the space of eight months, they sent out thirty-two letters. Twelve replied that there was no opening and no expectation of an opening. Two wrote that they would keep the material on file. One returned everything with no letter. The rest failed to acknowledge their efforts in any manner whatsoever.

Daryl received one offer from a station in Kalamazoo, not through the girls' letters but through his own rapidly spreading reputation. But the Kalamazoo station could go no higher than \$125 per week. He quickly rejected the offer.

The summer came and went. The Hofferts made their annual trek to the LaFollette fishing camp and came home rested, relaxed and even more determined to own a camp of their own. Freda redoubled her efforts to help Daryl, but the results remained negative.

CHAPTER 14

Rex Blair was a *New Yorker*. The fact that he had been born and raised in Vineland, New Jersey was something he conveniently pushed into the back of his mind. It is not necessary to be a native of the teeming metropolis to be a *New Yorker*. In fact, Rex often told himself that such an accident of birth could possibly even be a detriment. There may be eight million souls pacing nervously through their apartments in the city, but they are not true *New Yorkers*. *New Yorkers* are numbered in the hundreds, not millions. Most of them have at least a nodding acquaintance with one another. They may see one another frequently, for the geographic boundaries enclose a tiny area. The unwritten code dictates no excursions above Eighty-Ninth Street, south of Forty-Fourth Street or west of Fifth Avenue. East to the river is allowed but never, never cross the bridge into Brooklyn or Queens. Harlem and the Bronx exist only in the *Daily News*.

Rex did, of course, occasionally venture to the West Side, but only when insulated within a taxicab and only to go to the theatre. For all *New Yorkers*, the Broadway theatre is a must. However, the "must see" shows consist

only of the big hits. The purpose is not to see the show, but to be able to say you have seen it. Ideally, you should be able to say you have only seen the first act. Walking out gives you a wonderful opportunity for a put-down. A marvelous topper for a cocktail party conversation is to be able to shrug off a smash musical with a "Well, I suppose some people might enjoy it. I was bored."

Boredom is the badge of the *New Yorker*. Emotion is not permitted. Even sex is considered routine. "Want to go to bed with me?" yawns the male *New Yorker*. "I guess so," answers the girl. The *New Yorker* is an adaptation of the human species who has adjusted his outlook in order to survive mentally and physically the hazards that await anyone who expects New York to be just another big city. He adapts as surely as the creature of the Everglades adapts to life in a superabundance of water or the animal of the desert adapts to life in the lack of it. Without this ability to adapt, the *New Yorker* would perish as quickly as those other human beings who must either flee the city or come apart emotionally in the soot, din and clamor to become another victim of this most unnatural habitat for *homo sapiens*.

Rex Blair, a *New Yorker*, was on the phone talking to his agent.

"Hell, no! If they can't come up with another five thou', I'm getting the hell out! Hold on a second, Sam."

Rex interrupted his conversation long enough to motion to his engineer to toss another record on. Rex had introduced two numbers and promised the weather forecast to his listeners after the second song; but Rex was in charge. The engineer had to follow orders. As the strains of the old standard "More Than You Know" found their way to WPO's transmitter, Rex again immersed himself in conversation with his agent.

"Sam, I've put in four years here. I was paid twenty-six five when I started and I'm making twenty-six five now. If it weren't for the outside stuff you get me, I'd starve." Rex's listeners would not have recognized his voice when it was not being directed into a microphone. It abruptly

lost its dulcet quality and became much harsher. He no longer radiated warmth and cultivation.

Rex continued. "How can anybody survive in this town on less than forty grand? (PAUSE) Well, I don't know how he does it. I'd have to go on welfare if I ever dropped below thirty. By the way, I'm throwing a small wingding at my pad Friday night. Fall by, O.K.? (PAUSE) I don't know . . . thirty or forty people, I guess. The usual crowd . . . agency types and producers. Plus an assortment of swingin' chicks. It should be a ball . . . and you can do us some good. You know . . . the right word in the right ear. I'll see you then, about seven. In the meantime, if you hear of anything, holler."

Rex's parties were part of his stock in trade. Without his free-lance commercial work he would never be able to keep up the facade of a *New Yorker*, so he used every device at his command to keep his name and voice in front of the advertising agency casting directors and producers. He had printed postcards which were sent out once a week to all producers . . . constant reminders that Rex Blair was available for auditions. He made at least a dozen telephone calls per day and never, never ate lunch alone. Business was business was business. But it was through his parties that Rex made his most indelible mark. He served food from Manhattan's finest caterer, mouth-watering delicacies that rivalled the output of the city's most elegant restaurants. No one was allowed to wander around with an empty glass. The liquor flowed like Yosemite Falls. Rex also made sure that each party was peopled with young, pretty and willing girls. Models, actresses, secretaries and receptionists all vied for the honor of an invitation to a Rex Blair party. It was guaranteed to be a swinging affair that often led to even greener pastures. The highlight of the occasion was the unwrapping of gifts from Rex. These little mementoes made the average Christmas business offering look like a handout. At his most recent party, for example, each of Rex's guests received the top of the line Polaroid camera, suitably stamped: TO (name of guest) FROM REX BLAIR. All of Rex's gifts came stamped with his name.

The cost of his little "wingdings" ate up nearly a quarter of Rex's annual income. However, he was convinced that it was more than a bargain, it was a ball.

Every once in a while, Rex talked of leaving New York. To him, this was the ultimate threat, akin to talking of ending one's life. His threat, of course, never made any impact on the listener. *New Yorkers* were always telling other *New Yorkers* about the plans they had to escape the concrete and steel canyons that imprisoned them. It was little more than empty talk, one more bit of evidence of the boredom they cherished. Secretly they subscribed to the Toots Shor theory that everything outside New York was Bridgeport.

Rex Blair knew this was not completely true. He and Mindy had spent last summer driving through the mid-west. WPO had sent him on special assignment to collect brief tape interviews with show business personalities who were on tour. The trip had taken them to nightspots and civic theatres in Milwaukee, Detroit, Grand Rapids, Flint, La Crosse, Minneapolis, Fargo, Aberdeen, Des Moines, Topeka and Oklahoma City. Rex was shocked to discover that those cities were surprisingly civilized. The shops were as modern and up-to-date as many on Fifth Avenue. The streets were better lit and cleaner than Park Avenue. The women, as Mindy, his third wife, had observed, were chicly attired. Rex and Mindy both wondered when this New York influence had spread westward. Or had it worked its way back from the West Coast? Perhaps it was merely the effect of television.

Even more of a surprise to Rex had been the quality of mid-western radio. The stations he listened to, almost without exception, seemed to have more character than the rigidly-formatted New York stations: WABC and WMBE with their hard rock . . . WOR and its talk, talk, talk, even through the tiny hours of the morning . . . WPAT and its ceaseless elevator music . . . WQXR and its pompous pseudo-intellectualism. Even his own WPO, Rex admitted silently, was distantly removed from being called a great radio station.

The syndicated radio program, he had discovered on his tour, was flourishing in the Midwest. And they were programs with substance. Featurettes covering sports, background news, comedy, general information . . . combining to form a virtual encyclopedia of the air. Rex had to admit that his own station contributed nothing to American culture, but was only a vehicle for playing commercials.

For about sixty seconds, all of this was a bitter realization for this *New Yorker*, but it was conveniently forgotten when he thought about the kind of money the performers on these stations were making. At WCCO, Minneapolis, he learned that newscasters were making only twelve thousand dollars a year. In Rex's mind there existed only one purpose in working for such a station: to gain enough experience to get out and head for the big money. Had he been informed that some men placed dedication to their profession over dollars and cents, Rex would have chalked them up as naive schmucks.

Rex recalled driving through Michigan during a mid-morning rain listening to various stations in the area. He was particularly impressed by the chatter of a deejay on a little station in Grand Rapids. Rex remembered the station had faded less than an hour after he left the Michigan town. And he recalled feeling sorry for this young talent who was doomed to a life of underpaid obscurity. Seven thousand dollars would be about tops in a market of this size. Rex had taken pains to inquire because he remembered dating a co-ed from Grand Rapids when he was a senior at USC.

Rex had been attracted to the Michigan girl . . . a refreshing good-looking sophomore he had met at a fraternity dance. She had come with one of his fraternity brothers, but Rex found himself dancing with her through most of the evening. She had seemed to be fascinated with his tales of Manhattan and he, in turn, couldn't believe such a great looker could come from a little town in Michigan. (Anything under half a million was a small town to Rex.) He had dated her three or

four times afterwards but dropped her when he discovered the limits of her warmth. He had geared himself to an all-night affair with the chick. Instead, he got a stern lecture from her about morality that included some quotations, she said, from Ecclesiastes 12. He'd been turned down before by girls, but this one had left her mark.

So the "hick-chick," as he thought of her ever after, passed out of his life. He thought of her every once in a while, curious as to what had become of her. Settled down in Grand Rapids with a local veterinarian, he often told himself.

Mindy had also exited from Rex Blair's life. She filed divorce papers shortly after they returned from the summer tour. They still saw each other now and then. In fact, they slept together just a couple of weeks after the divorce became final, enjoying each other as much as ever. The split had been inevitable though. Mindy wanted to spend two or three nights on the town every week and she liked variety in her companionship. She would remain fond of Rex Blair for the rest of her days and proud to have been his wife but, as she put it, a girl has to live. The decision had not bothered Rex. He expected to go through half a dozen wives in his lifetime. And, as long as Mindy and the others weren't too rough in the alimony department, he'd manage.

The free-lance business was picking up for Rex. For almost a year he had done very little, although his residual payments were still rolling in from jobs he had done over the last two years. Now he was eager to get back into the big money again. When was it . . . three or four years ago he had cracked the one hundred thousand dollar barrier for the only time? He liked that kind of money coming in. It took the pressure off. He shied away from on-camera work. It might be a little more exciting and pay a bit more, but he had seen too many of his friends get "hot" for on-camera work and then disappear forever. People got tired of a face, but Rex reasoned that a voice-over career could go on for years.

His agent, Sam Bunsen, knew that his client would not

be able to wheedle much more out of WPO than the \$26,500 he'd been making since joining the station four years ago. Sam kept his ear to the ground and threw out feelers to other stations but although most PD's agreed that Rex was excellent, nobody was buying. An agent is nothing if not undaunted, so Sam kept pushing.

Rex won an audition for a gasoline commercial that eventually brought him over eight thousand dollars for a half-hour recording. And his affair with casting director Erin Whitman paid off. He was selected as the spokesman for the Oat Crunchies account at a guaranteed twenty thousand for each of the next two years. Erin also hinted broadly, that if he paid attention to her, especially in bed, there would be other rewards in store for him. Rex, however, had other plans. Before the ink was dry on the Oat Crunchies account, he began to ease Erin out of his life. He had a new sideline . . . one that promised even greater rewards than commercials. Nonetheless, he needed better on-the-air exposure. And WPO was not the answer.

Rex put the pressure on Sam and Sam applied it to the other radio stations in the city. WPO ignored the concerted effort being made to find a new job for one of its deejays. The invitation list for Rex Blair's parties was expanded to include PD's and station managers in addition to the traditional agency people. One notable exception was Basil Kelcke. Mr. Kelcke sent his regrets. Still, WMBE did not go unrepresented. George Barnstead, Vice-President and General Manager and Champion Martini Drinker, was delighted to carry the standard of Mercury Broadcasting to a Rex Blair party. After four martinis, Mr. Barnstead became convinced that Rex Blair was Mr. Radio, even though he had never heard him on the air. By the end of the evening, Rex and George were "ol' buddies." It was Rex who personally poured Barnstead into a taxi at three o'clock in the morning after giving the cabby twenty dollars to deliver the head of WMBE to Manhasset.

Rex and Sam had done a lot of sowing. The time was

now ripe for reaping. And it seemed like harvest time had truly arrived on a clear Thursday afternoon during the Rex Blair show when the phone light began flashing impatiently in WPO's studio B. Sam Bunsen, fellow *New Yorker*, was on the line.

CHAPTER 15

Ev Dowling was back in town. Word spread quickly through the small community the radio and television people comprise in New York City. Ev was unique among radio personalities, for he spanned three generations of listeners. He was now fifty-nine years old. But he still carried his imposing six-feet-three-inch frame with an erect springiness, and his salt and pepper sideburns seemed to make him even more handsome than he had been almost four years earlier when he left New York. It was no accident that he looked better and walked taller now than he had in 1959, because Ev had not left by choice.

He had been the announcer for countless famous radio programs—Lux Radio Theatre and One Man's Family from the Coast; The Air Adventures of Jimmy Allen and Gasoline Alley from Chicago; and Tennessee Jed, When A Girl Marries and Superman from New York. He also turned up from time to time doing quiz shows, interview programs, newscasts and even an occasional singing performance. If a microphone was involved, Ev Dowling would be the right man. Whatever the script called for

. . . folksy, forbidding, dashing . . . Ev Dowling could handle it.

In his heyday, which covered all of the forties and most of the fifties, Ev pulled down as much as a hundred fifty thousand dollars a year. To match his take-home pay in this generation, radio people insisted he'd have to make almost a million a year. This was an exaggeration, but not completely distorted. Ev had earned . . . and spent . . . a fortune.

Ev developed what he called "a taste for the grape" early in his career. Whether this was part of the typical radio performer's "death wish" is something Ev never discussed. It was not an uncommon syndrome. Most announcers and actors took delight in courting disaster by gambling that they could make it down to the saloon for a quick one and still be back in time to sign a show off the air. It was part of the "live dangerously school" that demanded a stream of obscenities mouthed into "dead" microphones just before airtime. The fact that these dead mikes had a habit of suddenly becoming "live" at inopportune moments did not deter anybody. More than one "big name" had been embarrassed from coast to coast via a slip of the tongue. Since everything was live in those ante-tape days, whatever went wrong was a disaster.

As Ev's career reached its zenith, his drinking increased. At first, it had little effect on his work. It had been said more than once by a producer, "I'd rather have Ev Dowling drunk than anybody else sober." However, when Ev began to show up unshaven and sloppily dressed, the complaints started to filter in. Many of the big radio shows had live audiences, so the performers had to cater to appearance. Even those soap operas that were ground out in tiny studios had an occasional VIP advertiser in the control room or client's booth. To see an announcer weaving back and forth in front of the microphone as though he were drunk caused more than one raised agency eyebrow. Maybe he didn't *sound* drunk but he looked drunk.

Ev took the pledge at least six times during his last big year in broadcasting. Each time he fell off the wagon, he

fell harder. At last, he no longer just looked drunk . . . he began to sound it. His once resonant voice took on a shrill timbre and an occasional slur was noticed in his delivery. The less work he did, the more he drank. Job calls for Ev Dowling began to be rarities. His total income for 1958 was \$1347.00. On three occasions he woke up in a Bowery flophouse, his mouth tasting like the bottom of a birdcage, his pockets empty. Since Ev was the kind of person who always picked up the tab, he liked to carry a thousand dollars in cash at all times. The empty pocket evidence of having been robbed was thus more than a casual loss. These episodes led to still more drinking. Ev had reached the stage where he could not face life sober. His friends tried to help at first, then began to avoid him and finally cut him cold. Ev recognized this when he was sober, but when he was in his cups he seemed to have thousands of well-wishers and good buddies. It mattered not that these new-found friends were just drunken spongers. They were comrades, thought Ev, as he bought another round.

Things reached the nadir when Ev found himself in Bellevue Hospital with the D.T.'s. When they finally sobered him up, his alcohol-soaked brain told him that New York was his curse, not liquor. So he left town determined to make a comeback. He took a job as an announcer in eastern Pennsylvania. But word reached New York that he had been fired there, too. Years passed with only an occasional report finding its way back to the tiny broadcasting clique. Ev was in St. Louis, then Miami. He was working in Eugene, Oregon . . . then Yreka, California. Then . . . no word at all.

Ev was never sure just how or why he turned up in Hollywood that December day. He could not recall whether he had hitchhiked or taken a bus from Yreka. But there he was, standing on the corner of Hollywood and Vine staring bleary-eyed at once-familiar surroundings. Suddenly he felt a resounding whack on his shoulder. Whirling belligerently, he faced a man with a dimly remembered face. Ev focused his bloodshot eyes carefully and then broke into a smile as he recognized a former

New York radio director who had switched to television. He hugged his old friend and then tried to steer the director into a bar for a celebration drink. The director smiled, shook his head and pointed to his watch. It was ten o'clock in the morning.

"Let's save that for tonight," said the director. "You want to be in shape for the reunion, don't you?"

Ev looked puzzled. "What reunion?" he asked.

It was the director's turn to look puzzled. "I thought that was why you were here," he said. "All the old gang is getting together for a re-hash bash. They've been flying in from Chicago and New York for the last two days. Didn't you get the invitation?"

Ev's eyes took on a faraway look. "The old radio crowd," he said wistfully. "Gee, it would be great to see them again." He looked down at his frazzled jacket and rubbed his hand over his stubble of a beard. "But I can't go looking like this."

"The hell you can't. Come on. You're coming home with me."

The director took Ev home and bathed and fed him like a child. He insisted that Ev take a long nap so he would be in shape for the reunion. Intrigued with the idea of seeing old friends and determined to make a good showing, Ev allowed himself to be sobered up and dressed in one of the director's suits. The dark blue sharkskin hung a bit loosely on Ev's emaciated frame, but the director was as tall as Ev, so only a Savile Row tailor would have found cause for complaint.

When they arrived at the party, Ev looked quite presentable. In the old home week atmosphere, dozens of nearly forgotten names and places gradually unblurred and the years seemed to slip away. Ev was in seventh heaven and too busy reviving old memories and rehashing yesterday's good times to venture toward the bar. From time to time he glanced at the array of bottles a mere thirty feet away from him and licked his lips in anticipation, but each time he headed in the direction of liquor, he was intercepted by another voice from radio's

golden age. He forgot the need for a drink as he found himself once again the center of attention.

Actually, he was one of two centers of attention. The other was Vera Carrera, once the queen of radio, now a strikingly handsome woman of sixty-one enjoying the fruits of semi-retirement. Although she was two years older than Ev, she looked fifteen years younger. Vera radiated good health. She could outjog most men over forty and was someone to be reckoned with on the tennis court. The swimming pool that cut a crescent shape in her backyard was not merely a symbol of California affluence. It was a health machine to be used daily. Even when she worked in New York, Vera's agent was under standing orders to see to it that no rehearsal schedule interfered with her daily workouts. She took a lot of teasing about this dedication to physical conditioning, but her friends soon learned that Vera was no mere health nut. She was an avid student of nutrition but eschewed food fads. She ate wheat germ long before and long after it was "in."

Vera was no crusader. She argued that she paid attention to her health because it enabled her to get more out of life. She was a fine sculptress, an accomplished pianist and a licensed airplane pilot. Only by maintaining her rigid standards of exercise and eating could she pursue her avocations and still keep up the hectic pace of a half dozen live radio shows per day.

Ev Dowling had a drink in his hand when he was introduced to Vera.

"Your reputation precedes you, Miss Carrera," he intoned. "I am mortified to have in my hand the very foe you have attempted to vanquish. I look to you for what I should do to avoid your displeasure."

Vera studied Ev carefully to see if he were mocking her. Finding no evidence, she replied, "Mr. Dowling, my dear, your personal habits are of no concern to anyone but you and your loved ones. My only thought at the moment is regret that I cannot claim to have appeared on a radio broadcast with you. Out of three thousand

programs, one might expect I would have had the pleasure of working with you on at least one occasion. But it seems that when I worked in Hollywood you were back east and you came out here while I went to New York to work the serials."

"Ah, Miss Carrera, if you will but think back to one of those . . . was it four thousand appearances you made . . ."

Vera Carrera was too enchanted with the strength and rich resonance of the famous voice to correct Ev on the count of her radio performances. True, whiskey and cigarettes had taken their toll. There was an occasional fuz-ziness to some of his words and Ev cleared his throat more often than a professional speaker normally does. But none of these defects could hide the quality that had once sent shivers of desire through women all over America.

"I believe," Ev went on, "if you go through your file of souvenir scripts, you will find that you once appeared on Superman. Is that not true?"

Vera was not quite sure whether he was putting her on or not. She had never kept a file of scripts . . . rare was the performer who had . . . and she had even forgotten that Superman was once a radio program. Radio performers of those days, for the most part, paid little attention to which serial they were on unless they had a starring role. There were, of course, a handful of actors and actresses who could remember every show on which they appeared. But, for the many without total recall, a performance on Ma Perkins, The Second Mrs. Burton, Dick Tracy or Don Winslow of the Navy was quickly forgotten.

For an announcer, however, it was different. Most, like Ev Dowling, remained with a program . . . often for several years. Ev was reasonably certain that Vera had been on Superman one afternoon back in the late forties. But it was possible it was on some other show. As he chatted with her, he became painfully aware of how differently time had treated both of them. Or perhaps, he thought, how differently they had treated time. He had heard all of the stories about her food and exercise

habits. Were they indeed responsible, or was she one of those ageless people who move through life seemingly defying Father Time?

Vera was also aware of the difference as she absorbed every aspect of this once great announcer's appearance. This man had been one of the most handsome specimens of her generation. What had happened?

As the party picked up speed and the activities became more boisterous, Ev and Vera found it easy to escape the friends that had blocked their early attempts to get to know each other. They were still surrounded by noisy compatriots but they continued their conversation as though they were alone. When they made a quiet exit together, no one noticed. Outside, in the clear evening air, Ev suddenly realized that he had not even taken a sip from his glass while he was talking to Vera. Nor did he want a drink now. It gave him a strange feeling of exhilaration to leave a party cold sober for the first time in years.

The conversation which Ev and Vera had begun at the party continued for weeks. They talked as though they were discovering the use of their voices for the first time. Long years of professional training prevented them from stepping on each other's lines, but a momentary pause became the cue for a gushing forth of ideas, dreams and memories. They took long walks at dawn . . . and talked. They joined each other at lunch . . . and talked. They talked constantly . . . driving to the mountains for a picnic or splashing in Vera's pool.

All at once, the talking ceased. Now they shared each other's company in silence . . . each immersed in thought. Neither understood the reason for this sudden reversal, although most teen-agers could have analyzed it quickly. Love had come to Vera and Ev. A late love . . . an autumn love . . . but love, nonetheless. The same love that makes a youth lose his normally ravenous appetite now gripped Ev Dowling. Unconsciously, he had given up liquor. Knowing Vera had proved more therapeutic than all the cold turkey cures he ever tried.

It was six months before Vera Carrera and Ev Dowl-

ing married. Had they wed twenty-five years earlier, their marriage would have been the sensation of the gossip columns. Bob Hope and Fred Allen would have had a field day with topical gags about the twosome.

Happening when it did, the ceremony merited only a brief mention in *Time*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report*. There was no coverage by *Life*. The *New York Times* had a pictureless story on page seventeen. The *Daily News* was kinder . . . nostalgic pictures of both Ev and Vera during their peak days and a wedding photo. This story evoked a couple of letters to the editor recalling the good old days when Ev and Vera were household names.

The only flaw in the union of Ev and Vera was money. Vera had it. Ev did not. At first, it did not matter. Ev allowed himself to be pressured into staying with his director friend until he could get on his feet. As the weeks stretched into months, he began to chafe at the bit. Only his growing love and need for Vera kept him from pulling up stakes and moving back to the northern part of the state. Jobs were easier for has-beens in the smaller markets. And Ev was a has-been. Or so he thought. He could remember his big money triumphs of the past, but he could not envisage ever recapturing the confidence needed to make a comeback. He was off liquor, but he secretly harbored a fear that this was just one more temporary journey on the wagon. He dreaded the inevitable day when he would fall off again.

Ev did not fall off the wagon. Gradually he came to realize that he had licked the habit. He would never again be tempted to take even a sip of wine. He had learned that he was and always would be an alcoholic. Which meant no booze . . . ever. Defeating whiskey, however, proved far easier than defeating pride. Ev had always been the host, never the guest. It was alien to his nature to accept a handout. And he considered his free ride with the director to be nothing more than charity. It tortured him to see Vera pick up a check in a restaurant.

Vera was very wealthy. Early in her career she decided that she would never spend her sunset years in a

home for aging actors. She recognized how easily the entertainment industry tossed performers up to the top only to push them back to the bottom. So she started to put her money into real estate in the late thirties. She bought land in the San Fernando Valley . . . and land in Long Island's Nassau County when nobody else would touch it. The stock market frightened her with its constant fluctuations, but land always went up.

Having finally found the man she had sought all her life, Vera was determined not to let money stand between them. It was she who pressed the marriage issue. Ev stalled. He loved her, he admitted, but he needed time to recoup his fortune. Vera argued that they had everything except time. Again Ev hesitated, reluctant to take advantage of California's community property law. Finally, he capitulated, but not before exacting a promise from Vera that she would follow him wherever his work called him.

Vera would have preferred not to return to New York. She loved the sun and her luxurious California home was built to take advantage of it. It was an hour's drive from Hollywood, but it was also an hour's drive from smog. Trading this for the dirt and noise of Manhattan was not uppermost in her wishes. Nonetheless, the Dowlings moved to New York. Ev was determined to work his way back to the top. And he felt more secure in New York than he did on the West Coast.

With time on her hands, Vera decided to take a crack at the television commercial field for the first time in her career. Her agent avoided subjecting her to the "cattle call" auditions that often prove so fruitless. He told Vera that most of the ostensibly wide-open auditions at New York advertising agencies are little more than a game played by casting directors enjoying their role of God for a day.

The hopeful talent reports to the casting office receptionist who listlessly hands out the Xeroxed commercial copy while checking off the talent's name on the sheet of paper before her. Almost noiselessly, the glamorous receptionist (invariably the best-dressed girl at the

agency) dials an inside number and surreptitiously repeats the talent's name. Then, politely but without emotion, she asks the talent to wait.

The wait can easily be for an hour or more as the room fills steadily with performer after performer. On a Monday the waiting room may be filled with nine year old boys, each with freckles on his nose and three deliberately untrained hairs standing up boyishly on the back of his head. On Tuesday the call might be for an "Adolphe Menjou type," which peoples the room with distinguished gentlemen of later years each sporting a waxed mustache. Later in the week the room may be filled with dumpy, middle-aged women or with gorgeous titian-haired starlets or with ruggedly handsome leading men or with ordinary looking housewife types. Eventually, after digesting every available magazine, the performer is directed to a studio where a faceless panel of judges sits, pencils and pads poised, staring at the candidate. After a quick voice-level check, the performer is asked to record the copy. Once . . . twice . . . three times. Within two minutes it's all over and the talent is thanked profusely for taking time to participate in the voice and face search.

The theatre is tough, hard and cruel. The television commercial world is courteous, kind and cruel. An actor trying to crack Broadway is rebuffed at every turn. The producer's receptionist snarls at him and growls "no casting today." The Madison Avenue receptionist smiles welcome. The casting director seems delighted to see the performer, but when the audition is over the performer returns to the streets of Manhattan never to hear how he was graded or who won the audition or if the commercial was ever made. Maybe the theatre is less cruel.

Vera was too important a property to be asked to undergo that kind of treatment. Her agent simply made a recording of her in his office with a small Sony tape recorder, dubbed a stackful of copies and took them around to the three dozen New York advertising agencies where he was acquainted. He was firm in ruling out any cattle calls for his distinguished client. If sponsors wanted her, it would cost them double scale for she

might not be available for long. She certainly didn't need the money. The sales pitch worked. The mere fact that Vera Carrera was not begging for work made her all the more appealing to the agencies. Young and Rubicam broke the ice and when the word got out that they had used her, the others scrambled wildly to sign her. In the span of two weeks she recorded eight commercials. On one occasion, she was in the recording studio a total of forty-five seconds. All she had to do was laugh sexily for a mouthwash sponsor. The first take was a "purchase," as the producer called it, and Vera Carrera Dowling was richer by what turned out to be another six thousand dollars.

Ev took a different approach. For the first few days, he visited the networks to renew old friendships with the announcers at NBC, CBS, ABC and MBE. He was distressed to learn that so many of his old friends, announcers and engineers, had passed away. Many had retired or gone to Florida to work part-time for small stations. He hung around while some of the older men still serving on the network staffs performed their routine duties, doing station breaks. It took Ev less than a week to realize that the old days were gone and that his future definitely did not lie with a staff job.

It had all changed so much. He wondered how he might fit into the modern radio industry. Would radio audiences of today, so young and hip, be interested in what Ev Dowling had to say concerning the world about him? He had so many experiences to share with today's audiences and stories to tell that he knew he might make it big on a talk program. But of what value, he wondered, would he be in introducing rock numbers to the teen-agers? Well, he thought, they dig Bogart and W. C. Fields . . . I'm a link to that era . . . maybe . . .

Ev spent a sultry afternoon in the office of Vera's agent. The agent had the same doubts as Ev . . . but also the same fascination with the idea of a comeback. Could a star from the past return to New York radio and make a hit with the youngsters? He knew one thing for sure. It would be a snap for a publicity campaign. He

could easily visualize the full-page ads set in Broadway type with nostalgic pictures of Amos 'n' Andy, Charlie McCarthy and Baron Munchausen. All symbols of an age in which Ev Dowling reigned as America's number one radio announcer.

CHAPTER 16

Rex Blair saw the flashing phone light out of the corner of his eye. As he laid aside Earl Wilson's column and reached for the phone, his ear told him the record was coming to an end. He picked up the phone and said, "Hold on a sec'." Placing the phone in his lap, he waited for the red on-the-air light to come on and introduced the next record. As the mike light went out, he again placed the phone to his ear.

"Yeah?" said Rex.

"This is Sam," said the voice. "Meet me in my office when you get off the air. I have something important for you."

Rex heard a dial tone before he could ask his agent what it was all about. For the remaining minutes of the show, he wondered what could be so urgent. Might be a big TV commercial deal, he ventured silently. Or perhaps . . . no . . . you don't mean he's got another radio job for me. I haven't heard of anybody getting fired around town.

Sam was on the phone as Rex strolled into his office. The agent quickly ended the phone conversation declar-

ing, "I'll get back to you, gotta run." Without waiting for a reply from his caller, he set the phone down in the cradle, stood up, leaned forward and pressed down hard on the desk with his thumbs.

"I won't beat around the bush, Rex. Mercury is looking for a new morning man."

Rex pursed his lips together in meditation, stared for a moment at a pencil-drawn Parisian street scene that hung at a slight tilt on Sam's dingy, yellow wall. He sat down. After a long pause, Rex asked, "What's with Daddy-O?"

"Daddy-O, you'll be pleased to learn, has decided to retire at the ripe old age of thirty-nine. Seems he wants to spend the rest of his life fishing in Minnesota."

Rex found it hard to believe.

"Where'd you get this information?"

"From your very good friend, George Barnstead. We had lunch today. Now, get this. The lucky bird who gets the slot will be a hundred G's, just what Daddy-O's been taking down. And the station wants to nail the deal with the first five-year contract since Marvin Marshall. It seems they don't want to go through this search routine again."

Rex whistled softly.

"Wait'll I finish," Sam continued. "Every agent in town is going to be after this deal, but I have it on good authority that you have the inside track. Barnstead's sold on you."

"What about the program director, what's his name?"

"Kelcke? Forget about him. Barnstead's the boss and Barnstead's the guy who'll make the decision. You oughta know a PD is just a figurehead. The manager runs the station and Barnstead's the manager. Now pay attention. As I said, you've got the inside track, but I think we should take out some insurance anyway. Barnstead is a guy on the take. Remember how he sloshed down the free booze at your last brawl? Well, I think we can cinch this deal if we toss a little giftie his way."

"Fine by me," agreed Rex. "Send him a case of Chivas Regal."

"Rex, Rex, come on, get with it. We're playing for a hundred thou' and Barnstead pulls down more than half that himself. You'd insult him with a case of Scotch."

"Okay, what's he want? A broad? A couple of hundred a week under the table? You name it and he's got it."

Sam swiveled around in his chair and rummaged around on a shelf behind him. He produced a copy of Yachting magazine and tossed it over to Rex.

"Barnstead loves to sail. Take a look at the ad on page seventy-three."

Rex thumbed through the magazine until he came to the page Sam had memorized. It was an advertisement for a thirty-foot sloop. The boat sold for fifteen thousand four hundred thirty dollars. Rex's jaw dropped as he looked up at Sam.

"You've gotta be kidding!"

"Simple arithmetic, lover. You lay out fifteen big ones and you get back one hundred. Every year."

"But," sputtered Rex, "that's not a kickback. That's grand larceny."

"All I know is that Barnstead gave me the magazine at lunch and specifically mentioned that sloop. He didn't actually say the deal was yours if you came through, but the message was in neon."

Ten days later, a gleaming, white-hulled sailboat rested at anchor in Manhasset Bay. On board were George Barnstead and Rex Blair. Sam Bunsen was conspicuously absent. Rex explained to George that he had always dreamed of owning a boat like this, but discovered after he bought it that he was subject to mal de mer. Knowing Barnstead's love for the sea, Rex wanted George to have the boat. However, lest anyone get the wrong idea, Rex was selling the boat to George rather than giving it to him. George said he understood perfectly. Rex Blair signed the transfer papers and the deal was consummated when George Barnstead handed him a check in the amount of one dollar.

Basil Kelcke took another sip of black coffee, glanced at his watch and strolled toward the men's room. He splashed cold water on his face, re-combed his thinning black hair and straightened his tie. The mirror made it evident that he'd still appear tired to his visitor no matter how much cold water he doused on himself. He wondered fleetingly if Ev Dowling were as concerned with his own appearance this morning. One thing's for sure, thought Basil. Dowling hasn't been up all night listening to tapes.

Basil smiled to himself as he walked back to his office. This is a strange turn of events, he thought. Here I am dolling up for a man who's going to ask me for a job. But Ev Dowling was more to Kelcke than a man looking for a job. Ev Dowling was one of Basil Kelcke's boyhood idols. He was Superman's announcer. How many hundreds of episodes had Basil heard when he was a kid in the Bronx? How many hundreds of times had Basil sat hunched in front of the radio listening with awe?

Basil was still awed at the thought of meeting the most famous announcer of all time. Yes, he was better known than Jimmy Wallington or Harry Von Zell or Milton Cross, decided Basil. He was also impressed with the way Dowling seemed to be slipping back into broadcasting. Basil had seen him on two TV commercials. He understood his voice was being used on several others. Suddenly Basil realized that he had also heard him on Daddy-O's show a week ago. He recalled being impressed by the majestic voice of the Buick spokesman. He remembered telling himself, that's selling!

Ten minutes later, Jeannie ushered a tall, stunningly handsome man into Basil's office. Basil didn't wait for the formal introductions. He grasped the famous announcer's hand and shook it warmly as Jeannie slipped out and silently closed the door.

Basil started to gush his admiration for Ev, but checked himself before the words came out. He reminded himself sternly that it was necessary to keep this meeting on a strict business basis. If Ev became WMBE's new morning man, there would be ample time

for pleasantries. If he failed to get the job, premature words of adulation could prove embarrassing. Basil decided to get right to the point of the meeting.

"First of all, Ev," he declared, "the man who sits in Daddy-O's chair will make a hundred thousand dollars a year. That means we can have the greatest and most famous voice in America or we can go in the other direction and pick an unknown. We could, I hate to use this word, exploit you to the limits. You would profit personally from the enormous coverage we'd get for you in the press and, of course, the station would profit equally. You and Vera are already making news. This would be icing on the cake. Now, the obvious drawback to hiring you. We're reaching for the kids in this market. If we bring you in, what's their reaction going to be? Will they think we've gone square? Or will you be a living Bogart? I don't have the answer. I just don't know. But I darned well better know in the next few days. Well, that's the picture. You know the terms, a five-year pact, three weeks vacation and ten individual days off per year. Frankly, I can tell you that as of now, you're the leading contender. That doesn't mean you're in. The question that concerns me is: could you maintain the ratings?"

Ev Dowling saw the picture clearly. He expressed complete agreement with WMBE's program director that the publicity would be a natural. They certainly wouldn't have to pay for any of it. The press would have a ball with the comeback angle. As to whether or not he would appeal to the kids, Ev Dowling was honest. "I just don't know either," he admitted.

Basil was embarrassed to suggest it, but he asked Ev if he would mind cutting an audition tape. Ev readily agreed and put Basil at ease by stating that there was no time like the present. Basil buzzed Jeannie and arranged to have an idle studio set up. Ev studied the music list and the catch-phrases that Basil gave him and entered the studio.

Listening to the tape after Dowling had departed, Basil found himself intrigued. Dowling was different, but good. Darn good. It was a long shot, but the marriage of

Ev Dowling's old world style of delivery with modern rock might just work. Basil closed his eyes and leaned back in his chair as the tape continued to roll.

"Who's that on the tape?"

Basil opened his eyes and discovered a visitor. George Barnstead had quietly entered the room and was standing in the doorway listening to the tape.

"Ev Dowling," replied Kelcke.

"Ev Dowling?" echoed Barnstead. "You mean the old-time radio announcer? I thought he was dead."

"Far from it," said Kelcke. "In fact, I'm giving serious thought to the possibility of using him to replace Daddy-O."

"Forget it," snorted Barnstead. "He sounds like a horse's ass with those pear-shaped tones. Besides, I've found Daddy-O's successor."

Basil raised his eyebrows. He and Barnstead had lived with a tacitly agreed armed truce ever since Spaulding had left. Kelcke saw to it that the general manager was photographed with the Mayor and the Governor and Barnstead was the one whose name appeared on the plaques and citations the station regularly received for public service. Kelcke also made a point of coming to Barnstead with any major problems. But it was Kelcke who solved those problems. This was the first time Barnstead had interfered in a program decision.

"What we need," continued Barnstead, "is a modern day pro. You're wasting your time listening to all of those tapes. The boy we're looking for is right here in town. He's smooth, smart and with it. And he's perfect for WMBE."

"May I be so bold as to inquire who this paragon might be?" asked Kelcke with just a touch of sarcasm.

"Rex Blair."

As Barnstead began to extol the merits of Rex Blair, Basil studied him curiously. There is something about this, thought Kelcke, that doesn't add up. Barnstead is pitching a disk jockey like an agent, not like a general manager. Why the sudden interest? When Turk Myers'

ratings began to slip a couple of years ago and Kelcke dumped him for the Miami deejay, Barnstead had refused to get involved in the firing and hiring. He had, in fact, studiously avoided any discussion about programming policy. Why then this turnabout? It puzzled and annoyed Basil. Equally annoying was Barnstead himself. He had a rasping voice that sounded as though he had a chronic case of laryngitis. When he smiled, he looked as though his face was wired together. Despite these handicaps, he insisted on doing station editorials on the air. Each time he did one, he acted as though it was a Peabody award-winning documentary. Sometimes it took him twenty takes just to get the sixty-second editorial down to his satisfaction. It was all the recording engineer could to keep a straight face at the farce Barnstead presented. Basil had tried once to make a subtle suggestion that someone else record the editorials, but Barnstead was adamant. Now he sounded equally adamant about Rex Blair.

"Has Blair submitted a tape?" asked Basil.

"Why should he?" answered Barnstead. "He's on the air every day over WPO. All you have to do is listen."

"But that's an easy-listening station. How do we know how Blair will sound in a 'rock' format?"

"Because *I* say he'll be great. That's how *we* know," replied Barnstead testily.

"Well . . ." hedged Basil. "I'd still like to give it some more thought."

"You just do that little thing," said Barnstead pointedly. "You give it a great deal of thought."

Barnstead turned on his heel and stalked out of the office. Basil stared after him for a moment and then turned on the tape machine again to listen to more of Ev Dowling's audition. After thirty seconds, Basil found his mind wandering and flicked the machine off. He rose from his desk and began to pace as he pondered his quandary. Obviously, Barnstead was determined that Rex Blair was going to get the job. The simple solution was, of course, to hire Rex Blair. If he worked out . . .

all was well and Basil would keep his nose clean with Barnstead. But suppose Blair turned out to be a dud? Then it was Kelcke's neck.

Maybe Blair would be okay, thought Basil. But was "okay" enough for the number one station in the country? What about Dowling? He too could turn out to be a loser. Then what? Barnstead would have a field day with "I told you so's"—that's what.

Basil took the problem home with him and wrestled with it for half the night. Millie tried to question him, but he decided against involving her in the decision. Time was running out. And Kelcke knew that he could never talk Daddy-O into another extension. In the morning, when the little transistor clock radio nudged the Kelckes into another day, Basil was still no closer to a solution than he had been the night before. He dawdled over breakfast, spent an extra fifteen minutes in the shower, started out the door, came back for his briefcase, set it down and went into the bathroom to wash his hands for the third time and finally left his apartment. He dragged his feet east on Seventy-Second Street, paused for ten minutes to study the window of an antique store, gathered up steam again and strode toward Central Park. He stopped twice to peer intently at a forsythia bush which was trying to bloom and finally arrived at his office . . . forty-five minutes late. He had still not made up his mind.

Jeannie entered his office with his morning coffee in one hand and a tape in the other.

"Good morning, boss-man," she said with her usual morning cheeriness. "I come bearing gifts. An eye-opener and an earful."

Reaching for the coffee, Basil replied, "I need the eye-opener but, please, no more tapes."

Jeannie was already threading the tape. "Just this one, as a favor to me."

Basil sighed a reluctant assent and leaned back to listen. In a moment, a pleasant, though unprofessional, voice broke in brightly over the opening bars of a song.

"Let's go, gang . . . number four on the WCOO charts

this week . . . hey . . . would you put down the newspaper, Bernie . . . for crying out loud . . . what do you do with an engineer who won't take the time to push on a cartridge when millions of Grand Rapids youths . . . well, thousands . . . well, actually my kid sister promised she'd listen this morning for the weather forecast . . . Bernie . . . I can't believe it, gang . . . he's going to work . . . that's it . . . yes, push the button. Oh, you're a doll, Bernie . . . oh, why didn't I meet you before I met my wife . . . isn't he great, gang? Here's number four . . . the Supremes have it for us."

Basil Kelcke had heard the same kind of nonsense chatter a hundred times or more in going through audition tapes. He'd heard far better voices and much smoother delivery. But there was something in this tape that seemed to reach out for the listener. Basil couldn't put his finger on it, but it was there.

"What town did you say, Jeannie . . . Detroit?" Basil asked thoughtfully.

"You'll throw me out, but I'll tell you anyway. Grand Rapids, Michigan."

Basil broke up with laughter. All of the tension that had been building in him for the last fifteen hours suddenly released itself. Jeannie stared at him with a half-smile on her face. She could see the humor in the situation, but it wasn't that funny.

"There's more to the story," Jeannie went on. "He hasn't even applied for a job here. He probably doesn't even know WMBE is on the lookout for a successor to Daddy-O. In fact, it's quite possible Daryl Hoffert never heard of Daddy-O."

Jeannie explained to Basil that she had been going through a mountain of tapes with the studio engineers during her spare moments. She listened to only fragments of each, secure in the knowledge that if she was to help uncover a new talent, she'd recognize it in the first thirty seconds. She had just stepped into the studio with coffee and a packaged cake for the engineer when she was stopped in her tracks by the fresh, clean, Mid-western voice. He sounded like a boy most high school

girls would flip over, but he had just enough maturity to give him authority.

Basil walked over to the tape machine and re-wound the tape to the beginning. It had been an amateurish dubbing job, he observed, noting the lack of any leader. Tiny bits of the head of the tape had already been broken off. He threaded the tape and played it again. This time he listened more carefully. As he did, a plan began to unfold in his mind. Maybe this was the answer to the conflict with Barnstead. Yesterday Barnstead seemed adamant about hiring Rex Blair. If Basil tried to jam Ev Dowling down the general manager's throat, there was bound to be trouble. However, a third entry might be the face-saving solution. Besides, thought Basil, I have a hunch this Daryl whatever-his-name-is can be the best thing that ever happened to WMBE. He smiled as he remembered that it was Jeannie who had originally brought Daddy-O to his attention. Maybe she should be named assistant program director. He'd have to remember to kick that one around with Barnstead.

Basil picked up his phone and dialed Barnstead's number. At first, Barnstead rejected the idea of meeting in Basil's office. Protocol dictated that Kelcke come to him. Besides, Barnstead said there was no need to hear any more tapes. However, Basil persisted and finally Barnstead agreed.

One look at Barnstead's face as he entered the office told Basil that it was going to be a tough sell.

"Okay, I'm here," rasped Barnstead. "Now what's this tape you think I should waste my time with?"

Basil said nothing as he started the tape machine. Again the voice of Daryl Hoffert filled the room. Basil watched Barnstead's face as the mylar ribbon moved across the playback head. The general manager's countenance was frozen in a bored mask. After a minute of the audition had been heard, Barnstead began to fidget in his chair.

"What am I supposed to be hearing?" asked Barnstead in an exasperated tone. "Who is this guy?"

Basil hesitated before answering, then took a deep

breath and plunged in. "I think we're listening to Daddy-O's replacement."

Barnstead threw up his hands. "I thought we settled that yesterday," he exploded. "Rex Blair is Daddy-O's replacement and that's that!"

"Look, George," began Basil quietly. "The last thing I want to do is lock horns with my boss, but I think I know my job. I've done nothing but think about this since yesterday. I agree with you that Ev Dowling might be too much of a gamble. We're number one and we have to stay that way. But I'm convinced that Rex Blair is not what we're looking for. I'll admit that he's smooth and a pro, but we need more than that. We need somebody who can establish an immediate rapport with the kids and still hold the grownups. Rex Blair is too sophisticated. He's great where he is, but he's not for WMBE. I know I'm not explaining it too well, but this kid on the tape has it."

"Has what?" growled Barnstead.

"It's nothing you can put down in black and white. I can't describe the kind of person we're looking for. I just know it when I hear it."

"You mean you get a feeling?"

"Something like that."

"This is big business, Kelcke. Hunches have no place in it. I didn't buy Dowling and I don't buy this kid. Now let's stop horsing around. I've got a lot to do today. Get on the phone and sign Rex Blair. That's an order."

Barnstead stood up and prepared to leave, but Basil blocked him. They stood eyeball to eyeball for a few moments. Finally, Basil turned away.

"I can't do that, George," said Basil with a trembling voice.

Barnstead's eyes bugged out as he shouted, "Don't tell me you can't do it! Goddam it, I gave you an order! Who the hell do you think you are?"

Basil took another deep breath as he fought to control his voice. "George, I hate to put it this way, but I know I'm right about this thing. I'm afraid it's either Rex Blair or me. You can't have both."

Barnstead glared at Kelcke for a full minute. This time he failed to stare the program director down.

"Okay," said Barnstead. "You want a choice, you got it. I choose Rex Blair."

"I'll have my resignation on your desk Monday morning," said Basil quietly.

Barnstead did not answer as he stormed out. He strode purposefully back to his own office and placed a call to Sam Bunsen.

"Have your client in my office Monday morning," Barnstead told Bunsen. "I'll have a contract drawn up."

Jeannie poked her head in Basil's door after Barnstead had gone.

"Do I place a call to Grand Rapids?" she asked.

"No," answered Basil succinctly.

Jeannie looked at her boss with surprise, then slowly closed the door as she went back to her desk. A few minutes later, Basil came out and told her he was leaving for the day. Jeannie's heart leaped into her throat as she glanced at the clock on the wall. It was 11:25.

Barnstead also left early that Friday. He and his wife had a dinner date in Connecticut with his first cousin and her husband, Ben Killian. Barnstead smiled as he contemplated the evening. Killian studiously avoided him in the Mercury building. But this was different. This was family . . . and a good chance to score some points. He wondered what Killian would think about Kelcke's resignation, but shrugged it off with the thought that the Chairman of the Board of Mercury Broadcasting was too busy to be bothered with program directors. On his way to Manhasset, Barnstead vowed to stay sober for the evening. He brushed aside his wife's proffered martini when he entered his home and went upstairs to shower and shave. Tonight he had to look good, sound good and be good.

When the Barnsteads arrived at the Killian's palatial house in Connecticut, George again declined a cocktail, although he did accept the dinner wine. He knew Killian was a wine connoisseur and would be offended if his

guests refused the vintage libations he featured at dinner.

The dinner progressed serenely as all dinners did at the Killians'. As Barnstead savored the chateaubriand en papillote and marveled over the asparagus with sauce mousseline, he told himself that he should cut down on the booze. Food was so much better when the palate was not dulled with liquor. He promised himself that he would change his habits. He too would become a gourmet.

After dinner, Killian invited Barnstead into his study for a brandy. The two men settled themselves in huge leather armchairs and sipped silently. Killian finally broke the silence.

"How are you coming with a replacement for Daddy-O?"

Barnstead looked up, surprised that Killian even knew of Daddy-O's imminent departure. "It's all settled," he answered. "I'm bringing Rex Blair over from WPO. He's signing Monday."

It was Killian's turn to look surprised. "That's funny. I would never have figured Kelcke to go to WPO for a disk jockey."

"He didn't. I found Blair," said Barnstead proudly. "Which reminds me. I'm going to have to find a new program director. Kelcke quit today."

Killian masked his shock as he digested that piece of information. He did not ask why Kelcke had resigned. He didn't have to. Barnstead finds Blair. Kelcke quits. Two and two are four.

"You stupid schmuck," said Killian quietly.

Barnstead's jaw dropped. He spilled some of his brandy on the heavy carpet and stooped quickly to mop it up with his handkerchief.

"You stupid schmuck," repeated Killian more vehemently. "You've just cost us the best program director in the country. Why do you think WMBE is the number one station? Basil Kelcke, that's why."

"I thought Amie Spaulding built the station," sputtered Barnstead.

"Not even Spaulding thinks that. He's NOT a stupid schmuck." Barnstead winced at the constant repetition of the word.

"Kelcke made that station," continued Killian. "He made it number one and, for the past three years, he's kept it number one. He did it because he knows a disk jockey when he hears one. I don't know who this Rex Blair is, but if Kelcke doesn't want him, you can bet your ass he's got a good reason."

Barnstead made a feeble attempt to justify his decision. "Blair is one of the top commercial announcers in town. He's a real pro, Ben. I'm confident he'll be bigger than Daddy-O ever was. Why, Daddy-O used to stumble over three-syllable words."

"Bullshit. Daddy-O makes more money doing commercials than you and I put together. If he stumbles over a word, you can bet your bottom dollar it's because he wants to. Performers don't come wrapped up in little square boxes. I thought you knew that. Look at the really big stars. Neither Ethel Merman nor Mary Martin is a raving beauty. I can find you better singers and better actresses. But they have both been superstars for years. Why? I don't know. Call it charisma . . . call it electricity . . . call it whatever you want. The fact remains they have it."

Barnstead looked up with a start. It was the same argument Kelcke had used that afternoon. Suddenly he was scared. He realized he was in over his head. He thought of the sloop and wondered if he'd have to give it back. No! thought Barnstead. I bought it. It wasn't a gift. But he knew better. Well, he'd worry about that tomorrow. Right now he had to get back in Killian's good graces.

"Maybe I was a little hasty, Ben," he began.

"Hasty! You may have blown the whole thing. If we lose Kelcke, you're through. You don't think I'd let you try to run a station alone, do you? As long as Kelcke's calling the shots, I don't give a damn who's general manager. But if Kelcke leaves, it'll take a lot more than a drunken first cousin to keep that station on top."

Barnstead blanched at the words "drunken first cousin." It was the first time Killian had ever referred to the Barnsteads' relationship to Killian's wife. It was also the first time Killian had made reference to Barnstead's drinking. Barnstead had been sure Killian was unaware of that.

"What are we going to do?" asked Barnstead meekly.

"We aren't going to do anything. *You* are. I can't afford to interfere in this thing in the open. As Chairman of the Board, it's my duty to back up my top executives . . . even when they are schmucks. I have to pretend I don't even know about this resignation. If Kelcke comes to me, I'll have to defend you. That's how we play the game. It's part of the executive syndrome." Killian was explaining this to Barnstead as though he were a child. "But *you* can and *you* will do something about it, now. You get on that phone and call Kelcke tonight. You tell him that you've been giving this Blair thing a lot of thought and you've decided that the final decision should rest with Kelcke. Admit you were hotheaded today and ask him to reconsider his resignation. That's what you do . . . right this minute."

"My God, Ben," cried Barnstead in an anguished voice. "Can't I send him a memo? If I call him now, I'll never be able to face him again. He'll lord it over me every chance he gets."

"We'll worry about that later. As for facing him, you've got a choice: face Kelcke or face me."

Barnstead rose from his chair and started for the phone.

"And while you're at it," added Killian, "tell Kelcke you've decided you're not going to do any more editorials on the air. Your voice sounds like a whistling asshole."

The Barnsteads left right after that pleading an early sailing date. Killian's wife was perplexed at the sudden departure, but Killian said he understood perfectly as he smiled them out to their car.

The following Monday morning, two scenes were enacted simultaneously on the seventh floor of the Mercury

building. In Kelcke's office, Basil was issuing instructions that would bring Daryl Hoffert to New York City. Jeanie was making arrangements for a contract to be drawn up, an airline ticket from Grand Rapids to LaGuardia and, oh yes, something should be done about contacting the still unsuspecting Michigan disk jockey.

In Barnstead's office, meanwhile, a contrite general manager was trying to placate an angry Sam Bunsen and a furious Rex Blair. Four-letter Anglo-Saxon expressions ricocheted off the walls like birdshot. But no one dared bring up the subject of the fifteen thousand dollar sloop which lay at anchor in Manhasset Bay.

BOOK THREE

Daryl

CHAPTER 17

The trout just weren't biting. Daryl could see them dimpling the stream all around him, but they refused to rise to his lures. He switched from a floating line to a sinking line . . . from a dry fly to a wet fly to a nymph, to no avail. He glanced up with a frown as the golden fingers of the morning sun curled themselves around the tops of the trees. Moments later, the full force of morning bounced blindingly from his reel. That does it, thought Daryl. Maybe trout can't hear, but they sure can see. All thoughts of remaining hidden from the elusive squaretails vanished. Grudgingly, Daryl packed up his tackle and headed for his car.

He had been fishing since dawn with nothing but an empty creel to show for it. Now, instead of fresh brook trout for lunch, he and Freda would have to settle for leftover roast beef sandwiches. It was more a blow to his pride than to his stomach, because Daryl was used to sandwiches. They were his steady diet when he was on duty at WCOO. But today should have been different. The trout season was just beginning and Daryl had the day off. He had been given Sundays and Mondays off

ever since Al Heinemann had named him host of the station's big Saturday teen record hop.

As he pushed open the door of their little apartment, Freda came rushing to meet him, her eyes brimming with excitement.

"If you're looking forward to trout for lunch, forget it," said Daryl. "It just isn't my day."

"Maybe it is, after all," said a somewhat breathless Freda. "The New York operator has been trying to reach you all morning. Station WMBE in New York has a person-to-person call in for you."

Daryl stopped in his tracks. He thought hard for a moment and then shook his head. "I don't know anybody at that station," he said.

"Maybe they want to hire you."

Daryl laughed. "Oh, sure, they're desperate. They've been on a coast-to-coast search for a deejay and they've picked me. I think I'll hold out for fifteen thousand a year and demand a chauffeur-driven limousine to cart me back and forth to work." He headed for the bedroom to get out of his fishing clothes. Freda followed hard on his heels.

"Aren't you going to call them back?" she asked.

"Sure," answered Daryl. "As soon as I get out of these smelly old pants." He turned to her. "Look, honey. The biggest thing that could come of this is that they want me to tell them the top song in Grand Rapids this week. If it was St. Louis or Des Moines calling, I'd say maybe I'm being invited for an audition. But don't you know what WMBE is? It's the biggest station in North America. I've heard of them, but I can guarantee you they've never heard of Daryl Hoffert."

"Please, darling," pleaded Freda. "Call them right now before they all go out to lunch. I'm bursting with curiosity."

As he placed the call, Daryl began to suspect he was about to become the victim of a prank. When Jeannie introduced herself, Daryl said, "You do a great imitation of what a WMBE secretary should sound like. Now, where do you really work?"

An amused Jeannie finally convinced him the whole thing was for real. She put Basil on the line and the program director calmly recited the story of the talent search which had culminated in this telephone call. A chill raced up Daryl's back when Basil told of the hunt. As he listened to Basil talk of a five-year contract at one hundred thousand dollars a year, Daryl nervously opened and closed his fist repeatedly. He became aware that his palms were moist. It hadn't happened to him in years. Mr. Cool was losing his composure!

After agreeing to meet Basil in New York on Wednesday morning, Daryl slowly placed the phone back in its cradle. He stared fixedly at it, not daring to look at Freda. Tiny beads of perspiration dotted his forehead. His face was drained of color.

"Honey, what's the matter?" asked Freda concerned.

Daryl slowly raised his eyes to meet hers. In a hushed voice he replied, "They offered me a job. Freda, they offered me a job. The . . . biggest . . . job . . . in . . . radio." He reached for the phone.

"What are you doing?" asked Freda.

"I have to call that man in New York back. I told him I'd meet him Wednesday. I can't. I have to work Wednesday."

Freda covered his hand with hers. "Now wait a minute," she said. "Don't call anybody until we talk about this. Just what did the man in New York say?"

Daryl repeated his conversation with Basil. As he did, he kept shaking his head in disbelief. He kept trying to reach for the telephone, but Freda pulled his hand away each time.

"Freda, you don't understand. It's got to be a mistake," said Daryl. "I've never applied for a job with WMBE. They must think I'm somebody else. They got the number wrong, or the name wrong, or maybe even the city wrong."

Freda had never seen him so overwrought. The rock upon whom she leaned so often was quivering like jelly. He obviously wanted to believe the phone call, but didn't dare. She had a fleeting sense of fear. Did every

man act like this when the golden fleece dangled before him? She almost half-hoped it was a mistake. A wave of guilt washed over her because she knew she was responsible for the job offer.

"Honey, they got the right man," Freda said hesitatingly. "You did apply for a job with WMBE. Harriet and I sent an audition tape."

Daryl's eyes widened as Freda explained how she and Harriet had been secretly conniving for months. As she talked, the color came back to Daryl's face. His hand became steady again and he gripped hers in an ever-increasing tightness. Suddenly he released her and broke into a wide grin.

"I don't know whether to get mad at you or hug you," he said.

"I'd prefer a hug," answered Freda coyly.

Daryl took her in his arms and began to dance around the apartment. Between giggles, Freda begged him to stop before he woke their daughter from her nap.

Less than twenty-four hours later, Daryl was aboard a DC-8 United Airlines jet streaking eastward some thirty thousand feet above the ground. With him went Freda's love and Al Heinemann's blessing. The WCOO general manager had simply said "Go" when he heard about the offer. He added that Daryl's job at WCOO would always be open.

Daryl checked into the room WMBE had reserved for him at the Americana a little after four p.m. He immediately called Kelcke. Basil was out of the office, but Jeannie welcomed Daryl to New York and informed him that Mr. Kelcke would see him at ten o'clock the following morning. Jeannie suggested that, in the meantime, Daryl relax and enjoy the rest of the day on his own.

Daryl started to call Freda but decided to wait until the night rates were in effect. He unpacked his suitcase, placed his razor, comb and toothbrush neatly on the glass shelf over the basin and wandered out into the streets of Manhattan. He gazed south on Seventh Avenue unaware that he was looking toward Times Square.

With no destination in mind, he headed east. The Avenue of the Americas (which he would soon learn had always been and would always be Sixth Avenue to New Yorkers) was a hybrid of construction, skyscrapers and rundown bars and discount stores. Daryl stared at the tall buildings that graced the street in the fifties. ABC and CBS loomed into the sky a few short blocks north of NBC. Towering over all three was the glistening silver shaft that housed Mercury Broadcasting. Mammoth neon lights spelled out MBE for all to see, within a five-mile radius. Daryl gasped inwardly as it dawned on him that this giant would soon be home base for him.

He continued east. On Fifth Avenue he caught himself gawking like a tourist at the opulent shops. Then he smiled to himself as he remembered he *was* a tourist, at least for today. Tomorrow he would be a *New Yorker*. The thought gave him a twinge of fright. The fright heightened as he noticed the people around him. They all seemed so self-assured, so well-dressed and affluent. Daryl began to entertain doubts about his ability to reach these aloof sophisticates. Perhaps this trip was a mistake after all. Better to swim in Grand Rapids than drown in New York.

His wandering took him to Madison Avenue. There the crowd increased as the offices began to disgorge their hordes of homeward bound executives. Daryl was buffeted by people at every turn. It seemed that among them, only he had no destination. Only he seemed to have no purpose in life. He backed up against a building and tried to scrutinize the passers-by. How could he communicate with them over WMBE? Would these well-groomed monsters accept his banal chatter on the air? No! thought Daryl. I'll never be a *New Yorker*. I'll never make it.

The shops and pedestrians blurred his eyes as he hurriedly retraced his route back to his hotel. Walking west on Fifty-Third Street, he passed Fifth and Sixth Avenues in a daze. He was in a cold sweat by the time he reached Seventh Avenue; his head felt as though it would explode if he did not reach the sanctuary of his room. He

flagged down a passing taxi. The wary driver leaned out of the window determined not to get trapped in a ride to the airport in the middle of the rush hour.

"Where ya headin', pal?" asked the hackie.

"The Americana Hotel," replied Daryl as he started to open the door.

The driver quickly locked the door. "You tryin' to pull somethin', buddy?" he growled. "You don't look like no cripple to me."

Daryl stared blankly at the man. The driver pointed south. Daryl's eyes followed the extended finger. The Americana was less than a block away. Daryl ran all the way.

Safe in his room at last, he started to sit down when a wave of nausea rushed over him. He barely made it to the bathroom before the burning liquid erupted from his throat. When he finally stopped retching, he mopped his face with a wet washcloth and brushed his teeth thoroughly. Then he staggered out into his bedroom and threw himself on the bed. Twenty minutes later, his pulse quieted down and he felt calm enough to take stock of the situation. Conflicting thoughts jostled in the arena of his mind. Was he a coward? Or was he coming down with the flu? Did the city scare him? Or was it just the magnitude of the new job? Was he a grown man? Or a mewling, puking child?

He stood up and walked over to the full length mirror on the bathroom door. He took several deep breaths and glowered at his reflection in the glass. I'm not afraid, he told himself. The people in this town are just ordinary flesh and bones. They're not miracle makers. They will listen to me. They must!

He crossed to the desk and placed a call to Freda. Hearing her voice, his confidence again welled up inside of him. The conversation was brief because they were both accustomed to pinching pennies and aware of the cost of long distance telephone calls.

"Have you met Mr. Kelcke yet?" asked Freda.

"Not yet. I'm to see him at ten tomorrow morning."

"What do you think of New York?"

"From what I've seen, it's just like Grand Rapids with tall buildings."

"Are the girls pretty?"

"I haven't seen one yet that can hold a candle to my little Michigan dreamboat."

"What are they wearing in New York?"

"Just ordinary clothes, you know, dresses and stuff."

They talked for another minute and ended the call with Daryl's promise to telephone the next night. As he hung up the phone, Daryl was engulfed in loneliness. He looked around his room. It was like every other commercial hotel room in the world, although Daryl had stayed in too few to realize it. It was tastefully sterile. And empty. A cocoon for the itinerant. He glanced at his watch. It read 7:35. Dinnertime, thought Daryl, although he wasn't hungry. He tied his tie in a single Windsor knot, put on his jacket and headed for the elevator. Riding down, he noticed that he was the only single in the lift. Everyone else was part of a pair, which added to his loneliness.

He walked across the lobby toward the door when a poster on a tripod caught his eye. The Royal Box, it announced, was proud to present Ella Fitzgerald. Daryl quickened his step as he hurried toward the entrance to the Americana's famed night club. He got no farther than the door leading to the darkened room. The maitre d' informed him coldly that, without a reservation, he was not welcome.

Daryl found himself on the sidewalks of New York for the second time in three hours. This time, he noticed the blaze of lights that splashed garishly across Times Square. He was drawn toward them like a tussock moth to a flame. A half block from the hotel he bumped into a young black girl with blonde hair piled high on her head. Daryl tried not to stare but could not take his eyes from her. She was the first blonde black girl he had ever seen.

"Lookin' for a little action, honey?" asked the girl.

"What?"

"You look lonely, darlin'," she said, inching closer. "What you need is a good lay."

Daryl just gaped.

The girl smiled invitingly. She whispered in Daryl's ear, "How'd you like to fuck me, lover?" She started to rub her body against his genitals.

Daryl backed away and then turned and fled, the girl's laughter echoing in his ear. She was also the first prostitute he had ever seen. He walked briskly until he reached Forty-Seventh Street. Looking over his shoulder, he saw the girl was gone. Slowing down, he stared at the gaudy window displays of the tourist traps. GOING OUT OF BUSINESS!!! proclaimed signs in the windows of fully a third of them. Their cheap trinkets and magic tricks were sandwiched in with cameras and binoculars and radios, all drastically reduced in price.

Daryl entered one store looking for souvenir presents for Freda and Becky. Two sales clerks descended on him like turkey vultures, convinced they had found a choice tourist to pluck. But Daryl rejected their pitches when he saw how sleazy the merchandise looked up close. Besides, he told himself as he headed back down Broadway, if I come to work in this town we won't need souvenirs and if WMBE decides against hiring me tomorrow I won't be able to afford any.

The street crowd grew larger as he neared Forty-Fifth Street. People were beginning to converge on the theatres. For the second time that day Daryl found himself jostled like a ping-pong ball. He reached back and took a tight grip on the pocket that contained his wallet, as Al Heinemann's warning about New York pickpockets rang in his ear. He passed a movie theatre and considered seeing a film, but changed his mind when he saw the price of a ticket. At a hot dog stand he ate his dinner: two frankfurters and a large paper cup of orangeade. It was not the meal he had anticipated having on his first night in Manhattan.

On his way back to the hotel he stopped at a newspa-

per stand at the corner of Fiftieth and Broadway and bought a copy of Field & Stream. It was his first link with the world of reality that he had seen since he got off the plane. Back in his room, he pored through an article on striped bass fishing until his eyelids began to droop. He crawled into bed and finished the story just before he fell asleep.

The sleep that came so easily proved false and deceptive. It merely heralded another "first" for the twenty seven year-old disk jockey. Today had marked his first commercial airline flight, his first trip to New York, his first meeting with a prostitute and his first experience with panic. Now, the blank screen of sleep began to flicker as it gave birth to Daryl's first nightmare.

Had credits flashed on his retinal screen, they might have announced the unlikely combination of choreography by Busby Berkeley—scenario by Franz Kafka. Daryl saw himself walking through a large, strange city. The buildings were out of perspective . . . architectural distortions whose top floors seemed wider than those at ground level. The illusion was one of impending toppling. In the distance, a tiny figure scurried along the sidewalk, hugging the buildings. As Daryl drew nearer, he saw that the figure was Freda. He heard himself call her, saw her turn and start toward him, only to be swept away in a crowd that suddenly funneled out of a hundred offices. Daryl began to run . . . shoving people aside like ten-pins as he sought his wife. He almost reached her when he lost his footing and was engulfed by the swirling mass of humanity. The mob undulated like a huge ocean wave . . . thrusting Daryl to the surface one moment and then plunging him to the street in another. He fought for breath and flailed his arms wildly in an effort to escape thousands of trampling feet.

The scene dissolved into a deserted street. The walls of the buildings began to edge closer . . . threatening Daryl from all sides. Then . . . Freda . . . again beckoning him like a will-o'-the-wisp. He tried to follow her but his shoes were welded to the ground. He kicked out

of them and raced toward her. He came within arm's reach but she rounded a corner and disappeared. In her place were ten thousand young executives, each wearing the same silent, supercilious smirk, all garbed in matching white London Fog raincoats and each carrying a black attache case. Daryl turned to flee only to be confronted by ten thousand young matrons . . . all attired in identical Saks Fifth Avenue cocktail dresses. The women linked their arms and began to dance a time step in Daryl's direction. The young executives pirouetted in place and then threatened to bear down on Daryl . . . marching in step. Daryl looked frantically about and discovered a huge doorway. He rushed for it, but found the entrance blocked by a twelve-foot-tall black woman with blonde hair. She was stark naked. Daryl's only escape lay between her outstretched legs. He looked back at the ten thousand young executives. Across the street, Freda pleaded with him. He stared blankly at Freda, then turned to fix his gaze on the huge, swelling breasts of the blonde giant. His eyes traveled downward to her mass of ebony pubic hair. She thrust her torso within inches of Daryl's contorted face. He looked back at Freda, then felt an uncontrollable force drawing him toward the nude black girl.

Daryl awoke in a cold sweat. For a moment, he forgot where he was as he reached for Freda. His hand patted an empty bed, then fumbled for the light switch. As the light flooded the room, he remembered. He was alone in New York. He checked his watch. It was only three a.m. He tried to go back to sleep, but it was a lost cause. Morpheus had deserted him. He tossed fitfully for the next three hours, then resigned himself to his fate and headed for the shower.

Manhattan gave birth to one of those rare, cloudless blue days that make New Yorkers glad to be alive. There was a crisp, clean feeling to the air that put a spring in the step of tired garment workers and turned jaded stage doormen into girl-watchers. The first patron in the hotel coffee shop that morning was a young man named Daryl Hoffert. He attacked a huge platter of pancakes, ham

and eggs and then marched forth into the nearly empty streets.

As he breathed deeply of the morning air, he began to feel more like his old self. He smiled a friendly good morning to workmen hosing off the sidewalks in front of the buildings. At least, thought Daryl, New York makes an effort to keep clean. The city looked far less forbidding than it had the day before. Observing a faint green haze in the distance, Daryl walked north with renewed confidence until he came to Central Park. The leaves were beginning to open on the trees and the reflecting ponds sparkled in the morning sun like mountain lakes. Even the people seemed different. Early risers were walking their dogs, riding bicycles and enjoying canters through the bridle paths. A few merely strolled.

Daryl ambled through the park until he came to Fifth Avenue and Seventy-Ninth Street. There the picture changed. The rows of opulent co-op apartments that graced that side of the park were beginning to come to life. Long limousines stood bumper-to-bumper guarded by bored-looking chauffeurs. Nurses in highly starched uniforms began to wheel infants in carriages that cost more than Daryl earned in a week. Doormen paused in their brass knob polishing chores to give Daryl baneful looks of warning. You don't belong here, said the looks. Daryl scrutinized his sixty-dollar brown tweed suit and agreed. The fears of yesterday began to ooze back into his pores.

He arrived at the Mercury building at 9:30 a.m. Determined not to appear too early, he walked around the block four times. At 9:55, he entered the elevator marked 1-10 and pushed the button for the seventh floor.

A receptionist looked up as he emerged from the elevator and gave him a disinterested stare. Convinced more than ever that the whole thing was a mistake, Daryl walked over to her desk and gave his name, adding that he had an appointment with Mr. Basil Kelcke. She dialed a number, whispered into the phone and then gestured toward a black vinyl lounge. Daryl sat down and wondered how long he would have to wait.

The wait was mercifully short. Ninety seconds later, a smiling Jeannie strode into the lobby, introduced herself and ushered Daryl down the long hall to Basil's office.

Basil was waiting at Jeannie's desk to greet his new discovery. He grasped Daryl's hand and placed his arm around the young deejay's shoulder as he guided him into the office.

"Well," said a smiling Basil, "you made it. I'm sorry I couldn't see you when you got in, but we had a minor crisis around here yesterday. Is your room okay?"

"It's fine," answered Daryl.

"Good. We tried to get you a suite, but there's a big convention in town and everything was booked up. Let me know if there's anything you need. Of course, it's only temporary. As soon as you get used to the routine here, you'll have time to find an apartment. I'm sure you don't want to be separated from your bride any longer than you have to."

Basil went on to spell out the details of the contract and then outlined the ground rules for WMBE disk jockeys. He gave Daryl a copy of the station slogans to study and showed him the list of the current week's records. As he talked, he studied the young man across the desk from him. Daryl seemed to be taking it all in, but his eyes had a dazed look that troubled Basil.

"Am I going too fast?" asked Basil.

"N-n-n-no," stammered Daryl. "But I can't shake the feeling that I'm caught in a tornado."

Basil gave an embarrassed laugh. "I keep forgetting that this whole thing must have hit you like one. I don't know exactly what you've been making back in Michigan, but I have a pretty good idea. Believe me, Daryl, we wouldn't offer you the kind of money I've been talking about if we didn't expect to make a profit on you. We could, of course, start you at scale and then boost your salary every year. But we don't want to get involved in yearly negotiations. We're offering you a firm five-year contract. If you make the grade, you're worth every cent we're paying you. It's as simple as that."

"Forgive my ignorance," said Daryl. "But what does 'scale' mean?"

Basil looked surprised. "Scale," he explained, "refers to the AFTRA minimum wage." Daryl still looked blank. "You do belong to AFTRA, don't you?" asked Basil.

Daryl looked down at the floor. "I'm afraid I don't. Does that make a difference?"

"Wow," murmured Basil. "Well, we'll make arrangements for you to join. You've got thirty days to do it, but the sooner the better. You don't want any trouble with your own union. Now, anything else? Do you want your lawyer to go over the contract?"

"I'm afraid I don't have a lawyer," replied Daryl.

Basil stifled another "wow." "I think you'll find it's a standard contract. I don't want to push you, but we're running short of time. We have a lot to do if we're going to get you ready to go on the air a week from Monday."

"So soon?" gasped Daryl.

Basil looked at him sharply. "Why not? Are you scared?"

"A little, I guess."

"Why? It's a microphone just like the one you're used to. And we're not asking you to change your style. Just do what you've been doing in Grand Rapids and everything'll work out fine."

"What about the audience?"

"What about them? They're just people."

"The ones I saw yesterday didn't look like 'just people'."

It was out. All of Daryl's trepidations were summed up in that one sentence. Basil began to see the problem.

"What people did you see yesterday?" he probed. "Where did you go?"

"I . . . uh . . . just wandered around. You know. Fifth Avenue . . . Madison . . ."

"I see." Basil stood up and walked to the door. "Wait here," he commanded over his shoulder. Outside the office, Basil put through a call to the garage of his apartment building. He asked the garageman to bring his car

over to the station. The man promised to have it in front of the building in ten minutes.

Turning to Jeannie, Basil asked, "You busy tonight?" "No," she said with a slightly raised eyebrow.

"We have a very naive, scared young boy in there. I'm going to ask you to do something above and beyond the call of duty. See if you can get tickets to a good show . . . maybe 'Hello, Dolly!' If you're lucky, you can still latch on to a pair of house seats. Take him out to dinner at the Forum or the Four Seasons. You know this town. Teach him how to handle himself in public."

"I thought you hired him for his innocent quality."

"That's fine on the air, but he has to be able to make personal appearances and talk to agency people, too. Look, Jeannie. I know I'm asking a lot, but I promise I'll make it up to you. I need your help. I've gone way out on a limb in hiring this kid. He's just got to be right."

Reluctantly, Jeannie agreed. She remembered that Basil's last request for extracurricular activities had led her to Larry. And that meeting had led her nowhere. She hadn't heard from him in almost eight months. Coincidentally, they had seen "Hello, Dolly!" on their last date. Now she faced the prospect of seeing the show again with a total stranger. But was this Daryl really any more of a stranger than Larry? She still didn't know where she stood with Larry. Nor, for that matter, was she sure where Larry stood with her. It's all academic, she thought ruefully. The situation will probably never be put to the test. She put Larry out of her mind as she busied herself making reservations and arranging for the tickets.

Basil steered Daryl out to the waiting car. He gave the garageman five dollars for a cab back to the garage and then motioned for Daryl to join him in the front seat. They drove one block north and then turned east. Halting at the red light on Fifth Avenue, Basil gestured at the pedestrians.

"In a very short while, Daryl," he said, "you'll be part of that scene. You'll feel at home with those people because you'll be able to buy and sell most of them. The

whole gig is nothing but a pose. Never forget it. And never forget that they are NOT your audience."

The light turned green and Basil aimed the sedan for Madison Avenue. He continued east until he reached Park.

As he made a left turn, Basil said, "This is Park Avenue. It used to be THE place to live, but you can see the office buildings starting to make inroads on the fancy apartments. There are still a lot of old money people stashed away in those apartments, but they are NOT your audience."

He drove over the Fifty-Ninth Street bridge and stopped at a gas station in Long Island City. A radio in the background blared forth a WMBE jingle.

As the attendant approached the car, Basil said, "Here comes your audience."

The tour continued out Queens Boulevard past hundreds of drab, concrete apartment buildings. Daryl noticed people on every floor trying to scrub away the incinerator soot from aluminum chairs on tiny terraces. Basil told him to take a good look as he informed Daryl that his audience was clustered in those warrens.

The car moved steadily east, gliding onto Grand Central Parkway and rolling swiftly by thousands of look-alike development homes. Only the varying tints of pastel colors distinguished one from the other. Again, Daryl was reminded that he was seeing his audience.

Basil steered the car into the parking lot of a vast shopping center. He got out and beckoned Daryl to follow him. They entered a huge supermarket. Basil took a grocery cart and began to push it up and down the aisles. Dozens of women wearing pink or blue curlers in their hair bumped their way past the groaning shelves. Two of the women were carrying little transistor radios . . . tuned to WMBE.

"Get the message?" whispered Basil.

"I'm beginning to," answered a relieved Daryl.

Back in the car, the two men rode silently across the Triborough Bridge. As they wove in and around the traffic of Harlem, Daryl stared open-mouthed at the hun-

dreds of heads popping out of the dirty gray buildings that line Lenox Avenue. The people were leaning on quilts and mattresses as they shouted down to friends on the street. Everyone seemed to be reaching for a breath of spring. As the car paused for a light, a bright yellow convertible drew up beside them. Their ears were assailed by a radio blasting at full volume. It too was tuned to WMBE.

Basil skillfully dodged children playing in a Bronx street as he outmaneuvered another driver for a lone parking place.

"Come on," Basil said. "I'll show you the Bronx counterpart of a Long Island supermarket."

They squeezed their way into a little store. Outside, a two-by-twelve board stretched over a couple of empty Coca-Cola boxes bent under the weight of newspapers and magazines. Inside, they had to elbow their way by a half dozen people crowded around the cigar counter. In the back, Daryl saw a small grocery department. The pungent aroma of kosher pickles and salami was everywhere. On one wall, shelves reached up to the ceiling, piled high with dusty notebooks, pencils, envelopes, paperback books, toys, plastic lunchboxes, soda bottles, beer cans . . . there seemed to be no end to the variety of merchandise crammed into the narrow store.

Basil hopped up on a stool in front of an ancient marble counter. "Ever had an egg cream?" he asked Daryl.

Daryl shook his head and Basil ordered two egg creams and two hot pastrami sandwiches. The egg creams were prepared before Daryl's astonished eyes . . . sans egg and sans cream. Basil watched with amusement as Daryl tasted the concoction of chocolate syrup and seltzer water.

"Hey, it's good," said a beaming Daryl. "But why do they call it an egg cream?"

Basil laughed out loud. "I haven't the faintest idea. It's been called that ever since I can remember. When I was a kid in this neighborhood, an egg cream was a rare treat. Most of the time we had to settle for two cents

plain." Noticing Daryl's puzzled expression, he added, "That's just plain seltzer water."

Daryl bit into his first pastrami sandwich and smiled his approval. Basil nudged him and pointed to the radio on the ledge behind the counter. It was singing forth the news that Pete Sunday was on the air. They finished their lunch and started back to the car. They had to step around a row of little old ladies who had set up their chairs on the sidewalk and were busily conversing in Yiddish. As they passed an alley, an aging yellowed poster caught Daryl's eye. He drew closer and saw that it was a three-sheet advertisement for Marvin Marshall. Tune in WMBE every morning from 6:00 a.m. until 10:00 a.m., said the ad, and hear America's number one disk jockey.

"What's that all about?" asked Daryl.

Basil reached up and tore the sheet down. Crumbling it into a ball and tossing it into a trash basket, he said, "He was before my time. I never really knew him."

A young mother pushed a baby carriage down the street. Over her shoulder, a radio sang out a WMBE jingle. Basil shooed three youngsters off the hood of his car and started to climb in. Daryl stopped him.

"Thanks, Basil, for chasing away the butterflies in my stomach. It was a good lesson."

Basil grinned. "Let's go back and sign a contract."

CHAPTER 18

Daryl signed the contract at 1:47 p.m. on Wednesday, April 21, 1965. The effective date of his employment was Monday, May 3. Daryl noted the date and studied the monetary provisions carefully. He skimmed through the rest of the fourteen-page document, taking Basil's word that it was just a standard form. Thus, he overlooked the sections that spelled out exclusivity (WMBE owned him); illness (he received no compensation when ill); the station's rights to use his name, likeness, voice and biography for advertising purposes (WMBE could do anything they wanted in this area . . . free); indemnification (Daryl was obligated to bear all costs in the event of a suit against WMBE or him); moral turpitude (he could be fired summarily for any unconventional act); and, most important, the tiny clause that prohibited Daryl from leaving the company for a period of five years, although WMBE could terminate the agreement at the end of any thirteen-week period. It was, as Basil declared, a standard contract, but any good agent or lawyer could have punched holes in it and successfully demanded revisions.

Basil smilingly placed the four signed copies in a

manila envelope and promised to send Daryl his copy as soon as the company had signed it. It was a promise he conveniently forgot. Basil also expressed the hope that Daryl would consent to using a different name on the air. Daryl Hoffert was a bit too prosaic, he pointed out. He personally had renamed three of the station's present deejays including Daddy-O.

"Any ideas for a catchy name?" asked Daryl.

"Yes, as a matter of fact," replied Basil. "I like the name Daryl and it's been churning through my mind that if we named you Daryl Jackson or Daryl Jeffers or perhaps Daryl Jones your initials would be D.J. It would be a natural for promotion." He paused to take in the young performer's reaction.

Daryl was not prepared for this. He agreed that it made sense, but wondered silently what Freda would think. She wouldn't like it. But, he reasoned, she wouldn't want him to resist either.

"Daryl Jackson sounds great to my country ear," Daryl said.

Basil grinned and stood up. He extended his hand toward Daryl and said, "Welcome to WMBE . . . D.J."

With the contract safely tucked away in his desk, Basil was ready to swing into action. He had less than ten days to advertise, promote and prepare Daryl for the biggest step in the deejay's career. The need for haste was urgent he said, although he recognized Daryl's natural desire to return to Grand Rapids for a celebration. He apologized because the trip would have to wait. There was too much to do here. Daryl masked his disappointment as he replied that he understood. I only hope Freda will, he thought.

"I'm sure you didn't bring enough clothes for an extended stay," Basil said, "but we can take care of that right now. Do you own any credit cards?"

"I'm afraid not. Freda and I believe in paying cash for everything."

"Not a bad policy, but I'm afraid it won't work in New York. This town runs on plastic."

He dialed the number of a well-known Broadway clothier. After a pause long enough for two rings, he said

into the mouthpiece, "Cy? Basil Kelcke of WMBE. (PAUSE) Just fine, thanks. How's by you? (PAUSE) Look, Cy, I need a favor. We're putting on a new deejay and I need a rush wardrobe for him. Can you handle it? (PAUSE) A real rush . . . like I want him wearing the threads yesterday. (PAUSE) Cy, you're a doll. I'll send him right over. You handle it personally, okay? (PAUSE) No . . . not too Broadwayish . . . you know . . . tastefully wild, but subdued. Like the rest of the deejays wear. Oh . . . and open an account for him in the name of Daryl . . . Jackson."

Basil hung up the instrument and turned back to a stunned Daryl. "Okay, D.J., that fixes that. Now you scoot over and get yourself decked out like a New Yorker. Just leave everything to Cy. He's an expert. Oh, by the way, I want you to get to know the city so I've made arrangements for you to take my secretary to dinner and the theatre tonight. Don't worry about the cost . . . it's on the house."

"Gee, thanks, Basil. I'd love to go but . . . well, you see . . . I know this sounds square but I'm married and I don't play around."

"Neither does Jeannie. That's why I'm sending her. Now, don't worry. This is strictly business. Necessary business. Jeannie knows this. Just to make sure it's on the up and up, we're paying her time and a half. It's done all the time."

Daryl made another mild protest, but Basil waved away his objections.

"Now I have to shoo you out of here and get busy with some ads. The Sunday papers have a deadline this afternoon and I want to make sure we get in. I'll see you tomorrow morning at 8:30. You can meet Daddy-O and sit in on his show."

Daryl started to leave and then turned to Basil, "I've been meaning to ask, when do I meet the general manager?"

Basil frowned and hesitated before answering, "Plenty of time for that. You'll be meeting all of the brass just as soon as we get squared away."

But Daryl was destined never to meet George Barn-

stead. Ever since his defeat in the selection of Daddy-O's replacement, Barnstead had gone out of his way to avoid Basil. When Basil broached the subject of putting Ev Dowling on as a morning newsmen, Barnstead just looked at him. Basil explained that the contrast between the smooth, sophisticated Dowling and the fresh, young approach of Daryl would make for a winning combination. Barnstead merely shrugged and told Basil to do anything he wanted. Barnstead was past caring what happened to WMBE. Besides, he had other fish to fry.

Thirty days later, a Mercury Broadcasting press release would proudly proclaim the elevation of Arnold Spaulding to the presidency of the television network. Another release would congratulate George Barnstead on his appointment as Vice-President in charge of Station Relations. A third release would herald the promotion of Tom Flaherty from sales manager of Mercury's San Francisco station to general manager of WMBE, New York.

After stopping by Jeannie's desk to make arrangements to meet her at the Forum of the Twelve Caesars at six o'clock, Daryl fairly soared over to the haberdashers. He kept repeating to himself over and over that he was the luckiest man on the face of the earth. Lou Gehrig had used that line once, he reflected. He quickly dismissed the stabbing thought that Lou Gehrig's life had ended in tragedy. Remarkable, thought Daryl, that Gehrig had made that statement in the knowledge that his life would be cut short tragically. But here I am with the world by the tail, twenty-seven years old, and all the lights green!

Daryl was greeted by a beaming Cy at the clothing store. The haberdasher shrewdly avoided any mention of his customer's bargain basement suit as he skillfully laid out a complete wardrobe. When he learned that Daryl was going out that night, he promised to have one complete outfit finished in time for D.J.'s engagement. "Anything for the boys at WMBE," said Cy. No mention was made of cost. It was not until six weeks later, when he received the bill, that Daryl discovered that he had spent over twenty-five hundred dollars in one afternoon.

Feeling a little self-conscious in his new tight trousers and hourglass jacket, Daryl walked east on Forty-Eighth Street toward the restaurant. He kept looking down at his feet as he crossed Sixth Avenue, carefully avoiding any obstacle that might scuff his brand new alligator shoes. In his anxiety, he walked right past the restaurant. He had expected a flashing neon sign, like the ones that blinked in front of the Broadway restaurants. It was not until he reached Fifth Avenue that he realized his mistake. Retracing his footsteps, he saw at last the small brass plaque that identified the Forum of the Twelve Caesars. He walked quickly past the hat check attendant, feeling guilty that he had nothing to check. He glanced around the bar and finally located the maitre d' standing like a sentinel at the entrance to the dining room. Daryl approached him with trepidation. What if Jeannie had failed to make a reservation? Would a two dollar tip get him a table? What name shall I use . . . Hoffert or Jackson?

"Yes, sir, may I help you?" asked the haughty-looking host.

"Uh . . . do you have a reservation for Daryl . . . uh . . . Jackson?"

The maitre d' quickly perused the long list in front of him.

"Ah, yes, here it is. A table for two. Follow me, please."

Daryl started to follow him, then suddenly remembered that he had failed to call Freda. He asked if they had a telephone. Downstairs, in a booth, he placed the call collect.

"You're early," said Freda. "The night rates don't go into effect for another ten minutes. And why collect? Have you spent all our money in one day?"

"Honey, from here on out, we couldn't spend all our money in a hundred years. And I'm calling collect because I'm in a restaurant. I'm waiting for . . ." He started to tell her about Jeannie, but thought better of it. Time for explanations later, he decided. ". . . for some people from the station. They're taking me to dinner and then to see 'Hello, Dolly!'"

"Golly, that sounds terrific," said an excited Freda.

"Everything here's terrific," Daryl bubbled. "You're going to love it. My new boss is the nicest guy I've ever met and the people here are nothing like you've read about. They're just like the folks in Grand Rapids. I can't wait for you to get here."

"Well, I can't wait for you to get here. I miss you. When are you coming home?"

Daryl paused. He hadn't thought about that problem since he agreed to stay in New York.

"Daryl? Are you still there?"

"Yes, I'm here, darling. Listen, things have been happening so fast that I haven't had time to think. They want me to start a week from Monday and . . . I don't know how to tell you this . . . but they want me to stay here and do promotion until I go on the air."

"You mean you aren't coming back to Grand Rapids at all?"

"Well, not right away. Don't you see, sweetheart, they need me."

"What about Al Heinemann? Everybody's been filling in for you, but they expect you back . . . at least for a couple of weeks."

"Gosh. Gee, I don't know what to say. I guess I forgot all about . . . oh, brother . . . I feel like the world's biggest heel. Honey, what am I going to do?"

"I don't know. I suppose I could call him at home and explain the situation, but I hate to do it. Isn't there some way you can come home?"

"I don't see how. Look, darling. It's an awful thing to ask, but this is the chance of a lifetime. If I blow it, I may never get another. Don't you see? I *have* to stay here."

Freda promised to do what she could and that she would start packing. She told Daryl she planned to drive their old car to New York. Daryl told her to hold off. He felt they should wait until he actually got on the air before they burned their bridges. Wait, he told her, until he had a chance to look for a nice apartment. Wait, he told her, until he saw if the audience was going to accept him. Wait, he told her, until . . . he spotted Jeannie

waving to him through the glass in the phone booth. He brought the call to Freda to a quick conclusion, explaining to Freda that he couldn't keep the people from the station waiting for him any longer. He promised to call her tomorrow.

"I'm sorry I didn't meet you at the door," he told Jeannie as he emerged from the booth.

"Oh, that's okay," Jeannie replied, "but we'd better get to our table if we want to make the curtain. Dinner here is an event. And one not to be rushed."

Daryl whistled involuntarily as he followed Jeannie and the maitre d' to a table near the middle of an elegantly appointed room. As they settled in their comfortable leather armchairs, Daryl continued to let his eyes wander. He found himself avoiding the portraits of the Caesars that hung on the walls. These ancient Roman emperors all seemed to be giving him stern looks, as if to say, one false move . . . one wrong fork . . . and it's off with your head. He looked up. The captain was asking him if they cared for a cocktail. Daryl looked at Jeannie. Jeannie said she'd prefer wine. Daryl was handed the wine list.

As the captain moved discreetly out of hearing, Daryl said to Jeannie, "How come 1964 costs more than 1963? I thought the older wines were more expensive."

Jeannie hesitated before answering. Larry had introduced her to a love of good wine, but should she display this knowledge before Daryl? Then she remembered that this was not a date but an assignment. She was here to help Daryl learn. "Some years are better than others," she replied. "1964 was an exceptionally good year for Beaujolais, for example."

"I guess I'll never learn things like that. Besides, I'm afraid I don't drink. But you can go ahead and order what you want. I was never a member of Andy Volstead's fan club."

Jeannie decided she liked D.J. He was unpretentious and not afraid to admit there were some things he didn't know. It was refreshing after some of the phonies she had dated.

"These are table wines, Daryl. Even children drink

them in Europe. It isn't quite the same as drinking hard liquor or fortified wines like sherry and port. You're missing a treat if you pass up the wine here."

Daryl gave in and ordered the 1964 Beaujolais. The captain smiled his approval of the choice and stood with pencil poised for their dinner order.

Daryl again turned to Jeannie for advice. She had a twinkle in her eye as she confidently ordered wild boar paté and Alpine snow hare stewed in wine and served with maize and lingonberries.

D.J. slapped his menu shut and looked up at the captain, declaring, "The same. I gotta find out what all those things are."

The captain displayed no expression as he said simply, "Thank you, sir."

Turning back toward Jeannie, Daryl grinned and said, "Tell me, how does a girl who knows the things you do ever become a secretary, or maybe I should say where does a secretary find out things like that? Or am I being too personal?"

Jeannie's eyes took on a faraway look as she answered, "No, you're not being too personal. I was a secretary long before I learned about wines and food. My . . . a friend taught me."

"And now you're going to teach me. I take back what I said a while ago. I will learn. Now tell me something about yourself. How did you end up at Mercury?"

"Whoa," she said in mock horror. "I don't like the phrase 'end up.' I'm not that far over the hill."

Daryl was embarrassed. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way." He noticed the twinkle in Jeannie's eye had returned. He added, "And you know it."

"Okay, you caught me. I *was* teasing you. Anyway, to answer your question, I guess I'm just crazy about this idiotic business . . . or at least I thought I was. I was radio's number one fan as a kid in Virginia. I still own a collection of oldtime radio recordings. I mean *real* old ones, back to the thirties."

"You're kidding!" shouted Daryl, forgetting where he was. He slid down in his chair as he saw several heads

turn in their direction. "Excuse me," he said to Jeannie in a quieter voice. "I didn't mean to blurt out like that, but the coincidence is amazing. I'm an oldtime radio buff myself. Let's see if you're for real. Who used the lady in the balcony?"

Jeannie laughed softly. "Dr. I.Q. the Mental Banker. You can get tougher than that. Like who was his announcer?"

"Hey, you *are* tough!" replied D.J. admiringly. "McClain? No, wait. McClain . . . Jimmy McClain was the Doctor's real name . . . one of the guys who played Dr. I.Q. anyhow. Oh, what was his name . . . don't tell me. . . uh . . . uh . . . uh . . . Anthony. Allan C. Anthony, of course! The guy used to practically drool over the candy bar commercials."

"Correct," laughed Jeannie. "And a box of Mars bars and two tickets to next week's production here at the Forum of the Twelve Caesars."

The first course arrived as they continued their newly-discovered common interest covering Jack Benny and Fred Allen's "feud," Ben Bernie's closing monologue, the sponsors of Jack Armstrong, Little Orphan Annie and Buck Rogers.

"One more," said Jeannie over dessert. "Who was Superman's announcer?"

Daryl thought hard but failed to come up with the answer.

"I'll give you one hint," said Jeannie. "He was probably the most famous announcer of all time."

Daryl thought harder. Then his eyes brightened as he answered, "Oh, for Pete's sake. Ev Dowling! It was on the tip of my tongue all the time. When I was a boy, he was my idol."

"Then you'll be pleased to hear that you're going to be working with him. Basil signed him up as your morning newscaster this afternoon."

"Wow! I *am* in the big leagues."

"Is your friend Bernie shooting for the big leagues too?"

"Oh, you heard me mention him on that tape of my

Grand Rapids show, didn't you? Well, WCOO isn't really big enough to afford an engineer *and* an announcer. Bernie happens to be a figment of my imagination. Not that I'm completely looney . . . I just feel secure, I guess, talking to somebody or something. You know . . . to get that 'talking to one person' quality."

"Yes, I've heard of that," nodded Jeannie. "Most deejays apparently have some particular person in mind when they're talking, their wife or buddy or someone."

The check arrived. Daryl reached for it but Jeannie was too fast. "Uh-uh," she said. "Don't rock the boat. WMBE is picking up the tab. You're a guest." She signed the check and handed it over to Daryl to present to the captain. Daryl glanced at the total.

"Good grief, Jeannie. Eighty-seven dollars for dinner? Why, my wife doesn't spend that much in two weeks. Won't the station be furious with us for spending this much?"

"They'll probably be surprised we didn't go over a hundred." She handed Daryl two ten dollar bills and showed him how to crumple them in his palm. She explained that one was for the captain and one for the maitre d'. She had already added the waiter's tip to the check. Daryl protested that the maitre d' had done nothing but show them to the table. Jeannie insisted that he still expected a tip. Reluctantly, Daryl shook hands with the captain and felt the first ten disappear. The action was repeated with the maitre d'.

On the way out, Daryl took Jeannie's hand and held it, just for a moment. "You're terrific, Jeannie. Really."

Basil Kelcke's secretary felt her poise crumbling. D.J.'s touch affected her. She felt a sudden dryness in her throat. An urge to put her arms around this boy and protect him. Recovering quickly, she smiled. "Alors. Je suis enchanté de faire votre connaissance. Allons."

"Yes, I thought it was expensive, too," replied D.J. in a helpless non-sequitur response.

They both laughed heartily, oblivious to stares. Jeannie led him to a waiting limousine.

"Yours?" asked a stunned Daryl.

"Ours. For the night. In case you're curious, you can rent one of these for less than ten dollars an hour. Keep it in mind if you want to go first class some evening. Of course, you can tell the rented ones by the Z on the license, but not everybody knows that, so feel free to impress a visiting fireman."

They rode in silence to the St. James Theatre and Daryl's first Broadway show. "Hello, Dolly!" was a perfect choice. Jeannie felt a slight twinge as she remembered seeing it almost a year previously with Larry, but the toe-tapping Jerry Herman melodies soon caught her up in their spell and she forgot her bittersweet memories. She was also caught up in the fun of watching Daryl enjoy himself. When Carol Channing parted those red velvet curtains at the top of the stairs and started descending to the strains of the title song, Daryl leaped to his feet with joy. He joined the other fifteen hundred members of the audience in a frenzy of applause.

The limousine drew up to the door of Jeannie's apartment building. Daryl beat the chauffeur in a race to open the car door for her. He escorted her to the lobby and would have followed her into the elevator when she stopped him.

"I'd invite you up, but it's been a long day for both of us and tomorrow promises to be even longer." She smiled warmly at him and added, "Thank you, D.J., for a lovely evening."

"Jeannie, it's been the most wonderful night in my life." He kissed her impulsively on the cheek and then blushed a deep scarlet as he fled.

Basil introduced Daryl to Daddy-O during a record. The big deejay waved his replacement to a chair and offered him a Danish and coffee. The record ended before Daryl could reply, so he just shook his head. Somehow he had expected a WMBE disk jockey's mid-morning snack would be served on silver with Irish linen napkins. The paper cup filled with milky coffee and the waxed paper wrapping for the Danish seemed strangely out of place in the hands of a glamorous radio

star. Daddy-O took no notice as he sloshed more cream in his coffee and emptied two paper envelopes of sugar into the cup.

The pace of the morning show was too fast for any real conversation, so D.J. just sat back and made mental notes. At ten minutes before ten, Pete Sunday entered the studio, walked over to the revolving rack that housed the cartridges and started to select his show. With the loudspeaker booming, Daddy-O yelled an introduction and Sunday paused long enough to whisper a warm welcome to his new colleague as Daddy-O began a live commercial. At ten o'clock, Daddy-O moved out of the chair, Pete Sunday slid into it and the radio reins changed hands. Daryl noted that there wasn't a split second of dead air during the transition. He followed Daddy-O into the hall.

"I thought I knew something about running a tight format, but the way you guys do it is something else," said Daryl.

"You'll get the hang of it . . . just stay loose. Come on, I'll buy you some coffee."

"You just had coffee."

"That was an hour ago. Now I'm hungry. Don't forget, I had breakfast at four a.m."

The two deejays headed for the elevator. They were a study in contrasts. Daddy-O towered over D.J. by half a foot and outweighed the young disk jockey by a good hundred pounds. Despite his massive bulk, Daryl was impressed with the way Daddy-O moved. He seemed exceptionally light on his feet.

Over coffee, the two men eased into a light conversation. Each was a little wary of the other. D.J. wanted to please. Daddy-O wanted to help. But neither knew how to begin. They talked shop but it was only surface talk. Finally, they reached a firm footing. The magic word was fishing. As soon as they stumbled on that subject, the words poured forth. As it became obvious to both of them that each knew his subject well, all the wariness melted. By the end of thirty minutes, they were fast friends.

CHAPTER 19

Basil argued that he had plans for Daryl, but Daddy-O convinced him that it would be more to everybody's advantage if he could spend some time with the new deejay. Thus Daryl found himself invited to lunch in Darien with the Harry "Daddy-O" Evenson family.

As he climbed into Evenson's Mercedes 300 SEL, Daryl gave a long, low whistle. Evenson smiled proudly as he told Daryl that he had two vices: this car and a collection of expensive guns.

"Of course," added Evenson, "I'll lose money on the car when I finally sell it, but I consider it money well spent. It's comfortable, safe and a dream to drive. When you put twenty-five thousand miles a year on a car just going back and forth to work, you're entitled to make it as enjoyable as you can. As for the guns, well, they're like the house. Every year they go up in value. So it's more of an investment than a luxury."

As they rolled smoothly up the West Side Highway and onto the Henry Hudson Parkway, Harry expounded his theories about money. One hundred thousand dollars a year, he pointed out, seemed like a fortune. And it was. But it was easy to slip into the habit of spending as

though there were no tomorrow. If a man wasn't careful, he could find himself at the end of his career with nothing but the memories of a few high-living years. Too many people in show business, he declared, were suddenly skyrocketed into big money before they learned how to handle it.

Daryl listened carefully, occasionally nodding his acceptance of the big man's reasoning. He was half-aware that Daddy-O was lecturing him, but he did not resent it. It made a lot of sense and Daryl vowed to himself that he would follow the advice. He knew Freda would go along. If anything, she was more frugal than he. He heard Daddy-O talking about using a business manager.

"The best thing that ever happened to me was the day I met Abe Eisen," the huge deejay was saying. "He made it possible for me to retire from this squirrel cage before I got kicked out."

"You'd never be kicked out," argued Daryl. "Basil himself told me that he'd give anything to be able to keep you."

"For a while, maybe, but being a disk jockey is like being a ballplayer. It's a young man's job. You either make it before you're forty or forget it. After that it's all downhill. I know that's hard to believe when you're in your twenties but, take my word for it. I've seen too many guys try to hang on after they passed the age when the audience turns its back on them."

"Then that's the reason you're leaving," said Daryl.

"Part of it. I've been lucky, Daryl. Not too many people know this, but my income has been close to three hundred thousand dollars a year for the last four years."

"Holy Toledo!" exploded Daryl. "That's over a million dollars. I had no idea WMBE paid that kind of money."

"They don't. They pay me the same thing they're going to be paying you. The real money is in commercials."

Daddy-O went on to explain to Daryl about the vast residuals that even a single spot could bring in. He made it clear that not every recording session turned into a gold mine. Some commercials, he explained, ran only a couple of weeks. Nor was it a cinch to get those jobs. He

enucleated the techniques used to get the auditions and win them. He offered to introduce Daryl to as many producers and agents as he could before he left town. Then he pursued the subject of a business manager.

"The idea of paying somebody as much as fifteen thousand dollars a year just to write your checks may seem silly right now, but I can guarantee you Abe Eisen has been worth every cent I've ever paid him. He held me back when I was tempted to go wild with a buck, he kept my nose clean with the income tax people and he showed me how to invest my dough. He made me a fairly wealthy man. But that isn't the real reason I'm leaving. I tried to get it across to Basil, but he thinks I'm just a fool who wants to go fishing. I think you'll understand, that's why I'm telling you all of this. Have you ever read 'The Silent Spring'?"

"I remember hearing a lot about it a couple of years ago," Daryl replied, "but I never read it. It was a best seller, wasn't it?"

"Yeah, a lot of people bought it, but I wonder how many actually read it, or believed it. I know it hit me hard and I've been delving into the subject of conservation a lot ever since I read the book. Rachel Carson hit quite a few nails right on the head, but most of the politicians have only paid lip service to her ideas. It's not just DDT. It's the way we do everything. Unless we change our approach to nature, this earth of ours is going to go to hell in a basket."

"I hadn't thought too much about it, but I guess you're right."

"I know I'm right!" said Daddy-O, warming to his subject. "I've seen the fish die in lakes I used to drink from as a kid. I've seen the trees and plants and birds and animals grow sicker and sicker every year. If it keeps up much longer, the people will begin to die off too. Even if they don't, there won't be much reason for living. What's the point of bringing kids into a world if all they have to look forward to is an existence in a cement test tube? That's why I'm quitting, Daryl. I want to get involved. I want to do something about it. I want to contribute. And

I can't do it chattering into a microphone about traffic conditions on the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway."

"I should think you could accomplish more right where you are. After all, not many guys can reach millions of people every morning."

"Do you know how long we'd keep an audience if I started on that kick? No, Daryl, that's not the way. Believe me, I've thought about it. I suppose I shouldn't be talking to you this way, because you're all hopped up about your new job . . . and you should be. But I've been at this sort of thing for almost twenty years. I started when I was only nineteen. WMBE has been good to me, so I can't knock them. But I can't go on any longer just being a highly paid cog in a wheel of money. There aren't any showmen left in this industry anymore. The whole thing's run by a bunch of lawyers and bookkeepers. They don't give a damn about the public. All they care about is making a buck." He broke off abruptly, suddenly aware that he had gone too far.

"I'm sorry, Daryl," said Evenson in a quieter voice. "I shouldn't have said that. I brought you out here to see if I couldn't help make your new job easier and here I've been spouting off like a preacher at a revival meeting. Forget what I said. Sometimes I get carried away."

"I won't forget it," said Daryl soberly, "because I think you make a lot of sense. Besides, I've got some plans along those same lines." He told Daddy-O about his dream of owning a hunting and fishing camp. He described the place owned by the LaFollettes and how isolated and primitive it was.

"Why, they don't even have indoor plumbing," Daryl said.

"Sounds like paradise," said a now grinning Daddy-O. "When you get your own camp, I'll be your first customer."

"I'll hold you to that," Daryl laughed.

As the car moved quietly onto the Merritt Parkway, the conversation veered into fishing and hunting. Daddy-O told Daryl about the eastern trout streams, particularly the virtues of the Beaverkill and the Bat-

tenkill, both of which were within driving range of New York City. He touted the famous Miramichi in New Brunswick and launched into a long dissertation about the thrills of catching an Atlantic salmon on a four-ounce fly rod. By the time they turned off at exit 37, Daryl was an eager convert.

D.J. fell in love with the Connecticut countryside. All his fears of being penned up in a concrete cocoon vanished as he scanned the wide, sweeping lawns and ancient oak trees that guarded the well-kept homes. It reminded him of Michigan and home. The tires crunched on the gravel driveway as Daddy-O turned into his own grounds. The house was a rambling colonial that seemed to have been built for someone just like Harry Evenson. It was huge, but not gaudy. Carefully maintained, but not flashy. There was a lived-in look that put Daryl at ease. Inside, the sturdy furniture gave the impression that sprawling with your feet up not only was accepted but demanded.

Evenson led his guest through the house to the terrace in the rear. There he introduced Daryl to Amy, a genial, pleasant-looking woman in her late thirties, who seemed tailor-made to be Evenson's wife. The children were in school so the threesome had the charcoal grill to themselves. Daryl declined his host's offer of a beer but dived into the hamburgers, downing two in fast order. Harry Evenson ate three.

"Gee, this is perfect," said a satisfied Daryl. "I only wish Freda and Becky were here to see it. My wife would flip over this house."

"How soon are they coming in?" asked Amy Evenson.

"As soon as I can get settled in the job and find a place to live. I think we'll have to start with an apartment in town, but this is what we want eventually."

Amy excused herself to attend a meeting of her garden club and left the two men alone. Harry showed Daryl his collection of guns. Most of the really expensive ones were shotguns. Purdeys, Holland and Holland and several finely made Parkers predominated. Daryl gasped when he learned that you could spend as much as four

thousand dollars for a shotgun. He laughingly told Evenson that he had done a lot of pheasant shooting back in North Dakota using an old sixty-dollar Sears and Roebuck piece.

"You're not alone," said Evenson. "I've put more shells through this old Remington than I ever have through the ones in that rack. They're more for show than blow. Still, I'm proud to own them and, as I said, I'll never lose a cent on them. I could sell the whole lot now for much more than I paid for them. And I can't say that about every common stock I own. Anyhow, I thought you'd like to see them."

It was getting close to Daryl's train time. He had another dinner and theatre date with Jeannie. He thought Daddy-O looked at him in a funny way when he mentioned it, but he could have been mistaken. On the way to the station, Daddy-O grew serious again.

"Daryl, I hope you don't mind the advice I've been tossing your way today," he said.

"Not at all. I need all the help I can get."

"Well, I don't think I have to say this, but I will anyway. You've got a lot on the ball or you wouldn't have made it to the top so fast. Just don't let it change you. Don't get carried away by all the fancy folderol of New York. Everybody's going to be making a big fuss over you, but don't forget they can drop you mighty fast, too. I've seen it happen. And don't let them sucker you into playing a big shot because of your position. You don't have to, no matter what anybody says."

Daryl thought he seemed to be skirting the surface of a much deeper subject, but the big man refused to elaborate.

"One more thing," Evenson added as they pulled into the Darien train station. "Keep your pecker in your pants."

Daryl looked up in surprise.

"You're going to have a lot of young girls flocking around you because you're a big deejay. They're going to look like easy lays and some of them probably are. But don't touch. If you play around, do it with the big girls.

Steer clear of the kids no matter what they do or what they say. They're not just jail bait, they're poison."

Daryl assured him that he had no intention of playing around with anybody. He had always been true to Freda and he always would be. The train pulled in and the conversation ended. Daddy-O waved as Daryl climbed aboard and said he'd see him in the studio at six a.m.

The afternoon train from Darien to New York was virtually empty. Daryl sprawled across two seats and sat watching the towns whiz by: Stamford, Greenwich, Rye, Larchmont. They all had a look of restful affluence that made him feel comfortable. He closed his eyes and conjured up a mental picture of Becky playing with her as yet unborn brother while he and Freda looked on. He saw the children discard their tricycles for two-wheelers. He saw them pulling their sleds up a gentle hill and running through piles of fallen leaves. He saw their wide-eyed wonder as they caught their first glimpse of the thick, green Christmas tree, its branches sagging under the weight of dazzling lights and fairyland ornaments. He saw them each married in the white New England church, the one with the tallest steeple. He saw life . . . and it was good.

He walked slowly through the vast expanse of Grand Central Station. It was 4:35 p.m. and some of the young executives who were fortunate enough to sneak away early were beginning to converge on the tracks marked Chappaqua, Dobbs Ferry and Greenwich. No longer did they appear to be faceless monsters. Now, they were kindred souls . . . neighbors. He checked an impulse to go up to one of them and shake his hand.

Back in his room, he called Jeannie to confirm their plans for the evening and then called Freda. When she answered the phone, he poured forth a stream of joy. Everybody in New York was kind, generous, thoughtful, loving and beautiful. He had found a dream town and a dream home. He told Freda to drop everything and fly out immediately. No, he hadn't found an apartment, he had found a house. They would buy the Evenson place and live happily ever after. This time it was Freda who

drew him back to earth. They couldn't buy the Evenson house or any other. Where would they get the down payment? They had exactly eleven hundred twelve dollars in the bank and he was not yet on anybody's payroll. Oh yes, she had called Al Heinemann. He was wonderfully understanding, but she could tell that he was a little hurt that Daryl had not called himself. No, it was all right, but perhaps Daryl should call him, or at least drop him a note. Daryl promised to do more than that. He would send a gift. He would find a store first thing tomorrow. What about an apartment? Daryl would look over the weekend. Soon . . . soon . . . soon . . . they would all be together.

That night the "teach-Daryl-which-fork-to-use" class continued with dinner at Voisin and seats E-101 and E-102 at the Majestic Theatre. Daryl agreed with Jeanie that "Golden Boy" was a marvelous musical, as long as Sammy Davis Jr. was in it. After dropping his date off at her apartment, the limousine whisked Daryl back to his hotel. Five and a half hours later, he was in the WMBE studio just in time to meet Jamie Lawrence, the all-night deejay. This time, Daryl sat through the entire Daddy-O show. It was agreed that on Monday Daddy-O would actually introduce the new deejay to the audience and begin to ease him into the show.

All thoughts of shopping for a present for Al Heinemann evaporated when Daryl left the studio. Basil was waiting for him with a tear sheet of the first ad in the campaign to make D.J. a star. It was a quarter page ad which said simply:

*Beginning Monday, May 3, 1965
New York Radio Will Have Only One
D.J.*

Basil informed Daryl that this "teaser" would run in every edition of every newspaper in town. He had also ordered car cards and bus posters which would state: D.J. IS HERE, beginning a week from Monday. Daryl would also have his own theme song. A special arrange-

ment had been written and flown to London to be recorded by the Glad Stones . . . the biggest rock group in the business. Two press conferences were scheduled for today, a luncheon at Toots Shor's and a cocktail party at the New York Hilton. All day Saturday, Daryl would follow the other deejays as they made their weekly personal appearance tours. On Sunday, a photographer was assigned to capture Daryl's likeness in candid shots all over the city. A beaming Basil said this was only the beginning. WMBE was pulling out all stops to make this the biggest promotion the city had ever seen.

The following week flew by like a newsreel montage of people, places and things. Daryl collapsed in his bed every night in a state of happy exhaustion as his mind screened the day's events: agency lunches and columnist interviews, cross-plug recording sessions with the other deejays and cocktail parties with famous rock groups. At the cocktail parties, Daryl escaped detection as a non-drinker by carrying around a nearly full glass of plain ginger ale. Not that it really made any difference. He learned that nobody pays any attention to who's drinking what.

He began to look forward to his nightly dinner and theatre date with Jeannie as the one moment in the day when he could thoroughly relax. He had become dependent on Jeannie. She was like a rock to lean against. Recognizing this, Jeannie held off telling him that Basil had decreed that the free dinners and tickets would end when Daryl actually went on the air. Jeannie also hated to see the arrangement stop. She not only enjoyed the dinner and shows, she also liked being with Daryl. She told herself that it was strictly a brother-sister relationship, but secretly wondered if this were true. The thoughts that began to sneak their way into her mind troubled her. She had not waited all this time just to steal another woman's husband. Maybe it was right that they would soon stop seeing so much of each other. What was it the French said? There is no such thing as a platonic relationship between a man and a woman.

To the millions of New Yorkers scampering into the shower, and shoveling breakfast down their throats, May 3, 1965 was just another Monday. It was neither a blue nor a green nor a red letter day. True, it did bring them one step closer to vacation time and the suburbanites were beginning to take pride in their pre-crabgrass lawns, but the day was nothing to kick up their heels about. For one thing, it was a first-of-the-month-bill day and most people were still not over the ravages of income tax day. Besides, it was Monday and who needs that?

There was one exception. Daryl Jackson needed it . . . yearned for it . . . eagerly awaited it . . . feared it. He had been awake since four a.m. His body felt as though a billion tiny needles were piercing him with little prickly tingles. His mouth was dry and his stomach was churning. He showered, shaved and dressed quickly, hoping food would quell his growing anxiety. In the coffee shop, when he tried to order breakfast, the words got caught in his larynx. He cleared his throat and tried again. This time he managed to push out a coherent sentence. The waitress grinned knowingly and said something about his having a rough weekend. The orange juice felt good as it cascaded down his sandpaper tongue. Oh, please, God, he prayed silently, don't let me louse up my first day.

He walked swiftly through the nearly deserted streets and entered the revolving door of the Mercury building at 5:30. A guard he had never seen before was bent over the reception desk listening to Jamie Lawrence on the lobby monitor. He looked up as Daryl walked over to sign in.

"May I help you, sir?" inquired the guard.

Daryl attempted an impish grin but his rubbery facial muscles refused to obey. "Just on my way to work," he said.

"May I see your identification card, please?" asked the guard.

Daryl became a little irked. Hadn't this man seen the

publicity? Didn't he realize that Daryl was the new morning deejay? He started to mouth an irate reply, but checked himself. Perhaps the guard had been sick or away on vacation. Why make waves on your first day? Daryl reached into his pocket for the wallet that housed his shiny new ID card. He tried another pocket, then realized that his wallet, pen, pencil, stopwatch and handkerchief were all still lying neatly on his dresser. Meekly he explained the situation to the guard. The guard was unimpressed. Ten minutes of arguing failed to move him. It was now 5:43. In desperation, Daryl pleaded with the guard to phone Jamie Lawrence.

An embarrassed D.J. stepped off the elevator. It was hardly an auspicious beginning. Here he was . . . a star . . . being escorted to his microphone by a copy boy from the newsroom who had been pressed into service by Jamie Lawrence. He walked into the studio and began to pick out cartridges with trembling fingers. The tall, slender black deejay he would follow in less than seven minutes introduced his next to last record and swiveled his chair around to face D.J.

"Hey, ol' buddy, you okay?" asked Jamie.

"I guess so," replied D.J. "A little nervous, maybe."

"Shit, man, just think of all those listeners running around in their underwear. You can't miss. I got 'em all warmed up for you. When you get on . . . just tell 'em Jamie sent you."

The two deejays switched seats during the thirty-second public service announcement, which Jamie logged simply "PSA."

The station break was done by a staff announcer. Ev Dowling was not due in until the following week.

"Take a deep breath, hold your left testicle and GO," said Jamie.

The all-night man's easy banter broke through Daryl's fears. He began to relax. When his new theme blasted forth, he was back in command. A theme has two purposes: it tells the listener what is about to happen and it gets the performer in the mood to do his show.

D.J. . . . D.J. . . . D.J. . . .

The echoing theme faded into the background and the engineer flicked Daryl's mike on.

And a happy Monday morning to all of you mamas and papas running around in your underwear. D.J. is with you to chase away the hangovers and send you out to battle. Let's brighten up the morning with a WCOO . . . oops . . . WMBE Diamond Dilly. The Glad Stones do it with "Baby Pants."

Jamie Lawrence had been standing behind D.J. with a worried look on his face. As the young deejay started his spiel, Jamie's look dissolved into a grin. He exchanged nods with Saul Kalaman. The boy was going to be all right. The slip of the tongue bit about WCOO did not disturb either of the two veterans. Virtually every radio performer inadvertently uses the call letters of his old station at least once when he changes jobs. Sometimes it happens five years after he has left his old job, but it happens. What pleased Jamie and Saul was how easily D.J. slid over the boo-boo. It was the mark of a pro that D.J. did not belabor the subject with a longwinded explanation.

Daryl accepted Saul's suggestions readily. He knew he needed help in adjusting to the tight format of WMBE. He tripped over Massapequa and mispronounced Kearny, New Jersey, but otherwise zipped through the rest of the morning. Once again, Basil had made a right decision. Those who had pegged Daryl as a naive bumpkin breathed a sigh of relief as they listened to his first day on the air. He had the same ambivalent quality that marked Daddy-O: one character off the air . . . another before the mike.

At 8:55 Jeannie stuck her nose in the studio door and gave Daryl the traditional thumb to forefinger circle of O.K. At 9:15 Basil looked in and raised his hands in a prizefighter's signal of victory. At 9:50 Pete Sunday stepped into the studio to prepare for his show and bowed deeply from the waist. Daryl stood up, grinned and returned the bow. He was in. He was part of the team!

CHAPTER 20

Vera and Ev Dowling returned from an early morning jog in the park and sat down to breakfast. They turned on WMBE. They listened in silence for about fifteen minutes and then Ev said, "In a way, I'm glad I didn't make it. I don't think I could ever be as good as that boy D.J."

"You'd have been different," countered Vera, "but just as good."

Ev reached over and took her hand. "You not only know the right words, my dear," he said, "but your delivery is impeccable."

Vera smiled. She knew in her heart that Ev was disappointed at not getting the early morning deejay spot with WMBE. She also knew that no performer can ever honestly admit to himself that he lost out because somebody else was better. Confidence was the key to success in this field and confidence was fed by ego. Secretly, though, she was pleased that Ev was not going to be a deejay. The early morning news job might not pay as much, but she felt it was more in keeping with Ev's image.

Neither Ev nor Vera had any inkling of the battle that Basil had undergone with news director Ed Wilford re-

garding the hiring of Ev Dowling. Wilford argued that Kelcke had once again invaded his domain. Kelcke pacified him somewhat with the explanation that the young deejay would need all the help he could get if he were to maintain the high ratings WMBE enjoyed in the morning. Wilford came back with a demand to hire a "real" newsman.

"Just what is a 'real' newsman?" snorted Basil. "You've been using a staff announcer in that slot for years."

"That's just the point," argued Wilford. "I planned to replace him next month. We need a guy in there who can go out and get the story, write it and then broadcast it."

"Do you think the audience gives a hoot who wrote it? All they want is someone who can read the story in a way that enables them to understand what's going on. And nobody in this town reads better than Ev Dowling. Besides, he did news before either one of us could tie his shoes. What you really want is someone who answers only to you. The deejays don't and the staff announcers don't. Okay, Ed, if that's what you want, you've got it. I'll tell Ev that you're his boss . . . that you're the one who tells him when to blow his nose. Does that satisfy you?"

Wilford protested that he didn't mean anything like that. But he did, so he accepted the arrangement. He reversed his opinion, dictated a memo that placed a press card in Ev Dowling's wallet and arranged for Ev to receive the coveted NYP license plates for his car. Now Ev could park in restricted areas all over the city. It made no difference that he would never be asked to cover a story on the outside. He was a newsman and, as such, was entitled to all of the benefits of that ivory-towered fraternity. Later, Ev would accept this largesse with concealed amusement. Newsmen were made . . . not born, he would reflect.

D.J. stopped by Jeannie's desk as soon as he got off the air. "What's on the agenda for tonight?" he asked.

Jeannie hesitated before answering. "I'm afraid the slate is blank. WMBE has decided that you've gradu-

ated. You don't need any more theatre and restaurant lessons."

Daryl tried unsuccessfully to hide the hurt look on his face. "Then how about a post-graduate course? On me."

Jeannie noticed his hurt expression and tried to soften her refusal. "Daryl, it's been a lot of fun . . . more fun than I've had in years. But I don't think it would be wise for us to keep on seeing each other."

"We're not . . . I mean there's nothing wrong." He stopped as two secretaries walked by headed for the coffee wagon. "Jeannie, we can't discuss this here. Let's talk about it at dinner tonight. Come on. I'm entitled to a celebration, am I not? After all, this is my first day on the air."

Jeannie decided that one more date would not hurt. They agreed to meet at "21."

After he made the date, Daryl suddenly realized he did not have enough money to pay for it. He had not expected to stay in New York more than a couple of days, so he had only brought seventy-five dollars with him. It had not posed a problem before when the station had paid for everything. But now he was on his own and payday was not until a week from Wednesday. He debated calling Freda to ask her to withdraw money from their savings account, but rejected the idea. How could he explain to her that he needed the money to take another woman to an expensive restaurant?

Basil solved the problem with a couple of strategic telephone calls. Daryl found himself the proud owner of credit cards from the Diners Club, American Express and Carte Blanche. Basil also arranged for Daryl to open an account with a ticket broker who could be depended upon for last minute seats to all the hit shows . . . for a price. That night, Daryl took Jeannie to see "Luv." Dinner at "21" plus the scalper's price for the theatre tickets added up to almost one hundred fifty dollars. Daryl brushed aside Jeannie's protests, rationalizing that they were entitled to a celebration. It was just one night, he argued. The one night stretched to seven as he continued his spree. By the end of the week, he owed seven hun-

dred thirty dollars, not counting his tab with the Broadway clothier.

Freda was beginning to be a little concerned about her absentee husband. Daryl forgot to call her on Wednesday and Thursday. She placed three calls to his hotel only to be told Mr. Jackson was out. Every time she heard the name "Jackson" she frowned. She could not get used to it. It has a harsh sound, she thought, so unlike Daryl himself. She also wondered about this Jeannie, Daryl kept mentioning. Every call was sprinkled with remarks about Jeannie this and Jeannie that and Jeannie something else. She teased Daryl about it, but he merely laughed. Jeannie, he told her, was strictly a business acquaintance. Besides, she was older than Daryl. When pressed on this subject, Daryl reluctantly admitted that Jeannie was only a year older.

Basil stepped up the campaign to make D.J. the top disk jockey in the city. He ran a contest to determine who could submit the best likeness of the new morning man. Jeannie told Daryl one morning that they quit counting after twenty-three thousand entries had poured in. The drawings filled one studio four inches deep. When the station announced the winner and finally released Daryl's picture to the press, the mail zoomed. It appeared as though every high school girl in the tri-state area had a crush on WMBE's new deejay. Invitations by the hundreds poured in requesting Daryl to appear at various school functions. Six Manhattan and Brooklyn high schools named him their favorite radio star in school newspaper polls.

D.J. also appeared regularly in grocery stores and department stores in the five boroughs. As the publicity tempo increased, the crowds grew progressively larger. Daryl tried to squeeze in some time to search for an apartment, but in vain. His spare moments were sucked in by the WMBE p.r. department like smoke vanishing into an air conditioner. Edna St. Vincent Millay's little quatrain about burning the candle at both ends kept ringing in his ears. Added to all of this was the nightly

date with Jeannie. They studiously avoided any talk of the right or wrong in their seeing each other. Each pretended it was merely an extension of the original business arrangement.

Sitting close to Jeannie on a banquette in Sardi's, Daryl wondered aloud if Freda could possibly appreciate how busy he was. Jeannie assured him that his wife would understand.

"She sounds like a marvelous person," said Jeannie in a sincere attempt to sell herself as well as Daryl. "I can't wait to meet her. When is she coming in?"

Daryl admitted that he had not had much luck in finding an apartment. Then he confessed to Jeannie that he hadn't really looked. A ripple of remorse hit him as he remembered lying to his wife for the first time in their marriage when he described the four apartments he had supposedly looked at and rejected. Two were in unsafe neighborhoods, he had explained, and the other two were just too small. The conversation had taken place that very afternoon.

"Maybe I can help," offered Jeannie. "You really should do something about it. After all, you've been here almost six weeks now."

"Has it really been that long? Golly, the time has passed quickly."

Jeannie suggested they meet Sunday for an all-day safari through the New York Times classified section. Daryl wanted to get started early in the morning, but Jeannie said that later in the day would be better because she wanted to attend church in the morning. "Haven't missed in three years," she noted and added, "I don't want to break the streak."

D.J. blanched. He had a longer skein than that until he came to New York. Now he realized he had not only missed church all these weeks . . . he hadn't even thought about it.

"May I join you for church?" he asked quickly while trying to recall what denomination Jeannie belonged to.

"Certainly," she replied.

"What church again?"

"Episcopalian. I go to St. Bartholomew's. It's on East Fiftieth . . . only four blocks from where I live."

Daryl was awestruck as he walked in with Jeannie past the sign listing the hours of masses. He had never been in an Episcopal church before. "Sure this isn't a Catholic church?" he whispered to Jeannie.

She led the way down the aisle, genuflecting gracefully before slipping into the pews. D.J.'s imitation of her action was awkward. He felt all eyes were upon him. Glancing around, he realized that he was seeing still another side of New York. The people here seemed even more self-possessed than the young executives who had intimidated him that first day. Here they had an air of quiet wealth that reflected old money. He marveled how easily Jeannie seemed to fit into this milieu. No longer was she Basil Kelcke's secretary. She was a woman . . . an extremely beautiful woman, thought Daryl as he stared at her from the corner of his eye. She edged forward and rested her knees on the bench before her in silent prayer. Daryl fought back an impulse to take her hand. As he knelt beside her, the soft hush of the magnificent church embraced him and he had a vision of a wedding ceremony. Daryl and Jeannie. Dear God, he prayed, am I to be responsible for being momentarily unfaithful in my imagination? Surely Thou must know I would never lust after another woman . . . in Thy house.

When they emerged in the bright spring sun fifty-five minutes later, D.J. felt an overwhelming desire to sleep. These hours, he admitted, were beginning to catch up to him. Sleep had to wait though. He was determined to take care of the apartment now. Suddenly it seemed imperative that Freda join him. Jeannie took his arm and led him into the Waldorf-Astoria. They bought a paper and pored through it over coffee and Danish. Jeannie briefed him on neighborhoods and strongly recommended the East Side. She suggested several two-bedroom apartments in the listings, but Daryl insisted on something larger. He wanted to have a guest room for Freda's mother or, for that matter, any other visitor from the old crowd. They finally narrowed the

choice down to three. Co-ops were eliminated because of Daryl's lack of cash.

The resident manager of the first building embarrassed both of them with his constant references to "Mrs. Jackson" . . . indicating Jeannie. Daryl started to correct him but decided an explanation would be too involved. It did not matter anyway, because the apartment was not what Daryl had in mind. Admittedly, it was a far cry from the little walk-up he and Freda shared in Grand Rapids but, if he was going to pay this kind of money, he wanted to be satisfied.

They finally settled on a large duplex on Fifth Avenue overlooking the park. It was fully furnished and could be sub-let for three years, for eighteen hundred dollars a month. Jeannie mumbled something about the cost, but Daryl came back with his philosophy that a man should be able to pay a week's salary for a month's rent. Besides, it was ideally suited for entertaining.

Daryl thought his dream apartment would slip through his fingers when the manager asked for two months' security and one month's rent in advance. Fifty-four hundred dollars in one fell swoop was more than Daryl could possibly scrape together. He did some quick mental arithmetic. He had collected forty-two hundred dollars take home pay from WMBE and he was due to receive another fourteen hundred dollars on Wednesday. He had sent Freda a thousand and had charged most of his expenses. That left almost three thousand in his newly-opened checking account. A long way from what the man was asking.

Jeannie came to his rescue. She had been in New York long enough to know that security demands were negotiable. She bargained quietly and talked the manager into accepting one and a half months' security. She also got him to agree to half the money now and half within two weeks. That way, she explained, Mr. Jackson would not have to touch his savings accounts or investments. D.J. nodded soberly, hoping feverishly that his jumping heart did not give him away.

After signing the lease and writing a check for

twenty-two hundred fifty dollars, D.J. admitted to Jeannie that he'd like nothing better than to stretch out in the apartment then and there and sleep until tomorrow. The manager smiled patronizingly and informed him that the duplex would not be available until Wednesday. They wanted to clean the windows and do a little touch-up painting.

On the way out of the building, D.J., trying to stifle a yawn, suggested that he and Jeannie go somewhere for an early dinner. Jeannie smilingly replied, "It might be embarrassing for me to have to carry you home in a taxi. Tell you what. Let me grill a steak at my place. Then you can zip back to your hotel and get a good night's sleep. Remember, you have to rise and shine at five a.m."

D.J. covered another yawn and patted her gracefully on the shoulder. "You're a lifesaver. Lead the way."

They rode down Fifth Avenue to Jeannie's street, both immersed in similar thoughts. This was the first time Jeannie had ever invited Daryl to her apartment. Why today? Was it because Freda was finally going to enter the scene? Was it because this might be the last time they would be together? Neither dared answer the unspoken questions.

Jeannie put a couple of potatoes in the oven to bake and led Daryl out to the terrace. Pointing to her outdoor grill, she said, "Think you have enough energy to get a fire going?"

"Listen, here, you're talking to a master firebuilder. I could do it with flint and steel."

He added a few briquets to the partially burned ones already lying at the bottom of the circular grill and soon had the embers glowing. Joining Jeannie in the kitchen, he found her busily tearing greens for a salad. She had changed into a loose fitting blouse and slacks. The outfit did nothing to disguise her exquisite figure. Daryl felt a surge of desire sweeping through his loins but tried to fight it down.

"Why don't you loosen your tie and take your jacket off? We're not dining at Quo Vadis, you know," Jeannie said.

Daryl wondered if the invitation contained more than was said, but quickly rejected the thought. He knew Jeannie well enough by now to realize she was not "that" kind of girl. Nor was he that kind of boy, he insisted to himself.

"If you don't mind a busman's holiday, how about putting on some music?" Jeannie suggested.

Daryl went into the living room and thumbed through a stack of albums. He noticed that Jeannie's record collection did not contain any of the songs played on WMBE. Maybe she hears enough of them at work, he thought, or maybe she just prefers soft music. He selected a Peter Nero album and placed it on the changer, then abruptly changed his mind and replaced it with a Jackie Gleason album. The mood called for subtle background sounds.

He weighed calling Freda to tell her about the new apartment. But somehow it didn't seem right to call his wife from Jeannie's apartment. Time enough for phone calls later. Jeannie interrupted his reverie as she brought him the steak. He nipped it expertly on the fatty edges in several places and dropped it neatly over the gray coals.

Jeannie served the dinner on the coffee table in the living room. As she poured an inexpensive red wine, she remarked, "It isn't exactly a *premier cru* but it's the best I can come up with on such short notice."

Daryl took a sip and looked straight into her eyes. "The company more than makes up for the vintage," he said quietly. "Any wine would taste good if I could share it with you."

Jeannie felt a slight shiver race up her back. She tried to pass the compliment off lightly as she replied, "Why, Mr. Jackson. I never realized how gallant you are."

She moved closer to him without realizing it. They both reached for a piece of French bread at the same time and their hands touched. Daryl noticed she was wearing perfume. "That's a delectable fragrance you're wearing, Jeannie. What is it?"

Jeannie thought for a moment. Had she absent-mindedly put a drop behind her ears when she changed?

Or was it a deliberate move? And why this scent? Was it because Larry had given it to her and she wanted to punish him for not calling all these months?

"It's called Caleche," she answered. The memory of Larry darted between them and she moved away. "Eat your steak," she said. The moment was gone. She rose and walked over to the television set. As the tubes warmed up, she walked into the kitchen and returned with coffee. They began to watch *Bonanza* in silence.

Humphrey Bogart, as he looked in 1937, was tough-guying on the screen when Jeannie awoke with a start. She looked down and saw Daryl sleeping with his head in her lap. She slowly wriggled her left arm free from his and looked at her watch. Two-thirty! Oh, God! she thought, we must have fallen asleep at the same time. The late hours had caught up with both of them. She shook her head to collect her thoughts. Daryl had to get up in a little over two hours. She couldn't let him spend the night here. Or could she? He was exhausted and looked so peaceful lying there. She moved carefully, trying to slide out from under him. He stirred and then blinked at her.

"Jeannie?" he asked.

"It's all right, Daryl, you fell asleep."

In his half-sleep, the warmth of her body permeated his head. He felt himself swept by the same surge of desire that had hit him earlier. This time he couldn't fight it. He wanted the warm, comfortable feeling of her. He reached up and pulled her face to his. Their lips met and he felt Jeannie's passionate response as her hungry tongue probed its way into his mouth. He rolled to his side, taking her with him so their bodies could stretch out full length on the couch. The dam of convention was broken as their desire for each other swept away all objections. Daryl held her tightly against his body, letting her feel his erection through their clothes. He was as hard as steel. She moved her thigh against it. His hand moved from her cheek gently down past her throat and into her blouse. Jeannie moaned as she felt his fingers fondle the nipple of her breast. She unbuttoned her

blouse and pushed his head toward her breast pulling it out of her bra. The TV station signed off and the screen went black. Daryl sucked Jeannie's nipple between his lips and let his fingers slide down to the zipper on her slacks. He had trouble with it so she arched her back to help him. His hand moved under the cloth, down past her panties and covered the silky hairs, moving all the while into the moistness of her. She moaned again as she felt his finger gently exploring inside her. She reached one hand down to caress the throbbing organ that pulsed under his trousers and began to undo them with the other.

The jangle of the telephone pierced the darkness with the loudness of a 100 watt amplifier. The two bodies jumped apart. Jeannie closed her blouse around her breast and pulled her slacks up and in place before she picked up the instrument. She held her thighs tightly together. "Hello," she whispered, wondering who it could be at this hour.

"Jeannie Draves?" Asked the youthful voice on the other end. Without waiting for confirmation, the voice continued. "I'm sorry, please forgive me for calling so late. This is Daryl's wife, Freda. I'm in his hotel room."

CHAPTER 21

"Sonovabitch!"

"Shhh," stage whispered George Barnstead. "You wanna wake up the whole marina?"

"Well, I missed the fucking mooring," retorted Rex Blair.

The redhead and the brunette giggled. With a sigh, Barnstead threw the sloop's engine into reverse and backed away from the elusive mooring. A yawl swung on its anchor and barely missed the stern of the sloop. Barnstead swung the tiller frantically and slammed the engine into forward. He made a wide turn and brought the boat back into the wind as he made another stab at the mooring. This time, Blair managed to catch the ring with the boat hook. Barnstead cut the engine and went forward to help Blair.

"Sorry I missed it the first time around," said Blair, "but it's not easy to see the sonovabitch at three o'clock in the morning."

"'specially when you've had a couple of drinkie-poos," teased the redhead as she snuggled up to Rex.

"Not here," said Barnstead as he pushed away the brunette.

"I thought your wife was out of town," whispered Blair.

"She is," answered Barnstead in a low, croaking voice, "but we know a lot of people at this marina. And some of them would like nothing better than to blab all over town that they saw me playing footsie with another woman."

The girls went below to gather up their gear. As the two men furled the sails, Barnstead remarked, "Jee-sus, it's late. We must have drifted for miles when we were in the sack."

"Yeah, but what a way to drift. There's no fucking in the world like fucking on a boat, with the water lapping against the side."

"You did a little lapping yourself."

"Don't knock it till you've tried it. You know, after this weekend, I'm a little sorry I ever sold you this boat."

"No, you're not," said Barnstead as he patted an envelope in his jacket.

Blair grinned in the dark. "I guess not. I'm glad it all worked out, George. I was ready to kill you there for a while, but you came through . . . even better than you promised. You're a great guy, George. A man of honor."

The envelope in Barnstead's pocket contained a contract for Rex Blair to star in a new daytime television game show. It had not been easy for Barnstead to sell Arnold Spaulding on using Blair. But Sam Bunsen and Rex Blair had applied so much pressure that Barnstead had been forced to come up with something. They never mentioned the boat deal specifically, nor had they threatened openly to expose Barnstead; nonetheless, the veiled hints hit their mark. Barnstead knew that Rex Blair and his agent were in a position to ruin him. Besides, he really wanted the boat. He badgered Spaulding constantly about using Blair from the first moment he moved into his new office on the thirty-seventh floor. Spaulding smelled a rat. Blair must have something hot on Barnstead, thought Spaulding, but what the hell. Blair was a pro and who knows? Maybe Spaulding would need a favor from Barnstead some day.

Jamie Lawrence gulped down the last of his Stage Delicatessen triple decker and signalled for the mike.

WMBE time . . . two minutes before three a.m. News time coming up on the Jamie Lawrence Show . . . then your lover boy will be right back with a brand new Beagle Treatle. Don't touch that dial. You're surrounded by (JINGLE: W—M—B—EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE).

The engineer flicked on the announcer's microphone in the news booth and reached for a piece of cheese cake. Between bites, he asked Jamie, "How come you gave that gal on the phone Jeannie's home number? You trying to get D.J. in hot water?"

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, everybody knows D.J. and Jeannie have been shacking up. If that broad on the phone is really his wife, you've opened up a can of worms."

"I thought about it. But I'm positive that was D.J.'s wife on the phone. She knew all the right answers and D.J.'s told me enough about his family, I know all the right questions. I'm *also* positive he's not screwing around with Jeannie. You forget nobody's ever gotten to first base with her in five years. And D.J. is the original goodie-goodie two shoes."

"Maybe you're right. He's a nice guy. I'd hate to see him get hurt."

"Me too."

The news ended and the all-night team went back to work.

Jeannie's mouth went dry as she listened to Freda. "Jeannie, I'm worried about him. He hasn't come back since this morning according to the desk and it's nearly three a.m. I hated to call you, but he's told me so much about you, I feel I know you. I don't know what to do."

Jeannie's brain spun as she tried desperately to think of the right thing to say. Did she dare suggest Daryl was with Basil? What if Freda had called him first? Could she pretend she didn't know where Daryl was? No. The girl on the other end of the line was too distraught for that kind of cruelty.

"Freda . . . Freda . . . uh . . . uh . . . uh . . ."
Jeannie was not a good liar. She couldn't think of anything but the truth. "Daryl is here," she blurted out. Then an idea rushed to her mind. "Hold on. I'll wake him."

As she set the phone down, the impact of what she said struck her full force. The idea was to convey the truth . . . or at least half of it. They had fallen asleep innocently. If Freda had called ten minutes earlier they would have been embarrassed, but otherwise blameless, Jeannie convinced herself. Once Freda heard the full story she would have to believe the truth. Now they had to pretend that the last ten minutes never happened. They had to lie. And Freda would see through the lie once she saw them together. Jeannie started to pick up the phone again . . . then backed away as the tears rolled down her hot cheeks. Her blouse had fallen open. She quickly stuffed the exposed breast back into it and began to button it up.

D.J. was on his feet. "What is it, honey?" he whispered.

Jeannie lost her composure completely. She sank to the floor, sobbing audibly. "It's your wife," she cried. "It's Freda . . . she's here . . . in New York!"

D.J. reached for the phone and almost dropped it as his hand began to shake. The conversation was brief. Hushed. Cool. D.J. was back in his room in fifteen minutes. By the time he entered the lobby of the hotel, he had gathered his wits. He was mortified that he had nearly cheated on his wife for the first time, but at least he had his story straight. He and Jeannie had agreed to tell most of the truth. They had fallen asleep . . . Jeannie on the couch . . . Daryl in a chair. It was a simple case of exhaustion brought on by the merry-go-round of Daryl's promotion campaign. He had never been in Jeannie's apartment before nor had she ever been in his room. The fact that this was a true statement lent conviction to his story. He had to hope Freda would believe it.

Freda was heartsick. Of course, she believed every word, she insisted to herself. But still, the nagging doubt was there. Why did he permit himself to get into such a

situation? They talked until after five, when D.J. took time out to shave and shower. Becky woke up and asked for her daddy just as D.J. stepped into the elevator.

Jeannie did not show up at WMBE that Monday morning. Basil missed her. He went without his mid-morning coffee. The newspapers were on his desk as usual when he arrived, but they had been tossed haphazardly across the middle of the desk, knocking the large green blotter askew. He started to telephone Jeannie, but decided to wait another hour.

D.J. also missed Jeannie. He stopped by her desk, as usual, when he finished his show but no one was there. He left the building quickly and called her from a public phone booth. There was no answer. He debated going to her apartment but decided it was too risky with Freda in town.

On the way back to his hotel, his mental tape recorder played back the events of the preceding evening. He still couldn't believe he'd actually made a pass at Jeannie. Even more incredible was the way she had responded. Was it simply because they had been thrown together so much in the past few weeks or were they really falling for each other? He dismissed the thoughts from his mind. He was married to the most wonderful girl in the world. He quickened his step as he neared the hotel. This time, the greeting was as they had both envisaged it all the time they were apart.

They both agreed that yesterday had been a bad comedy of errors. On reflection, Freda admitted that she had played her own part in it when she made the decision to drive to New York as a surprise instead of waiting for him to give her the go-ahead. But she had sat in Grand Rapids without her husband long enough. One more month, she told Daryl, and Becky would have been saying "who he?" when she saw her father.

She had planned to arrive around four o'clock on Sunday afternoon, but she got a later start than she intended that morning in western Pennsylvania. Later, the old car gave out on the turnpike. It needed only a fan belt, but several hours elapsed before the car was rolling again.

Then she got lost trying to find the Lincoln Tunnel. It was one-thirty a.m. when the bellboy turned the key to Daryl's room. She had waited an hour before calling the station.

Daryl was booked for an afternoon personal appearance in a New Jersey supermarket, but he was free for lunch. He gathered Becky in his arms and caught a cab for the new apartment. Freda was enthralled with his choice until she found out how much it cost. Daryl teased away her fears and added that it was too late to do anything about it anyway since he had signed a three-year lease.

He took them to lunch at Tavern-On-The-Green. As they sat waiting for the food at the outdoor tables, Freda began to relax for the first time. Tomorrow was the first day of June and in Central Park the warm sun felt good as it soaked away the fatigue of the trip. The only remaining problem was Daryl. He looks dreadfully tired, Freda thought. Of course, he didn't get much sleep last night but one night could never etch those dark circles under his eyes.

Jeannie called Basil at eleven-thirty that morning. She was at the airport in Washington. She hoped he would forgive her for the sudden departure, but a family crisis demanded her presence. No, there was nothing he could do. She was sure it would work out. He told her to take all the time she needed. It must be something important, thought Basil. Jeannie was not one to go flying off the handle. He called personnel and got a pool secretary to fill in.

As she hung up the phone, Jeannie breathed a sigh of relief that Basil had not pursued the subject. How could she tell him that she, herself, was the crisis in the Draves family?

She placed another call, this one to Arlington, to tell her mother that she was home and then flagged a taxi. As soon as she walked in the door her mother sensed that something was wrong, but wisely decided not to ask questions. If Jeannie was still the same girl she had borne and raised, she knew the time would come when

her daughter would tell her. Time, Jeannie decided, was what she needed most of all. Time to think, and time to work things out. One thing was certain. She knew she would never return to work at WMBE. The only question that remained was how and when to tell Basil. If she resigned too quickly, Freda would begin to put two and two together. Jeannie could not do that to Daryl. Nor did she want to hurt Freda.

"How did the first day go, Mr. Newsman?" asked Vera.

Ev chuckled. "Not much to it," he replied. "I did two five-minute newscasts before the network service began. Everything else was just a quick thirty seconds. It's not like the old days, I can tell you. All they seem to care about today is slapping it out. You don't even see the copy until about a minute before air time. You don't have a chance to check pronunciation or even mark the script. I can remember when, if you heard it on the radio, you knew it had to be right. Why, even their time checks are sometimes a minute off. Don't ever set your watch by the radio. The rule there is 'don't make a correction if you give the wrong time—it just calls attention to it.' Even the network news is a farce. I wandered downstairs to see how they did it and overheard a newsman arguing with an editor about a taped report. They call them 'actualities.' You couldn't understand a word of it. All you could hear was some snapping and crackling in the background for about forty seconds. Then, at the very end, you heard a voice say: 'This is Bill Benjamin . . . MBE News . . . Saigon.' The funny part of it was the newsroom had a full transcript of his copy. All they had to do was give it to the New York newsman to read. But the editor argued that it was more important to impress the audience with a foreign correspondent's voice than to present a clear story."

"Does this mean you're not happy with your new job?"

"Oh, it'll work out. The important thing is that I'm back in harness. I needed that."

"What do you think of D.J.?"

"I really haven't had a chance to get to know him. He

seemed awfully preoccupied this morning, like something was bothering him. But he was nice enough . . . and everyone seems to like him."

Daryl took delight in showing Freda the town. At first, he avoided the restaurants he had frequented with Jeanie, but gradually the pangs of remorse disappeared and he introduced his wife to the joys of gourmet dining.

Freda frowned when Daryl ordered wine with dinner. "Be not among the winebibbers," she quoted from Proverbs. "Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. At the last it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder."

Daryl responded with a quote from Ecclesiastes. "Go, eat your bread with enjoyment; and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already approved what you do."

Freda giggled and took a sip of the Bordeaux. She had to admit that it not only tasted good but it complemented the meal. Over the first hurdle, thought Daryl. The money hurdle proved more difficult. Freda could not help worrying about the money her husband was spending. Daryl insisted she shop for a complete new wardrobe. Her appearance would be important to his career, he explained. She was aghast at the prices some of the Fifth Avenue shops demanded for a simple afternoon dress, but D.J. pooh-poohed her shock. Without his help, Freda could have outfitted herself suitably for under five hundred dollars. With Daryl along, the charges mounted to thirty-seven hundred dollars.

Freda began to feel as though she were a puppet being carried along with her feet dangling inches above the ground. It was Vera Dowling who restored her footing. Two weeks after they had moved into their apartment, Freda received an invitation to dinner with the Dowlings. She called Vera promptly and accepted for Saturday evening.

Despite the difference in their ages and backgrounds, the two couples hit it off immediately. Daryl found Ev to be a fascinating conversationalist and the two men spent

hours talking about the golden days of radio. Ev was delighted to learn of Daryl's interest in the subject and regaled his young colleague with a never-ending supply of reminiscences.

Vera practically adopted Freda. The older woman became a willing confidante, advisor and friend during the course of the evening. She never preached but she managed to convey a series of warnings to Freda about the hazards of being at the top of the entertainment world. She alerted her to temptations that D.J. would face as his star continued to rise, and cautioned Freda against paying too much attention to the stories she was bound to hear about D.J.

"It's a different world, Freda. It can be a wonderful world or a Dante's Inferno. All you can do is be there when Daryl needs you. You don't dare try to steer the course. He has to have room to spread his wings. You can only pray he isn't wearing the wings of Icarus. He will be flying close to the sun. If his wings are held together with wax . . . they'll melt."

Jeannie wrote Basil a long, cryptic letter in which she explained that it was impossible for her to leave Virginia. She hoped to return to work as soon as her family problems eased, but it had become apparent that her presence would be required for some time to come. Therefore, she had no alternative but to resign. It would be unfair to WMBE for her to ask for another extension on her leave of absence. Basil telephoned her, but she refused to elaborate. He said he understood (although he didn't) and added that her job would always be open as long as he remained with the company.

August wrapped its soggy blanket around the city. D.J. and Freda found their only solace from the heat in air conditioning. Their newly-acquired air conditioned Mercedes 280 transported them from air conditioned apartment to air conditioned restaurant to air conditioned studio to air conditioned theatre. Freda longed for the clean, fresh air of the LaFollete fishing camp, but

Basil had vetoed any vacation this year for the new WMBE morning man. It was too early in the game, he explained to D.J., to allow a gap in the continuity of the show. The ratings were great . . . even higher than those of Daddy-O, but they couldn't chance a drop. Not yet. Next year for sure. But not now. Daryl suggested Freda take Becky back to Michigan for a visit, but Freda said she had had enough time away from her husband to last her a lifetime.

So the Hoffert-Jacksons stayed put, in air conditioned splendor. Freda was becoming increasingly concerned about their financial condition. It doesn't make sense, she reasoned silently. Daryl says he's earned more in the last four months than he had previously made in his entire radio career, but our savings account holds only fourteen dollars. They were no closer to buying the fishing camp than they had been when he worked in Grand Rapids.

Freda was also increasingly concerned about Daryl's health. He just wasn't getting enough sleep.

September breathed a promise of relief as it tiptoed into Manhattan. In Virginia, summer clung to the countryside with a tenacity that threatened to never let go.

Jeannie threw the stick one more time for the family German shepherd and then headed home. As she strode across the meadow with the dog heeling at her side, she picked up an earlier conversation with the animal.

"I envy you, Max," she said. "Life is so simple for you, so uncomplicated. All you ask is a stick and someone to throw it for you."

The dog looked up at her with his deep brown eyes. He gave the illusion of comprehending. His tongue lolled from his mouth in that happy fashion that causes people to believe the breed can smile. Jeannie smiled back.

"What's wrong with me, Max?" she went on. "What do I really want?"

The questions plagued her all summer. She tried to re-establish old friendships with people she had known in school, but they all seemed part of another world. Most were married. A few had been married and di-

voiced. But, married, divorced or single, they had little in common with the once gangling tomboy who had grown into a beautiful, sophisticated woman. Sophisticated? Jeannie laughed wryly to herself at the thought.

At first, her friends had plied her with questions about the glamorous broadcasting business, but they soon tired of the game when they learned she had never met the big network television stars. Radio was a parochial medium. Daddy-O, Pete Sunday, Jamie Lawrence and the rest of the big disk jockeys of New York were total unknowns in Washington.

Now, that world was beginning to seem far away to Jeannie. She thought less and less about WMBE as the weeks dragged by. She was no longer enamoured of radio as she had once been. True, she still listened to her old tapes on occasion, but she now recognized them for what they were: echoes of another era on which the final curtain had fallen. Today's radio was as alien to those recordings as plastic was to handcrafted furniture. The age of creativity was gone. The appeal to the listener's imagination was gone. Today's radio was a computerized machine . . . punching out a never-changing formula. Jeannie had waited five years for it to revert. She now knew that it never would.

She also recognized that the thing with Daryl had been simply a case of proximity. Two strangers tossed together on a desert island would have resulted in the same violent joining. Except that no telephone would have come between them. She shuddered at the thought of how close fate had come to ruining two . . . actually three lives. Now, with Freda in New York, Daryl was safe. Jeannie could not know how wrong she was.

Her feelings about Larry were more mixed. Anger, hate, love, frustration, desire, hurt, need, fear, longing . . . the emotions elbowed each other for position. Paramount among them was determination. Jeannie was determined to put Larry out of her mind once and for all.

The dog and the girl rounded the corner and started up the walk to the Draves' house. Suddenly the dog bristled. Instinctively, Jeannie reached down to grasp his

collar. Then she saw the reason. Someone was on the porch with her mother and father. As she drew closer, she saw her father lean over and say something to the person. The man stood up and Larry Rhodes turned to face her. Jeannie stood stock still . . . not able to utter a word.

"Aren't you going to say hello?" asked Larry.

"Hello, Larry," Jeannie said in a muffled voice.

Jeannie's father broke the awkward moment. After five minutes of strained dialogue, Jeannie excused herself and went to her room. A few minutes later, her father knocked softly at her door.

"This fellow has come all the way from Phoenix just to see you. The least you can do, angel, is have dinner with him," Colonel Draves said.

"Daddy, you don't understand . . ." began Jeannie.

"Maybe I understand more than you think I do," interrupted her father. "Larry and I had a long talk while you were out with the dog. Go have dinner with him. Hear him out and then make up your mind."

An umbrella of politeness hovered over the restaurant table. Gone was the easy, intimate bantering Jeannie and Larry had known on their New York dates. Now they were two super-civilized human beings who discussed the events of the past year with all of the light informality of a negotiation between the U.S. and Red China.

After dinner, they took a long walk around the Tidal Basin. Neither of them said a word for fifteen minutes. Finally, Larry could stand it no longer.

"Jeannie, I've been seven kinds of an idiot. I tried to tell myself a thousand times that it would be better for both of us if we never saw each other again. That's why I haven't called you in almost a year. I thought if I stayed away, you'd find somebody your own age. I wanted you to be happy. I felt I was too old for you and I didn't want to burden you with a son you'd never met. But I'm selfish. I couldn't stay away from you. I tried. Believe me, I tried. But every time I had to come to New York, I could think of nothing but you. I can't tell you

the number of times I picked up the phone to call you and then put it down.

"When I flew in the other day and found out you'd left the station, I almost panicked. I thought I'd lost you forever . . . that you'd gotten married before I even had a chance to tell you I loved you. On top of that, that Kelcke fellow wouldn't give me your address. I had to go clear to Ben Killian to get some action. Now, I'm here. And this time, I'm either leaving with you or I'm *really* never going to see you again. I can't take this anymore. Jeannie, I love you more than I ever believed I could love anyone. I want you more than I've ever wanted anything. I need you. I've been afraid to ask you before, but now I have to know. Do I stand a chance?"

Jeannie listened with a rising wave of emotion. She didn't know whether to laugh or cry. She did neither. She fell into his arms. All of her dreams floated before her. All of her problems dropped through the trap door of love. Daryl was forgotten along with Basil and WMBE and New York. All that remained was Larry . . . Larry . . . Larry . . . Larry.

Larry wanted to get married as soon as they could get the license and blood tests. Jeannie's mother would have none of it. She had waited patiently all of these years and was not about to be cheated out of her daughter's wedding. Mrs. Draves finally allowed herself to be pressured into a small affair and began to busy herself with preparations for the reception.

On the eve of the ceremony, Jeannie asked Larry to take her for a drive. They took a long, circuitous route through Rock Creek Park and on up into Chevy Chase and Bethesda. Maryland's Montgomery County was beginning to don its fall colors. The rolling hills beckoned the two lovers at each crest in the highway. Larry was absorbed in studying the countryside for the first part of the drive. It was a different kind of beauty than he was used to out west. More intimate, delicate and transitory. He turned to Jeannie to comment on it and noticed a troubled look on her face.

"Hey, what's this? It's the groom who's supposed to have jitters the night before the wedding. Don't tell me you're having second thoughts," Larry said.

Jeannie gave him a half smile. But her face became serious again as she said, "Larry, there is something I think you should know . . ."

"There's nothing I need or want to know," cut in Larry. "Our past begins tomorrow. Nothing that happened before that matters."

"It isn't what you think. Maybe it's worse. Larry . . . I'm still a virgin."

Larry pulled the car off the road and braked it. He swung around to face Jeannie and said, "Say that again."

"I said . . . I'm a virgin . . . and I'm scared."

Larry took her in his arms and held her for a long moment. Then he kissed her tenderly and murmured, "As I said, nothing that happened before matters. And that goes for things that didn't happen, too. I'd be less than honest if I didn't tell you that I'm pleased. I guess I'm just old-fashioned. But I'm also a very healthy male animal with very healthy desires. You'll never know how much trouble I've had since I've been here keeping my hands away from you. So if that's what's scaring you, don't worry about it. And if you're afraid I'll hurt you . . . darling, I'd cut my arm off before I'd ever hurt you . . . I promise you . . . your honeymoon will be a beautiful memory . . . in every way."

And it was.

CHAPTER 22

*Takin' a trip on a shot and a puff
It's easier with acid, ain't no bluff.
Pass the pills around and live a bit
Forget your pain, life'll be a hit.
Blow your mind, blow your mind, blow your mind!*

Freda looked sharply at D.J. as the lyrics to the song hammered their way through the big speaker on the wall. Daryl wasn't listening. He was cooing into the telephone propped under his ear. Obviously a female listener, thought Freda. Oh well, she told herself, it's all part of the business. But must these lyrics also be part of the business? Did Daryl deliberately close his ears to them? Or was he simply becoming immune?

Freda was making one of her rare visits to D.J.'s show. Daryl had never really voiced any objections to her presence while he worked, but Freda sensed his desire to be isolated from family and close friends when he faced the microphone. He was like a ventriloquist who feels free to say anything through his dummy but is shy when forced to speak in his natural voice. Daryl talked to the microphone as though it were a human being. He said things to it he wouldn't dare say in his living room. Few people outside the business understood this ambivalence. Even Freda found it difficult to put into words, but she respected his feelings enough to remain at home while he did his show. Today was an exception. Daryl had sug-

gested she join him so they could get a head start on Christmas shopping.

As D.J. cradled the telephone, Freda asked, "What's that song you're playing?"

"A new one by the Glad Stones. It's moving up fast on the charts. It's a real gas, isn't it?"

"The music's all right," Freda replied, "but I think the lyrics are a bit much for a family radio station."

Daryl looked at her strangely. "I hadn't noticed," he said guardedly. "They seem okay to me."

Freda stood up. This was neither the time nor the place to argue about the words to a song. She noticed Saul, D.J.'s engineer, kept his eyes glued to the VU meter as though he did not wish to become involved. "Honey, why don't I go on ahead?" said Freda, changing the subject. "The stores are open now and I want to look at something for you. I'll meet you in the Sixth Avenue Delicatessen for coffee at ten-fifteen."

D.J. blew Freda a kiss as she left the studio. The record was ending. D.J. turned back to the microphone and gave the call letters, time, temperature and weather before launching into a soft drink commercial. Freda walked quickly past the rows of secretaries. A couple of them looked blandly at her and another smiled and nodded. The rest ignored her. As she walked to the elevator buttons she found herself comparing the easygoing informality of WCOO, Grand Rapids with the cold efficiency of the music factory known as WMBE.

Thank goodness for Vera and Ev Dowling, she mused as she waited for the elevator. Without them I'd feel like an Israelite in Egypt. She had met Basil Kelcke but had no desire to foster any kind of social relationship. Daryl thought Kelcke was a warm, generous human being, the New York counterpart to his old boss, Al Heinemann, but Freda looked upon Kelcke as a robot who was programmed to smile on cue and pretend to be kind whenever the situation demanded it.

The light above the third elevator in the bank blinked red and Freda got on. She emerged on the ground floor and started to walk briskly.

"Hey! Michigan," called a voice.

Freda paused and looked back. A man was hurrying to her side. At first she didn't recognize him. Then, as he drew closer, vague memories began to float through her mind.

"Well, well, small world, to coin a phrase," said the man. "Don't you remember? Rex Blair, USC."

"Why, of course!" Freda said. "How are you?"

"I'm fine, now," he smiled. "What are you doing in New York? Are you here for tickets to a TV show? Let me know which ones and I'll guarantee you front row center."

"To answer the first question, I live here. As for the second, thanks for the offer, but I'm not looking for tickets," laughed Freda.

"You haven't changed a bit," said Blair. "You still have that same bubbly giggle." He took her arm and led her to the door. "Come on, let's go somewhere and talk. We've got a lot of catching up to do."

Freda gently shook her arm free. "Rex, I'd like to, but I'm meeting my husband in an hour and I have to do some shopping."

She observed Blair's face muscles tighten at the word "husband." He recovered quickly and turned back to her with, "So you got married. Congratulations. He's a very lucky guy."

"Thank you, and I'm a very lucky girl. He's a wonderful person."

"He'd have to be to get you," Blair said soberly. "I'd like to meet him."

Freda thought a moment. "No reason why you can't," she said. "I'll tell you what. I'll let the shopping go for another day. Let's go over to the Sixth Avenue Deli and rehash old times. I'm dying to know what happened to some of the college gang. Daryl's going to join me there when he gets off the air. You'll meet him then."

"Daryl?" said Rex. "You're not married to D.J., are you?"

"Do you know him?"

"No . . . not really. I've seen him at a couple of movie

openings, but I've never met him. How come I haven't seen you with him?"

"I don't like those big, swanky affairs. Besides, we have a two-and-a-half year old daughter and I like to spend as much time with her as I can. We have a nursemaid, but I still think she needs her mother."

They were crossing Fifty-Fifth Street. Rex Blair was struggling to remain calm. That bastard, he thought. That dirty sonofabitch. He beats me out of a job and now I find he's beaten me out of a girl. I wonder if anybody got into her pants before he did. He looked over at Freda and sucked in his breath as he mentally undressed her. Little girl, he said silently, you don't know it, but one of these days soon you're going to be in the sack with old Rex. He smiled as he thought of the things he could teach her. Things he was sure that hick husband of hers never dreamed of.

Over coffee, Rex poured on the charm. He was the epitome of a gentleman as he talked about the fun things that went on in Manhattan. Had she seen "The Odd Couple"? No, but she had seen "Barefoot in the Park." Was she going to the opening of "Man of La Mancha"? They hadn't been invited. Rex debated asking her to join him, but decided it was too early in his slowly formulating game plan.

Daryl bounced in at ten-fifteen. He scanned the restaurant for his wife and almost missed her. He was looking for a table with one person at it. When he finally spotted her and noticed she was with another man, his heart skipped a beat. The idea of Freda with somebody else had always been anathema to him. He hurried over to the table. Rex stood up as he approached, still playing the role of the gentleman. Freda introduced them and explained that she had known Blair in college.

"Honey, you never told me you had a past," Daryl said with a grin.

"I can assure you, D.J.," said Rex with a matching grin, "Freda had no past at USC. In fact, she was the talk of the campus. Every guy tried and every guy failed."

"Including you?"

"Nope," lied Blair. "I know when I'm licked. Once the word got around that she was an untouchable, I steered clear. My ego doesn't like to be bruised."

"Stop it, you two," giggled Freda. "I feel like a heifer at a state fair. Anyway, if we're going to get any Christmas shopping done, we'd better get with it. Daryl doesn't get many free mornings."

As the threesome walked toward the cashier, Rex said, "I just thought of something. I'm having a few people in on Friday night. If you're free, I'd love to have you join us."

Freda started to beg off but Daryl jumped in with a quick acceptance. They parted on the sidewalk and Rex hopped into a taxi. When he was gone, Freda said, "I hope you didn't say yes to please me. Believe me, honey, I hardly knew Rex in school. He was a senior when I was a sophomore."

"No, it wasn't that. I like him. And a party might be fun."

"But it'll be the day after Thanksgiving. What are we going to do with all that leftover turkey?" protested Freda.

"What leftover turkey? I told you we're joining the Dowlings for dinner at the Plaza."

"I know, and I think the idea of having dinner with Vera and Ev is marvelous, but why can't we have it at home? A real old-fashioned Thanksgiving. I'll call Vera. She'll understand."

"Sweetheart," replied Daryl in an imitation of W. C. Fields' voice, "the wife of a New York radio star of the first magnitude does not spend an entire day slaving over a hot stove. Why, if the word got out, I'd be banned from the club."

"But I've been planning it for days. I've already ordered the turkey."

"Fling it to the varlets. Hurl the mince pie at the churls. Toss the stuffing to the knaves."

Freda would not be put off by Daryl's teasing. "Honey, I want to cook it," she pleaded. "It's the first

time I've had a chance since we've been married. We've always gone to Mother's in the past. Now, it's my turn. Daryl, I've been looking forward to it."

D.J. put his arm around her as they crossed Fifty-Fifth Street. "I'm sorry, darling," he said. "I didn't realize it meant so much to you. But, don't you see? I have to work that morning and I'm scheduled to make personal appearances at two high school football games that afternoon. There just isn't time for a real holiday. I'll make a deal with you. Go along with the Plaza and I promise we'll spend all day Christmas at home. It falls on a Saturday this year so I have the day off. You can have a field day in the kitchen then. Okay?"

Freda nodded reluctantly. She still wasn't happy with the arrangement but she knew any further discussion would be fruitless. They windowshopped their way north on Fifth Avenue until they came to F.A.O. Schwarz.

"Look at that, Freda. Wouldn't Becky love to wake up on Christmas Day and find one of those by the tree?"

Freda giggled as she stared at the huge stuffed giraffe. "It's four times as big as she is. I'm afraid she'd be scared to death. But, gee, it's a fabulous store. Let's not buy anything today. Let me bring her down here and see what she likes. She's been asking when she could meet Santa Claus anyway."

They wandered aimlessly but happily for another hour. Several stores were beginning to jump the season with Christmas displays. Freda and Daryl both agreed that they didn't like to see decorations before Thanksgiving. It was still only topcoat weather although there had been a couple of sub-freezing days. But for the Hofferts it was a mild autumn. A far cry from a Michigan November. Freda started humming Vernon Duke's "Autumn in New York" as they strode up the avenue.

"It feels good to walk," she said.

"Yes," replied Daryl. "We haven't done enough of it lately."

They walked all the way home . . . hand in hand. They were closer than they had been in months. And

closer than they would ever be again, although neither of them knew it at the time.

Rex Blair's apartment looked as though it had been designed by Playboy magazine. A custom-built, tangerine velvet couch curled its twenty-foot length around one corner of the living room. In front of it a massive, kidney-shaped coffee table crouched on the thick, white shaggy rug. Recessed in the teak coffee table were controls for the stereo and color TV sets. Soft rock beat its insistent rhythm through speakers which were cantilevered in each of the four corners of the room. Contour chairs built for two were scattered around the forty-foot expanse. Tiny spotlights pinpointed little areas . . . each controlled by separate dimmers. A strip of pink bulbs backlit the drapes. Soft cushions were spaced all around, nestled in front of low hibachis. The decor was Arabian mod.

As a smiling, white-coated man took their coats and ushered them into the room, Freda and Daryl gasped. The party was just beginning to warm up. The sweet aroma of marijuana drifted by the Hofferts causing Freda to wrinkle her nose questioningly. She never did learn what the odor was.

"Welcome, welcome to Chez Blair," said a beaming Rex as he rushed over to greet them. "I was afraid you weren't going to make it."

"I'm sorry we're late," said D.J., "but our daughter refused to go to sleep."

"Ah, the hazards of parenthood," Rex said. "Well, no matter. You're here. That's what counts. What are you drinking?"

"Just a couple of 7 Ups," said D.J.

"Now I know why you married him," Rex said to Freda. "You're two of a kind."

"Right out of the same pod," smiled D.J.

Rex led them over to the bar and personally poured their soft drinks. Then he guided them around the room, stopping in front of each group to introduce Freda and D.J. to the assembled *New Yorkers*. None of them gave

any indication of ever having heard of D.J. It was a new experience for the WMBE deejay. Wherever he had gone in the past six months, he had been greeted by fawning fans who shrieked their admiration. This gathering was a different breed. Daryl was puzzled at first, then slightly defensive, finally determined to make his mark with these beautiful sophisticates. They *were* beautiful. The women seemed to have stepped right out of magazine covers, which was not unusual since many of them were top models. The men emitted an aura of cool success. Freda took it all in stride. Since she was an outdoor girl who had no desire to get involved with the jet set, she felt no need to seek acceptance. She acted friendly and natural and won over everyone she met.

In keeping with the tradition of parties, the young couple separated. Freda sat down on a cushion, nibbled on a tiny meatball she cooked on one of the hibachis and joined a discussion about the U.S. in Vietnam. Daryl floated from group to group seeking an entry.

Rex was leaning back against the bar studying his guests when Sam Bunsen approached him.

"You look like a reincarnation of Machiavelli," Sam said. "What's the plot?"

Rex turned to his agent with a look of feigned innocence. "I . . . plot?" he asked. "Why, Sam. I'm just trying to be a considerate host."

"Oh, sure." Sam's eyes searched the room and then stopped when they came to rest on D.J. "Who's the kid with the blond hair?"

"That," replied Rex sarcastically, "is the hyper-talented D.J., WMBE's successor to the famed Daddy-O. You remember Daddy-O, don't you?"

"How come you invited him?"

Rex stared pointedly at Freda.

"That his chick?" inquired Sam, following Rex's stare.

"For the moment."

"Aha," sneered Sam. "The picture's coming into focus. Hit 'im where it hurts, eh?"

Blair grinned.

Freda excused herself to go to the bathroom. When she came out, she found Rex waiting for her.

"Oh," she said. "You startled me."

"You haven't had the twenty-five cent tour. Let me show you around."

He escorted her down the hall and into the bedroom. It was a study in scarlet. Scarlet wallpaper merged with a deep rug of the same hue. A scarlet canopy hung tent-like over a king-sized double bed. A soft glow of light washed down the headboard and disappeared into satin scarlet sheets.

"This is the master bedroom," said Rex. "Like it?"

"It's . . . golly, it sure is different from anything I've ever seen," replied Freda.

"Everything in it is different including me."

Freda felt Rex's thigh pressing against hers. She moved away. "Let's continue the tour, shall we?" she said hastily.

Rex gritted his teeth as he led her down the corridor. Opening another door, he said, "this is the guest room. Feel free to use it anytime you wish." He flicked on the light.

The tableau that greeted them hit Freda with the force of a tidal wave. Three people were meshed together on the bed. All were nude. A lithe young redhead had her legs spread wide as she writhed in ecstasy. A slim man was thrusting himself into her with a steady rhythmic motion. Another man cradled her head as he inserted his penis into her mouth. When the light flooded the room, the girl rolled her eyes in the direction of Freda and Rex and winked.

Freda clapped her hand over her face in horror and backed out of the room. She raced down the hall and into the living room. Her eyes darted across the crowd until she spotted Daryl. Hurrying toward him, she pulled him to his feet and away from the group.

"Daryl, take me home, please, right now."

"Why? What's wrong? I'm just beginning to get to know these people."

Freda rejected further discussion. She caught the white-jacketed servant by his arm and demanded her coat. Flinging it over her shoulders, she fled. Daryl started to follow her when Rex caught up with him.

"Where are you going, ol' buddy?" asked Rex.

"Freda flew out of here like a scared rabbit. She looked sick. I have to catch her."

"She'll be all right. I just talked to her. She ate some smoked eel and chocolate-covered ants before she found out what they were. She got a little squeamish. A lot of people do before they get used to it. Let her go. She'll be too embarrassed to want to see you right now. Give her some time to get over it. I called the doorman to get her a cab, so you don't have to worry."

Daryl hesitated. Rex took him by the arm and pointed to a girl sitting by herself in a corner. "There's a chick over there who's been dying to meet you all night. Come on, I'll introduce you."

They started toward the girl. "I have to warn you about one thing," continued Rex. "That gal's got a real snappin' pussy. She'll draw your guts out of you if you're not careful."

D.J. stopped and faced Rex. "I'm afraid I don't get it."

"Oh, you'll get it all right," leered Rex. "You can't miss with Maggie. She'd rather screw than breathe."

D.J. gave a little self-conscious laugh. "I'm afraid you've got me wrong, Rex. I'm an old-fashioned square who never cheats on his wife."

Rex shrugged. "Just trying to be a good host," he said. "I hope I didn't offend you."

D.J. laughed again. "Oh, no, not at all. I know what goes on. It's just that I don't do it. What other people do is their business." He yawned. Rubbing his eyes, he said, "Excuse me. Sometimes I think I'm tired all the time. That station keeps me hopping day and night. I don't know how people in this town keep up the pace."

Rex's eyes narrowed almost imperceptibly. "Most of us get a little help . . . from Bennies and Aimies."

"Who are Benny and Amy?"

"Not who . . . what. Bennies and Aimies are Uppies. As opposed to Downies."

D.J. shook his head in an effort to comprehend. "I guess I'm dense, but I still don't get it."

"Forget it . . . for now. If you really start having problems keeping up the scene, let me know. I'll send you to my doctor. He'll fix you up quick."

"Gee, thanks, Rex . . . and thanks for a boss night. I had a ball. I'm only sorry Freda couldn't stay."

"Maybe next time."

A crew-cut man wove his way toward them. "Hey, Rex," he said. "I'm cleaned out. You holding?"

Rex glared at the man and gave a sidelong glance at Daryl.

Catching the motion, the crew-cut man backed away and mumbled, "Sorry. Didn't see you were busy."

Rex walked D.J. to the coat closet, helped him on with his topcoat and escorted him to the door. "I'd have introduced you to that guy, but he's strictly a scag. You're better off not knowing him." Rex stuck his hand out and added, "The door's always open, D.J. Let's get together real soon."

"Yeah," said D.J. "But I better take a course in the language you guys talk. I'll bet they don't teach it at Berlitz."

They both laughed and D.J. headed for the elevator. Rex closed the door and turned back to his crew-cut acquaintance. "You got bread?" Rex asked him.

"I got the smash," answered the man defensively.

They went into the master bedroom. Rex made the man face the wall. Then he slid open a hidden panel in the headboard. He reached in and retrieved a small glassine envelope containing white powder. He passed it to the man with his left hand and accepted a wadded up bill with his right. Not a word was exchanged during this transaction.

Freda was asleep, or pretended to be when D.J. arrived home. He undressed quickly and slid into bed be-

side her. He reached over to caress her breast, but she turned on her stomach with a muffled "not tonight." D.J. resigned himself to a sexless night and turned over to go to sleep himself.

The weekend passed uneventfully. Freda studiously avoided any mention of the party. Daryl thought he understood. She was embarrassed, although Daryl could see no reason for it. Cripes! he thought. I couldn't stomach chocolate-covered ants either.

Freda took Becky's hand and pushed her way through the crowd. They found the end of the line and waited patiently for almost forty minutes until it was Becky's turn to talk to the Macy's Santa Claus. As she watched her daughter's starry-eyed expression, Freda decided the wait had been worth it.

When Becky had finished telling Santa all she wanted for Christmas, they pushed their way back onto the street. Luck was with them. A taxi pulled up to the store just as they reached the curb. Freda held the door for the emerging passengers and then boosted Becky into a seat next to her.

The cab deposited them in front of Rumpelmayer's restaurant. Inside, they had another wait, this time for ten minutes. Glancing around, Freda noticed dozens of mothers and children had all picked this same day to go shopping. Nonetheless, there was a feeling of camaraderie as the mothers exchanged smiling "Christmas comes but once a year" looks. Becky took no notice of the crowds. She was too enthralled with the sights and sounds and smells of the season. She was also pleasantly surprised that her mother ordered her a tall, gooey chocolate concoction for lunch. To Becky, it was a welcome change from her usual meal.

After leaving Rumpelmayer's, they walked slowly east on Central Park South. Freda felt exhilarated for the first time in weeks. It had been a wonderful day. The sky was overcast with a gray promise of snow by nightfall. The lack of sunshine made the lights and decorations in the store windows glisten more brightly. Maybe I can learn

to live with this town after all, Freda told herself. It certainly does go all out for Christmas. Even the people seem friendlier and warmer. They still push and bump each other in the shops, but they do it with a smiling apology.

They entered F.A.O. Schwarz and Becky reached for the first of the nine thousand toys she would be told not to touch. Rocking horses and forest tree houses; besieged castles and peasant doll houses; Steiff animals and tricycles; and dolls, dolls, dolls. Becky's eyes grew wider with each aisle. It was toyland, fairyland and Heaven under one roof. And it was a tired, happy little girl who finally went to sleep that night amidst visions of elves, reindeer and sugar plums.

It would have been the happiest Christmas Freda had ever known save for two things. Her mother had not felt up to the trip east and Daryl did not seem to be able to get into the Christmas spirit. He went through the motions, but they were lackluster. He asked Freda to take care of Christmas cards and shopping, two items that had always been joyous joint ventures. This year he did not even bother to ask Freda what she wanted for Christmas. That too had been a tradition. The secret smiles, the broad hints, the "don't look in the closet" warnings . . . these things were special to Daryl and Freda. Until this year . . . and this present.

Freda had always looked forward to receiving gifts from her husband. They were never expensive because Daryl had never had much money. But they were unique. Each present had obviously been searched for and then carefully selected so that it seemed to have been made just for Freda. This Christmas was a complete turnabout. There was just one gift: a sable coat. Freda could only guess what it cost, but she was certain it was in the five figure area. To many women, it would have been a dream come true. But Freda was not many women. She was not the sable, mink, diamond, emerald type girl. She was . . . Freda.

Vera walked into the kitchen as Freda was stirring gravy for their dinner. "May an old woman venture an opinion?" asked Vera.

"Only if she's a *wise* old woman," responded Freda with a twinkle in her eye.

"All right, this wise old woman suspects you're not too happy with your Christmas present."

Freda placed the gravy spoon on a dish. "Strictly between a wise old woman and a foolish young girl, Vera, we can't afford a sable coat."

"Nobody can afford a sable, my dear, but sometimes people in our business have to get such things out of their systems. Ride with it. He'll get over the big money syndrome."

"I hope so," Freda sighed.

Denver, Colo., Mar. 21 (UPI)—Former disk jockey Harry Evenson, now executive director of POP—People Opposing Pollution—today kicked off the campaign to reverse the eutrophication of America's Great Lakes. Evenson warned the nation that, unless drastic steps were taken, future generations would have no water to drink. He addressed . . .

"Honey, did you see this?" asked Freda.

"See what?" replied Daryl.

"This story in the paper about Harry Evenson. Wasn't he the fellow you replaced . . . the deejay they called Daddy-O?"

Daryl leaned over her shoulder and perused the article. "Sonofagun," he said. "He's actually getting involved. Good for him. I'm sure sorry we all never got together before he left town. You'd have liked him, Freda. He was a man with both feet on the ground. By golly, I envy him. Well . . . one of these days we'll be following him. Back to nature. Right, sport?"

"I hope so. But, honey, we've got to start saving some money if we're ever going to do anything about getting a fishing camp. I hate to keep bringing this up, but we're

beginning to run behind in bills. Maybe we should go back to a cash only basis and drop the charge accounts."

Daryl laughed. "Freda, the stores in this town would faint dead away if you waved a ten dollar bill in front of them. I'll bet half the clerks wouldn't know how to make change. Don't worry, all we have to do is take it easy for a month or two and we'll be caught up again. Then we'll start saving for that camp. Which reminds me. Did you make reservations for the LaFollette camp this summer?"

"Not yet. I thought I'd give Bill a few weeks to get over his wife's death. It was so sudden, you know. I feel awfully guilty about not being able to get to Mary's funeral."

"Yeah, I know. But it wasn't your fault. You didn't even find out about it until two weeks after it happened. Why don't you write Bill a long letter and make reservations? It'll probably cheer him up."

D.J. left the apartment for a lunch date with some people from the ad agency that handled a chain of banks, one of his newest clients on the show. Freda took Becky for a brisk walk in the park and then turned the child over to her nursemaid. Daryl's birthday was less than a week away and Freda still hadn't bought him a present. It seemed that every time she came up with an idea, Daryl thought of it too, and bought it.

The taxi let her off at Forty-Fifth and Fifth. Freda laughed to herself at the thought of saving a few pennies by walking one block to Madison. They were in so deep now that it would take more than a few pennies to catch up on their debts. Still, she thought, you have to start somewhere. She entered Abercrombie & Fitch and took the elevator to the ninth floor. Three well-tailored men were wandering through the fishing department. Otherwise, she had the floor to herself. She walked over to the Orvis fishing pole rack and began to test the action of the various bamboo fly rods.

This is the answer, she thought, as she selected an ultra light rod. Once Daryl gets back to a Michigan trout stream he'll be himself again. She felt encouraged by the fact that it was Daryl who had suggested she make reser-

vations at the LaFollette camp. Maybe he's ready to slow down a little bit. That's what he needs, some rest.

"Now, what's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?" asked a deep voice behind her.

Freda whirled and came face to face with Rex Blair. It was the first time she had seen him since his party in November.

"Don't tell me you actually know how to use one of those," he said.

"What are you doing in the fishing department?" asked Freda, ignoring his question. "I thought bar accessories were more your style."

"Oooh! The lady can handle the lance as well as the rod," he said. "Look, Freda, I want to apologize for what you saw that night. I had no idea anything like that was going on. Believe me, those people will never be invited again. I . . ."

"I've already forgotten about it, Rex," Freda interrupted. "Let's not discuss it any more."

"Fine. Listen, I have to get a gift for a friend's boat, then I'm free for lunch. How about it? We never did have a chance for that long talk."

Freda planted herself firmly in front of Blair. Fixing a cool gaze on him she said, "Rex, I don't think we have anything more to say to each other. We live in different worlds."

"You've got me all wrong, Freda."

"I don't think so. You're really quite transparent, you know. What you couldn't get at USC, you think you're going to get in New York. Why me, Rex? I saw the girls at that party. Every one of them was prettier and more experienced-looking. Why don't you go after them? You're wasting your time with me. I'm a one guy girl."

She picked up the rod and walked over to the clerk. Rex stood looking after her for a moment, then spun on his heel and disappeared into the boating department.

Rex Blair had a nine o'clock audition for a toothpaste commercial. He was early, so he stopped at his favorite shoeshine parlor on Fiftieth Street. As he climbed into

the only available chair, he heard a familiar jingle blasting through an ancient, dust-covered radio with a yellowed dial light indicating WMBE.

O.K., guys and gals, wind those Mickey Mouse watches. It's 8:35 Mercury Standard Time. Sudden thought! If we have antique shows, why can't we have uncle-tique shows?

Rex winced and closed his eyes. So I lost out to that hayseed, he berated himself. He opened his eyes as the shoeshine man began rubbing a mahogany compound into his sixty-five dollar cordovan shoes.

"Man, that D.J. is somethin', ain't he?" laughed the man.

"Is he?" answered Rex with thinly disguised sarcasm.

"Oh, yeah. The kid says whatever pops into his head. He don't care for scripts or sponsors or nuthin'. What a character!" The man did his work keeping time to another WMBE jingle.

Rex had gone through this scene before. In barber shops, cigar stores, his neighborhood pharmacy. O.K., I'm jealous. So what? he said silently as he shoved his hand into his pocket to buy the Times at the corner of Seventh Avenue and Fiftieth Street.

He strode east, trying not to think about D.J., but his mind kept returning to the odious subject. That phony little wife of his! She thinks the kid she's married to is so sensational. No liquor, no cigarettes. "I'm an old-fashioned square who never cheats on his wife." Daryl's words echoed in Rex's head. Bullshit! "I'm a one guy girl." Double bullshit! That little Puritanical bitch! I could show her how to live in this town.

Blair began to smile a block later. I can imagine just how pure that insipid sap would be if he were in the right situation. Rex saw his own reflection in Wallach's window at Fifth Avenue and Forty-Sixth Street. The faces next to his all seemed to have a mop of blond hair and a generous sprinkle of boyish freckles. Rex looked from one reflection to another. You don't know it, kid, he told them collectively, but you're going to see a side of this town you never even knew existed.

CHAPTER 23

Rex Blair occupied a choice table at Saito's. Daryl spotted Rex as he gave his name to the maitre d' at the Japanese restaurant. He was amused to see that Rex was the only Occidental seated at a table. The other Western-world customers were all sprawled awkwardly on the floor attempting to dine in authentic Japanese fashion, struggling with chopsticks while the Orientals were, without exception, seated at tables using forks and spoons. Daryl caught Rex's eye and motioned to the maitre d' that he'd make his own way to the table.

"Well, glad you could make it, D.J."

"Wouldn't miss it. How've you been?"

"Oh, about normal. Looking under every rock for a buck."

"Yeah? You'll be buying Mercury one of these days. I hope you keep me on when you do. I *really* need the loot!"

"You're doing fine, kid, simply great. I wish I had your future."

The two men dined on tempura and sukiyaki following a sushi appetizer. After being served the strong, warm sake, Rex steered the conversation away from

small talk. "D.J., I invited you to lunch because I wanted to ask you a favor. I have a friend, a girl who's trying to break into the music business. She's a pretty good singer, but the record game is an uncharted sea today. She digs rock and I don't know much about it. I'd appreciate it if you could meet her, that is, if you can spare a few minutes."

D.J.'s face began to crease in a warning frown.

"Now don't get me wrong," Rex continued hurriedly. "I know how you feel about playing around. Believe me, this gal is straight. She won't even let me lay a glove on her. All she's interested in is singing. And she got pretty excited when I told her I'd be seeing you for lunch today. She thinks the sun rises and sets on your show. It does rise on it come to think of it. Anyhow, all you have to do is give her some advice."

"When would I meet her?"

"Right now, if you've got the time. She works in traffic at Mercury."

"Lead on."

Rex picked up the twenty-four dollar tab, tossed a five dollar bill on the table, paid the cashier and led the way out. Ten minutes later, Rex was opening the door to the Mercury Broadcasting traffic department mail room. A slender, graceful, raven-haired girl who appeared to be about nineteen smiled as they entered. "Rex! Hil Oh . . . D.J.!"

D.J. was pleased, as always, by the excitement of a teen-ager who recognized him. He was somewhat embarrassed for Rex, for Daryl sensed that he would never again receive the adulation of a youngster like this one. He lived on a different planet, Daryl reflected, a closely related one, but very much apart from D.J.'s. And Daryl himself could offer no explanation of how he managed to have this incredible instant rapport with kids. But it was there. And he enjoyed it.

The girl was called Mickey. D.J. missed her last name. Later he found out it was Browne. An interesting face. Very youthful. But a grown-up body. Eye-popping figure. And that jet black hair . . .

"Rex says you're a singer," D.J. gulped. He cleared his throat. What's the *matter* with me? he asked himself. I'm nervous. This is ridiculous. I've been through this routine a hundred times before. Chatting with a teen-ager who wants to break into show business. Not always eighteen or nineteen or however old she is, but still cut out of the same cloth.

"You look just like your pictures," Mickey cooed.

"Pictures?" asked D.J. blankly.

"Oh, I've got dozens of those little cards WMBE distributes all over town. You know."

"Oh, yes, of course." Daryl fought to keep from staring at her sexy figure. A wide, glossy black belt divided the pale green sweater and plaid skirt that sheathed her upper and lower torso. D.J. felt a rush of desire he hadn't experienced for a long, long time.

Rex excused himself and slipped out the door.

"Gosh, I'm so excited to meet you in person, D.J." She smiled and then reached for a pack of cigarettes resting on the Xerox machine. D.J. watched as she sensuously undressed the package, tossing the cellophane wrapper teasingly into the wastebasket. She handed him a butane lighter. He lit it and held it to her cigarette. Mickey grasped his wrist gently to steady the flame. Her hands were soft and warm.

Oh, wow, thought Daryl. I've gone this far in life without getting into trouble. I'd better not start now.

"Gosh, I've been dying to meet you. Rex said you could give me a road map of the recording business." Daryl opened his mouth to answer but she went on in a rush. "Now I don't expect to hire you as my manager. I just want some advice on how to start out. And maybe if I'm real, real lucky, I'll be able to convince you to play my record when it comes out."

"Well, Mickey, it's not all that simple . . ."

Mickey took Daryl's hand boldly and stood on her tiptoes to whisper in his ear. "I know you're a happily married man, so I can't tell you exactly what I was thinking when you stepped through that doorway."

"You're right, Mickey. I'm . . . happily . . . married." Then why am I sweating? he asked himself.

Rex walked back into the room. "Your boss is beginning to give your desk dirty looks, Mickey. I think we'd better get out of here and let you get back to work. Do you have a demo?" She nodded. "Why don't you bring it over to my place tonight and let us hear it? Then D.J. can tell you whether or not you stand a chance of breaking in."

Daryl started to protest but Mickey gushed right over his words, "Oh, that would be wonderful. Could you, D.J.?"

"It won't take long, D.J.," assured Rex. "A half hour at the most."

"Well, I guess it would be all right," said Daryl with obvious reluctance.

"Then it's all settled," Rex said emphatically. "I'll expect you both around eight."

Daryl kissed Freda and Becky goodnight and grabbed his jacket.

"What is it tonight?" Freda sighed as he opened the door to leave.

Daryl hesitated before answering. "Just a couple of appearances. Should be back by eleven. Take care, baby."

On the way down to the garage, Daryl wondered why he had lied to Freda. There certainly wasn't anything wrong with what he was doing. Or was there? Freda cooled noticeably whenever Rex Blair's name was brought up, but she refused to give a reason. Daryl decided not to pursue the subject. That's why he didn't tell her he was going over to Rex's, he rationalized. But why didn't he tell her about Mickey? And why was he taking the car? Was he subconsciously planning to drive Mickey home?

Rex answered the door on Daryl's first ring. Mickey was already there. She was wearing another outfit with an even shorter skirt than the one he had seen earlier. This one emphasized her long, slender legs. Daryl gave

an involuntary gasp as he examined her. She caught his look and smiled invitingly.

"What can I get you people to drink?" asked Rex.

"Make mine Scotch on the rocks," answered Mickey.

"I'll have . . ." Daryl was embarrassed. Suddenly he didn't want to ask for a soft drink in front of Mickey. "I'll have . . . you know . . . my usual."

Rex smiled knowingly as he walked over to the bar. He threw a "your secret is safe with me" look at Daryl as he started to mix the drinks. He was pouring D.J.'s ginger ale when the telephone rang. Rex picked up the extension next to the bar and said, "Hello. (PAUSE) Right now? (PAUSE) But, Sam, I've got some people here. (PAUSE) Okay, I'll be right over." He hung up the phone.

"That was my agent. He's got an agency fish on the hook over at Arthur. He claims I have to make an appearance to wrap up a fat new account. I don't know what to say. I've got to go. I'll make it fast. Can you two hold down the fort for an hour?"

Daryl stood up. "Maybe we'd better postpone . . ."

Mickey reached up and pulled him back down on the couch. "Don't be silly," she said. "We can listen to the demo while Rex is gone and then play it again for him when he gets back. That way you'll feel free to tell me if it's really good or really bad without embarrassing me in front of Rex."

The argument made sense. Rex handed them their drinks and hastened out.

"Okay," said Daryl. "Let's hear this waxed miracle."

"Can't I finish my drink first?" asked Mickey petulantly. She rose and took his hand as she pulled him to his feet. "Come on, let's snoop while Rex is gone. I've never seen his pad before."

"Do you really think we should?" asked Daryl.

"Sure. I'm curious. I've heard so much about this place I'm dying to see it."

She led Daryl down the hall and into the master bedroom.

"Wow," said Mickey. "This is like something out of the

Arabian Nights. Look at all that scarlet." She crossed over to the bed and sat down on it. "Mmmm. This is soft. Try it."

D.J. reddened. What was going on? He looked over his shoulder, half expecting a photographer to leap from behind the drapes, flashbulbs popping, as Mickey threw herself into his arms. But, in reality, she was sitting there smiling.

Alarms sounded in his ear. Danger! Don't throw it all away! Did Rex set this thing up? How do I get out? Or do I want out? Mickey leaned back on the bed. Her skirt inched up and exposed a trim thigh. Daryl felt an erection starting. He did an about face and walked back into the living room, fighting for control.

"You're afraid of me, aren't you, D.J.?"

He turned around. Mickey had followed him and was leaning seductively against the door jamb.

"Yes. As a matter of fact I am." He bolted from the room and raced down the fire stairs, dashed past the startled doorman and continued running until he reached his car. He unlocked the door and flung himself into the soft bucket seat.

He sat there breathing heavily for almost five minutes before he calmed down enough to start the engine. First Jeannie and now Mickey, he admonished himself. What was it Daddy-O had warned him? Keep your fly zipped up. Something like that. He slipped the car into gear and drove around the park three times before he finally headed it back to his garage. He had to kill time before he went home. Freda would question an early return.

Two hours later, Rex pushed the key into his door. He entered noisily.

"No need to make all that racket," Mickey said. "He's gone."

"Well?"

"Nothing. I blew it."

"Shit."

"I'm sorry, Rex. I did everything but wave it in his face. I saw him start to get a hard-on and then he ran. He's scared shitless."

"It wasn't your fault. This guy is weird."

"Does this mean I don't get paid?"

"No, you still get paid."

Rex walked into the bedroom and emerged a few moments later carrying a small packet. He handed it to Mickey who fingered it greedily.

"Thanks, Rex. I need this. I need it badly."

"Forget it."

She slipped the heroin into her purse and started for the door. Turning back, she said, "Want to join me?"

"No, thanks. I never touch the stuff."

Mickey shrugged and left. When she had gone, Rex went over to the bar and mixed himself a drink. He carried it to his desk and started to do some figuring. Let's see, he said to himself. One hundred fifty grand for the TV show and I'll hit another one hundred big ones this year in commercials. That means Sam is pulling down twenty-five G's from me alone. I wonder if he'd want ten percent of the drug action if he knew about it. Rex laughed softly to himself as he put down another one hundred thousand dollars on the pad. He did some quick calculation and figured out the tax on two hundred fifty thousand dollars. Then he laughed again as he wrote NO TAX after the one hundred thousand dollars he was making in drugs.

He had drifted into the illicit drug sideline. At first, he just kept enough marijuana on hand for close friends. Then the challenge of beating the law began to titillate him. It was a thrill to realize that he would probably never be caught. Who would suspect a big television star of being a pusher? Rex grimaced at the word "pusher." He never thought of himself in that vein.

Ev Dowling flung himself down on the couch and propped his feet upon the coffee table. He was sitting there staring at the wall with a bemused expression when Vera returned from shopping.

She placed her packages down on the table in the foyer and walked over to stand in front of him.

"Tired?" she asked.

Ev blinked and looked up at his wife as though he were noticing her for the first time. He shifted his feet to the floor. "No. Not tired," he said. "Disgusted is a better word."

"Something happen this morning?"

"Nothing that doesn't happen every morning. Vera, that station is an electronic enema."

Vera sat down next to him. "Want to quit?" she asked.

He stood up and began to pace. "No . . . at least not right now. I still keep hoping that one of these days they'll swing back to responsible broadcasting. As long as I'm there, they have to listen to one small dissenting voice."

"Yours can hardly be called a small voice," smiled Vera.

"But they don't pay any attention to it. Every time I open my mouth they just shrug and point to the ratings book. All they care about is numbers. They don't give a damn what they put on the air as long as people tune in."

"Well, you really can't blame them for seeking a large audience," said Vera in a mollifying tone.

"That's just the point. They *have* a large audience. WMBE is the number one station in the country. That means they have an obligation to those listeners. And they're not living up to that obligation. Let me give you a couple of examples. They make a large noise about public service and wave a lot of flags about eliminating discrimination. Do you know how many black people work at that station? Two! One disk jockey and one copy boy. They bleat on and on about how they have the most news. They play at least four jingles an hour raving about WMBE news. Then, when they finally get to a newscast, it lasts all of thirty seconds. And even that news is slanted."

"Are you suggesting the news department bends the truth?"

"Not the news department. The little people who work for it. Mercury Broadcasting news is theoretically an autonomous organization. It even has its own president. Under him there's a vice-president in charge of television

news and a vice-president in charge of radio news. Then, each local station has its own news director. Now, for all I know, the top brass in news is comprised of high-principled, honorable men who wouldn't dream of misleading the public. But they can't possibly hear all the tape and see all the film brought in every day. That's where the little people come in. The writers, editors and producers. Even the reporters have little to say about how the story finally hits the air.

"Television is the worst culprit. If ten thousand people are peaceably assembled at Madison Square Garden at a rally and fifty of them start hurling bricks, you can bet your bottom dollar you'll see those fifty filling up the screen on the late news. To the viewer it appears as though the whole Garden was one big mob scene whereas less than one half of one percent of the crowd was causing the trouble. Why, some of those radicals wait until they see the camera lights before they start demonstrating. TV news is the best soap box the world has ever known."

"What about radio?" asked an incredulous Vera.

"The same thing. Only here it's tape instead of film. You can't tell the full story of anything in a thirty-second newscast, so the writer chops everything into little bits and pieces. This morning, for instance, we had a recording of a speech delivered last night by a Senator from out west. What he actually said was, 'If Red China should send troops into Vietnam and those troops fired against American soldiers, I would think this nation has every right to declar war against Red China and should have no hesitancy about using nuclear weapons.' Do you know how that came out on the air? My copy read 'When the Senator was asked about his proposals for Southeast Asia, he replied: (TAPE) 'This nation has every right to declare war against Red China and should have no hesitancy about using nuclear weapons.' All of the qualifying phrases were carefully edited out. I questioned the writer about the way he edited the tape. Know what he said? 'You just read it. I'll write it.'"

"But that's dangerous . . . inflammatory," said Vera with growing vehemence.

"It happens every day. If the writer on duty happens to be a flaming liberal, he selects stories which express his point of view. If the writer is a right-winger, we get a biased report in the other direction."

"Have you brought this to Ed Wilford's attention?"

"Ed Wilford gave up years ago. He sits around and draws up schedules for the writers and reporters. He makes out the payroll and doublechecks the overtime figures and turns a deaf ear to what goes out on the air. Kelcke calls the shots and Wilford knows it. So he doesn't make waves."

"What about Kelcke?"

"Kelcke hates news. It cuts into the music. If he had his way there wouldn't be any news. The only reason we do any at all is to keep our nose clean with the FCC."

"Why don't you gather up this information and send it to the FCC?"

"The FCC wouldn't listen. All it cares about are charts. So many minutes per month of public service . . . so much news . . . so many commercials. It's another case of the tail wagging the dog."

"What *are* you going to do?"

"Stay in there and keep pitching. It's not much, but it's the best I can do. All I can hope is that I'll be like water dripping on a rock. Sooner or later it's bound to wear a hole in the rock . . . if I can last that long."

D.J. dragged his feet down the hall toward the studio. Huge plastic bags of trash turned his path into a slalom course. A noisy industrial vacuum cleaner was gobbling up debris in one of the offices. Two cleaning women were swishing off the last vestiges of grime from the desks in the corridor. In another half hour, WMBE would be spotlessly clean and would remain so until the leaky paper coffee containers branded the desk tops with new tan circles and the wastebaskets started to soak up more pickle juice. By noon the station would be a mess again. The ashtrays would become pyramids of cigarette butts

and the desks strewn with papers, memos and sales orders.

Jamie Lawrence stepped out of the studio to stretch his legs while a record was playing. Catching sight of Daryl, he called out, "My relief has arrived. A welcome sight after six hours in the WMBE salt mines. How're you doing, D.J.?"

"I'm beat."

"Beat? You haven't even started yet." Jamie came closer and studied Daryl more carefully. "Hey, you do look tired. You ought to cut down those late hours."

"Well, you know how it is," said Daryl resignedly. "Kelcke sets up these personal appearances and I have to go."

"You have to sleep too. Why don't you tell him to ease up a little?"

"I'll be all right. I'm going on vacation next month. I can catch up then. Say, I've been meaning to ask you. Have you ever heard of Bennies and Aimies?"

"Sure, man. They're pep pills. Truckdrivers and athletes take 'em all the time."

"Are they dangerous?"

"I figure any kind of drug is dangerous if you overdo it. Even aspirin."

The engineer stuck his head out of the studio and shouted, "Comin' out, Jamie!"

Jamie ran back into the studio. Ten minutes later Daryl moved into the swivel chair in front of the microphone and began another show. That morning he sent out for coffee twice. The caffeine had little effect. Daryl kept stumbling over phrases that normally posed no problem to his nimble tongue. He poured a cup full of water and dipped his handkerchief into it. The cool liquid felt good as he dabbed his eyes with the wet cloth. But when Pete Sunday relieved him, Daryl was still tired. And he was slated to be interviewed at eleven-thirty by a group of high school editors.

Rex Blair emerged from the 10-20 bank of elevators at the same moment Daryl stepped out of a lower floor lift. Rex crossed quickly to Daryl. "Hey, D.J. Long time no

see. I haven't seen you since the night I had to run out on you and Mickey. Say, what happened while I was gone? She said you were in the middle of a sentence when you suddenly raced out of the apartment like you were on fire."

Daryl responded with a sheepish half-grin. "Maybe I was."

Rex raised an eyebrow and said, "Oh? Maybe there are some things about that gal that I should look into. How've you been?"

"Okay, I guess. A little bushed."

"I told you I could fix that up. Come on. No arguments now. I'm taking you over to see my doctor. We can't have one of Mercury's finest collapsing on us."

Daryl was too tired to protest. He let himself be guided into a taxi and sat quietly while Rex gave the cabby directions. Minutes later, the cab pulled up in front of a Park Avenue apartment building. Rex paid the driver and the two men walked into the lobby, past a brass plaque which said: John Golmer M.D.

The doctor's waiting room was jammed. Daryl looked questioningly at Rex who merely waved his hand at him reassuringly. Rex strode silently across the thick carpet and whispered to the receptionist. In a few moments Daryl heard his name called.

The doctor listened sympathetically to Daryl's complaint of chronic fatigue. He took the young deejay's blood pressure and then handed Daryl a small white envelope.

"This'll do the trick," said the doctor. "Take one every morning before breakfast. If you have to stay up late, take another before dinner. When you run out, come on back and I'll give you some more. If I'm busy, just tell the nurse. She'll give them to you."

"What are they?" asked Daryl quietly.

"Dextro-amphetamine sulphate, if you want the technical name. Most people call them dexedrine. Don't worry. They won't hurt you."

"Can I take one now?"

"Go right ahead." The doctor poured a cup full of water and Daryl downed the pill.

"Feel better?" asked Rex when Daryl came out of the examining room.

"I don't feel anything yet."

"Give it time. In about an hour, you'll feel great. I told you he was a good doctor. He specializes in helping people in show business."

Whether Dr. Golmer was a "good" doctor was open to argument. It was true that he was a "specialist." His specialty was dexedrine and its derivatives. The overweight, the chronically tired and those who simply needed a boost to get through the day flocked to him in droves. He dispensed pills to over a hundred people a day . . . at fifteen dollars per person. Patients with gall bladder troubles, heart conditions, ulcers and broken toes were referred elsewhere. Golmer was too busy to be bothered with ordinary ailments. Besides, it took less than three minutes to smile, mumble banalities and hand over a little white envelope.

CHAPTER 24

Daryl turned off the Henry Hudson Parkway and aimed the car for the upper level of the George Washington Bridge. He was still feeling slightly depressed and tired. The thought of facing a dozen high school students in New Jersey was repugnant. It had been thirty-five minutes since he had taken the pill in Dr. Golmer's office. He began to suspect it was a placebo.

There was a minor accident on the bridge. Darn, thought Daryl, I'm going to be late. He had allowed no time for traffic since the bridge was normally free-flowing at this hour. He braked the sleek Mercedes gently and came to a stop. Five minutes passed and the automobiles had inched forward no more than ten yards. Another five minutes and another ten yards. First down, thought Daryl.

He became aware of a dryness in his mouth. Gradually the traffic delay ceased to be an annoyance. His tiredness dropped from his body like a cape sliding off his shoulders. He looked over at the Manhattan skyline, glistening in the morning sunlight. He squinted his eyes in a vain effort to pick out the Mercury building. A towering apartment building on Riverside Drive blocked it from

his view. Still, the city looked good. The sky was a crackling blue. Down river, Daryl could see the stacks of an ocean liner. How can anybody knock this town, he thought. It's the greatest city in the world. He recalled a poem he had once memorized:

"A squirming herd in Mammon's mesh
A wilderness of human flesh;
Crazed with avarice, lust and rum,
New York, thy name's Delirium."

A tow truck removed the obstructing vehicle and the bridge traffic glided forward.

"How do you know which records to play?"

"Do you wear pajamas when you sleep?"

"Which do you like best—the Beatles or the Rolling Stones?"

"Are you married?"

"What's your favorite food?"

"Do you have any hobbies?"

"Have you ever met the Glad Stones?"

"What's your pet peeve?"

Daryl fielded the questions smoothly and skillfully. He felt marvelous . . . exhilarated . . . alive and alert. The kids were great. They loved him and he adored them. He talked and talked and talked, apologizing frequently for his talking jag. The students ate it up as they crowded around the rock wall on which he sat. Finally it was over. The student counselor shooed the students back to the main building. Daryl stretched and breathed deeply of the spring air. He started back toward his car.

"Mr. Jackson . . . D.J."

Daryl looked toward the sound of the voice. A girl was running toward him. He stopped to allow her time to catch up. She seemed to be about seventeen or eighteen. On the pretty side. Neatly dressed.

"Where is everybody?" she asked.

"I'm afraid they've all left. Are you one of the high school editors?"

"My name's Doreen Rogers. I'm from Englewood Cliffs and I'm sorry I'm late. I missed the bus and had to

wait twenty minutes for another one. Golly, if I don't get this interview, all the kids in my school will be furious. I mean like angry. I won't be able to hold my head up in front of anybody. I know it's a lot to ask but could you possibly answer just a couple of questions? I mean just a few?" The words gushed out.

Daryl smiled and looked at his watch.

"I know. It's lunchtime. Look. My mother's a big fan of yours. So's my dad for that matter. I know she'd love to meet you. Why don't you come back to our place for lunch? I can ask you questions and you can kill two birds with one stone. Please, D.J. I'll be in big trouble if you don't."

"Whoa . . . slow down," laughed Daryl. "I'll give you the interview, but I'm really not hungry. I was thinking of skipping lunch today. But I'll tell you what. I'll drive you home and we can talk on the way."

He escorted her to his car. Her eyes widened when she saw the gleaming machine and smelled the rich leather interior.

"Like wow," she gasped. "What a groovy set of wheels."

Doreen directed him to Englewood Cliffs. Ten minutes later Daryl pulled off the parkway and slowed down as he drove past the neatly manicured lawns. The houses were fairly close together, but the area was obviously upper middle class.

"Make a right at the next corner. My house is the third one on the left," Doreen said.

"What year are you in school?"

"I'm a senior. I graduate next month. And to answer the next question, I was eighteen last week."

"Well, a belated happy birthday."

They pulled into the driveway. Daryl noticed the two-car garage was empty.

"My dad's away on a business trip," explained Doreen as if she anticipated his question. "Mom must have gone to the store. She should be back any minute."

"I'm afraid I can't stay, Doreen. I'll meet her some other time."

"But you have to eat some lunch. You'll get sick if you don't. Please, D.J. Just a quick sandwich. Mom's bound to be back before you eat it. And I'll make some soup."

Daryl permitted himself to be led into the house. He wasn't a bit hungry. The dexedrine had taken care of any appetite. But he did not want to admit this to an impressionable teen-ager. She'd probably be shocked to learn that a disk jockey hero needed some help to stay awake.

She showed him into the panelled family room, told him to make himself comfortable and excused herself. Daryl stretched out in a leather armchair and studied the room. Apparently Mr. Rogers did well in whatever business he was in. A color TV was built into one wall. Another wall was of fieldstone with a raised hearth in the center. A well-stocked bar curved around a corner. Extending from it was a long, low planter. Indirect lighting behind the plants cast a relaxing glow over the entire room.

"Mind eating in the kitchen?" called Doreen.

"My favorite room," replied Daryl as he headed for the sound of her voice.

Entering the kitchen, he noticed that Doreen had made a quick change. She was wearing a short pleated skirt and a low-cut blouse. He sat down in a breakfast nook. Outside he could see a brick barbecue and a flagstone patio. The yard was fenced with basket-weave redwood. He looked at Doreen. She had her back to him as she stirred the soup. For the first time, he took careful note of her. She had straight mahogany-colored hair which cascaded down her back like a shimmering waterfall. The calves of her legs curved smoothly from her tiny ankles. The short skirt revealed creamy white thighs. Daryl felt his heart quicken. Oh, no, he thought. He looked away and tried to concentrate on the kitchen. A note was buttoned by a tiny magnet to the refrigerator door. He rose and walked over to read it: Doreen—Gone to a matinee. Be back for dinner. Love, Mom. Daryl drew his breath in sharply.

As Doreen moved the soup away from the hot burner

on the stove, she saw him reading the note. "I guess Mom will have to meet you some other time," she said. "She'll be disappointed that she missed you."

Daryl returned to his seat in the breakfast nook. Doreen reached into a cabinet for a soup bowl. As she stretched, the skirt crept up and Daryl got a glimpse of a rounded derriere shrouded in pink. He felt a slight stirring in his loins. She placed a bowl in front of him and began pouring the soup. As she leaned over, the blouse fell forward and her hair brushed his cheek. He caught the aroma of a faint fragrance he had not noticed in the car. He tried to avert his eyes but they seemed to have minds of their own as they fixed themselves on the small, perfectly shaped breasts now revealed by the protruding blouse. She was not wearing a bra. Daryl made an unsuccessful effort to quell the erection he could feel beginning.

Doreen gave a repeat performance as she reached back into the cabinet for another soup bowl and bent low over the table to pour her own. This time Daryl saw both nipples and noticed that they seemed to be pushing outward. Was she aware of his gaze? Had she deliberately bent over . . . twice? His mind was a maelstrom of desire as he reached for the spoon.

"Ooops, I forgot the sandwiches," said Doreen as she leaped to her feet.

"Please don't bother, Doreen," Daryl said in a husky voice. "I'm really not hungry."

"You mean you're not hungry for food."

Daryl looked up at her. She wore a seductive half-smile but her gaze was bold. She suddenly looked older than she had in the car. Her eyes had a look that seemed to contain the wisdom of every woman since time began. She came closer and stood over him. Slowly she unbuttoned her blouse and pressed her naked breasts into his face. The nipples were hard and erect.

"Now," she whispered, "you won't get a crick in your neck trying to look down my blouse."

Every nerve and muscle in Daryl's body quivered. He tried to turn his head but it was held in an invisible vise.

Doreen placed her hand between his legs. His penis was hard as a rock. "I thought you'd be ready," she said. "Come on, I want you."

He looked up at her face. Daryl had never seen a more beautiful complexion. Her skin was flawless. Not a blemish . . . not a freckle. A subliminal image of Freda flashed before him, but it was gone before he could consciously identify it.

"Doreen," he breathed. "Somebody could see us."

"Nobody's home and nobody's expected . . . for hours. Come on, lover. Don't you want to ball me?"

"Yes," he said hoarsely as she pulled him to his feet and led him up the stairs to her bedroom. She tossed away the stuffed cat from the center of her bed and Daryl thought he saw another subliminal picture . . . this time of Becky.

Doreen kicked off her shoes and slipped out of her skirt. Daryl licked his dry lips and tried to will his pounding heart to slow down as she moved up to him. She pulled off his tie and started to unbutton his shirt. His fingers moved quickly to help her. He felt her unbuckle his belt as her lips met his. They fell on the bed and rolled around in a never-ending kiss as he pulled off his shoes and socks and wormed his way out of his slacks. They broke and faced each other. Daryl was down to his shorts. He slipped his hand under her nylon panties and began to caress her. She was wet. She moaned and dropped her hands to his shorts. Daryl felt them ripped off his body and then he groaned in ecstasy as her fingers gripped his organ, pulling and stroking. She put her lips around the head and began to suck him. He couldn't remember ever being so aroused. After a while she said hoarsely, "Touch me!" He worked his fingers around inside her.

"I'm so hot. Oh, now . . . now . . . now!" Doreen cried.

He tore off her panties and the two naked bodies met. She wrapped her legs around him as Daryl broke his marriage vows for the first time.

"What are you doing, lover?" breathed Doreen, wriggling beneath him.

"You know what I'm doing." He pumped faster.

"Then say it . . . say it! Say you're fucking me."

Daryl remained silent. She arched her back and drove him deeper inside her, making each stroke longer.

"Fucking me. Say it," she hissed.

"I'm . . . I'm fucking you."

"Yes! Fucking, screwing, balling! Fuck me harder, baby, I'm coming."

Freda stepped out of the shower, threw on a robe and ran out to check the roast. Satisfied that it was cooking nicely, she returned to the bedroom and sat down at her dressing table. She brushed her hair carefully and teased it. She placed a dab of perfume behind each ear. Tonight everything has to be just right, she thought. Nothing must spoil Daryl's first night home in weeks. She ticked off the things that remained to be done and grinned at the thought of seducing her own husband. Still, maybe that's what was wrong. We may look like brother and sister, she told herself, but we don't have to act like it. It had been almost a month since they had made love. I know he's tired and on the go every evening, but I've always been able to arouse him in the past, so why not now? I have to be subtle . . . but not too subtle. She giggled at her reflection in the mirror. "Who would have ever thought that I would become a sexual aggressor?" she whispered to the image.

Daryl moved the car into the outer lane as he re-crossed the George Washington Bridge. His head swirled with mixed emotions. Doreen. How had it happened? He'd always been able to escape in the past. How could a girl of eighteen know so much? Would she tell? Would she brag about going to bed with a famous disk jockey? He hoped not. Still, it was a long time since she was a virgin. That much he knew. I wonder how many men have had her. Oh, God! Suppose she had a venereal disease. How would I ever explain it to Freda? Will Freda suspect? How should I act? Maybe I should call Rex and ask him. He's had plenty of experience. No! He'd only laugh. Oh, God. Forgive me, oh Lord, for I have sinned. Doreen's words echoed in his ear. Fuck,

suck, cock, cunt, balls. Why did she like to use those words? She seemed so sweet and innocent when I met her. And why did she make me say them? Did she know I never used words like that before?

He stepped into the elevator in his garage and felt a sinking sensation as he rode upward. He had to make three stabs with his key before he finally inserted it in the lock. The aroma of roast beef assailed his nostrils as he stepped inside. Roast beef. His favorite food. What was the occasion? Did one celebrate one's first venture into adultery?

Freda walked into the living room. She looked radiant and beautiful in her long hostess gown. He noticed it was not zipped up fully. His eyes traveled to the cleavage as he mentally compared Freda's full womanly breasts with Doreen's smallish girl breasts. He looked quickly over to the wall and thought he saw the word gonorrhoea etched on it. Freda came to him, threw her arms around him and kissed him deeply. Can syphilis be transmitted with a kiss? thought Daryl wildly.

He couldn't eat. The dexedrine was still working . . . or was it remorse? He looked across at Freda. Her face was drawn. She looked like a stricken fawn. Daryl pushed the chair away and walked around the table. He put his arms around her.

"I'm sorry, honey," he said. "I've loused up your beautiful dinner. I'm afraid I'm coming down with a virus. I just can't eat. Would you mind terribly if I went to bed? Maybe it's just a twenty-four hour thing. I should be over it by tomorrow."

Freda's hurt turned to solicitude. She wanted to call a doctor, but Daryl insisted he'd be all right. All he needed was rest and liquids. Lots of liquids. He was so dry.

He tried to force himself to go to sleep but the dexedrine refused to release him. He lay awake staring at the dark ceiling long after Freda had dozed off. He turned on his side and stared at his wife's dimly lit form. A wave of anguish washed over him. He barely managed to turn in the other direction as the first tear hit his pillow.

CHAPTER 25

The bronze Mercedes left the blacktopped macadam in its wake and the radial tires bit into a gravel road. Freda rolled down the window and leaned out.

"Mmmmm. Even the air smells different. Gee, it's good to be back."

She cast a sidelong glance at Daryl for his confirmation, but he continued staring straight ahead. His eyes were wide open . . . almost as if propped open. He seemed filled with nervous energy but he displayed no enthusiasm.

He had flown into Grand Rapids the night before to pick up Freda and Becky. Freda had driven the car west ten days earlier to spend some time with her mother. It had been a pleasant visit, marred only by Freda's anxiety about Daryl. He was different from the Daryl of two months ago. And that Daryl had been different from the Daryl of the preceding year. Freda longed for the original and prayed that this vacation would prove to be the answer.

Daryl halted the car and reached out of the window to pull the rope that opened the LaFollette gate. He eased the car through the opening and halted to close the gate.

They rounded a bend and pulled up before the main lodge. Bill LaFollette stepped gingerly down the three broad steps that separated the porch from the ground and hobbled over to meet them.

"Well, well, well," said Bill. "If you aren't a sight for sore eyes. I was afraid for a minute there that a couple of Eastern dudes had descended upon us. How are you, kids?"

Freda bounded out of the car and gave Bill a big hug. Over the old man's shoulder she grinned at Daryl. She received a half-hearted smile in return.

"And don't tell me this is little Becky," said LaFollette. "Last time I saw you, you weren't no bigger'n a minute. Why, you're a grown-up girl now."

The three year old hid her eyes and ran behind her father.

"All right, no more of that, young lady," Daryl said testily. "Get over there and say hello to Mr. LaFollette."

There was an awkward pause as Becky hesitated. Daryl gave her a push. She took a few shy steps in the direction of LaFollette before Freda came to her rescue. Swooping her daughter up in her arms, Freda said, "There, there, honey. You'll have plenty of time to talk with Uncle Bill. Let's take you to the cabin for a nice, long nap."

"You're in cabin eight," said Bill. "Last one on the left."

He handed them the key and waved them on. The Hoffert-Jacksons re-entered the car and drove slowly down the row of log cabins.

"You didn't have to embarrass her," Freda said quietly.

"It's time she learned some manners," snapped Daryl.

"We'll talk about it later," replied Freda.

They went the rest of the way in silence. Freda carried Becky into the cabin and placed her on a cot while Daryl brought in their luggage.

At Freda's insistence, LaFollette joined them for dinner that night. Daryl just picked at his food but he seemed to have lost some of his tenseness and was obviously making an effort to be pleasant.

"Looks to me like you've lost some weight, Daryl," said Bill.

"A little bit," was the laconic reply.

"I'm hoping to fatten him up while we're here," interjected Freda. "How's the fishing this year?"

"Not as good as it was last month, but better than it'll be next month," replied LaFollette with a grin. "Which reminds me. A feller was askin' for you last week. Harry Evenson. Know him?"

Daryl looked up with interest. "He's the man I replaced in New York. What's he doing in this neck of the woods?"

"Claims you told him this was a fisherman's paradise. It was . . . for him. That feller really knows how to catch fish. Handles a fly rod like it was part of his arm and chooses flies like he was born around here. Never asked me a question . . . just went out every morning and took his limit. I never would have figured him for a New Yorker."

"He isn't. He's from Minnesota. Gee, I'm sorry I missed him."

"If he'd had his way, you wouldn't have. He wanted to buy the camp. Offered me a hundred thousand dollars for it. Twice what it's worth. But I told him it wasn't for sale. Too many memories around here. Good memories. Besides, I promised Mary I'd never sell it. I've got other plans for the camp."

Three days later, Becky buried her shyness in the woods and selected Bill LaFollette as her first sweetheart. She followed the old man around like a puppy and snuggled up to him as though she'd known him all of her young life.

The sun hit the top of the trees and burst into a dozen colors. Becky climbed into Bill's lap for a rocking chair trip. From another rocker, Freda smiled contentedly at her daughter.

"You're a little young for this rocking business," Bill said to Freda. "If you'd like to wet a line with Daryl, I'll

watch Becky. You haven't done any fishing since you got here."

"I don't think Daryl has either," said Freda soberly as she looked upstream.

LaFollette followed her gaze with his eyes. Daryl was casting wildly. As soon as the fly hit the water, he retrieved it and sent it soaring in another direction. The lure never sat still long enough for a fish to grab it.

"He's been acting a little antsy," said Bill. "What's wrong, honey? Too much big city-itis?"

"I hope that's all it is, Bill. Frankly, I'm worried about him."

"Well, give him a couple of weeks up here and he'll be his old self again. I've seen this place work wonders on some pretty tense businessmen. Mark my words. When Daryl leaves that river, he'll be as calm as a cow."

For once, Bill's prophecy proved wrong. Ten days later Daryl received a telegram from Basil Kelcke:

Urgent you meet me ten ayem Thursday July twenty-one. Harold Hertz office. Seventeenth floor.

Freda complained that this latest request from Kelcke was unfair. It meant cutting the vacation short. However, Daryl seemed to look upon the telegram with relief, almost as if it was a welcome excuse to return to New York. Freda suggested that Daryl fly back, but he was insistent upon driving. They left the following morning at five o'clock.

Thick, dirty gray clouds scudded across Manhattan as they started over the George Washington Bridge. The clouds struck the city and merged with a pall of incinerator smoke. It gave the skyline an ominous, forbidding appearance. Freda shuddered as she stared at the sight. It looked cold and foreboding although the temperature was in the eighties.

She glanced at Daryl. He had that same wide-eyed look she had come to fear. Did it have anything to do with the little yellow pills she had discovered in his shav-

ing kit? He claimed they were merely vitamins, but when she offered to sample one, he snatched it out of her hands with a vehemence she had never seen him display.

Daryl sat staring at the Central Park vista that unfolded beneath their living room window. The telegram puzzled him. He tried to recall whether he had ever met this Harold Hertz. The seventeenth floor? What was that . . . accounting? . . . legal? Perhaps it was part of the TV programming department. Maybe television wanted him for a show. Oh, well, he'd find out in the morning.

CHAPTER 26

Rex Blair spread the map of France over his teak coffee table. He placed his finger on Paris and then traced the route to Marseilles. Let's see, he told himself, if I fly to Paris and then rent a car, I should be able to drive to Marseilles in a day. No. That wouldn't be smart. I'll drive to Geneva. Then down to the Riviera and work my way along the coast to Marseilles. Then back to Paris. It's a natural. The sort of trip any tourist would make.

He walked over to his record collection, selected an instrumental treatment of Cole Porter's score for "Can-Can" and placed it on the turntable. The haunting strains of "Allez-Vous En" filled the room. "Go away," declared Rex aloud, saying the piece's title in English. He looked back at the map. Do I dare make the pickup myself? he asked himself. It's a risk, but then isn't that half the thrill? Besides, if I cut out the middle man, I can make a fortune. Just a kilo. That's all I'll take.

The engineer threaded up a blank tape on the huge Ampex. Then he threaded another tape on a sister machine. Turning the knob to CUE, he rocked the reels

back and forth until he found the start of the second tape. He backed it up a half turn and pressed RECORD on the first machine. A second later his finger reached for PLAY on the second recorder. The door to the tape room opened and another engineer stepped in. He listened carefully for a minute and then said, "Who's that?"

"Some guy from Boston. He does a morning show up there."

"How come you're dubbing it?"

"Kelcke wants three copies on seven-inch reels."

"You think he's planning to replace D.J.?"

"Why should he want to do that? D.J.'s the hottest jock in town."

"You never know with Kelcke."

Daryl stepped off the elevator on the seventeenth floor. The reception lobby was identical to those on every floor in the Mercury building. Stark white walls, armless vinyl chairs, antique bronze carpeting. Sterile. Nonetheless, there was a subtle difference on the seventeenth floor. As if the white walls were mere camouflage for dark paneling. He asked the receptionist where he could find Harold Hertz's office. She pointed down the corridor.

Daryl walked slowly past an array of desks and filing cabinets. The secretaries were busy at their typewriters. No coffee cups were on the desks. No cigarettes were on display. He noticed the walls were lined with blue-green cardboard filing boxes and manila folders. Several law books were propped precariously on top of filing cabinets.

He stopped by a desk near the end of the hall and again asked the whereabouts of Harold Hertz. The girl rose, motioned for him to follow her and opened the door to the last office. Daryl stepped inside.

Basil Kelcke looked up as Daryl entered. "Come in, D.J.," he said in a non-committal voice. "Sit over there, please. You know Tom Flaherty, of course." The general manager nodded in Daryl's direction. "This is Harold

Hertz of Mercury's legal department and his assistant, Frank Walters." The other two men in the room gave Daryl curt nods.

Daryl was puzzled at the cool reception. Was something wrong? A cold chill rippled up his back as he took his seat.

Hertz cleared his throat and began, "Mr. Jackson . . . or should I say Mr. Hoffert?"

"Either one," said Daryl.

"I should like to call your attention to paragraph seventeen of your contract with WMBE," continued the attorney in his dry monotone. "I quote: 'You will act at all times with due regard to public morals and conventions. If you at any time shall have done or shall do any act or thing which shall be an offense involving moral turpitude under federal, state or local laws, or which might tend to bring you into public disrepute, contempt, scandal or ridicule, or which might tend to insult or offend the community or any organized group thereof, or which might tend to reflect unfavorably upon us, the sponsors, if any, or their advertising agencies, if any, or injure the success of the programs, we shall have the right to terminate this agreement forthwith upon notice to you at any time prior to the expiration of thirty days after the date on which we acquire knowledge thereof.'"

"Do you understand the meaning of that paragraph?" asked Flaherty.

"I think so," answered Daryl hesitantly, "but I don't see why . . ."

"Do you know a girl by the name of Doreen Rogers?" Hertz cut in.

Daryl's heart took a sudden jump. He licked his lips and looked from one man to the other. The four men in the room sat stonily . . . their faces displayed no emotion. It wasn't a joke. It was for real.

"You haven't answered the question," persisted Hertz.

"Yes." Daryl's voice was barely audible.

"On or about June eighth of this year, did you engage in sexual intercourse with this girl?"

Daryl dropped his eyes to the carpet. He opened his mouth to answer but could not get the words out. He nodded.

"Jesus Christ!" gasped Flaherty.

Daryl stared at him. Flaherty turned his eyes away. Daryl faced Kelcke, but the program director also refused to look at him. Daryl's heart began to pound more insistently. His mouth was as dry as a bleached skull. Why? Why this inquisition? Were these men so pure that they dared cast stones? Was Daryl the first broadcaster to taste forbidden fruit? He eyed the water carafe on Hertz's desk and wanted desperately to ask for a drink.

Hertz was talking again. Daryl shook his head as he tried to tune in to the words, ". . . the girl's father is an executive with one of our major sponsors, so Mercury has a double stake in this case. The fact that the girl is pregnant can only complicate . . ."

PREGNANT! The word leaped forward like a rapier thrust. Daryl closed his eyes and made an effort to conjure up a picture of the mother-to-be of his child. Doreen's face refused to come into focus. All he saw was a pair of small breasts and wildly flailing legs. He buried his face in his hands.

Through the hash of his throbbing brain, Daryl heard Hertz addressing him.

"I asked you a question, Hoffert. I'll repeat it. Are you aware that the state of New Jersey has severe penalties for statutory rape?"

Daryl's eyes misted over as he tried to look at Hertz.

"Didn't you know how old Miss Rogers was?"

"She . . . she . . ."

Hertz finished Daryl's sentence. His voice cut through the room like a whip. "SHE'S FIFTEEN YEARS OLD!"

Daryl was stunned. FIFTEEN! PREGNANT! PREGNANT! FIFTEEN. STATUTORY RAPE . . . ADULTERY. RAPE! RAPE! RAPE! He wanted to scream that she seduced him. He wasn't the first, he wasn't even sure he was the father. But the words refused to come out. The only sound in the room was the agonizing moan of

racking sobs. Daryl suddenly realized that the sobs were coming from him.

The other four men in the room looked at each other and then simultaneously turned their heads toward the window. No one made any attempt to soothe the weeping disk jockey. No one said anything. Daryl looked pleadingly through his tears as he sought a friend. There was none.

Gradually his sobbing subsided and Daryl managed to squeeze out the words, "I'm sorry."

Hertz swiveled around to face Daryl. "I sincerely hope so," he said. "I must tell you that if it were up to me you'd be fired on the spot. However, both Mr. Flaherty and Mr. Kelcke have assured me that your record has been clean up to this point. Mercury Broadcasting has long held a reputation of being a considerate and understanding corporation. Therefore, you're going to be given another chance. But I warn you. If you step one inch out of line, you will be immediately dismissed. And nobody will be able to save you. I promise you that."

Walters spoke for the first time. "We have made arrangements to transfer ten thousand dollars into Mr. Rogers' account. In return, he has promised not to prosecute. Naturally, he is as anxious as we are to avoid publicity. The ten thousand dollars will be deducted from your salary at the rate of one thousand dollars a week."

"What about the baby?" asked Daryl in a small voice.

"Part of the ten thousand dollars will go for a trip abroad . . . for an abortion," answered Walters.

Daryl spread the bills over the desk and pored through them. Diners Club: \$727.37 . . . past due. American Express: \$434.56. Carte Blanche: \$512.04 . . . also past due. His face was drawn as he studied the little notes appended to most of the statements: Did you realize you missed last month's payment? . . . Please disregard if paid . . . Past due . . . Overdue . . . Please remit . . . Good Lord! he thought. How did we get so far behind?

He opened the check book and noted the balance: \$943.12. Why hadn't Freda warned him? Then he remembered. She had. Again and again. What would she say when she learned that his salary had been cut in half for the next ten weeks? He didn't dare tell her. He had to find some money . . . fast.

He picked up the phone and called Rex Blair. Blair's answering service informed Daryl that Blair was on vacation. He was not expected back until the middle of August. Daryl began to panic. He rummaged through the desk for the list of producers and agents that Harry Evenson had written out for him. More than ever he regretted not taking Evenson up on the offer to introduce Daryl to the agency people. The list was gone. He remembered throwing it away on the day he got his first paycheck from WMBE. Who needed commercials when this kind of money was rolling in?

He dialed the station and asked for Basil Kelcke. Kelcke was brusque on the phone. No, he didn't know any of the advertising casting people. Why did Daryl want to know? To do commercials? No chance. WMBE was holding Daryl to the exclusivity clause. Daryl was prohibited from doing any outside work. What about Daddy-O? That was different. His contract had not contained such a clause. Yes, Basil recognized the thousand dollars a week was a hardship, but Daryl should have thought of the consequences when he entered that girl's bedroom. Daryl should consider himself lucky. He got off easy. Plenty of people live on much less than a thousand dollars a week. Basil was sure Daryl would manage. Now, if Daryl would excuse him, Basil had work to do.

"D.J. what a pleasant surprise," said the bank vice-president. "We hear your commercials for us all the time. You're doing a fine job. Everybody in the bank loves your show. Now, what brings you down here? Business or social?"

Daryl walked out of the bank with a five thousand dollar loan. He opened a separate checking account. Half-way home, he mused. All he had to do was make up the

difference in his check and maybe Freda would never know. He was safe for at least five weeks. Now . . . the other five thousand.

Ev Dowling squeezed lemon juice on his fillet of sole and reached for a fork. He picked it up and then set it down again.

"Daryl asked me to lend him five thousand dollars this morning," he said.

Vera raised her eyebrows. "Did he say why he needed it?"

Ev shook his head.

"Are you going to lend it to him?" asked Vera.

"I don't know. Do you think I should?"

Vera pondered the question for a long time. Finally she answered, "We're all good friends and we have the money. But I'm worried about him. He's been acting strange every time we've had them here for dinner. I told Freda he'd get over the big spending habit but now I'm not sure. It can be a disease, you know."

"I'm a walking example."

"But you did get over it."

"Not until I hit rock bottom. And I'd hate to see that happen to Daryl."

"So would I."

The Dowlings discussed the matter all through dinner. Over coffee, Vera reached a decision. "Give him the money," she told Ev, "but insist that it's only a loan. Make him sign a note for it."

"Vera! That's a little harsh for a friend."

"I know, but he has to learn that he can't go through life just throwing money away. Make sure he understands that."

"All right, darling. I only hope that whatever trouble he's in is only temporary. He's a fine boy. I'd like to help him stay that way."

"Amen," sighed Vera.

CHAPTER 27

Rex Blair returned from Europe with a new hobby: photography. Or so it appeared. Two Leicas and two Rolleiflexes dangled from his neck as he waited in line for customs inspection. A 16 mm. Bolex movie camera hung from his shoulder. He glanced around at his fellow sufferers in the line and smiled. How guilty most Americans look when confronted by the law, he thought. Even if they're innocent, their consciences work overtime. A few, he realized, would have cause for their anxiety. What jerks they were to try to slip by with a few hundred dollars over the limit.

"Anything to declare?" asked the customs officer.

Rex fished in his pocket and produced five sales slips. "Just these cameras," he answered.

The officer smiled as he looked at the sales slips and then at the cameras weighting down Rex. "Going in the business or did you just get carried away?" he inquired in a friendly tone.

"I'm with MBE-TV," answered Rex.

"News department?"

"No, I've been making some test shots for a proposed new series."

Rex paid the duty and walked casually through the massive International Arrivals terminal at Kennedy. As he did, another thought struck him. News film. He had seen the white net bags the couriers used to transport overseas film. He must remember to get some. How easy they would be to move through customs. No one would think to open a can marked undeveloped film. He hailed a cab and directed the driver to his home address.

Rex dropped his luggage in the apartment foyer and hurried into his bedroom, still carrying the cameras. He tossed them on the bed and selected one of the Rolleiflexes. He opened the box and carefully removed a plastic bag filled with white powder. Turning to the other cameras, he repeated the operation. Then, he reached up on the top shelf of his closet and pulled down an old shoe box. Dumping the plastic bags into the box, he tossed it casually back on the shelf.

There, he thought, even if one of my junkie friends breaks into the hidden panel in the bed, he'll never find the real cache. Pure heroin. And I got away with it. After I cut it, I should have enough of a supply to set me up for a long time. Thank God for Swiss banks! He glanced at the cameras strewn across the bed. One of these days, he laughed to himself, I must remember to put some film in them.

The D.J. who faced the WMBE microphones in August of 1966 was another new Daryl. Gone was the nervous, tense disk jockey of June. Gone was the wide-eyed, naive youngster of the preceding year. Gone too was the easygoing Michigan trout fisherman. All of these characters had been replaced by a contrite, subdued adult. His engineer, Saul Kalaman, noticed the transition and breathed a sigh of relief. It was a lot easier to work with a deejay who was all business than to have to hold your breath for four hours each day wondering whether the man across the console from you would make it through the morning or explode.

Ev noted the change in his young friend and chalked it up to the process of growing up. Daryl was paying him

back at the rate of a hundred dollars a week. Another sign of maturity, thought Ev.

Freda was not so easily fooled. Daryl was *too* sober . . . *too* calm. Something was wrong. She could not put her finger on it for, on the surface, she had no cause for complaint. The business lunches and personal appearances had dropped to zero. Daryl had time for his family for the first time since his arrival in New York. He took Freda and Becky to the Statue of Liberty and the Empire State Building; to the Bronx Zoo and Chinatown; to West Point and Bear Mountain. They mingled with tourists and ate hot dogs and popcorn and took pictures and picnicked and bought souvenirs. They were a family. But Freda could not shake the feeling that an invisible barrier existed between Daryl and his wife and daughter.

The only person who was not aware of the new facade D.J. presented to the world was Basil Kelcke. Ever since that fateful morning in the lawyer's office, Kelcke had avoided his morning disk jockey. He rejected all requests for D.J. to serve as a judge at swimming meets or host clambakes at Fire Island or simply turn up at functions in New Jersey. D.J. had other commitments, Basil informed those who sought the presence of his star.

Millie Kelcke poured the orange juice and turned on the kitchen radio as Basil sat down for breakfast.

WMBE time: 8:32. And a happy September 19th to you and yours. D.J.'s the name and music's my game. Here's a new one by the Glad Stones.

An electric organ wailed a strident introduction over Daryl's last words. Two guitars twanged a steady beat and the top rock group in the world began to sing:

*Daddy has a shotgun, Mommy has a tongue
Daddy kills and Mommy wounds.
Now, they say I should be good in every way
Kids are bad, they're just like goons.
War and killin's fine, they say
If it's done the patriotic way.*

*But kids who look for trouble
Burst the big, golden bubble.
Fight and die for the red, white and blue
That's what our folks raise us up to do.
But lovin' and holdin' and squeezin'
That's bad by their standards and reason.*

"How's D.J. doing these days?" asked Millie.

"All right," answered Basil succinctly.

"You haven't been using him in the new school promotion programs."

"That's right," replied Basil as he reached for another piece of whole wheat toast.

"Look, honey. You know I don't interfere in your work, but don't you think you're carrying this thing too far?"

"I don't want to talk about D.J."

"That's what you've been saying for the past couple of weeks. But you have to face it sooner or later. Either he's part of your team or he isn't."

Basil interrupted his toast-buttering. He placed the knife on his plate and looked steadily at his wife. "How do I dare send him out to a high school? How do I know he won't stand up in an assembly and expose himself?"

"Oh, come on, honey. He made a mistake. He isn't the first and he won't be the last. I'm sure he's learned his lesson by now."

"Decent people never have to learn that lesson. Decent people never make that kind of a mistake."

"Is anybody really able to cast the first stone?"

"Yes!" thundered Basil. "I can! You can! We can! Not only did that man commit adultery, he did it with a child. How can you possibly suggest that I condone that sort of thing? How can you possibly suggest that I forgive him? I tolerate him because he's right for the morning slot, but that's all. I want no part of him as a person and I won't have him corrupting young girls. I disapprove of wanton sex."

Millie stared at her husband with growing alarm. His eyes gleamed with a religious fervor she had never witnessed before. Nor had she ever heard him raise his

voice. If he reacted so vehemently over an employee's transgression, what would he do if he ever learned about his wife? Please, God, she prayed silently, never let him find out.

"You and I went to bed together before we were married," ventured Millie.

"That was different. We weren't teen-agers. And we got married almost right away."

Eight years is almost right away? thought Millie. And I was nineteen. That isn't a teen-ager?

"Are you going to fire D.J.?" she asked.

"Why should I fire him?"

"Because he won't be much good to you unless he starts turning up at things. You yourself have told me a dozen times that people won't settle for just voices on radio. They want flesh and blood stars they can see in person."

Basil picked up his knife and started to butter his toast again as he contemplated her remarks. He hadn't thought much about that aspect of his treatment of Daryl. Maybe he was carrying things a bit too far. After all, business was business.

That afternoon Basil accepted a request for the first personal appearance by D.J. in almost three months. Daryl was back on the circuit. Two weeks later he went back to the dexedrine pills. He had stopped taking them in late August because he no longer felt the need for a crutch. Besides, they were beginning to lose their effectiveness. Now, he needed them again.

The Governor of New York and the Governor of Connecticut beamed into the cameras as they issued their joint proclamation: By January 1, 1967, the New Haven Railroad would offer the finest commuter service in the nation. The twenty thousand commuters who had arrived at work two hours later that morning mouthed a collective "bullshit."

Basil Kelcke read the announcement over for the third time as a promotion scheme began to crystallize in his mind. He buzzed his secretary.

WMBE cordially invites you to celebrate the arrival of the New Year aboard the WMBE Rock Express. Departure time: 9:00 p.m. at track 18 at Grand Central Station. All aboard for fun, frolic and festivity as your host, D.J., takes you over the rails of the finest commuter line in the nation.

The Governor of New York telephoned the Governor of Connecticut. "Is WMBE trying to make fun of us?" asked the first Governor.

"I don't know. Are you going?"

"Hell, no. Are you?"

"Wouldn't be caught within ten miles of that train."

"D.J. . . . D.J. . . . over here."

Daryl turned away from the group of high school students and tried to find the voice calling him. A girl separated herself from another group and came toward him. His heart gave a momentary syncopated beat as he recognized her.

"Hello, Doreen," he said coldly.

"Please, D.J. Let me talk to you for just a minute," she said, drawing him away from the crowd. "I just wanted to say I'm sorry."

"So am I," replied D.J., biting the words.

"It really wasn't my fault. My daddy . . ."

"It's over. I don't want to hear about it," interrupted D.J.

"Does it have to be over?" she said softly. "I've missed you terribly. I want you . . . right now."

Daryl stared at her with disgust in his eyes. He wanted to lash out and hurt her—to shatter her . . . pay her back for the agony she had caused him. But the words stuck in his larynx. He felt his rage subsiding as her deep brown eyes met his. He dropped his look and saw her soft, sweet lips begin to tremble. He sensed an involuntary stirring in his loins.

"Nobody's home at my house. We could go right now . . . and you don't have to worry. I have my own diaphragm now."

Fifteen . . . fifteen . . . fifteen years old. The words beat on his brain like a primitive tom-tom. Still, he hesitated.

"Let's go," she whispered.

Daryl clenched his teeth and held his breath. Finally, the invisible manacles released him and he whirled on his heel and raced for his car. He looked back once. Doreen was still standing where he had left her. Thank God, he breathed.

On December 5, Basil called Freda and suggested that she might like to handle the details of the New Year's Eve party. She would act as co-host with Daryl, Basil informed her, so perhaps she should have the fun of planning the affair. Freda was delighted to accept. Anything to take her mind away from Daryl's ever-increasing jumpiness.

Freda soon learned that putting together a huge party was not as simple as Basil had led her to believe. He had told her that all she had to do was call a party planning service and leave everything to them. But this was no little living room drop-in affair. This was gigantic. She found herself staggering under an avalanche of detail. Newspapers, wire services, TV news departments and magazines all had to be notified. Each demanded its own private area. She did her best to juggle the requests as she puzzled over priorities. Normally, a radio station party would not have caused so much interest, but the news media were intrigued by the prospect of seeing firsthand if the two Governors' prediction came true about the New Haven becoming the finest commuter railroad in the country by New Year's Day.

The party planning service promised the moon, but besieged Freda daily for decisions: How many people would attend? Did she want more Scotch than bourbon? What about the ratio of hot to cold hors d'oeuvres? Would she like champagne at midnight? How about bacon and eggs for a late supper? Or perhaps she would prefer a buffet.

The next three weeks blurred into a succession of

near-catastrophes. It began when she lost the only copy of the master guest list before she could get it Xeroxed. Fortunately, she found it in Becky's room covered with sticky candy before Daryl discovered the loss. She dreaded what his reaction would have been had he found out. He seemed stretched out like a huge rubber band . . . ready to snap at the slightest provocation. She hoped it was only anxiety about the party, but his attitude was reminiscent of that period just before their last visit to the LaFollette camp. Every little thing seemed to trigger an argument with him. Most of the disputes were petty and blew over quickly, but his constant sarcasm was beginning to set her nerves on edge too.

Freda did manage to take Becky out for a repeat performance of the pre-Christmas Day they had had the year before, but the city lacked the toyland-like charm of that first jaunt. Maybe the weather was to blame. An unexpected warm front had pushed temperatures up into the fifties, turning the snow on Manhattan's streets into an ugly, black slush.

Then there was the Rex Blair party. Daryl wanted to go. Freda steadfastly refused. Another argument ensued and Daryl stomped out of the apartment alone. Christmas itself was bleak. Ev and Vera had flown to the Coast for the holiday, so the Hofferts were left to themselves. It was a day spent in hushed politeness . . . for Becky's sake.

On December 30, life took a turn for the better as far as Freda was concerned. The weather improved and the temperatures became seasonal. Cold and crisp. Daryl finished his last show of 1966 and breezed into the apartment in a cheerful mood. The railroad called and announced that the WMBE Rock Express was happily ensconced on track 18 and ready for business. Despite the frantic last minute hassles, everything was now ready.

At 4:00 p.m. on the 31st, Freda took one last tour through the four empty cars. Each car had been scrubbed clean of the accumulated grime of a decade. Five seats had been removed from the left side of each

car to make room for the bars. Japanese lanterns were hung the length of the train. She checked the kitchen of the dining car. The caterer was bustling about supervising people who were putting the finishing touches on mountains of hors d'oeuvres. Steam tables were being filled with boiling water and cases of liquor vied for position with an ocean of ginger ale and soda. A WMBE engineer made a final connection and pushed a button. A volcano of rock music erupted through the cars. The WMBE Rock Express was ready to roll.

Freda scanned the guest list. The most important guests, of course, were the prospective sponsors and the executives from the advertising agencies. The Mayor had accepted an invitation but was forced to cancel his appearance and send a deputy when a wildcat strike of sanitation men threatened the city with a major health problem.

With every VIP accounted for, Freda turned her thoughts to the MIP. As far as she was concerned, the most important person at the party would be her old friend Harriet Roth. Harriet was now working in Detroit, so the two girls had missed seeing each other during Freda's trip to Grand Rapids. Determined to have at least one close friend in the midst of a party full of virtual strangers, Freda had sent Harriet an invitation and enclosed a round trip airline ticket to New York. Harriet took this as an indication it was important she attend. When she phoned to accept, Harriet sensed, as soon as she heard Freda on the line, that she was really needed. Freda managed to stop short of tears during the conversation, but there was no doubt in Harriet's mind that all was not one hundred percent perfect with the Daryl Hoffert family.

A cameraman from WMBE-TV interrupted Freda's reverie and asked where he could set up. She directed him to the far end of one of the cars and then turned to answer a similar question by a young girl from Associated Press. People from the news media were beginning to converge on her. She glanced around anxiously for the WMBE p.r. man but he was nowhere to be found. She

was on the verge of anger when Basil Kelcke arrived and rescued her. Close on Kelcke's heels was Daryl. Daryl gave his wife a quick kiss on the cheek and disappeared into the growing crowd. Freda saw him shaking hands with guests and smiling as though he did this sort of thing every day. Suddenly she realized that he did. He was at ease with these people. Only Freda felt out of things. We're growing further apart every day, she thought ruefully.

She started for the dining car but stopped short when she heard her name called. Turning quickly, she spotted Harriet coming in the door. Harriet looked smashing. She had a totally different hairstyle, cut shorter in the back and flattered by a lighter color. She actually seemed more youthful than Freda had remembered her. She wore a low-cut, short buff cocktail dress of taffeta. It accentuated her fabulous figure. As Freda stared, she wondered how Daryl would have reacted if Harriet had looked like this back in Grand Rapids. Would he still have wanted to marry Freda?

Harriet pushed her way through the crowd and was hugging her. Tears of delight sparkled briefly in their eyes as they embraced. They tried to talk, but it was hopeless in the noisy car. Taking Harriet by the wrist, Freda started to push her way through the train to the observation car. Halfway down the aisle of the second car, she was intercepted by Basil. Who was her friend? he wanted to know. Freda introduced them. In a rare burst of chivalry, Basil insisted upon taking Harriet in tow and introducing her to the celebrities. Again, Freda was alone. She wandered aimlessly through the train . . . trying to pretend to be a hostess.

The WMBE Rock Express shuddered and jerked, huffed and puffed, spun its wheels and slammed people into one another. Then, with a final, straining, drink-spilling effort, it slowly eased its way out of Grand Central Station. Everybody heaved a sigh of relief and poured another drink.

As the train slowly chugged past One Hundred Twenty-Fifth Street, Freda stood by herself in a corner

and surveyed the merry-makers. Take away the drinks and laughter, she thought, and this could be a cattle car. No. A cattle car would never be this happy and gay. Why couldn't she enter into the spirit of the occasion and have fun? Was it simply because she didn't drink? No. It wasn't just the liquor that filled these people with joy. It was the closeness . . . the conviviality that some can find only in a crowd. Was it claustrophobia that caused Freda's depression? She rejected this thought too. She was not a loner. She merely preferred the companionship of a few close friends at one time. Small sips as opposed to deep gulps. She elbowed her way through the cars, catching snatches of conversation as she went.

"I told him I wouldn't consider the job for less than forty thous'."

"He's a lousy Mayor. Look at the way he's loused up the bargaining with the unions."

"We oughta have a law against unions."

"Let's have breakfast at my pad. Just you and me, baby."

"What kind of a girl do you think I am?"

"Do you like the music on WMBE?"

"Who listens? I'm just here for the free booze."

"My broker says we're in for a bear market."

One conversation stood out, perhaps because Freda knew the participants. Basil and his boss, Tom Flaherty, were obviously engaged in a heated discussion. As she passed by them, Freda heard Basil say, "I couldn't possibly do that, Tom. It goes against everything I believe in. It's immoral and unethical."

"Don't give me that guff about immoral," said Flaherty. "What about this Doreen girl?"

"But his wife doesn't know anything about that."

"Then get him to make the pitch. Only do it. We need this one."

Freda hurried on, embarrassed that she had been eavesdropping although none of it made sense.

The train screeched to a halt and then crunched forward as it rolled onto a siding. It was twenty minutes before midnight. The party slipped into high gear. Freda

looked for Daryl. She spotted him in the middle of a circle of silver-haired men who were laughing uproariously as D.J. talked. Harriet was nowhere to be seen. Suddenly Freda felt a hand on her wrist. Basil slipped her coat over her shoulders and led her out onto the little platform of the observation car.

"We seldom have a chance to chat," said Basil. "I just wanted to wish you a happy New Year and tell you how great you've been standing beside D.J. Just great. I know it's a rough life being married to a successful disk jockey. I'm sure you don't get to see him as much as you'd like." He continued without waiting for a comment, his words rushing out as though he could not bear to keep them inside himself any longer. "I don't know how to say this, but we have a shot at landing the Breezy sugarless gum account for a solid year on every show on our station, including the overnight. This may sound fresh or . . . uh . . . well . . . please don't take this wrong. Did you happen to meet Mr. Willard, the tall, sort of red-faced man . . . dark suit, white tie?"

"Why, yes, I remember Mr. Willard. He was one of the first guests I met . . ."

"Freda, please believe me. There's nothing wrong with what I'm trying to ask you . . ." Basil's voice was rising nervously. He was talking faster.

"Mr. Kelcke," Freda laughed, "you can tell me. What is it?" She could not imagine what was so embarrassing.

"All right. I'll level with you. Willard flipped over your girl friend from Michigan. Harriet, isn't it?"

"Wonderful. She'll be happy to hear . . ."

"It's a little more than that," Basil interrupted. "You see, if Harriet could somehow agree to be his . . . uh . . . date . . . for the evening . . . well, that Breezy account would be as good as signed."

"What do you mean . . . date?" asked Freda as suspicion began to creep into her mind.

Basil looked around furtively, then continued, "I'll be blunt. Old Man Willard is a lover . . . or fancies himself to be one . . . I'll be even more graphic. He has given us

a flat proposition. If he can sleep with your friend tonight . . . we've got Breezy."

Freda stared at Kelcke for a full ten seconds before answering. When she spoke, it was in a controlled, even voice. "Mr. Kelcke, those are the most insidious words I have ever heard in my life. Do you honestly think I would be a party to . . . to . . ."

"Freda," Basil's voice was supplicatory, "Freda, I didn't want to ask you this but sometimes . . . well . . . sometimes we all have to say things and do things that go against our grain. It's part of the business . . ."

Freda spun around angrily and faced the shadowy Westchester countryside. A slender dark cloud was just passing over the gibbous moon as she turned back to the WMBE program director.

"I know exactly what you mean now. Pardon my naivete, but the picture is finally clear. Why didn't you ask D.J.'s wife to strip for your client? Or wasn't I suited to his taste?"

"Please, Freda . . ."

"You filthy, vile, low, contemptible creature," she continued. "What did Daryl have to do to get his job anyway? What kind of a promise did he make you for that precious one hundred thousand dollars? It's you who have ruined my husband's life . . ." Her voice was rising hysterically. Small groups of faces suddenly clustered around the docrway. "You and your rotten radio station! Oh, I've seen those plaques from the Police Athletic League and the Boy Scouts . . . you're interested in public service and young people as long as the money piles up and good old community-minded WMBE dazzles the advertising world with its tremendous ratings. The commodity you deal in is music . . . but if you had to, you'd sell sex or dope or your own soul. I know you now, Mr. Basil Kelcke, like I never knew you before!"

Freda was angry with herself for losing control. She knew she was beginning to sound like a mid-Victorian schoolteacher but she couldn't stop. She didn't see D.J. slip up alongside her. She was prepared to blister Basil

verbally for another five minutes . . . and might have if she hadn't suddenly felt a piercing pain sweeping her shoulder as Daryl grabbed her arm viciously and whirled her against the railing. She was aware of a parade of angry faces peering down upon her as she sank to the icy steel floor. She remembered seeing the moon overhead, now completely clear of cloud cover, and a face that seemed to be smiling comfortingly at her. Later she recalled asking herself if the face belonged to the moon or to Harriet. Everything seemed unreal. She heard Harriet's voice telling the crowd to step back.

Harriet told her later on the plane headed for Michigan that she hadn't actually fainted. But for Freda Burber Hoffert Jackson, the memory of that New Year's Eve was a kaleidoscope of unfamiliar faces, piercing shrieks and scattered mumbling. She could recall clearly only two phrases. And two voices. One of the phrases was "You dirty, ungrateful bitch." And the other was "Honey, you and Becky are coming back to Michigan with me for a good rest." The voices, she was sure, belonged to Daryl and Harriet.

CHAPTER 28

The full impact of Freda's absence did not reach Daryl for a week. Basil deliberately kept him on a full schedule of personal appearances for the first week of 1967. Daryl was too busy to miss anyone. Every day followed the same routine. He did his show, kept a business lunch date and then hit the promotion circuit until he collapsed on his bed late at night. Only the dexedrine kept exhaustion at bay. And even that was beginning to lose its power.

On Sunday, January 8, he slept late. It was almost ten-thirty a.m. when the bedside telephone jangled him into wakefulness. Daryl managed to fumble the instrument off its cradle on the fourth ring.

"Happy New Year!" said the woman's voice.

"Freda?" asked a sleepy Daryl.

"Don't tell me you don't know the sound of your own wife's voice. For shame. This is Vera, silly. We just got back to town."

"Oh . . . Vera. Happy New Year to you too."

"Is Freda there?"

"No . . . no, she's not. She's . . . she's visiting her mother in Michigan."

"Oh, what a shame. I don't mean about the visit, but Ev and I wanted to have you over for dinner. To sort of make up for missing you on Christmas and New Year's. Well, you come. About six. Okay?"

Daryl staggered into the shower. As he stood under the tingling cold spray, his muddled brain began to clear. Now he remembered. Freda was gone. Where? Not to her mother's as he had told Vera. Harriet. That's where she was. With Harriet. My gosh, he told himself, it's been a full week. Why haven't I missed her before this?

He dressed and went into the living room. The Christmas tree was still standing in the corner. It was beginning to droop and balsam needles covered the rug. Several of Becky's toys were scattered around the room. Freda had obviously packed in a hurry. Daryl walked quickly into the bedroom and opened his wife's closet. Almost everything was gone . . . except her sable coat. He wondered why she had left that. It was January and Michigan was in the throes of a severe winter.

He returned to the living room and picked up a Madame Alexander doll. He turned it slowly around before his eyes as if he were seeing it for the first time. He crossed to the desk and picked up a photograph of Becky. He realized suddenly that she was almost a stranger to him.

"My God!" he said aloud, "we've been here almost two years and I don't even know my own daughter, Becky. She'll be three . . . no . . . FOUR in just a few months."

Freda's smiling eyes twinkled at him from a silver-framed photo. He carefully replaced Becky's picture and picked up his wife's.

"What are you doing to me?" he asked the picture. The photograph just kept smiling. Daryl stared at it intently as if to will an answer, but there was no response. He hurled it angrily against the wall and blurted out, "Well, fuck you, sister!"

The words seemed to hang in the air. Daryl looked around wildly to see if anyone had heard him. He

couldn't believe the expletive came from his own lips. He tried it again, this time in a whisper, "Fuck you, sister."

Daryl sat down at the desk, reached for the phone and dialed Rex Blair's number.

"Rex? D.J. here. Whatever happened to that girl, Mickey? You remember, the chick who worked in traffic."

"Yeah, I remember her. I think she's in Kentucky . . . for a cure."

"Cure for what? Never mind. How about the gal that was so anxious to meet me? You know the one I mean. The little broad with the . . ." He gulped the words out, "The snappin' pussy."

"This is D.J., isn't it?" asked a startled Blair.

"Sure. Who'd you think it was, your fuckin' brother?" Daryl was warming to his newly discovered penchant for four-letter words. "My bride's out of town and I'm on the prowl for some cunt."

"Hey, son, you've changed since the last time I saw you. Wha' hoppen?"

"I'm just growin' up."

"I guess you are. Okay. Let me see what I can do. Why don't you fall by my pad about seven."

Daryl called the Dowlings and begged off from their dinner date. He had forgotten, he told them, a previous engagement with a sponsor. At seven, he was in front of Rex Blair's door. Inside, Rex introduced him to two girls he had never seen before. Rex took one of the girls into the kitchen to cut up steak for a beef fondue.

"Rex tells me you're a disk jockey," said the girl.

Daryl feigned anguish. "You mean you're not one of my legion of fans? I'm crushed."

The girl laughed. "I never get up that early. I like my bed too much."

"Okay, let's go to bed," said Daryl with an attempt at a leer.

"Whoa. Slow down. Don't be in such a rush. You know, you're awfully tense. Like you were wound up too tight. How about sharing a joint? You could stand some relaxation."

Daryl looked perplexed.

"Don't you dig? Hey, I think I'm saddled with a square," said the girl. "Haven't you ever blown a stick?"

She pulled a thin handrolled cigarette from her purse and lit it. A sweet aroma drifted across Daryl's nostrils. She took a drag and passed the marijuana to Daryl. He shook his head.

"No thanks," he said. "I don't smoke."

The girl giggled. "Neither do I. I can't stand all that nicotine and tar. This is grass. Come on . . . it won't hurt you."

Daryl took the stick and held it gingerly up to his lips. Then he returned it to the girl abruptly and said, "I don't think I should."

The girl frowned. "Hey, Rex," she called into the kitchen. "What kind of a creep have you stuck me with?"

Daryl reddened and reached for the girl. Pulling her toward him, he kissed her full on the lips and placed a hand on her breast. The girl broke away and stood over him.

"Why don't you fuck off, kid. You turn me off," she said with obvious disgust in her voice.

Daryl stood up and glared at the girl. He checked an inclination to strike her and walked angrily over to the closet for his coat. He was trying to poke his arm into the sleeve when Rex came back into the room.

"Hey, where are you going?" asked Rex.

"Ask your friend," replied D.J. as he slammed out the door.

The February ratings showed a slight decline in the 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. slot on WMBE. Tom Flaherty called Basil Kelcke into his office.

"What's happening with D.J.?" asked Flaherty. "He's walking through his show these days like a zombie."

"I guess he's bothered by the problem with his wife. I understand he hasn't heard from her since she walked out on him."

"That was a tough break, all right, but he can't let it affect his work. Maybe you better have a talk with him."

"I wouldn't know what to say. I feel partly responsible."

"Bullshit," retorted Flaherty. "It's not your fault he married a stuffy broad. She didn't have to get so uptight over a simple little request. We're the ones who have a beef. We lost the Breezy account. You want me to talk to him?"

"No," said Basil. "At least not yet. I've been kicking an idea around in my head that may be the answer. The Glad Stones are coming over here in May for their first American tour. What if we sent D.J. over to London next month? He could meet them, get to know them and then come back with them as their official United States host. We'd have an exclusive. It could be worth a lot of publicity for us and maybe it would shake D.J. out of the doldrums."

Flaherty considered the proposal for a few moments and then inquired, "How much would it cost?"

"Not much, considering what we'd get out of it. Maybe three or four thousand."

"Do it!"

Daryl looked out the window at the rising dawn. The red and gold of the spring sky curled around the clouds that covered the ocean beneath him. The huge wing of the DC-8 dipped momentarily and the sun glared blindingly from the port engines. "Red sky at morning, sailors take warning," said Daryl to no one in particular. Then he shrugged and tried to get another hour's sleep.

It seemed like only minutes later when he was awakened by a change in the plane's altitude. He glanced down and saw the checkerboard countryside rising to meet him. Then the dull red brick buildings of suburban London zoomed by him as the big jet settled in for its landing.

Daryl fell in love with London immediately. It was every bit as cosmopolitan as New York, but the pace seemed more sedate . . . more civilized. He wished desperately that Freda and Becky were with him. He knew Freda would like the city as much as he did. He found

himself mentally pointing out things to her as he strolled through Pall Mall to Trafalgar Square. He felt his strength returning as he walked. The heady April air was invigorating and Daryl walked more than he had in over a year. He walked across Westminster Bridge so he could take the classic picture from Albert Embankment. He walked back over Waterloo Bridge and pretended every girl he saw was Vivien Leigh and he was Robert Taylor. He walked the Strand and cut back to Charing Cross Road through William IV Street. He ambled through Piccadilly Circus and windowshopped his way up Regent Street. He walked and walked and walked. And he felt good.

Two days after he arrived, the Glad Stones' manager called him.

"Hello. This is Ronald Ross. Have you recovered from the change in time?"

Daryl grinned as he answered. He had forgotten about the time change. He had arrived in London at eleven a.m., but to Daryl it was only six a.m. That was the day he had done all of the walking. He hadn't been able to get to sleep until four a.m. London time. Then, he had slept until after noon. He was pleasantly surprised that the Glad Stones' manager had recognized this problem, but he was assured that it was quite normal. Now, however, he was acclimated to the difference and ready to meet the group. Ronald Ross arranged a press conference for that afternoon.

The Glad Stones—Peter, Paul, Pat and Poke—had an average age of twenty-three . . . almost six years younger than Daryl. But it was they who adopted him. Somehow, Daryl seemed like the junior member. The foursome comprising the world's leading rock group welcomed the American deejay like a long-lost cousin. The group and the disk jockey liked each other immediately. Daryl found himself on a whirlwind tour of London. They bypassed the familiar landmarks and pooh-poohed any suggestions about Buckingham Palace and the Tower of London.

The Glad Stones' London centered on Chelsea and

Soho. Anything in between was merely a thoroughfare. They insisted that Daryl join them on a shopping tour on Carnaby Street and demanded that they be allowed to select a new wardrobe for him. Daryl's new image met with raucous approval. He was now mod and with it. The group laughingly referred to him as the fifth Glad Stone.

Two weeks sped by. Daryl sat in on recording sessions and press conferences; autograph parties and afternoon teas. Throughout it all, the Glad Stones grinned their acceptance of their new-found friend. As the departure date drew near, Daryl found himself more and more reluctant to leave London. The only consolation was that the Glad Stones would be going back with him. He looked forward to reciprocating their hospitality as he jotted down ideas for their New York visit.

On the next to the last night in London, the Glad Stones threw a massive party at their Tudor home in Grosvenor Gardens Mews. It was a mad, wild scene that did not break up until nearly three a.m. When all of the guests except three young girls had gone, Paul turned to Daryl and said cryptically, "D.J., we think you're ready."

"Ready for what?" answered Daryl.

"Ready for a trip."

"Oh, I'm all packed. I can be out of the hotel in twenty minutes."

The four singers and the three girls burst into hysterical laughter.

"We don't mean that kind of a trip," laughed Pat.

"We're talking about a trip to Utopia," said Paul.

"A psychedelic experience," added Peter.

"An enhancement of your senses," said Poke.

"I don't understand," said Daryl.

"That's just it. You don't really understand. How can you play our music unless you can really hear it?" asked Pat. "I mean hear every little nuance . . . each note."

"Not only hear . . . but touch each note," added Paul.

"Yes . . . touch the notes," chorused the group.

"How can I do that?" asked Daryl.

"On a trip . . . with LSD."

There was silence in the room as Daryl digested the full meaning of the proposal. They waited for his reaction with eager faces. Daryl looked from one to the other. His heart had risen into his throat and seemed to be lodged there.

"Fellows," he began hesitantly, "fellows . . . I've always steered away from drugs . . . I . . ."

"So have we," cut in Poke strongly. "Dope is bad medicine. Heroin, cocaine, opium . . . these are poison. You're absolutely right to think the way you do. That's why we say you're ready. Because acid is not dope. Dope is a crutch for the weak and mentally ill. LSD is a religious experience. It's the way to look into your soul. It's the secret of our music. It's a secret we want to share . . . only with you."

Daryl weakened. "Are you sure it's not addictive?"

"Cross my heart," answered Pat. "We wouldn't offer it to you if it were. And we won't let you take a trip alone. Poke here will go along as your guide . . . your co-pilot."

The four musicians poured on the persuasion. They had ready answers to every one of Daryl's objections. In the end, he agreed. He rationalized to himself that these were not only trusted friends, they were also superstars. They could not afford to be connected with anything that was wrong or unsavory. These were the Glad Stones.

Daryl held his breath as the group led him into the dark-panelled library. He admitted to himself that he was scared . . . almost petrified . . . but it would never do to have the Glad Stones suspect.

"Don't be ashamed of being frightened," said Poke, almost as if he read Daryl's mind. "Everybody gets a little uptight on his first trip. Just remember to relax and let it happen. There's nothing to be afraid of. You're just going on a little trip . . . a beautiful, mind-expanding trip. When you get back, you'll be a bigger man . . . and a happier man."

"We know that you've been on speed. That's bad, luv, bad," added Pat. "This will help you. You won't need any of those little yellow truckdrivers anymore. Just relax."

The young men kept repeating the advice to relax. They explained to him that no two acid trips are alike and pointed out the importance of the immediate environment. Daryl was taken on a tour of the room. It still retained its two hundred year old dark charm, but subtle additions had been made. Soft, subdued indirect lighting and modernistic paintings blended into the Old England atmosphere. Daryl noticed the books seemed to have been chosen as much for their decor as their content. The huge leather furnishings beckoned, saying, relax. Relax. Relax.

Daryl was ushered to a leather couch and instructed to remove his shoes and jacket. Soft, quiet music began to flow into the room. The lights were dimmed.

"Bring in one of the birds," said Paul.

Daryl was given the LSD as one of the young girls entered the room. She walked over to him, knelt at his side and began to remove his tie. Her fingers worked their way into the back of his neck and his tense muscles started to relax as she massaged him.

"I don't feel anything yet," said Daryl.

"You will . . . soon," Poke said. "Just remember. I'll be right here beside you. Don't fight. Just relax and remember you're among friends. Your best friends. I'm your guide . . . your co-pilot. I'm with you all the way."

The girl removed Daryl's shirt and massaged his back and stomach. He looked at the flickering logs in the fireplace. Were the colors suddenly more vivid? Had they thrown some of that colored powder on them? The girl's fingers unbuckled his belt, and he felt her hands kneading his groin.

Daryl began to feel sleepy. He started to doze off but was suddenly awakened by a ribbon of violent red that weaved and undulated before his eyes. He tensed up and shuddered as a chill ran up his back. He tried to sit up, but the girl pushed him back. Nausea bubbled in his stomach and began its upward voyage. He began to tremble as the chill gripped him with icy arms. He shoved the girl aside and stood up.

"Where are you going?" asked Poke.

"To the bathroom. No. I don't know. Anywhere. I have to get out of here," said Daryl.

"Relax. Lie back and let Cynthia soothe you."

Daryl began to pace the room. He looked frantically for a door, but the room started to swim before his eyes. His depth perception was suspended.

He felt Poke's hand on his shoulder and angrily thrust it away. "Get away from me!" he shouted. "You're trying to kill me!"

"Stop fighting," said Poke calmly. "I'm here to help you."

Daryl doubled over as a searing pain cleaved its way into his stomach. It rippled up his back and he stood up in a vain attempt to alleviate the backache. He felt dizzy and collapsed on the couch.

"Poke . . . Poke . . . Poke . . ." cried Daryl. "Help me, please . . . please . . . please. Stop it. Take me back. Please . . . turn it off."

"Take it easy, luv. You're going to be all right. As soon as you stop fighting it, the pain will go away."

Another swaying ribbon of light danced before Daryl's eyes. This time he did not shy away from it. He stared and followed the glowing purple movement with a renewed interest. The purple ribbon was joined by an amorphous yellow. Then a blue and a red swirled into the room. The colors were luminescent . . . radiant . . . acutely vivid. The music grew louder and the beat became more insistent. The tempo increased but Daryl was able to separate each note.

"I can touch the notes," said Daryl. He reached out and cupped his hands together. "What's this one?"

"A Flat," answered Poke.

"I'm in love with it. I never want to hear anything but A Flat as long as I live. A Flat is the most beautiful . . . the loveliest note in the universe. It's mine!" cried Daryl.

He felt Cynthia's fingers caressing his body. He looked down and discovered that he was nude. He raised his eyes to the girl and saw that she too was nude. He pulled her toward him and pressed his body into hers. Poke handed him a glass of water.

"Here," he said. "Drink some wine."

Daryl looked at the liquid. "It's water."

"You have the power to turn it into wine," said Poke.

Daryl stared at the glass. Slowly, the transparent fluid began to cloud and change color. He concentrated harder and watched the water grow thicker and turn purple.

"I can do it," Daryl said excitedly. "I can change water into wine." He gazed across the room and then said in awestruck tones, "I . . . can . . . see . . . God."

The wine began to overflow the glass. As it did, it changed slowly back to water. It poured faster and faster from the goblet until the room was several inches deep. The water rose to the top of the mantel. Daryl swam through it. He twisted his head and saw that his feet were gone. In their place was a tail. He was a trout.

"You have beautiful gills," Cynthia said.

Daryl was enchanted. He broke the top of the water, leaped into the air and then plunged to the bottom. He had never experienced such freedom . . . such joy. To be a trout was to know life to its fullest. A flash of color attracted his eye. He swam to the top and eyed the bronze object floating on the surface. Aha, thought Daryl, an Iron Fraudator. He opened his mouth and started to engulf the object. At the last second, he whirled away. It's not an Iron Fraudator. It's a fraud, he told himself. It's a Quill Gordon. An imitation. Artificial. The flies dropped like hail on the surface. Each time, he checked himself at the last moment. What appeared to be an Ephemera Guttulata proved to be a manmade Green Drake. The tempting Isonychia Bi-color was only a Dun Variant. Daryl the trout fisherman now saw life as Daryl the trout. And he resented the people who were trying to catch him.

He felt Cynthia's hands exploring him again and noticed that his feet had replaced his tail . . . arms had sprouted where once there had been only fins. He felt her hair brush his chest and then travel downward to his stomach. Spasms of desire flooded his body. He was in a

vortex of ecstasy. The music heightened and elevated him to the apogee of his sexual orbit.

He kissed her deeply and fell in love. She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen . . . the most desirable creature he had ever known. It made no difference that he did not know her last name. It made no difference that they had never exchanged two words together.

"I adore you," Daryl said.

"Of course you do," replied Cynthia.

He heard a clap of thunder and saw the earth beneath him dissolve into dust. The boy and the girl floated on a cloud through a forest of redwoods that rose from the dust. Daryl felt his soul evaporate in the most powerful orgasm he had ever experienced.

CHAPTER 29

Freda hung up the phone and turned toward Harriet. "He's in London," she said incredulously.

"See. I told you there was nothing to worry about."

"Vera said he's been gone two weeks. He's due back next Monday . . . with the Glad Stones."

"Then it's pointless for you to go to New York now. He'll be surrounded by a mob day and night. You'll never get near him."

"I still think I should go. He needs me."

"Do you need him?"

"Yes, Harriet, I do. I told that Blair character that I was a one man girl and I am. I had no right to stay angry this long. I love him, Harriet . . . and I know now that I always will."

"Then you have to get him away from that New York scene before it destroys him. Some people thrive on that kind of success, but I don't think Daryl can. From what you've told me, he was a far happier man in Grand Rapids . . . in spite of the money."

"Do you think he'd be happier in Detroit?"

"It's worth a try. We did it before. Maybe we can do it again. I'll speak to the manager of the station here. If

there's an opening, I think he'd leap at the chance to grab a big New York deejay."

"How well do you know the manager?"

"Well enough to marry him if he ever wises up to the fact that he can't live without me."

"You mean this Chuck fellow you've been telling me about is the manager?" Harriet grinned and nodded. "Oh, Harriet, that's marvelous."

The Plaza Hotel was barricaded. Police swarmed through the lobby and the halls in a valiant effort to protect the visiting group from the onslaught of tens of thousands of screaming fans. Five people moved out of the hotel and eleven threatened to leave unless something was done to restore dignity to the famed retreat. The management pleaded with their guests to bear with the madhouse for just two more days. By then the Glad Stones would be on their way to the West Coast.

Only D.J. penetrated the inner sanctum. He was host, guardian, shepherd and buffer to the press all rolled into one. He had gone without sleep for two days but he was not tired. The exhilaration of the events gave him a better high than all the amphetamines he had ever taken.

Suddenly the Glad Stones were gone and Daryl was left with an emptiness bordering on despair. He checked out of the hotel and returned to his apartment. Vera called and invited him to dinner but he told her that all he wanted was sleep. He went to bed at nine p.m. and slept the clock around. Then he scrambled some eggs and tried to watch NBC's Saturday Night At The Movies. He lasted thirty minutes and returned to his bed. Again, he escaped his problems with sleep. His strength was drained and his mind was filled with black fears.

On Monday, he raced into the studio with only thirty seconds to spare before he went on the air. He flopped into the chair and sat breathing heavily as he tried to gather the energy he needed to do his show. The four hours dragged by on leaden feet. When the show was finally over, he walked slowly up Sixth Avenue like an old man. What the hell is this? he asked himself. Am I

the same guy who used to run up two flights of stairs and still into a record? What's happened to me? Was it the acid? Daryl had ingested LSD once in London and twice in New York with the Glad Stones. There weren't supposed to be any aftereffects and the Glad Stones insisted that it was non-addictive. Why then did he have such a strong desire for another trip? And, with the group gone, where would he get more? A bus roared by, spewing black, smelly smoke from its exhaust. Daryl noticed a billboard on its side proclaiming the merits of THE INTERNATIONAL SELF-DEFENSE ACADEMY. Maybe that's what I need, he mused, some exercise.

Daryl tired as he climbed the steep stairway. The hand-lettered sign at the top of the second flight of stairs read INTERNATIONAL SELF-DEFENSE ACADEMY TO YOUR LEFT. He paused at mid-landing and glanced behind and below him. Man, thought Daryl, just climbing these stairs ought to get me back in shape. His meditation was interrupted by a distant, muffled thud as the walls surrounding the stairway shook. Daryl stiffened for a moment, then smiled as he realized he'd be hearing the walls shake plenty if he signed up for the judo course. He turned left as the sign indicated and walked slowly to the end of the hall where another sign was attached to wide double doors.

Bright red Oriental lettering ten inches high dominated the heavy cardboard sign with only one recognizable word painted in black near the bottom . . . WELCOME. Maybe I have to graduate from Berlitz first, Daryl thought as he pushed through the doors. The air was heavy with sweat . . . offensively heavy. There seemed to be several groups working out in different parts of the gym. Eight or nine men garbed in the traditional gi of karate students were going through warm-up exercises . . . stretching their legs, doing squats and swinging their arms in an arc. The gis were of varying shades of white, some almost creamy, one or two close to being gray. All but two wore white belts . . . one student had on a dark green belt, another a faded yellow.

Despite the obvious age and feeble condition of the building, the gym had a scrubbed look to it . . . its walls freshly painted hospital white. The room seemed larger than it was because of the floor-to-ceiling mirrors on three sides. Near the lone unmirrored wall was a cluster of black-belted men. Directly across from the double doors through which Daryl had entered was a group of about ten teen-age boys working out leg and arm muscles. Part of the floor was covered by a thick gray mat. The remainder was a shiny brown vinyl.

The group of teen-agers and the cluster of black-belts were obviously judo-oriented, Daryl surmised, from the holds they were demonstrating for one another. His conclusion was quickly confirmed when a scrawny, unimposing teen-ager turned his back to one of his fellow students. The attacker wrapped a powerful, hairy arm around his classmate's neck. The slender youngster seized the attacker's arm with his own, pulled the aggressor in front of him and flung him over his shoulder with a bloodcurdling YI! The larger student landed bruisingly hard on the mat. Daryl winced. That's not for me, he decided.

"May I help you?" asked a voice behind Daryl.

Daryl turned to confront a dark-skinned non-Oriental about six feet tall. He looked strong as an ox. "My name is Bill McKinnon," he offered. "I've been in the office. I'm sorry I didn't meet you when you came in. Have you been here long?"

"No, not at all," replied Daryl. "It doesn't matter anyway. I've enjoyed watching."

"What interests you more, judo or karate?" McKinnon asked.

"I-uh . . . just eliminated judo when I saw that little fellow over there break a hold," laughed Daryl. "Trouble is, I've heard karate is even rougher."

"Judo is a sport," explained McKinnon. "Karate is for maiming and killing. We teach both here."

"Well, I'm not interested in maiming or killing anyone. I'm frankly in miserable shape and want to do something to get back in condition."

A small, almost frail Oriental man of hard-to-determine age stepped up to them. McKinnon introduced him as Lee Chung, adding that he was the finest karate instructor in New York.

Lee Chung bowed deeply as he shook Daryl's hand. "Ahh . . . this is your first visit to our do-jo?"

"Do-jo?" repeated Daryl.

"Yes. We refer to our gymnasium as a do-jo. You will learn many words of Okinawa if you study with us," Chung promised in a pronounced Oriental accent.

"You're Okinawan?" asked Daryl.

Chung smiled. "I am born in Macao . . . near Hong Kong. Excuse, please, in moment must begin class. You watch?"

Daryl accepted the invitation to watch. The group of twelve students went through a good forty-five minutes of exercises. Daryl grew more excited as he watched. He was determined now to try karate. The idea of earning a belt did not entice him. He just wanted to get into shape and prove to himself he could still take it.

When the lengthy exercise period was over, Daryl was physically tired himself. The class seemed to have its own strange way of breathing. In fact, he was alarmed at first that some of the students were having difficulty getting their breath. One exercise appeared to be quite simple to Daryl as the class slowly made fists, then pulled their entire arms downward and counted together. Daryl assumed that the *ichl nil sanl* had something to do with the counting. To his astonishment, on the final downward pull, instructor Chung slipped up behind a few of the men and slapped them viciously . . . first on the shoulders, then on the back and finally on the calves. Daryl almost expected one of Chung's victims to whirl around and attack, but not one of those chosen for the assault seemed to even notice.

Daryl phoned Chung the next day and asked if he could sign up for a beginner's class. Chung explained patiently that there were no beginning or advanced classes . . . that he taught ten classes a week and anyone was welcome to take part and could progress at his own rate.

Chung's accent sounded even thicker on the telephone and it was impossible for Daryl to catch each word. The price would be four dollars for a two-hour lesson and Daryl could come whenever he chose; he would not have to work out with the same class each time. Daryl said he'd start on Thursday afternoon at four o'clock and laughed as he added that he hoped he could take it.

Chung replied simply, "We will take good care of you. We have gi for you in do-jo."

"Gi?"

"Sorry, did not explain. Gi is uniform. All students wear. Twelve dollar. You own."

Here we go, thought Daryl as he climbed the long stairway for the second time that week. I probably won't feel like walking anywhere tomorrow. Well, it won't kill me . . . I hope.

Five minutes later, Daryl was facing his first hurdle as a karate student . . . trying to learn the proper way to tie the white belt.

"You bring this end over and through like so. Understand?" Chung explained,

Daryl made another attempt.

"No, no. Over and *through* . . . not under. Ah . . . yes, yes, better. So. You look like champion now," lied Chung.

Daryl laughed. He was beginning to feel good again.

"Lesson begin now," Chung declared. His former charming manner had given way to a stern, almost chilling mien. "You see me on street, I am Lee Chung. Here I am Sen-sei. You ask any question when you wish, but say, please, Sen-sei. Now, you have no food one hour before coming as I tell you on phone, so?"

"Oh, no. No food," replied Daryl, somewhat shaken by the shifting tone of the conversation from friendly instruction to harsh interrogation.

"Very good. You wear cup, as I tell you?"

Chung pronounced it "cop" but Daryl realized instantly that he was referring to an athletic supporter

with a protective shield . . . which he had forgotten to bring.

"Uh . . . that's right; you told me to wear one. Let's see if it's in my bag . . ." said Daryl apologetically.

"No matter this one time. Easy work tonight. Hereafter, please bring cup . . . for your sake. Thank you." He said "thank you" as if he were about to leave but continued questioning. "You have any injury to body . . . ever? If so, I must know. Sen-sei always must be told of condition of student. If injury, I give different exercise for you."

"No, I think I'm okay," declared Daryl.

Chung peered searchingly at Daryl. "You not use drugs?" he asked accusingly.

Daryl reddened slightly. "Uh . . . no. You know . . . sometimes aspirin . . . or a cold tablet. That's all."

"Good. Drugs very, very bad. Much opium in Hong Kong, but not for karate student. So . . . you can run with class?"

"Well, the way you guys went at it the other day, I don't think I'll stay with you all the way, but if I get tired I'll let you know," laughed Daryl.

"You *will* get tired, Mr. Jackson," Chung said humorlessly.

"Mr. Chung . . ."

"Sen-sei. Sen-sei means instructor. You will remember, please. Also, when addressing me and after receiving instruction you bow . . . so . . . and say 'Isss.' Try it please."

"Isss," hissed Daryl as he bowed from the waist and brought his arms down abruptly with his fists seemingly pulling in opposite directions as though he were trying to stretch a long piece of taffy.

"Good," Chung approved. "Now let us go to go-ju floor. Go . . . hard; ju . . . soft. Go-ju. Hard-soft. That is our style of Okinawan karate. Many styles. Many good. But ours best. Go-ju."

Only one group was working out. About a dozen men

of all ages were going through warm-up exercises watching themselves carefully in the mirror.

"You bow, please, as you enter karate area," instructed Chung.

Proud of his bow and his "Isss," Daryl joined the other men who nodded sternly to him in grudging response to his friendly smile. These guys are serious, thought Daryl as he started doing the only exercise he had recognized earlier . . . simple knee bends.

Chung brought his hands together in a sharp clap-clap. "Face picture," he ordered as the men obediently turned their gaze upon a small, unimpressive portrait of an Oriental. "Founder of go-ju karate, courtesy ki-oski . . . iss!" shrieked Chung.

"Iss!" replied the entire class with the exception of Daryl who reacted too slowly to pay his respects to the man in the picture.

Daryl jumped as a strong voice directly behind him yelled, "Sen-sei ni, courtesy ki-oski . . . iss!"

Again the entire class but one bowed and joined in a proud Isss.

"Big toes up," shouted Chung.

Daryl looked about him to see everyone looking at their own feet and rather effortlessly pointing their big toes almost straight up in the air. All Daryl received for his effort was a pain that shot through his entire right leg as he attempted to bring only that one toe of each foot under control. When the pain disappeared, he tried again and all the toes shot up in the air.

"Little ones up," commanded Chung.

The orders came faster: "Big ones up. Little ones up. Big ones up. Little ones up."

I'm out of my league already, thought Daryl. Chung stopped in front of him and assisted him in getting control of his toes.

"You'll get it. No worry, please," said Chung matter-of-factly.

Next came the leg stretching exercises followed by arm and shoulder swinging. The sweat was beginning to work its way through Daryl's pores. He mopped his

brow. Other men in the class were letting out peculiar sounds . . . some throwing their head back and forcing air out . . . others putting their hands on their hips and inhaling loudly and then rounding their lips and blowing air out slowly.

"Breathe, gentlemen," urged Chung. "Breathe . . . breathe deeply."

Daryl wore down gradually, as he expected. The first sign of genuine fatigue hit him after the running exercises. It was then that Chung ordered the men to lie on their backs and lift their legs . . . up . . . down . . . up . . . down . . . to the count of ich, ni, san, go, rok. Daryl could feel his stomach pulling . . . the salty taste of sweat working into the corners of his mouth. He fought an overwhelming urge to give up and stretch out completely. Now, to a slower count, the legs had to go out, then together; out, together. Then, over the head, touch, back down, over the head, touch, back down.

One man, apparently in his early forties, looking fit as anyone Daryl had ever seen at that age, asked to be excused as he motioned to his stomach. Chung nodded, then responded to the man's Isss with an Isss of his own. The man returned, a bit pale, about ten minutes later.

Chung broke the class into small individual groups to work on punches, blocks and kicks. He showed Daryl how to bring the cocked fist from what he called the chamber, a position alongside the rib cage, and throw it forward without bringing the shoulder out of line with its mate. Over and over Daryl practiced it. The closest thing to a compliment he received was from a fellow white belt who said sympathetically, "You'll get it. Don't worry. Takes time."

Daryl's mind was spinning with disjointed instructions.

"Fist straight, please. Otherwise, break hand. Two bones here and here are straight. If you bend, you lose power, also maybe break bones."

"Shoulder back, please."

"Bring knee higher on kick."

"No, no. Chop done so. Hand slightly bent."

"Bend knees more for ge-dan punch. Must hit opponent solidly in groin."

The sweat formed tiny rivulets all over Daryl's body . . . his back, his chest, his arms, legs. His neck did not want to stay erect. His head flopped down so that his chin contacted his neck. His arms ached. Chung's shouted commands sounded distant. The white glare of the ceiling and the shine of the floor were painful to his eyes. Chung tapped him on the shoulder. "You rest now. Finish class next time. Not today."

Daryl shuffled off the floor, gave a half-hearted bow and a sotto voce Isss and headed for the dressing room. As he closed the sliding door behind him, his guts seemed to rip open . . . a flame bit into his stomach and he retched. Hard. The contents of his stomach roared onto the do-jo floor, running in all directions. As his eyes closed, Daryl saw the bright glare of the dressing room ceiling moving away from him. Up . . . up. His head just cleared the end of a hard, gray bench as he slumped to the floor.

CHAPTER 30

"I'm home, honey."

"I'm in the kitchen," answered Vera. "Be with you in a sec'."

Ev removed his jacket and tie and hung them carefully in his bedroom closet. He slipped off his shoes and replaced them with a pair of soft moccasins. Then he ambled into the kitchen and kissed his wife tenderly on the back of the neck as he embraced her.

"I'm in love with you, Mrs. Dowling," he whispered.

Vera spun around in his arms and faced him. "Thank you, Mr. Dowling," she said, matching his serious mien. "I'm in love with you, too. But what brought on this ardor at eleven o'clock in the morning?"

Ev released her. "I guess this morning has taught me how lucky I am. And how happy."

A look of fear crossed Vera's face. "What happened this morning?" she asked anxiously.

"Daryl didn't show up for work."

"Oh, no!" gasped Vera. "Do you have any idea where he is?"

Ev sat down heavily on a stool. "No. I've called his apartment a dozen times but there was no answer. The

fellows in the newsroom checked the hospitals and even the morgue, God forbid. But we can't find him. That's why I'm late. Frankly, dear, I'm very worried."

"Who did his show?" asked Vera.

"Jamie Lawrence. And Jamie's worried, too. He thinks Daryl's been taking something."

"What do you mean—taking something?"

"I'm not sure. Jamie says that some time ago Daryl asked him a lot of questions about amphetamines. Since then he's noticed that every once in a while Daryl acts as though he were on them. You know . . . nervous and jumpy . . . ready to bark at you if you look at him crosswise. I remember seeing him like that, but I never attributed it to taking pills. I assumed it was just the pressure of the job."

"Has he ever said anything to you about Freda's leaving?"

"No. He's never mentioned her to me since she left. And I have never felt I should bring up the subject."

"Maybe you should. Freda called me this morning."

It was Ev's turn to look startled. "Freda? Called you? What did she say?"

"She said she'd tried to telephone Daryl a number of times but couldn't catch him in. She wants to talk with him and asked me if he'd given any indication that he wants her to return. She said she didn't want to write because she couldn't put her feelings down on paper. She still loves him but she thinks he would be much better off away from New York."

"I'm beginning to suspect she's right. What did you say?"

"Ev, let's go into the living room." They walked into the living room and sat down. Vera looked out across the green vista of Central Park as she answered, "I promised we'd talk with him and try to find out what he thought about leaving the city. I also reminded her that he had almost three years to go on his contract. Getting him released from it won't be easy."

Ev frowned as he pondered the contract problem. "No,

you're right. It won't be. Kelcke would never let him go. At least as long as the ratings hold up."

Vera turned her gaze toward her husband and leaned forward as she said, "Do you honestly think he still loves Freda? Or do you think there is another girl, Ev?"

Ev thought for a long minute before answering, "I don't know to the first question and I don't think so to the second. He's always been fairly straightlaced although, I must admit, lately he's taken to using a slew of four-letter words. He's acting like a small boy who just learned what they were. One thing I do know. He's not the same person we met two years ago. But I still like him. And I want to help him. Okay. I'll try to talk with him about Freda."

"If you find him," said Vera softly.

Ev stood up and crossed over to his wife. Putting his arm around her, he said, "*When* we find him."

Daryl woke up and looked around at the strange room. He reached down and fingered the sheets and then glanced at his watch. It read 11:12. Was it a.m. or p.m.? He leaped from the bed and raced to the window. He pulled the cord on the venetian blinds and staggered back as the morning sun struck him full in the face. My God! he thought, I'm late for work. He looked around frantically for his clothes. The bedroom door opened.

"Hi, D.J.," said Rex Blair. "Boy, you really slept."

"Rex," said Daryl. "What are you doing here?"

"I live here. Don't you remember? You showed up last night looking like something the cat dragged in and asked if you could spend the night."

Slowly the events of the preceding evening fell into place. The karate lesson. Ugh! Passing out in the locker room. Chung's voice . . . so soothing . . . who was it that helped him get into a taxi? It wasn't Chung . . . but he couldn't remember it being one of the students either. Thank God he'd at least had the presence of mind to withhold giving his complete name and address. Now, he remembered. He had given them Rex Blair's address.

"Ooh, my head," murmured Daryl, "I wish they had a mat in that damn locker room." He couldn't locate a lump but there must be one there someplace.

"How long have I been asleep, Rex?"

"Almost eighteen hours."

For the second time in five minutes, Daryl remembered his job. "What about the station? Did you call them?"

Blair shook his head. "I figured I'd wait until you woke up and let you decide what to tell them. You were in no condition to go on the air anyway. Don't worry about it. I tuned in this morning and heard Jamie Lawrence doing your show, just as I thought he would. It was no sweat. He told everybody you were bedded down with a virus. Relax. We'll come up with a good story."

"But they'll be worried."

"Let 'em stew for a while. It'll do Kelcke good to worry a little. That way they'll be tickled pink when you finally turn up. You can always say you were mugged in Central Park."

"That'll mean police and a hundred questions. Besides, somebody at the karate school is bound to remember putting me in a cab. No, that's no good."

"Okay, then tell 'em you got food poisoning. You came here and I put you to bed. I thought you'd be all right by morning so I let you sleep and took off for a long weekend. My show's taped on Fridays so they'll never check up on that part of the story. Anyway, it turned out you were sicker than either one of us thought you were. You tried to get up, but you couldn't make it. You couldn't even make it to the phone."

Daryl turned the story over in his mind and then replied, "It might work. But what about the food poisoning? They'll want to know where I got that."

"Tell them you had dinner at a friend's house and you'd rather not identify him. You don't want to embarrass your friend."

Daryl grabbed a quick shower and then telephoned Basil Kelcke. Blair was right. Kelcke was too relieved to

learn that his star deejay was alive and well to say anything about his missing a show.

"Okay, that's that," said Blair. "Now what are you going to do? Want me to invite a few people over for some fun and games?"

"I really should go back to my apartment and change clothes. These are pretty sick," Daryl said as he took note of the stains on his clothing.

"Throw 'em out. Just stay put. I'll pick up what you need this afternoon. In the meantime, you can wear your shorts and one of my robes. It'll look like a tent on you, but it'll do for now. You're going to stay here for the weekend."

Rex fixed Daryl some brunch and then left to pick up Daryl's things. He returned to find the young deejay staring morosely at the wall.

"Hey, why the long face?" asked Rex. "I told you everything was fine."

Daryl continued looking at the wall as he answered, "I've been thinking. I really loused things up since I came to this town. I'm in debt up to my neck. My wife's left me. I can't even do simple little exercises without tossing my cookies. I'm a mess."

Blair placed the bag on a chair and stood over the slumping disk jockey. "Come on. Snap out of it. You sound like the third act of Camille. You're just lonely, that's all. Forget your wife. What you need is some strange pussy. And I'm the guy who knows where to find it."

"I tried that. It didn't work."

Rex masked his surprise at this admission. Daryl looked at him and continued, "You won't believe this, but I even tried acid. It was great while I was on the trip, but I felt even more depressed when I came down. Rex, I wouldn't tell anybody but you, but I've even considered ending it all. I went so far as to load a shotgun and stuck the barrel in my mouth, but I chickened out. I'm at my wit's end. I'm so goddam depressed I can't face anyone."

Daryl buried his face in his hands and began to sob.

Rex slowly reached down and pulled Daryl to his feet. "You do need help," Blair said. "Come on. Take it easy. I'll see what I can do."

He led Daryl back to the bedroom and gently pushed him onto the bed. "Wait here," Blair said.

Daryl lay back on the bed and curled himself up in a fetal position. When Blair returned, he looked down on the deejay for a full two minutes before he said quietly, "I have something that will help you. But you have to promise you'll forget where you got it."

Daryl rolled over to face his friend. Rex was standing by the bed holding a hypodermic needle.

"What is it?" asked Daryl.

"Something to help you . . . to relax you and get rid of the depression. I promise you, you'll like what it does to you."

*I'm high . . . high . . . high
Like Fourth of July . . . ly . . . ly.
My future I've found
With feet on the ground
And head in the sky . . . sky . . . sky.*

The record ended and the engineer flicked on Daryl's mike. The deejay just sat staring into space. Quickly Saul pressed the button that brought forth a WMBE jingle. Turning off the mike, he yelled across the console, "Hey, D.J., wake up. The record's over."

Daryl shook his head and tried to clear the cobwebs. "Sorry, Saul. I must have been daydreaming." He tossed a cartridge to the engineer. "Let's hit this one next and follow it with the Pepsi spot."

Saul eyed the deejay anxiously as he placed the two cartridges in their respective slots. "You okay?" he asked.

Daryl responded with a supercilious smile. "I'm fine. Never felt better in my life. Relax, boobee, that's the secret of life. Relax. You're too tense. It's only a job."

Saul shrugged resignedly and concentrated on the VU needle. He glanced up at the clock. It was 9:51. Nine minutes to go. Ev Dowling was already in the little an-

nounce booth looking over the ten o'clock news headlines. Saul caught his eye and the two men exchanged worried looks. Daryl leaned back in his chair and smiled at no one in particular. Pete Sunday came in and began to select the songs for his show.

"Happy Fourth of July, amigos," said Pete. Saul waved to him but Daryl seemed not to hear or see Sunday. "What's with D.J.?" Pete asked Saul. "He looks like a cat that swallowed a mouse. Did he win the sweepstakes?"

Saul threw up his hands in a helpless gesture. Daryl swiveled in his chair to face Pete and said, "You want to go celebrate? I'll do your show. I feel I could go on forever."

Pete looked at Saul who gave a violent shake of his head.

"Thanks, old buddy," said Pete. "I'll take you up on that one of these days. But I'm here now, so I might as well earn my two dollars."

Ev caught up with Daryl at the elevator. "How about some coffee?" he asked.

"Not this morning," replied Daryl. "I couldn't look another cup in the face."

They rode the rest of the way in silence. As they exited, Daryl started to outdistance Ev toward the revolving door, but the tall announcer quickly caught up with him.

"What's the rush?"

"No rush."

"Then how about slowing down? I'd like to talk to you."

Daryl stopped and faced the older man. "All right," he sighed, "let's go to my place and talk." He emphasized the word "talk."

CHAPTER 31

"Of course you didn't get anywhere," Jamie Lawrence was shouting. "Did any of your friends make a dent when you were on the sauce?"

Ev shook his head. "No, I guess not. Oh, I'd promise. I'd promise anything, just to get them to shut up. And that's what Daryl is doing . . . promising."

"How many times have you talked with him?" asked Jamie.

"Four or five anyway in the last couple of months."

"Right! And he's still not trying to kick it. Look, man, school opens next week. You any idea what'll happen if he turns up at a school stoned? The Board of Education will run him out of town on a rail and the station with him. I tell you, he's a junkie. And the only thing that'll make him take a cure is a damn good scare. Where does he live?"

Jamie Lawrence rang Daryl's doorbell at 10:15 a.m. There was no answer. He tried again. Still no reply. Finally, Jamie began to pound on the door with his fist. He yelled, "Open up, D.J. I know you're in there. Open up. It's me. Jamie Lawrence. Open up or I'll get the super to

let me in with a pass key. And I'll bring the fuzz with me."

Ten seconds later, a sheepish-looking Daryl opened the door. Jamie brushed by him and stormed into the living room.

"This place looks like a pigsty," he snarled. "A ghetto kid would be ashamed to live here. Don't you ever have anybody in to clean? And look at yourself. You haven't shaved in a week and I'll bet you haven't had a bath in two. You stink, man . . . you stink."

Daryl frowned as he tried to focus his eyes on Jamie. He started to protest but Jamie cut him off with, "Don't give me any shit about being sick. *I'm sick!* I'm sick and tired of doing your fuckin' show every other week. Ten hours! That's what I have to put in when you don't show. Ten mother-fuckin' hours! Just so you can shoot shit into your veins. No, don't try to deny it. I was born and brought up in Harlem. Harlem! You know where that is? It's where your best friends are either pushing or hooked. It's where you learn how to score before you're ten years old. And you're strung out before you're twelve. If you live that long. If you don't die of an O.D. So you don't fool me, junkie. You can take those shades off, scag. I've been hip to you for months."

Daryl slowly removed the sunglasses. His dilated pupils peered into his colleague's face and he opened his mouth to speak. Again Jamie cut in. "You're on a one way trip to oblivion, man. A bummer. Even if THE MAN doesn't bust you, you're a goner. You got one chance, mother, one chance. You turn yourself in. You get your ass down to Bellevue before it's too late. NOW! *Right This Fuckin' Second!*"

Daryl sat down on a hassock. "I'm sorry," he mumbled.

"Bullshit," snorted Jamie. "You're not sorry. You're just trying to make me split. Okay, hophead, I'll go. But you're on your own. Don't come crying to me when it's too late."

"Jamie . . ." pleaded Daryl. "Jamie . . . I promise. I'll go tomorrow. You'll never have to do my show again. I

promise. Please! All I ask is one more day. You got any bread?"

"Yeah, I got bread. And it's yours, man. Just as soon as you kick it. I'll take you to Bellevue and I'll stand by you and I'll pick up the tab and I'll do your show free for three months. But you come with me now. 'Cause I won't give you a fuckin' cent until you do."

Daryl began to sweat visibly. He scratched his arms and twitched with an uncontrollable tremor. He got down on his hands and knees and crawled over to Jamie. "Please . . . just this once," he pleaded.

Jamie shut the door quietly as he left.

"Rex, let me in!" Daryl shouted into the closed door. He banged on it with both hands until it opened.

"For Christ's sake," stage-whispered Rex, "it's three a.m. Get in here and keep your goddam voice down."

"Rex, I gotta have some smack. I need a fix." Daryl's voice wavered and shook as he pleaded.

"You got the change?" asked Rex coolly.

"Tomorrow, Rex, tomorrow. I'll pay you tomorrow. I gotta have it now."

"Like the Chinese say, 'no tickee no shirtee'."

"But we're friends. Buddies."

"I don't associate with junkies," sneered Rex. "It's bad for my image."

"I'm not a junkie!" screamed Daryl. "I just need some shit now. Just a little, come on man! Look." He held out a hypodermic syringe. "Look. I got my own works. Help me, please."

Rex leaned back against his teak bar and smiled. "I've waited over two years for this day, you little prick. The great D.J. The paragon of virtue who married the blessed virgin. Momma's golden gift to radio. Horseshit! I'll bet your wife's out banging every guy she meets. How's that feel, little boy? How do you like the idea of your loving bride wrapping her sweet, untouched cunt around a big, juicy cock?"

Daryl leaned forward and tried to swing at the grin-

ning TV star. Blair sidestepped easily and shoved Daryl back and onto the floor. "All right, you sonovabitch, get lost," said Blair as he picked Daryl up and pushed him toward the door. "And stay the hell away from decent people," he added as he slapped the disk jockey. Daryl spun around under the impact of the slap and found himself propelled through the door.

Daryl staggered the few short blocks that lay between Blair's apartment and his. He sneaked past the dozing doorman and slipped into the elevator. He stumbled into his apartment and began a frantic search. He threw the contents of the cupboards onto the kitchen floor and broke three cups as he brushed by them. Every nook and cranny in the kitchen was laid bare as he scratched his fingers into them.

From the kitchen, Daryl's search moved to the bedroom. Every pocket in every suit was turned inside out. The bed was torn apart and the drapes ripped from the window. He was now moving faster in his panic. Sweat rolled down his face and crawled from his armpit to his groin. Even Daryl himself began to notice the stench. Then he stopped. His eyes took on a hungry gleam and he licked his lips in anticipation as he remembered a nearly-forgotten cache. He ran into the bathroom and grasped his electric razor box. Clutching it to his breast, he raced back into the bedroom and with trembling fingers probed the compartment that held the cord. It was there! A tiny glassine envelope. Slowly, carefully, methodically, Daryl drew it toward him. Then his face fell as he held the envelope up to the light. It was almost empty. There was not enough of the white powder to make a full fix.

He tilted the envelope over a spoon and poured the few grains into it. Maybe. Maybe there was enough to get him through the show. He didn't dare fail to show up this morning . . . not after what Jamie Lawrence had said yesterday. Please. Please. Please. Let there be enough to last until ten a.m. Then he'd find a new supply. He'd have to!

Jamie Lawrence nodded curtly as Daryl walked into the studio. Both men were embarrassed and each wanted to say something to bridge the widening gap, but neither of them could think of an opening gambit. Two professional talkers were mute. Daryl picked his records and slid into the vinyl chair as he had hundreds of times in the past. But this morning it seemed as if the chair was filled with red-hot spikes. Jamie paused at the door as though he were about to say something, then changed his mind as he slipped wordlessly into the corridor.

The network news was just being wrapped up as D.J. tossed two cartridges onto Saul's console.

"Start with the 102 jingle . . . give me the light . . . and then play 412 and . . . let's see . . ." D.J. hesitated as he whirled the huge cartridge rack at his left and pondered the songs that blared over WMBE night and day. "How's about 210?" Another cartridge bounced on the console top and skittered off to the desk where Saul caught it like a sure-handed right fielder grabbing a dying quail fly ball.

"Got it, D.J.," said Saul assuredly.

Here he is! cried a sweet female voice.

Here who is? queried a mixed chorus.

My man, declared the sweet female with an effectively sexy inflection.

D.J.! she added.

Before the letter "J" had faded from her lips, her implicit declaration of fascination with WMBE's star disk jockey was punctuated by a shrill sound somewhat akin to a police siren. This sound meshed with the insistent beat of a tom-tom and the shrieking of the Glad Stones as they trumpeted the merits of D.J.

As the red light popped on in front of him, D.J. leaned forward and roared into the microphone, *Happy September fifth, lovers. It's D.J. with you on this last day before school starts. Now, now . . . no tears, gang. I'll be right in there with you with time and temperature. The temp is 64 degrees right now. WMBE time is 6:01.*

On his last syllable, D.J. nodded and the Beatles

stepped right on him with the number six song of the week. He reached into his pocket and brought forth a candy bar. He unwrapped it and began to munch on it.

"That's a wild breakfast, D.J.," yelled Saul above the din of the monitor.

"Want some?" offered Daryl, holding out the candy.
"Thanks. I'll wait for the coffee."

By eight-thirty, the fix was beginning to wear off. Daryl started to perspire. He rejected an offer by Saul to call the air conditioning department for more cool air. An hour and a half. That's all he had to go. Just let me get through today. Maybe Jamie was right, he thought. Maybe I should go to Bellevue. Could I survive cold turkey? Or even methadone? Well, I'll go tomorrow. First thing tomorrow.

Basil stuck his head in the door and inquired if Daryl was feeling better. Daryl informed him that the virus was almost gone. He was fine. Basil left to go to his office.

"Contest?" asked Saul, trying desperately to keep Daryl from making a mistake on the air. Saul knew full well that the contest was next on the log, but he wanted Daryl to say it.

"Yeah, yeah," said Daryl. "Okay. Got the phoner with Rudy that he did last night?"

"Got it."

"Okay. Hit that next and then . . . shit, I don't care what we do, man."

A secretary tiptoed into the studio and headed for the cork bulletin board behind Saul.

"Hey, sugar, what's new?" Daryl called as he fought to overcome the volume of the Shirelles. "Cut that sh . . . uh . . . cut it down, will you, Saul? Thanks."

The young secretary turned and said, "Ratings, D.J."

"Well, how are they?"

"Well . . ." she began.

"Here, let me see for myself." He spun from his chair and dashed to the posted sheet. The girl excused herself and left the studio.

"Comin' out, D.J.," warned Saul.

"Hit something, Saul," said Daryl.

"Can't do the contest without your intro, baby," called Saul, concealing his mounting panic.

"Hit it anyway," replied Daryl roughly as he studied the ratings. "Balls! These things don't mean a fuckin' thing. Third in my time slot. Do you believe that, Saul?" asked Daryl without turning around.

"Can't believe it, baby," lied Saul as he punched the button that put the contest on the air.

Hello, Mrs. Drury? This is Rudy Wills at WMBE. I've got a jackpot of prizes for you if you can tell us the mystery word in WMBE's Master the Mystery. Five seconds, Mrs. Drury.

As Mrs. Drury fumbled for an answer, Rudy, though realizing that she had not been listening earlier and could have no earthly idea what the mystery word was, gave her false encouragement. Daryl settled himself back in his chair. The studio phone light glowed. It was for Saul. As the engineer spoke into the instrument, he noticed Daryl had handed him the wrong commercial cartridge. Ridge Shoes was due up and they were tough people. At least, their agency was. Daryl had given him number 44 instead of 144. Rudy's recorded conversation with Mrs. Drury ended . . . unsuccessfully for Mrs. Drury . . . and D.J. nodded to the embattled Saul to hit the commercial. Saul, still clutching the phone and attempting to whisper to the caller that he had to set it down, said, "Wrong commercial" and hit the mike light so D.J. could ad lib while Saul found Ridge Shoes in the rack. It had happened dozens of times before and D.J. had always covered Saul faultlessly.

But Daryl's mind was still on the ratings and cynical about the inane conversation between Rudy and Mrs. Drury. He did not see the red on-the-air light come on in front of him.

"These fucking idiot listeners," said D.J. clearly. He grinned at Saul but the engineer was not smiling back. Saul's hand froze. He tried to reach to turn off the mike but couldn't get his hand there. Somehow he felt that if he turned it off quickly, the words would come filing back smartly into D.J.'s mouth and they'd be out of the

woods. Even a cartridge, anything to distract the listener so that he assumed he heard wrong. But now there was utter silence. The words hung there. D.J. reddened. Saul was momentarily paralyzed. It had happened!

CHAPTER 32

Basil Kelcke's hand dropped the coffee cup and flew to the telephone before Daryl's fateful words had ceased echoing from the monitor speaker. Kelcke dialed Security and barked into the mouthpiece, "This is Kelcke. Get two guards to the seventh floor . . . ON THE DOUBLE!"

He flung the phone back on its cradle before the security office had a chance to answer. Then he raced for the newsroom, grabbed Ev Dowling by the arm and gave him hurried instructions as he herded him into the corridor. Two blue-uniformed Mercury Special Officers converged on them as they burst into the studio. Saul had finally recovered sufficiently to push the button that brought forth the number nine song of the week. Daryl sat silently in his chair . . . trembling.

"You didn't have to bring the guards, Basil," said Daryl quietly as he rose from the chair.

Basil motioned for Ev to take Daryl's seat and said, "Under no circumstances are you to answer the phones in this studio. And you are not to make any reference to D.J. Just do the show as though you had been doing it from the top. Got that? No phones and no mention."

Ev nodded. Basil turned his chalk-white face toward Saul and received a nod from the engineer. The two guards flanked Daryl and began to escort him from the studio. Daryl looked at Basil with pleading eyes. The PD took a deep breath and waved the guards away. Basil walked out of the studio with Daryl following him like a dog at heel. Outside, they ran into a dozen office workers who had gathered around the little square window in the studio door and were trying to see what was going on.

"All right," said Basil in an exasperated voice, "everybody back to work. This is a radio station . . . not a Times Square peep show."

The office workers reluctantly moved back to their desks. Basil walked swiftly to his office where he met his frantic secretary. She was waving a sheaf of telephone messages. Basil brushed them aside and told her to hold all outside calls. He would talk only with company executives. He walked over to his desk and sat down. As he did, he noticed for the first time that Daryl was still with him.

"I'm going to be very busy, D.J. For the moment, you and I have nothing to discuss. I suggest you go home and lock the door. If you're smart, you won't answer any telephone calls either."

Daryl stared at him for fifteen seconds and then tried to make his quivering lips form words, but no words came out. He turned and walked slowly out of the office. As he passed Basil's secretary's desk, he heard the monitor speaker: 8:49 *WMBE time. Ev Dowling with you on this beautiful day in September. Here's the big one . . . the number one song of the week . . .*

The speaker faded into the background as Daryl rounded the corner that led to the elevators. Fifteen minutes later, he entered his apartment. He shut the door carefully and double-locked it. Nausea and the steady ringing of the telephone began simultaneously.

Ev's face was drawn as he waited for the elevator. The session with Basil had been embarrassing and frustrating. Nothing that Ev had said could penetrate the frozen

mask that Basil presented whenever Daryl's name was brought up. Ev clenched his teeth as he played back the scene in Basil's office. Was Kelcke really that cold? Were his hands tied, as he claimed? Ev glanced idly at the WMBE emblem which took up four feet of wall space in front of the bank of elevators. A slim microphone with a bulbous end pointed toward the ceiling . . . the WMBE call letters wrapped around it like slender fingers. Why, thought Ev, with all of the microphone styles there were, had this one been chosen? Was it a deliberate phallic symbol? Was that what WMBE represented . . . an electromagnetic stud?

Vera was waiting for him at the door when he entered their apartment. "Well?" she asked.

Ev shook his head. "Nothing. He won't even discuss it."

They walked into the living room and slumped into chairs.

"He must have said something," insisted Vera.

"The only thing he said was in answer to my plea for a second chance. He said D.J. had already had his second chance. I asked him what he meant by that, but he merely shook his head. Do you have any idea what he was talking about? Has Freda ever mentioned any problems in the past?"

"No, nothing. She was worried about him and afraid that he might go off the deep end if he didn't ease up, but she never mentioned any specific problem." Vera paused. "And Basil wouldn't even hint?"

"He refused to elaborate."

Ev pushed himself from his chair and walked into the kitchen. He poured himself a glass of milk and re-entered the living room, sipping slowly in an attempt to ease his tenseness. He started to place the glass on the coffee table and then reached into a drawer and carefully withdrew a cork coaster. With deliberate slowness, he placed the coaster on the table and set the glass on it. Vera watched him with all the concentration of someone following the movements of a great sculptor. Inadvertently, the Dowlings were going out of their way to avoid

looking at each other. Each was afraid to meet the other's eyes, as if doing so would trigger tears. A friend was in trouble and they could not help him. They had failed.

Daryl placed his suitcase down in the foyer and moved slowly through his apartment. It was immaculate. Vera? It had to be. No one else had access and surely no one else cared enough to take the time to worry about him. He walked into the bathroom and turned on the lights that encircled the medicine cabinet mirror. The face that stared back at his looked as though it had been painted with clown-white makeup. Hospital pallor, thought Daryl. He raised his fingers slowly to his face and tried to steady them, but the trembling refused to abate. He gripped his jaw in a vise-like clamp. The trembling stopped. He resumed his tour and stopped by the desk in the den. Unopened mail was stuffed carefully into the pigeonholes. He drew out a packet and lackadaisically sorted it. Bills. He shoved them back in the pigeonhole. No need to open them. There wasn't any money to pay them anyway.

He reached into another compartment and took out the five letters from Freda. He glanced at the dates: May, June, July, August and September. One a month. Why had he saved them if he had no intention of opening them? Perhaps he saved them for this moment. He was alone and he needed her.

He slit the five letters and spread them out on the floor. Dropping to his knees, he began to read them. Certain phrases stood out. "Tried to reach you by phone but you never seem to be home. Are you all right?"—"I've been thinking it over and I'm willing to admit that most of our trouble was my fault."—"Harriet and I are trying to get you into her station here in Detroit."—"Becky celebrated her fourth birthday today. I told her the doll house came from you."—"Becky and I are at the LaFollette camp. Bill asks for you. Can you come?"—"Becky wants to know when her daddy is coming home."—"I want to know when my husband is coming home."—"I love you."—"Why don't you answer my letters?"—"I have been drawing a hundred and fifty dollars a week

from our joint checking account. I know money is tight with you, but we have to live."—"Please answer this."—"Please."—"I love you."—"Please."—"I love you."

Daryl crumpled the last letter and pressed it to his chest. He crawled on his hands and knees over to the nine-foot leather couch and pulled himself up onto the cushions. He re-read the letter three times and then carefully smoothed out the wrinkles and placed it back in its envelope. Then he gathered the other four from the floor and methodically replaced them in their respective envelopes. He wrapped a rubber band around the tiny packet and placed it back on the desk.

The jangling of the telephone shattered the stillness. Daryl picked it up.

"Daryl? Ev. I went down to the hospital to meet you but they said you had gone. How are you?"

"I don't have that monkey on my back anymore, if that's what you mean," replied Daryl.

"That's wonderful," said Ev. "I knew you could do it. Look. Vera's preparing a welcome home lunch. Do you want me to pick you up or do you want to come by yourself?"

"Ev . . . give me a rain check, will you? I . . . I think I'd like to be alone for a while . . . I have a lot of things to work out."

"I know what you mean. Remember, I've been there too. But take it from an old war horse, it's better to work it out with friends. I'd have saved myself a lot of heartache if I'd known that when I was hitting the comeback trail. It's no good to sit there stewing in your own juices. You'll make it. You'll be right back on top in nothing flat, but it's no sin to have a little help along the way."

"What are they saying at the station?"

"They've soft-pedaled the whole thing. They released a story to the press that you'd had a nervous breakdown from all the pressure you'd been under. They said I'd be filling in for a couple of weeks until you got back."

Daryl's hopes leaped. "Is that what you're saying on the air?"

There was a long pause at the other end of the line.

Finally, Ev said quietly, "No. I won't kid you. I'm under orders not to mention your name. Now let's not talk about it anymore on the phone. I'll fill you in at lunch. See you in an hour, okay?"

"Okay. I'll be there."

Daryl hung up the phone and sat staring at the desk for another five minutes. So that's the way it happened. Click. And they tuned you out.

The doorbell rang. Daryl rose and carefully worked his way down the steps. He opened the door on the third ring.

"Mr. Hoffert?" A postman stood in the hall. "I've tried to deliver this to you three times this week. Will you sign here, please?"

Daryl signed and then closed the door. The registered letter grew heavy in his hand when he saw that it was from Mercury Broadcasting. He carried it up the stairs to the den and laid it on the desk. At last, he picked up the letter opener and ran it through the envelope. The letter fell open on the desk. It was short, sour and to the point:

". . . and so, in accordance with paragraph 17 of your contract with WMBE, we are exercising our right to terminate your employment with the company effective immediately . . . no severance pay . . ."

It was signed by Harold Hertz, legal counsel.

"It's been three hours since I called him," said Ev. "I'm going over there."

"I'll come with you," said Vera. "Just let me turn off the stove."

The Dowlings let themselves in with the key Daryl had given them when he had himself admitted to Bellevue.

"Whatever possessed him to take an apartment this large?" asked Vera.

"I guess he thought he could afford anything. When you're making only seven or eight thousand dollars a year, a hundred thousand sounds like an inexhaustible supply."

They searched through the first floor and then climbed

the stairs to the second level. "I'm surprised he hasn't been hit with a big income tax bite by this time," said Ev.

"Freda said they'd always gotten a rebate. Tax averaging took care of them. This is the year he would have been in trouble."

They entered the den. The registered letter from WMBE was still lying open on the desk. Ev picked it up and read it and then handed it to Vera without comment. She read it quickly and then placed it back on the desk.

"They didn't waste any time, did they? This letter is dated September 5th. That's the day it happened, isn't it?"

Ev nodded silently and then went out to check the bedroom. He returned moments later with a note in his hand.

"It was lying on the bed," he explained to Vera.

"Dear Vera and Ev," he read. "I'm sorry I had to miss your welcome home lunch. I wanted to come very badly, but I'm afraid this is something I have to face alone. I've learned some hard lessons in the last couple of years. Maybe everything was for the best. I never really earned a shot at the big time. I wasn't ready for it. Next time I will be. And there will be a next time. I'll be back.

"Please sell the stuff around here that belongs to me and send the money to Freda and Becky. I have enough to hold me until I get situated. One of these days, maybe I'll be able to thank you properly for all you have done for the Hofferts. In the meantime, I can only offer you

All my love,
Daryl"

Ev finished reading the note aloud and handed it to Vera. She stared at it until the first tear dropped on the paper. Then she stuffed the note in her purse and dabbed her eyes. Ev put his arms around her and held her tight. He restrained himself from saying anything because his own eyes were misting over, too.

"What happens now?" asked Vera as she dried her eyes.

"If he follows the traditional pattern, he'll drop out of sight."

"We can't let that happen," said Vera emphatically.

"There's really nothing we can do about it. Even if we hired a squadron of private detectives, we'd probably wind up in a blind alley. When a man is down on his luck and wants to disappear, he knows instinctively just how to do it. Believe me, darling, I know. I made sure nobody could follow me . . . and Daryl will do the same."

"But isn't there something we can do?" argued Vera.

"Later, perhaps, but not now. He said it himself . . . in his note. He has to face it alone. Even if we could track him down, he'd only resent us. We might even drive him right back to drugs. No, I'm afraid all we can do is wait. Wait until he gets another foothold on the ladder. Then, maybe he'll let us give him a boost. But not now."

"How soon?" persisted Vera.

"Maybe a year. Maybe three or four years. When you've had the world by the tail and lost it, time becomes your worst enemy. It's an erratic villain that refuses to be harnessed. When you're in a hurry, it stops cold and threatens to let you sink in the mire. When you want a moment to gather your wits, it leaps forward like a chariot and drags you with it. That is something Daryl will learn soon enough. It will be a long time before he is the master of his fate again. But he is the only one who can work it out. And well-meaning friends only hold him back."

"How will he live?"

"He'll live. Rest assured of that. Man has a way of surviving . . . when he wants to. And I think Daryl wants to. Now, no more talk of this. We have a lot of things to do."

CHAPTER 33

Bill LaFollette rubbed his hand thoughtfully across the coarse, gray stubble of two days' growth on his chin. The rasping sound that followed was immediately absorbed into the crisp, autumn air. A bushy-tailed chipmunk playing on the fallen leaves suddenly scurried up the bark of a peeling, quaking aspen and disappeared from the view of the trained, but now tired eyes, of the seventy-two year old veteran hunter, trapper, fisherman and guide.

Brittle twigs snapped underfoot as Bill walked on, observing contentedly the brilliant golds, reds and oranges of the Michigan autumn. The air smelled, yes, even tasted clean. Bill's ancient corn-cob pipe pushed light smoke from its barrel. The tiny furnace was an heirloom handed down to him from his maternal grandfather. Poppa Burton, as Bill always called him, had loved this part of the country. It was Poppa Burton who had showed little Billie LaFollette how to whittle a sturdy tool from a fallen branch, how to propel a crude arrow through a light breeze and bring down a buck, how to intercept a low-flying Mallard or Canada goose with a double-barreled shotgun, how to catch a fish on a home-

made fly. And now, mused Bill, what remains of Poppa Burton? No sound, no trace. Not even a clear image of what the old man had looked like. As the inside fogging of a cabin window, when blown upon gently, spreads inexorably into a broad blanket, so did the memory of Bill LaFollette shield itself gradually . . . ever so gradually . . . with each progressively difficult breath.

Strange, reflected Bill as he bit down firmly on the pale pipestem, how Mary had worried so about me after Doc found the emphysema coming on along with the enlarged heart. He smiled as he remembered Mary's determination to hide all his pipes and tobacco. She was too good a soul to carry out the threat born of love; but she sure had worried. Well, it's been five years and the lungs and heart are still doing their work. Then Bill sensed that terrible, familiar cloud of depression settling over his entire being as he recalled that black Sunday morning when Mary had routinely gotten out of bed at six a.m., flashlight in hand, to use the outdoor privy . . . and came back to bed moments later gasping, "Bill, Bill, help me!"

Why Mary? . . . why did she have to be taken from me? . . . God, why did You need to take my lovely Mary away? She was good . . . she had so much left to do. You didn't warn her. You whispered to her that her husband was in jeopardy and that his life was at its end . . . but You didn't tell the Truth. Poor, lovely, kind Mary. How she tended me, nursed me, cared for me . . . only to be pulled away that brutal March morning. Is this a Grim Sense of Humor? A warning of an Ethereal Anger? Ill Luck of the Draw? I know Your Daughter, Nature . . . but I don't know You. Whoever You are, wherever You may dwell, I must know . . . why? . . . why? . . . why?

Bill LaFollette had always believed in a Supreme Being. A Power that oversaw the squirrel's supply of nuts . . . the Painter of the trees . . . the Supplier of fish and streams and nitrogen to make the plants grow. The Wizard of forestry and crops and metal and mountains. Bill's faith had been at once simple and complex. Follow the Plan and the Master will provide. But that oh

so horrible Sunday morning. Yes . . . Sunday! Another wife of the One Above?

While Bill and Mary were indeed blessed through the years with the fruit of Nature, the womb of Mary had failed to bear the fruit of the flesh. Mary, my blessed Mary . . . surely a woman as thoroughly good as Mary, Mother of God.

They had often talked of what Mary would do when That Day arrived . . . when Bill was no longer around to catch the fish . . . to guide the ever-increasing number of vacationers. Insurance had been part of the answer. And savings. There were ample funds in the bank. And the fishing camp . . . all paid for. And then she would ask . . . was it knowingly? . . . what happens when she too was gone? What would happen to the camp . . . to the streams and trees and land they had loved for so long? Those kids . . . Freda and Daryl . . . they would become the reason for their existence. Freda and Daryl, who loved the same things they did. Freda and Daryl, who knew how to communicate with the Outdoors.

The decision had not been hasty. Inch by inch, day by day, Bill and Mary LaFollette came to the conclusion that this fine couple would serve Nature and her People. Had they guessed? No, the LaFollettes were determined not to even hint. But maybe, just maybe, the Hofferts could see in the LaFollette faces that they were like a son and daughter to the old couple. Anyhow, they did the right thing . . . calling on old Jake, the attorney, and fixing up a will:

"From the day of the death of the last survivor of the marriage of Mary McBane and William Robbins LaFollette, ownership, free and unencumbered, shall fall upon Freda and Daryl Hoffert . . ."

I know that boy will be happy here. He's probably had his fill of the big Eastern cities by now. Hmph! I saw all of New York City I needed to when I shipped out for France in '17. And they say the place is worse nowadays. Why doesn't Daryl leave? They haven't even given him a vacation in the last four years. He thought back to Freda

and Becky's last visit. That Becky! She was quite a young gazelle. How old was she? Seven. And she swims like a fish. Funny, though, she never wanted to talk about her daddy. Freda talked. She rattled off tale after tale of Daryl's accomplishments in the big city. He was working day and night, she said, to save enough to get out of the whole business and go fishing. Bill chuckled at the thought but then frowned. I hope he doesn't work himself into an early grave.

An angry-looking cloud drifted unimpeded across the Michigan sky. The golds and reds and oranges suddenly lost much of their glisten. The sun paused to rest behind the growing mass of the thunderhead. A foot-tall hare froze at Bill LaFollette's approach. A hare whose thoughts were of imminent danger . . . tense . . . alert. Bill LaFollette, 72, relaxed, contented now that his depression was beginning to dissipate, planning ahead to his winter schedule, thinking now of dark houses, of snowshoes and winter trapping . . . stopped abruptly. A pain, gentle at first, arose from his thorax. He placed his hand over the area as if to pull the pain away in time. It ebbed.

Bill sat cautiously on a stump. A tree he himself had felled two winters ago when he found it dying.

The pain struck again . . . this time strong enough to force his body to vibrate. His arms rose involuntarily above his head. An explosion followed in his brain . . . the pain grew . . . more terrible now . . . and Bill LaFollette fell to the ground. A few drops of rain fell heavily on the ground forming tiny coronets in the dust. Then, the cloud seemed to change its mind. The rain stopped. The hare wiggled an ear and hopped over the form of the old man. A chipmunk scurried through the brush. Then all was silent.

CHAPTER 34

Ev Dowling surfaced, blew a miniature waterspout and aimed his lean frame for the chrome ladder on the other side of the pool. As he stretched his arms in long, powerful strokes, Vera paused in her rose-cutting chores and watched him. His twilight years had been good to him. His physique belied his age and his vitality would have done credit to a man in his forties. He climbed the dripping chrome steps and toweled himself dry.

"Is that the mailman's truck?" he asked as he cocked his ear.

"I'll check," replied Vera as she placed freshly cut roses on a brick wall.

"Wait'll I get a robe and I'll go," Ev said. "Or are you expecting a social security check?"

"All right, Mr. Matinee Idol," she smiled, "you needn't rub in the fact that I reached sixty-five before you did."

Ev jogged over to her and grabbed his wife around the waist. "You'll always be sweet sixteen to me, lover."

"Go back in the pool. You'll get me soaked," laughed Vera. "Ever since we returned to California, you've been acting like a young stallion. Can't you grow old gracefully?"

"I have no intention of growing old. I was old when I worked for WMBE. When I quit that job, I started growing young. And I intend to remain young . . . as long as I am entitled to your body."

"Why, you lecherous, dirty old man. Now stop." She twisted from his grasp and headed toward the mailbox. Minutes later she returned, walking slowly as she sifted through the mail.

"Anything interesting?" called Ev.

"Just the usual," Vera answered. "A new Reader's Digest, Time, Holiday, a bill from the garden supply and . . . no, wait! Here's one from Grand Rapids. It's from Freda." She ripped the envelope open and began to peruse the letter. "Oh . . . what a shame."

"What's wrong?" asked Ev anxiously.

"The old friend who owned that fishing camp died. But listen to this. He left the camp and everything in it to Freda and Daryl. They're his sole heirs!"

"What a strange twist of fate," murmured Ev. "It's what they've always wanted and what they were working for. Now, it's theirs."

"Freda says she had no idea this LaFollette man was even thinking in that direction."

"Does she say whether she's heard from Daryl?"

"Not a word. She wants us to help find him," continued Vera. "She says she knows that the camp will do more for him than all the hospitals in the world." She paused and looked at Ev. "She still loves him, Ev. We must try to help her."

Ev rubbed the towel across his cheek thoughtfully. "It's been three years. It'll be a cold trail, but we'll do what we can. Let's go inside. I want to call AFTRA in New York."

Vera glanced at her watch. "We'll have to wait a bit. It's lunch time in New York."

Ev wrapped a terry cloth robe around himself and stretched out in a chaise longue by the pool. Vera returned to her roses. Each was thinking the same thoughts, but neither wanted to voice them. Three years. Was Daryl still alive? Had he really kicked the drug

habit? Memories of those turbulent years in New York filtered back to Ev. He recalled his final confrontation with Basil Kelcke. Ev had entered the office to resign. As usual, Kelcke had misunderstood his motive.

"We don't want you to leave, Ev," Basil had said. "I know you had your heart set on doing the morning deejay show and, believe me, we think you've done a splendid job in the last three weeks. But business is business and the station thinks this jock from Boston can deliver us a bigger audience. But that doesn't mean . . ."

"You don't understand, Basil," Ev had interrupted. "I don't want the morning show. I don't want the news. I don't want the station. I don't even want the town anymore. I want out. Totally, completely out. Vera and I want to return to California. We've both had it with New York."

It had been Vera's decision, or so Ev thought. The suggestion had come up at dinner the week after Daryl had left the station.

"I've been thinking, darling," Vera had said, "aren't we both being a little masochistic in our determination to remain in New York? We don't have to prove anything anymore. And most of our friends are in California. I miss our beautiful home in the Valley more than you'll ever know. I'm not trying to push but I honestly think we'd both be happier on the Coast."

Ev chuckled as he remembered how little it had taken to persuade him. Persuade? All he had needed was a tiny hint. And how wise a decision it had been. How happy they had been in the last three years.

Elston St. Claire picked up the phone and said, "Evl You old Trojan, how in the hell are you? When did you get back in New York? Now . . . no arguments. You have a dinner date with Helen and me this evening."

Ev laughed. "You'd better grab a jet fast if you want to get here in time for dinner. I'm calling from California."

"Well, when *are* you coming to New York? We all miss you."

"Ellie, I just don't know. One of these days. In any

event, if I read my union mail correctly, AFTRA is holding its annual convention in L.A. next summer. Which means you have a standing invitation to stay here. And Vera and I will be mighty put out if you don't accept. However, that isn't the reason I'm calling you. I need your help. I'm trying to locate a member . . . Daryl Jackson . . . or maybe he's listed as Daryl Hoffert. You might remember him. He was WMBE's morning deejay about three years ago."

"Of course I remember him," said AFTRA's National Executive Secretary. "He was the chap who got fired for using a four-letter word on the air. Seems to me AFTRA found him a job at a station in Connecticut. Let me check it out with the membership department. I'll get back to you."

Daryl dabbled his hand in the stream and swished it back and forth. The cool water felt good as it lapped up against his sleeve. A trout broke the surface and fell back in the water with a sharp plop. Daryl jerked his head up at the sound and stared at the widening circles that marked the position of the fish.

"You'll catch a lot more fish if you use a rod," said a voice.

Daryl looked in the direction of the voice. His eyes narrowed as he tried to focus them on the man. The man drew nearer and Daryl was able to make out the lettering on his uniform: Michigan State Game Warden. The warden bent over and peered at the blond man's face.

"Daryl! Daryl Hoffert, as I live and breathe! Boy, are you ever a sight for sore eyes. I haven't seen you in . . . let's see . . . it must be over five years. How the dickens have you been?"

Daryl stared fixedly at the vaguely familiar face.

"It's Jeff. Don't tell me you don't remember. Have you gone big city on us?"

Jeff, thought Daryl. Jeff who? He noticed the warden was extending his hand. Daryl's eyes widened in fear. He leaped to his feet and began to run.

"Daryl. Wait up. Where are you going?" The warden's voice echoed in his ears as Daryl stumbled through the forest. He tripped over a fallen log and scrambled to his feet but his wind was gone. He was caught. Trapped. He listened carefully but all he heard was the sound of the small voices of the forest. The game warden was gone. He wasn't trapped, after all. He was safe.

Freda poured Vera another cup of tea and said, "We should be hearing from Ev, shouldn't we?"

Vera dropped a tiny saccharine tablet into the steaming liquid and began to stir her tea. "He said he'd come straight here from the airport . . . unless he had something definite to report."

The doorbell rang. Freda walked quickly through the foyer and opened the door. Ev offered her a half-smile, kissed her briefly on the cheek and then followed his hostess into the kitchen. He took one of Vera's hands and held it tightly as he kissed her. He answered Vera's questioning eyes with a slow shake of his head.

"Another dead end, I'm afraid," Ev said. "He was there . . . he worked there for almost six months, but he lit out suddenly two weeks ago. Nobody's heard from him. He didn't even pick up his check."

"That makes seven radio stations he's worked for in the last three years," said Freda.

Ev nodded. "And the pattern's been the same in each of them. Just when he's starting to build up a following, he disappears."

"Isn't that what you did?" Vera asked.

Again, Ev nodded. "I was so afraid they'd find out about me and fire me that I used to quit as soon as I built up a stake. It sounds to me like that's exactly what Daryl is doing." He turned to his wife. "Have you heard from Elston St. Claire?"

"He called yesterday. He's been in touch with every AFTRA local in the country. They've all been alerted, but apparently most of the stations that Daryl's been working for are non-union. There was one union station but . . . and this struck me as odd . . . when they

asked Daryl if he belonged to AFTRA, he said he had never joined. He had to join all over again and pay the initiation fee."

"What name did he use?"

"Don Jefferson. They made a big thing out of his initials being D.J."

"There's your explanation. He doesn't want anybody to know who he is. He's deliberately trying to cover his tracks."

"But why?" asked Freda.

"Fear . . . shame . . . pride. Take your pick. You don't think I ever used the name Ev Dowling when I was crawling along in the gutter? No . . . we'll never find him by asking if anyone's heard of a Daryl Hoffert. He's determined to make it from scratch."

Freda picked up the tea cups and began to wash them out in the sink. Keeping her back to the Dowlings, she said, "I guess . . . it's a lost cause. You've both done so much for us . . . I can't thank you enough. But you have your own lives to live. I can't ask you to do any more."

Vera and Ev exchanged worried looks. Vera rose and walked over to Freda. Placing her arm around her shoulder, she said, "Freda, my dear, you and Daryl and Becky are a very important part of our lives. We'll stay here as long as we have to. Until we find Daryl."

The doorbell rang for the second time. Freda dried her hands on a dishtowel and hurried to answer it. The game warden was standing in the hall.

"Why, Jeff! How are you? It's been a long time," said a surprised Freda. "Come in."

The lanky outdoorsman ducked his head instinctively as he crossed the threshold. "You look great, Freda. Still the prettiest girl in town. Forgive me for barging in like this, but I wanted to talk to Daryl. Is he here?"

Freda looked down at the floor as she answered, "No, Jeff. I . . . I haven't seen Daryl in over four years. I don't know where he is."

"I'm sorry, Freda," said Jeff. "I didn't know."

"What made you suddenly decide to talk with him after all these years?" asked Freda.

"I was worried about him. He acted so strangely when I spoke to him . . ."

"You spoke with him! When? Where?"

"About two hours ago. He was sitting on the bank of that favorite stream of his. I spoke to him, but he acted like he'd never seen me before. I thought maybe he was sick so . . ."

"VERA! . . . EV! Come here, quick! Daryl's in Grand Rapids!"

CHAPTER 35

Daryl squinted at the street sign. Campau Avenue, he spelled out to himself. Where had he seen that before? Campau Avenue. Of course! He was in Grand Rapids. He reached into his wallet to take financial inventory. four . . . five . . . six one dollar bills and . . . thirty-four cents in change. Not enough. He had to get some money. But even if he got hold of some, how did he score here? Where did he find a dealer? He'd worry about that when he found some bread. Freda! She might be at her mother's place. She might give him some loot. He'd call her.

He headed toward a drugstore across the street. As he started to cross, a huge bus rumbled up to the curb, forcing him back onto the sidewalk. It was empty except for the burly driver at the wheel. Impulsively, Daryl sprang aboard, paid his fare and slumped into a seat near the back. The driver showed no sign of recognition. They've long forgotten ol' D.J., he thought, at once disappointed and relieved. Fame is fleeting, he told himself savagely. Why, it's only been six or eight months since I was king in this town. He leaned across the back of the next seat to pick up a newspaper. He glanced at the date. Friday, May 7, 1971.

Daryl leaned back and digested the date. 1971. It had been a lot more than six months. Oh yes. There were a couple of years in New York. And then . . . why didn't people stop hounding him? They were all chasing him. Freda and her letters. No. He hadn't seen a letter from her in years. Where was she? Suddenly he remembered. She was here . . . in . . . in . . . what town was this?

He jumped off the bus before it came to a full stop. His feet gave out from under him and he crumpled to the sidewalk. A half dozen faces stared down at him as one man offered him his arm. Daryl pushed the arm aside and crawled hurriedly away. Rising to his feet, he began to run, glancing over his shoulder to make sure no one was following him. Half a block later, he stopped and leaned against the plate glass window of a store to catch his breath. He looked inside the store. A squat man of about sixty was arranging liquor bottles on a shelf. Daryl looked up the street and spotted a small novelty store two doors away. He reached in his pocket and jingled his change as he sidled up to the novelty shop.

"Yeah, I think I remember him," said the husky police sergeant. "Didn't he used to do a show over WCOO?"

"That's right . . . just before he went to New York," said Freda. "But he's back in Grand Rapids . . . or at least he was a few hours ago. I have to find him. I can't explain it but I think he's sick."

"We'll do all we can, ma'am. I'll put out an APB. Now don't you worry. We'll find him. But you better get some rest, ma'am, or you'll be sick too."

Daryl sat on a sun-warmed park bench trying to put his thoughts together. He had to call Freda. Why? he argued with himself. Because he wanted to see her. After all these years? What years? He felt in his pocket for the package he had purchased in the novelty shop. It was still there. Finally he rose from the bench and ambled across the street. The neon lights of the liquor store vied for attention with the afternoon sun. The squat little man was still there, chatting good-naturedly with a customer.

Daryl browsed casually among the bottles as the two men terminated their conversation. Unobtrusively, the blond deejay pulled the child's Hallowe'en mask from his pocket. When the door closed behind the departing customer, Daryl rised the partially torn face of a vampire to his own face and stretched the elastic band over his head. He placed his right hand in his pocket and pressed his index finger outward, as if he held a pistol.

The proprietor of the liquor store turned toward Daryl with a welcoming smile. "May I help . . ." The smile died as he quickly sized up the situation. His right hand moved under the counter.

Daryl jerked his head in the direction of the cash register. The shopkeeper made a motion toward it, then ducked behind the counter and fired three times in quick succession. The first bullet whizzed by Daryl and shattered a bottle of Smirnoff's vodka, spilling the colorless liquid onto a shelf before it dribbled down on the floor. The second slug caught Daryl on the left ear . . . shearing off a piece of it as it slammed by. Then two hundred thirty grains of lead, tin and antimony crashed into Daryl's chest.

The liquor store owner placed the Army .45 automatic down on the counter and reached for the phone. "This is the Bottle Shop on Ionia Avenue," he said sadly. "Send the police and an ambulance . . . and hurry! Please!"

CHAPTER 36

Larry Rhodes handed the reins to his daughter as he steadied her in the saddle. "Now, sweetheart, you hold onto these reins. Just remember. If you want him to stop, you pull back on them. When you want to turn, lean the reins on his neck."

Jeannie trotted over on her palomino. "Aren't you forgetting that 'head up . . . heels down' bit you always tell me? Or don't you think she's quite ready for the steeplechase? Seriously, honey, isn't she too young for a full-grown horse? She's only four, you know."

Larry's fourteen year old son laughed from his perch astride the fence railing. "Jeannie, you can't win. He had me on a mustang on my third birthday. Dad believes in startin' 'em young."

"I think you're both incorrigible," declared Jeannie with a smile, "but I love you anyway." She held out her hand for her daughter. "Sweetie, you hang onto Mommy. I won't let you fall."

"I'm all right, Mommy. He's just like my rocking horse . . . only fatter."

"How long have you been doing this?" hissed Sam Bunsen.

Rex Blair gave him a sneering grin. "Six years. Why? You want your ten percent?"

"I wouldn't touch it or you again with a ten-foot pole. The only thing worse than a junkie is a pusher. I'm through with you, Blair. You're the filthiest sonovabitch I've ever known. If I had my way, you'd be sent up for life."

"But you can't have your way, because you can't prove a thing. No judge, jury or cop will ever believe that a major TV star is a dealer. That's why it works. That bullshit about crime not paying is a myth."

Harry Evenson glowered as he stared into the yellowish waterfall. Pointing a finger at it angrily, he said, "That's what I've been talking about . . . right there. That's what your fine paper mill is doing to your streams and lakes. Do you want your kids to swim in that muck? Would you eat a fish you caught there?"

The men crowding around him growled as his words sank in.

"We're with you, Evenson," said one of them. "Just lead the way."

Ben Killian tasted the wine and nodded his approval. As the waiter began to pour the claret, Killian let his eyes travel around the table and come to rest momentarily on each member of the board of directors. The well-fed, well-tailored, well-barbered gentlemen met his gaze with a complacency born of success.

"Gentlemen," said the Chairman of the Board of Mercury Broadcasting Enterprises. "It's been a gratifying season. We're number one every day of the week except Sunday and we've got a little plot hatching to take care of that next season. The local stations are up fifteen percent in billing and, with our new automation, we should top that next year. I'd like to offer a toast . . . to an organization I'm proud to be associated with . . . to a company that can hold its head high because we are

dedicated to serving the public. Gentlemen, I give you . . . Mercury!"

Basil Kelcke's desk was piled high with albums and singles. Behind him, a turntable was spinning and a small speaker was sputtering out the sounds of the Glad Stones' newest release. Kelcke listened carefully for thirty seconds before whisking the disk from the whirring felt. He marked his chart and then placed the record on a small pile to his left. He reached for another album and was just slithering the record from its cover when Ed Wilford walked in.

"I thought you'd want to see this," said Wilford as he handed Kelcke a foot of wire copy.

"I'm up to my ears in new releases," said Kelcke. "What is it?"

"It's a split that came over the AP wire. A story out of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Daryl . . . D.J. . . . was shot trying to hold up a liquor store."

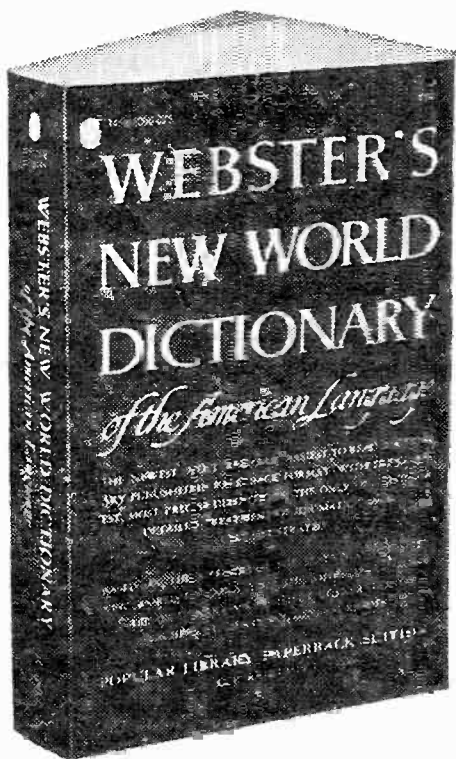
Kelcke laid the record down on his desk and looked up at the WMBE news director. "Was he hurt badly?" he asked.

"He's dead. He died before the ambulance could get there."

Wilford placed the news story on Kelcke's desk and walked out. Basil picked up the yellow wire copy and read it for himself.

"That's too bad," he said aloud. He looked down at his hands. The fresh ink from the teletype machine had smudged his fingers. He got up slowly and headed for the men's room.

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