Don Marshall ANNOUNCER

EDWARD FORD

DON MARSHALL, *ANNOUNCER*

by Edward Ford

THOUSANDS of boys would like to become radio announcers. *Don Marshall, Announcer* tells the story of one of them who did something about it.

Starting out on a summer job with a small Florida station, WNIJ (whose call letters, incidentally, have been assigned to the station in this book by the Federal Communications Commission), Don learns the business the only thorough way, from the bottom up. Acting as telephone operator, "platter changer" and general handyman, he keeps his eyes and ears open, with the result that when his chance comes to take on a more important assignment he is fully prepared for it. It isn't all a bed of roses, however, and Don finds himself in hot water more than once before he serves his apprenticeship and becomes, at last, a full-fledged announcer with a radio show of his own.

Here's the whole fascinating panorama of radio presented in an exciting fiction story and told by a man who has been closely identified with nearly every phase of commercial radio broadcasting.

Illustrated by Robert S. Robison

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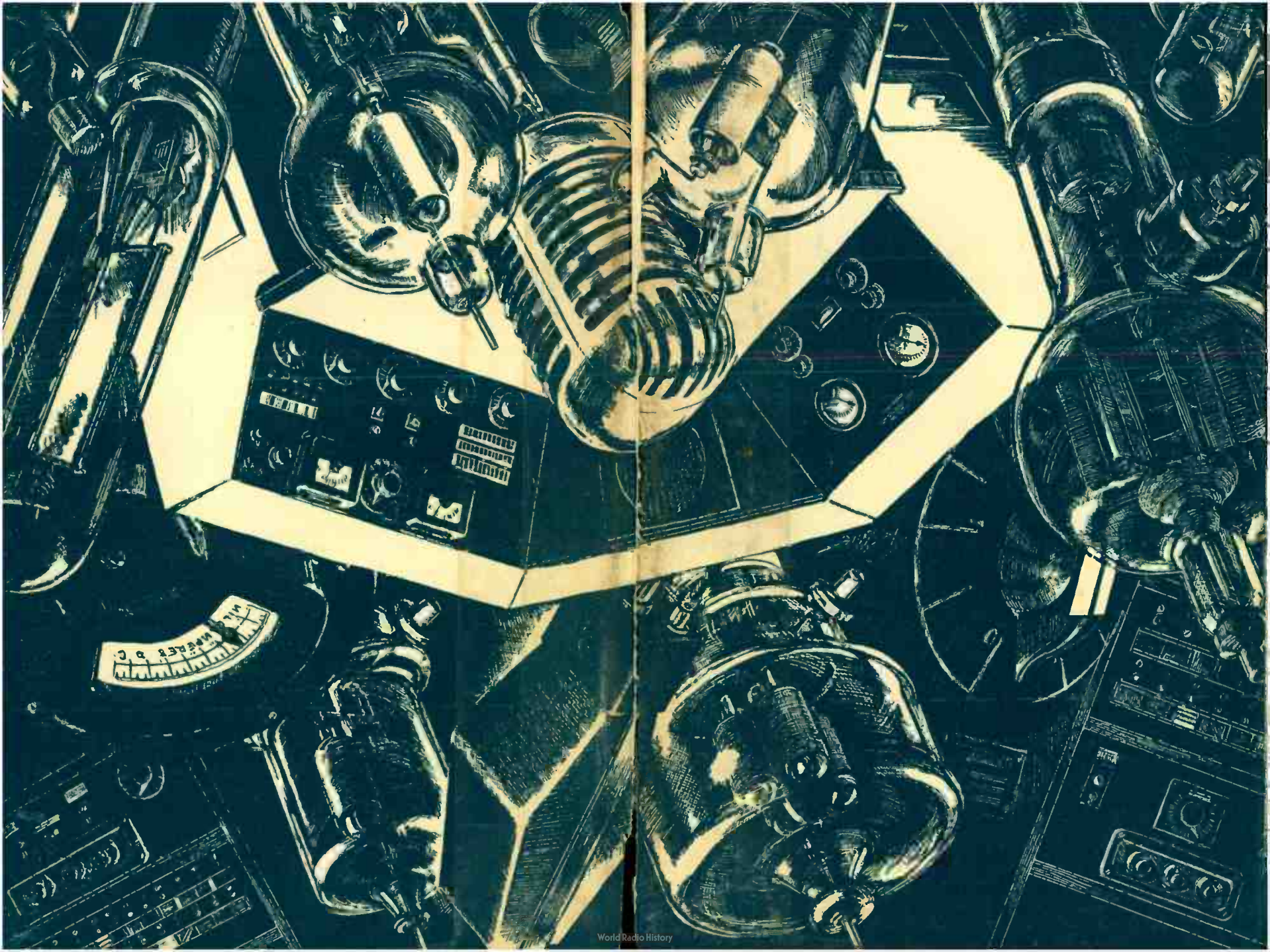

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ANNOUNCER

BY

Edward Ford

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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Don Marshall, *Announcer*

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Larry Scott of the *Sun*

TO

Natalie

Don Marshall, *Announcer*

Chapter 1

"YOU'RE going to stay right in this studio till after the broadcast," said Pete Joslyn, barring Don Marshall's way to the door. His attitude was determined but he was slim and only moderately tall, and Don, rangy, well-muscled and a three-letter athlete at Silver Beach High, could easily have brushed him aside. But for some reason Don hesitated.

"I only want to go out and get a breath of air," he said.

"It's as hot outside as it is in here," said Pete. "What you want to do is get out long enough to miss the broadcast. The trouble with you is, you're scared."

"I am not," said Don. "I just don't want to sing."

"You promised to stick with the chorus till after this broadcast. You're not going back on your word, are you?"

"Nobody will ever miss me."

"Papaya juice!" said Pete. "If you quit now—" He broke off as he saw Daphne West approaching.

"Did I hear someone mention quitting?" asked Daphne.

Don mopped the perspiration from his neck with a large handkerchief. He started to reply but Pete cut him short.

"Oh, Don's changed his mind," he said.

"But—" began Don.

"I'm glad," said Daphne. "This is Mr. Nason's big night. We've rehearsed this program ever since school started. If anything went wrong now he'd—well, I really don't know what he'd do."

Don looked into her flashing blue eyes for a moment, then let his gaze wander to her blonde, wavy hair, which seemed to have caught some of the brightness of the Florida sun. He saw a smile begin to play around her full, red lips.

"All right," he said. "I'll stay."

"You're more *trouble* to me," said Pete.

"I don't know why you feel like that," said Daphne. "You've got a fine baritone voice. You could be a good singer."

"That's one thing I'll *never* be," said Don.

"You were reading my mind!" said a familiar voice behind him. A look of annoyance crossed Don's face. He clenched his fists and turned around to see Marvin Caywood.

Marvin was a head shorter than Don and slightly built. His sleek, black hair and olive skin were inherited from his Cuban mother. Marvin was active in school and had his own small orchestra, but few of the boys liked him. His cockiness and stinging remarks always irritated Don.

"I hope that isn't *required* reading," Don said.

"Any time I feel like hearing your kind of singing," snapped Marvin, "I'll go steal the calf away from some cow."

Don's eyes blazed but Marvin hurried off and, before Don could follow, Charles Nason, the bald, rotund and always cheerful music teacher at Silver Beach High, came across the studio. He was accompanied by one of the announcers.

"Don," said Mr. Nason, "I want you to meet Kirk Beatty. He's chief announcer here at Station WNIJ. He has an idea you may be able to help him with the program tonight."

Kirk offered his hand and Don found his grip firm and friendly.

"An idea struck me a moment ago," said Kirk. "Every year we've tried to make this an all-school show. But we never quite did, because I've always done the announcing. So I asked Mr. Nason if he thought one of you boys could announce the show tonight. He suggested you."

"But I—" said Don.

"You've always done all right in public speaking and school shows," said Mr. Nason. "We'll miss you in the chorus, but I think Kirk has a good idea."

"I've got the script right here," said Kirk, rattling the sheets of paper he held in one hand. "We still have ten minutes before we go on the air. You could run over your lines back in Studio B."

Don appealed to Mr. Nason with a look, but the latter merely said, "Go on," and Don followed Kirk out into the corridor.

"We're taking a network show now," said Kirk, "so the mike will be dead, but it will give you the same feeling as a live one."

Entering Studio B, he pointed to a chair beside the microphone table and Don sat down. Kirk took the chair across from him.

"Now just read naturally," said Kirk, handing him the script. "As if you were *talking* to me."

Don read three sentences and Kirk stopped him. "Keep your voice up at the end of sentences," he said. "But don't raise it unnaturally. Read on."

Continuing, Don found the script fairly easy. His reading lacked the finish and assurance of a professional's but, when he finished, Kirk smiled. "That was fine," he said. "Now remember," he added on the way back to the larger studio, "always keep your voice up—even when you see a period. I'll throw you a cue to start reading when we go on the air. Then after every number I'll cue you for the next speech. Think you can do it?"

"I guess so," said Don, without too much confidence.

"Good. I think the listeners will like it."

Back in the studio, Mr. Nason had stepped up to the microphone at the far end of the room and was wiping his spectacles. "Come on, kids," he said. "Take your places."

The boys and girls who had been chatting and joking in small groups around the studio gathered in two semicircles before a standing microphone, the girls in the front rank, the boys in the rear. Script in hand, Don went with Kirk to another standing microphone. Mr. Nason, with an eye on the program director in the control room, sounded an "A" on a pitch pipe. The illuminated sign

over the control room window told the group it was on the air.

From the end of the semi-circle where Daphne stood with the other sopranos, Don, at the microphone, looked almost handsome. His thick brown hair was only a shade darker than his deeply tanned face. His nose was a trifle too short but otherwise his features were strongly chiseled and one hardly noticed the scar at the base of his jaw, where a rampaging halfback's cleat had left its mark. Under the shirt of a tan slack suit, his chest rose and fell rhythmically as he read:

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. We now present a concert by the Silver Beach High School *a capella* chorus. As you know, this chorus has helped make Silver Beach one of the best-known cities on Florida's East Coast. Listeners in all parts of the state look forward to its broadcasts. Several of the boys and girls who sang with the chorus in past years have since become professional singers. All this has been made possible through the lively interest and tireless efforts of Charles Nason, music director at the high school, who again leads the chorus tonight. The boys and girls will sing first 'Going Home' from the 'Symphony from the New World' by the Czech composer, Anton Dvořák."

Mr. Nason, who stood with arms upraised, awaiting a signal from Kirk, dropped his hands in a slow, graceful arc to mark the downbeat, and the concert was under way.

During the half hour, the chorus sang current song hits, light classic numbers and a couple of novelties. Daphne West, who had an exceptional soprano voice and was taking private singing lessons, had two solos. The musical portion of the program closed with the chorus

singing the Silver Beach alma mater. Don read the brief sign-off and the "On Air" sign blinked out. Mr. Nason, relaxing, smacked his palms noisily.

"Wonderful," he said. "Wonderful!"

Daphne hurried over to Don. "You announced beautifully," she said.

Don felt his ears growing warm and knew they must be reddening. Before he could reply, Mr. Nason grabbed his hand. "Splendid, Don," he said. "Splendid."

"Good job," said Kirk simply.

"Thanks," said Don. "It was hard to talk with my knees shaking the way they were."

Kirk laughed. "You were a long way from getting mike fright. You sure you never broadcast before?"

"Never."

"I'll bet the listeners wouldn't know it."

As Kirk went over to chat with the director, who had come out of the control room, Don turned to Daphne. "May I take you home?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. Dad and Mother are waiting to drive me down to Miami."

Catching sight of Marvin Caywood strolling toward them, Don remained silent. "Well," said Marvin to Daphne, "we did all right, didn't we? I always thought we had one baritone too many."

"If I could reach down that far," said Don, "I'd put a dimple in your other cheek."

"Why you—" began Marvin.

"Remember where you are," said Daphne, "and behave yourselves. I'll see you later." She smiled at Don and was gone.

"Not seeing the lady home?" asked Marvin.

Don started to raise his arm but Pete Joslyn came up in time to grab it. "Why don't you go join a quilting party, Marvin?" he said. "Your needling is good enough."

"I'll be too busy from now on," said Marvin. "I'm auditioning my band here at the station tomorrow."

"I thought you flopped on an audition last month," said Pete.

"We didn't have a licorice stick then. The boy I've got now is so hot I'm afraid to take him to the studio. He'll melt the mike."

On the way home, Don and Pete stopped for hamburgers at a barbecue stand on Ocean Avenue.

"I'd like to know whether Marvin's bluffing about that audition," said Pete, piling relish on his sandwich.

"He's probably telling the truth. His band's pretty good."

"You mean it *would* be if Marvin let the fellows play the music the way it's written. But he's always messing it up. He thinks he's an arranger."

"If he can break into radio, more luck to him. That'll make two out of our class in radio. You know Daphne has an audition coming up in a couple of weeks."

"She's as good as in," said Pete. "There's a girl who can sing."

Don was toying with the straw in his bottle of coke.

"You're not dreaming about going on the air, too?" said Pete.

"Not exactly. Why?"

"I heard that announcer giving you the build-up. Well, you could do worse. Sometimes I think I'd like to be an announcer myself. Radio is a swell business."

"Why don't you try it?" asked Don.

"Not for me. All my family has been in the newspaper game."

"How do you know so much about radio?"

"I can read," said Pete, slipping down from the stool. "And I'm right, too. Ask your mother. She used to be on the stage. I'll bet she tells you radio is the greatest business there is—next to newspapers, of course."

Don did not question his mother, but his thoughts were drawn frequently to the studio during the next few weeks. Marvin's audition did not win him an immediate engagement but Mr. Whitehead, the station manager, did tell him that his band was improving, and Marvin remained as cocky as ever. Daphne made an instant hit with her audition a week later and Mr. Whitehead proposed a twice-weekly program.

The difficulty lay in finding an orchestra to accompany her. Mr. Whitehead approached a band that was finishing an engagement at a Silver Beach hotel but the leader demanded too much money. The same day, Marvin got a phone call, asking him to bring in his band for rehearsal. At first, the boys had trouble with the more serious music Daphne was to sing, but after a good deal of hard work they mastered it and the program was scheduled for Monday and Thursday evenings.

Don was in the studio audience the night of the premier. When Daphne, in a simple black evening gown, stepped to the microphone, she was, Don told himself, the prettiest girl in the place. She sang four numbers during the broadcast and, at the end, the applause was long and enthusiastic.

"You were grand," Don told her.

"It was the greatest thrill of my life," said Daphne.

"There's something about radio that makes me tingle all over."

"It's pretty wonderful."

Daphne smiled. "It would be easy for you to get into radio," she said. "You have a fine voice."

"I'd never sing, but—"

"But what?"

"Nothing. I was only thinking out loud."

Actually Don was becoming more and more interested in broadcasting. He spoke about it to Pete one afternoon on the way home from baseball practice.

"I knew you had the idea all along," said Pete.

"The thing that worries me," said Don, "is how to get started."

"Well, I'm trying for a job as reporter on the *Sentinel.* I go down once a week and ask for it."

"Have you got it yet?" asked Don.

"No, but I keep right on trying."

"I could do that, too, I suppose, but I haven't quite made up my mind."

Several times Don was on the point of going down to the studio but at the last moment his courage always failed him. Then in the first baseball game of the season he was hit above the heart by a foul tip as he sat on the bench, and the team physician ordered him to rest a day.

He stayed home all next morning, lying in a deck chair on the broad porch of the beach-front house where a fresh breeze off the Florida Straits rippled his shirt and rustled the slender fronds of coconut palms on the lawn.

Perched on a dune, the white stucco house, with red shutters and tile roof, was one of the most attractively

situated on the whole long curve of beach. Don had only to turn his head to see all the way from the inlet lighthouse five miles north to the great beach hotel at Boca Verde six miles south. On the horizon, the Gulf Stream was an intense blue.

Don held an open book on his lap but his attention wandered to the beach where indolent breakers were folding in upon the sand. He watched a flock of pelicans wing past, their sharp eyes searching the water for a fishy tit-bit. Gulls zoomed and dived gracefully on the same never-ending quest. On the beach, sandpipers raced after each receding wave to feed upon anything edible that had been left behind, then beat a comical retreat as the next wave broke.

Shortly before noon, Mrs. Marshall came out with her crocheting and sat down in a rocker. She was still a young woman, with lustrous brown hair and fair, smooth skin. Her small mouth was shapely and usually smiling. She was most beautiful, Don thought, when her eyes shone, as they did when she grew enthusiastic about anything. Don watched her fluttering hands a moment.

"Do you like radio?" he asked.

His mother let her hands fall to her lap. "I get a good deal of pleasure out of listening to it."

"I don't mean that. How would you like to be on the air?"

"I'd probably find it strange," she said. "I've never been inside a studio but I imagine it is very interesting work."

Don looked up the beach where a sun-darkened vacationer and his small daughter, in bathing suits, were

gathering shells. "I guess you like the plays best, don't you?"

"Naturally. But I like music, too, and discussions and some of the comedians."

"How about announcers? Do they have good jobs?"

His mother studied him smilingly. "*You're* not thinking about a radio job, are you?"

Don avoided her eyes. "Ever since I announced the school broadcast," he said, "I've been wondering whether I ought to try it." Then hastily he added, "Only for the summer, of course."

His mother stopped crocheting. "I'm afraid you don't get to be an announcer that way," she said. "You'd need a good deal of training. A summer wouldn't be nearly long enough."

"Then maybe—" said Don.

"If you're really serious about it," said his mother, rising, "you'll have to talk with your father. You know he wants you to go into the building business with him."

"It was only an idea that popped into my head," said Don. He resolved to speak to his father as soon as possible, but when the latter came home he seemed to be preoccupied and Don decided it would be better to put the matter off.

"How does your chest feel?" asked Mr. Marshall, as they sat down to lunch. He was a large man of nearly fifty, with a deep-lined, weathered face and thinning, sandy hair. He was not handsome but his mouth was pleasant and his steel-gray eyes were clear and frank. Usually they twinkled with friendliness but, on occasion, they could be stern.

"I feel like a million dollars," said Don.

"That's a pile of money," said his father. "I'll probably never see that much. But," he went on, turning to Mrs. Marshall, "I heard some news that may turn out to be good. They're talking about a new hotel on the beach. If they go through with it, I'll get a chance to bid on it."

"Oh, I hope they do," said Mrs. Marshall.

"That's what makes building so attractive. Just as things look blackest, you get a chance at a good contract and everything's fine. It's a great game."

Don kept his eyes fixed on his plate. He did not want his father to see that he was not so excited as he felt he should be. It was clear the time had not yet come to talk with his father about radio.

But, when Pete and Daphne rode bicycles out to the house that afternoon, broadcasting was the main topic of conversation. Pete hardly gave Daphne time to ask Don how he was feeling before he said:

"I guess you heard Don's going on the air."

"Really?" said Daphne. "Why, you never said a word."

"I've only been thinking about trying to get on," said Don.

"Papaya juice!" said Pete. "He's going to the studio and pester them till they give him a job to get rid of him."

"What are you going to do, sing?" asked Daphne.

"I don't know what I *can* do," Don said.

"But you *are* going after a job, aren't you?" insisted Pete.

"I'm going to make a try," Don replied thoughtfully. "We'll see what comes of it."

Chapter 2

WHEN Don told Daphne he was going to seek a radio job, he was not at all sure he knew how to go about it. He supposed the right way was to ask Mr. Whitehead, the manager of Station WNIJ. But what kind of work would he ask for? Certainly he could not expect to become an announcer at once, and he had no idea what other jobs there were in a small station. He could have asked Marvin for advice but that would have gained him nothing but a jeering laugh. Daphne could hardly help, since she was interested only in her own program. The thing to do, Don decided after a few days, was to see Mr. Whitehead and simply ask him for a job. But for the next several weeks he was kept too busy with other things to carry out his plan.

During baseball practice one afternoon, he came back to the bench after laying down some steaming grounders for the infield, to find Pete Joslyn in high spirits.

"You look as happy as you did the day you found out you hadn't flunked solid geometry," he said.

"A little more respect, please," said Pete. "You're addressing a gentleman of the press."

"You'd better start working on those wrinkled slacks of yours."

"If you play baseball the way you make jokes, I feel sorry for Silver Beach. I mean I'm a reporter. I start to work on the *Sentinel* next Monday."

"That's swell," Don said. "But you're not going to quit school?"

"No. The *Sentinel's* a morning paper," Pete replied. "They do all the work in the evening. Drop around sometime, and I'll show you how they get out a newspaper."

Don slipped into a sweat shirt and sat down. Somehow he felt out of things. One by one his friends were getting started on careers. All he had done up to now was to think about going down to the radio station.

"Maybe," he said, "you could tell me how I could get a job in radio. I've been going to see Mr. Whitehead but I can't think of anything I could do around a studio."

Pete gripped the edge of the bench and crossed his long legs.

"There must be some way to start," he said. "I read some place that they have pages at the big stations. They're like errand boys or messengers. But I guess a little station like WNIJ wouldn't need them." He was silent a moment, with his gaze fixed thoughtfully on the diamond where the squad was starting batting practice. "But," he added as Don stood up and started to shed his sweat shirt, "I wouldn't stop trying. A fellow has to get a start somehow. I'd keep after Mr. White-

head till he gave in. I asked for a job on the *Sentinel* once a week for almost six months."

"That would discourage *me*," Don said.

"I've never seen you discouraged yet," said Pete, rising. "I hope you make it. Radio's a good business—and it's going to be better."

Don spent all that evening writing to Mr. Whitehead. He tried copying a letter out of an English composition book he had used in his sophomore year, but this seemed stilted and insincere, so he began to compose one of his own. The language may not have flowed quite so easily as in the textbook model, but it was clear and to the point. A week passed without a reply from Mr. Whitehead, so Don wrote again. This time the response was prompt. Mr. Whitehead apologized for his failure to answer the first letter and asked Don to drop around Friday after school.

Riding down to the station on his bicycle Friday afternoon, Don wished he had gone home before seeing Mr. Whitehead. That would have permitted him to change to his flannel slacks and sports coat but he had been too eager to get to the station. The blue cotton slack suit he wore was clean and well-pressed and his shoes were freshly polished.

Station WNIJ stood well back from Williams Avenue, the main north-and-south street of Silver Beach, surrounded by a large plot of well-tended lawn. It was a rectangular building in modernistic style, with white stucco walls, a blue tile roof, and a wide window of glass brick facing the street. The tall royal palms that bordered the entrance walk were dwarfed by the soaring antenna tower.

In the lobby, Don was confronted by a girl only a few years older than himself. Seated at a desk that had a small telephone switchboard at one end, the girl was tapping at a typewriter as Don walked up to the desk.

"I'd like to see Mr. Whitehead," he said.

"Have you got an appointment?"

"He asked me to come in."

"What's the name?" Don told her and she flipped one of the switches on the switchboard. "Don Marshall to see you," she said into the mouthpiece. She tipped the switch to its original position and waved toward the corridor. "Turn to the right," she said. "It's the last office."

Don found the manager's office roomy and comfortably furnished and carpeted, with Venetian blinds at the windows. Mr. Whitehead sat at a long desk, behind neat piles of correspondence and folded newspapers. He was a handsome man, with bushy white hair and a close-clipped white mustache. He looked like a man who had once been an actor, Don thought.

"I'm Don Marshall. I wrote you about getting a job."

Mr. Whitehead rose and extended a thin hand, while his quick blue eyes surveyed Don from the polished toes of his shoes to his carefully brushed hair. "Oh, yes," he said. "Won't you sit down?" He indicated an armchair at his right. As Don took a chair, Mr. Whitehead lifted the lid from a long box on the desk and offered a cigarette.

"I'm in training," said Don.

"I wish I were." Mr. Whitehead sat down and lit a cigarette. "Now what did you have in mind? Singing? Monologue? Or do you play some instrument?"

"Why, no, sir," said Don. "I just want a job around the studio—if there's any I could do."

Mr. Whitehead was about to put the cigarette to his lips, but with an expression of mild surprise he lowered his hand.

"You mean you're not an entertainer?" he asked.

Although he felt the confession might keep him from getting a job, Don hesitated only an instant before replying, "No, sir."

Leaning back in his swivel chair, Mr. Whitehead laughed quietly, and Don was puzzled. "You know," said Mr. Whitehead, "you're the first person who ever walked into this studio since I've been here who didn't want to sing, or tell jokes, or at least make a free political speech. You have no idea what a relief it is to meet someone who merely wants to work. Did you ever do any typing?"

"I had some in high school—but I'm not very fast."

Mr. Whitehead rubbed his mustache reflectively, then crushed out his cigarette. "It doesn't matter a great deal," he said. "It just happens that I've been thinking of putting on a young chap. Typing would be useful."

Don felt his heart skip a beat but he managed to answer quietly, "What else would I have to do?"

"I don't know exactly. But we've been getting busier and there are a good many little things that need attention. I think you'd find them all interesting. Of course, I couldn't pay much."

"Oh, that's all right," said Don.

"When could you start?" asked Mr. Whitehead.

"I'll be in school a few weeks more so—"

"Finish out the term by all means. Then as soon as you graduate come in. We'll see if you like radio as much as the rest of us do."

On his way home, Don felt a flush of pride. He had

wanted a job in radio and now he had it. And he had got it without anybody's help. Of course, Marvin would scorn such an unimportant opening, but Don resolved not to worry about what anyone thought. Some announcers got to be more important than band leaders. Daphne, of course, would be pleased, and that was a cheering thought. Still there was one fact that troubled him. He had not yet told his parents, for he had wanted to be sure of the job before mentioning it at home. His father might object but, if he did, Don felt he could explain to Mr. Whitehead. Surprisingly enough, Mr. Marshall had nothing to say against radio when Don explained about the job at dinner.

"I don't know much about it," said his father. "But it has one thing in its favor. It goes right on day after day, year after year. The building business isn't like that. It's either feast or famine. For the last few years it certainly hasn't been a feast. And I guess radio is all right. How do you feel about it, Mother?"

"I think a person's happier in work they like," said Mrs. Marshall. "It would be nice if Don went into business with you, but if he has his heart set on radio we ought to let him try it. He has a good voice and I'm sure he can succeed if he applies himself."

"He's got a long way to go before he's an announcer."

No one realized this fact more than Don himself. During the next few weeks he read everything he could find on radio in the public library, but that was not a great deal, for the Silver Beach library was small. Besides, his time was taken up with baseball and all the things that had to be done in connection with graduation. When the chance offered, he talked with Daphne about

studio routine but, beyond her own rehearsals and broadcasts, she could tell him little. Pete Joslyn, now that he was working regularly on the *Sentinel,* could repeat some gossip about broadcasting but he knew nothing from personal experience.

"It looks as if we're going to be rivals, though," he said one day when they stopped into Knight's drugstore for a soda.

"I don't see how," said Don.

"I mean on news. The fellows at the office say newspapers and broadcasting stations both receive news from the press associations. Then it's a race to see who gets it to the people first."

"That ought to be easy for radio," said Don. "It broadcasts news all day long. The *Sentinel* only has one edition in the morning."

"But people still read newspapers, don't they?"

Don nodded.

"That's because they want to see the full story. Newspapermen are trained to write news. On the air," continued Pete, quoting some of the veteran *Sentinel* reporters, "the men who handle the news are actors or singers or somebody. They don't know the value of news."

Pushing aside the soda glass, Don rested his forearms on the counter. "I'll tell you what we'll do, Pete. If I get to be an announcer, and you're still on the *Sentinel,* I'll buy you a double chocolate soda if you ever beat me on a news story."

"It's a deal," exclaimed Pete. As they shook hands, Don had the feeling that Pete's handclasp was far more confident than his own. Pete knew at least something

about a newspaper; Don was almost wholly ignorant about broadcasting. And he became acutely aware of this fact when he reported at the studio the day after graduation.

After a few minutes' wait in the lobby, Don was called to the big office at the end of the corridor where Mr. Whitehead greeted him with a friendly handshake and then phoned for Kirk Beatty.

"I'm going to turn you over to Kirk," he said. "He'll introduce you to the other folks. Kirk's our top announcer. For the time being, he'll be your boss. He looks after things when I can't be here. Probably," he continued, leaning back in the swivel chair, "you're wondering why I'm putting you to work when I'm so vague about what you'll be doing.

"The reason is simple. We're a small station and not very old, as you know. But we're growing. We joined the Federal Broadcasting System a few months ago and we're putting on more and more local shows, too. Everybody is doing more things than he has time to do well. I want you to help all of them as much as you can. Except the engineers, of course," he added as Kirk Beatty appeared in the doorway.

"Kirk," he said, "this is Don Marshall, the lad I told you about."

Don remembered Kirk from the night of the high-school *a capella* broadcast but now he studied him more closely. Kirk was not quite so tall as Don but heavier. His round face was pleasant and his blond hair was getting thin in front, although he was still in his thirties.

"You're the lad who announced the high-school show," he said as he crushed Don's hand in his powerful grip.

"Yes," said Don, a little surprised that Kirk should remember.

"So you are," exclaimed Mr. Whitehead.

Kirk turned to Don. "Ready to go meet the rest of the folks?"

"If he doesn't work you hard enough," said Mr. Whitehead, "let me know."

Kirk led the way down the long corridor. "You might as well get familiar with the layout," he said. "There ahead of us is Studio A. That's where the chorus broadcast that night. It takes up the whole front of the building. Now here on the left," he continued, turning to face back toward Mr. Whitehead's office, "is the transmitter room. Then comes Studio B, the record library, and the audition studio. On the right next to the lobby is the announcers' room, and then an office. Mr. Whitehead's office is at the end." He started down the corridor and stopped before the door of the record library.

"Here's a place," he said, "where you'll be spending a lot of time."

Following Kirk into the room, Don saw row upon row of shelves, reaching from floor to ceiling on all four walls, with barely enough vacant space for the door and a window. Almost every inch of shelf was filled with phonograph records. A table in the middle of the room held a card-index file.

"This is the heart of most small radio stations," said Kirk. "Practically all of the programs we put on the air ourselves are recorded. There are thousands of platters

on those shelves. We've got symphonies and boogie woogie, opera and torch songs, marches and lullabies. And we're always getting more from a service that makes a business of supplying radio stations.

"You see," he continued, "we're on the air seventeen hours a day—from seven in the morning till midnight. We pipe in several shows from the network, especially in the evening, but we can usually sell time to local business men for more money than the network would pay us. We have to take the big shows from the web so people will get in the habit of listening to WNIJ. But the rest of the time we put on our own shows and we don't have much local talent. So we use platters. We've got to please everybody and that means we must have about everything you can think of."

"How do you ever find the records you want?" asked Don, glancing at the shelves.

"Easily enough. We have them all indexed in the file there. But it takes a lot of time to assemble them—and that's where you come in. Up to now I've been doing it myself for my own shows and Ray Stott has been picking them out for his. Ray's the other announcer. You'll be meeting him; he's announcing a platter show right now. But we've been getting so blamed busy lately we need help. The boss thought that would be a good spot for you to start."

"You'll give me a list of the records you want?" Don asked.

"Sure," said Kirk. "We always map out our shows as far ahead as we can. Then we put them in a rack in Studio B next door till it's time to go on the air." He walked toward the door. "Taking care of the platters

will probably keep you busy at first, but the boss will want you to run errands once in a while and sit in for the receptionist at lunch time and after she goes home. We'll want you to start about noon and work through till nine in the evening, or maybe a little later sometimes. How does that sound?"

Don smiled. "Swell," he said. "I've always wanted to sleep late in the morning."

"Now," said Kirk, stepping out into the corridor again, "let's meet some of the folks."

He introduced Don to Peggy Hart, the pert little receptionist Don had already seen at the lobby desk, and to Jake Rumely, the sober-faced engineer whose voice and hand clasp were unexpectedly cordial.

"Jake has an assistant," said Kirk, "but he doesn't start till later. He's studying down in Miami." He glanced at the big electric clock at the end of the corridor.

"Ray will be out of Studio B in two minutes. We take a soap opera from the web for the next half hour."

The appearance of Ray Stott was something of a shock to Don. Kirk had been so friendly and interesting Don had immediately concluded that announcers were as good-natured and well-spoken in the studio as they sounded over the air. On seeing Ray, he decided that his ideas must be revised. Ray was tall and stoop-shouldered and wore shell-rimmed glasses. His sallow face was clouded by a scowl.

"I want you to meet Don Marshall," said Kirk. "He's the chap the boss was talking about the other day. He wants to break into radio."

Ray took a careful inventory of Don. "Why?" he asked.

"For the same reason you did, I suppose."

"I was nuts," said Ray. "And," he added as he brushed past Don, "all this five-watt station needs is another amateur to get things really balled up."

Chapter 3

KIRK shook his head slowly as Ray hurried off. Then he took Don by the arm and started for the announcers' room.

"I'm sorry Ray acted like that," he said. "He's been upset over something lately. But I'd try to get along with him, if I were you. You'll be working with him several hours a day." The prospect did not seem too alluring to Don but Kirk gave him no time to think about it.

"This," he said, showing the way into the announcers' room, "is where we relax and catch a smoke when we're not in one of the studios." It was furnished, Don saw at a glance, with three easy chairs, a davenport, hat racks, a writing desk and a drinking fountain. Kirk sat down on the davenport and lit a cigarette. Don took a chair.

"Mr. Whitehead says you want to become an announcer," said Kirk, and Don nodded. "It must seem like an easy life, when you're listening to a program."

"I was kept busy enough the night the school chorus broadcast."

"It's a little strenuous at first." Kirk went over to the

desk and returned with several sheets of foolscap paper, stapled together. "Here's something you'll want to look over," he said. "It's the program schedule for today." He leaned forward so Don could read the sheets.

"We have the schedule typed up a day in advance," continued Kirk. "You can see it's ruled off in columns. This first column shows the time, starting at seven o'clock in the morning. The next gives the name of the show. Then comes the initials of the engineer and next the announcer's initials and then the letter of the studio. Over here is the time and studio of rehearsals, if any. Every minute's accounted for.

"Then we have a station log. That's a report showing the exact time a show went on the air, and who put it on. You can't get away with much in radio.

"Now on this schedule you'll notice there's quite a bit of stuff that looks like code. 'Et' and 'SB' and 'tyin'. That's a kind of shorthand we use to get all the information in the narrow columns. For example 'Et' stands for electrical transcription."

"I always thought that meant the same thing as a record," said Don.

"It does and it doesn't. Some of our records are exactly like the ones you play on your record player at home. But most of the electrical transcriptions are made out of a plastic called vinylite, so the needle won't make so much noise. An electrical transcription is made especially for broadcasting. Sometimes it contains a whole fifteen-minute program. It's made in a studio, usually in New York, and the copies are sent to small stations around the country. We call that kind a platter show.

"Sometimes," continued Kirk, "the transcription

doesn't have anything on it except a commercial plug. We put them on the air during a chain break. That's what the letters 'SB' stand for—spot broadcast."

"I've heard of them," said Don. "Most of the time they're a jingle about soap or a soft drink."

"They plug almost everything. And most of them smell. But announcers can't do anything about a sponsor's bad taste." Kirk tossed the schedule over to the desk. "There's another kind of transcription," he said, "although it doesn't concern us here. The bigger stations have recording machines of their own. Sometimes a network show will conflict with a time the station has sold locally. The station records the web program as it comes over the wire and puts it on the air later from the transcription."

Don picked up the schedule and scanned it hastily. "It mentions 'tyin' a couple of times," he said.

"That's another kind of spot broadcast. It's mostly used by the movie companies. They send us a transcription describing a picture. We play that and then read an announcement saying the picture starts at the local movie house on such and such a day."

"Does the announcer have to keep all those things straight?" asked Don, somewhat dismayed.

"That depends on the station. Here at WNIJ Mr. Whitehead spends most of his time looking after business and directing the live programs we put on in the evening. That leaves almost everything else up to the announcers."

"And up to *you* most of the time," said Don. "Your initials are down for seven o'clock in the morning and again at nine o'clock at night."

"It *is* a long day, but I'm off from one o'clock to six. Ray Stott comes on from noon, until six, and then he's off till nine. A big station couldn't operate like that. Here, if anything goes wrong, we can play records and, if an announcer isn't around, Jake can take over. Most of the key stations only have live shows, so they keep an announcer and even a musician standing by all the time."

"A live show?" asked Don. "You mean one with lots of pep?"

"Some don't show much signs of life. 'Live show' is a term we use to distinguish a broadcast by living performers from a record or transcription broadcast. There's plenty more shop talk like that in radio. But you'll pick it up fast as you go along." Kirk glanced at the clock on the wall.

"That hand's moving fast," he said. "When we had slaves we used to drive them with a long blacksnake whip. In radio, they drive us with the long black minute hand of an electric clock. But it helps make radio interesting," he said as he got to his feet, "that split-second precision. I'll get you started on assembling a platter program as soon as I get the news together for the twelve forty-five news broadcast. Meanwhile I'll turn you over to Peggy at the desk. She'll be going out soon."

Before she went to lunch, Peggy showed Don how to operate the simple switchboard and then gave him the stack of bills she had been folding and stuffing in envelopes. Calls were not numerous at that time of day and Don had leisure, as he folded the bills, to reflect upon his surroundings. It was light and cheerful in the lobby. Through the open door he could see a large stucco house with bougainvillea pouring in a lavender torrent down

the side. And, in the distance, he could see the stream of automobiles flashing along U. S. 1 on their way to or from Miami.

A loudspeaker filled the lobby with the dialogue of the soap opera then being broadcast by the station. As Don listened, he remembered that he had heard a loudspeaker in every room he had visited so far, except the record library. Of course, he recalled a little regretfully, he had not yet been in a studio. He wondered how Marvin would behave when he learned Don was working at WNIJ. No doubt he would have some jibe to make, but Don was not worried about that. Perhaps he would be announcing a big-name band some day.

The broadcast ended and the next voice Don heard was that of Kirk Beatty, broadcasting news. He knew Kirk was reading from script but his voice was so friendly and natural a listener might suppose he was chatting with an old acquaintance. That, Don decided, was the style he would try for, if he ever got to be an announcer. He was brought back to reality by the entrance of Ray Stott.

"Run uptown and get me a pack of cigarettes," Ray demanded.

"Why, I can't," said Don in surprise. "I'm tending the switchboard."

"Okay. I'll let you get away with it this time." Ray glared and stalked off.

Don was annoyed with Ray's curt order and a trifle uneasy about what Ray might tell Kirk or Mr. Whitehead. His face was grave when Peggy returned from lunch.

"When did you get the bad news?" she asked.

"I didn't get—"

"You look like you just heard a hurricane warning.

What's wrong? Has our great Mr. Stott dropped in to see you?"

"Oh, he didn't say much of anything," Don answered.

"I thought so. Well, don't pay any attention to him. He's a big, conceited false alarm, as far as I'm concerned. He had a job with a network once and now he thinks he's too good for a little station like ours. He's always complaining about something and getting in everybody's hair. And, if he only knew it, the only reason he's still got a job here is because Mr. Whitehead's too soft-hearted to fire him."

Don started to speak but Peggy interrupted. "Now please don't go repeating what I said. But watch out for Mr. Stott."

Kirk came in from the corridor and Peggy added quickly, "You think you can operate that switchboard all right now?"

"It was easy," said Don, yielding the chair at the desk.

Peggy looked at the pile of envelopes on the desk. "Gee," she said, "you folded *all* the bills. Now I haven't anything left to do."

"You worry about that, Peggy," said Kirk. "Don's got plenty to keep him busy. Let's get started with those platters."

In the record library, Kirk pulled a typewritten sheet from the pocket of his shirt. "This is the script for a platter show we put on the air at five-thirty. We've got several before that, but the records are all assembled."

Don was studying the sheet Kirk had handed him. "Do you make up this?"

"Yes," said Kirk. "That's one of the things announcers have to do around here. Big stations have a script writer

or two to write the introductions to the musical numbers and the plugs. The boss takes care of our plugs but I help him with them and do the rest of the script.

"On my own platter show in the morning I just ad lib but on the rest we always broadcast from script. Now on this five-thirty show," he continued, taking the script from Don, "you'll notice all the numbers are from operas. People around here aren't much interested in that sort of thing but most of them eat dinner about that time and like pleasant music. We give them some of the lighter operatic arias one night and some semi-classics or Strauss waltzes the next. We can play about a dozen platters in an hour, not counting the signature. Suppose you get out the records and put them in the rack. Then I'll check them and show you where to put them in Studio B."

With the help of the card index, it was easy for Don to pick out the records. Kirk took him into Studio B. It was a small room, with two microphones, one standing, the other a table mike. The furnishings consisted of nothing more than a table and chair, the two record turntables, and a tall rack with narrow, horizontal shelves.

"Put the records in the rack," said Kirk. "You'll notice we've got two turntables. That lets us play right through a number when it runs over more than one record. A good record jockey can lift the needle on one record and drop the needle on the next with hardly a break."

He walked toward the door. "I'm going to run along home now. You can report back to the boss. He'll probably have some errands for you to do."

"If he sends me uptown," said Don, "I could get Mr. Stott's cigarettes."

"His what?"

"Cigarettes. He wanted me to go uptown for them while Peggy was out, but I couldn't leave the switchboard."

Kirk's mouth became a trifle grim. "The next time Ray wants to send you any place, tell him to see me. You weren't hired to run personal errands for anybody."

Don spent the rest of the afternoon uptown. Though Silver Beach stretched over considerable territory and was a busy enough town during the winter when Northerners were enjoying the winter sun, the business section was now only half-populated. Many of the expensive shops that catered to visitors were boarded up. Don posted the bills at the post office, got the mail from the lock box, and picked up information from a super market and a dress shop for two commercials Mr. Whitehead would write later that evening.

While Ray Stott was broadcasting the record program at five-thirty, Don went home to dinner. He insisted, of course, on tuning in the program and it gave him a thrill to listen to records he himself had selected only a few hours before.

Kirk handed him a list of records as soon as he got back to the station. These were for Kirk's "personality" program the following morning. This was an informal affair, lasting two hours. It consisted of time signals at frequent intervals, popular records, two five-minute news broadcasts, and Kirk's ad libbing about almost anything that occurred to him. He congratulated parents on the birthday anniversaries of their small children, mentioned the trips and visits of local residents. His quick wit and friendly, cheerful voice made it one of the best-liked of all the programs that originated with WNIJ.

"I pick out about twenty platters," he told Don. "I don't usually need that many, but this ad libbing is pretty hard going most of the time, and I'm always afraid I'll get stuck for something interesting to say. So I like to have a few extra records I can fall back on."

"I've often listened to you while I was eating breakfast," said Don, "and you never seemed to have any trouble. I don't know how you can think that fast."

"People have been known to talk without thinking," laughed Kirk. "But I guess the truth is, a good ad libber is like a good salesman. He opens his mouth and words come out. A listener wrote in once and said I must have been vaccinated with a Victrola needle."

Don selected the records carefully and put them in the rack in Studio B. He intended to check them to see that they were in proper sequence, but he heard the telephone switchboard buzzing and went to answer it. It was a call from a listener who wanted Kirk to mention her daughter's birthday next morning. While Don was penciling a note for Kirk, Mr. Whitehead strolled out to the lobby.

"Your first day's about up," he said. "How do you like radio, as far as you've seen?" he asked.

"It's better than I thought it would be," Don said. "It's something like going backstage at a theater."

Mr. Whitehead chatted a few minutes and when he left Kirk came out of Studio A.

"Think you can type this script I've scribbled?" he asked.

"If you're not in too much of a rush for it," said Don.

"Take your time. Work on it when you haven't anything else to do."

Don spent all his otherwise unoccupied time at the typewriter that evening. He never thought of the records again until the next morning.

When he came downstairs shortly after eight o'clock, he turned on the radio in the living room, and heard one of the records he had selected. He was sitting down to breakfast when the record ended and he heard Kirk's familiar voice.

"It's exactly five minutes before eight o'clock," announced Kirk. "If you're due at the office, you ought to be going out the front door. But, if you just *dread* getting started, here's a number that tells us a little work now and then is relished by the best of men."

"He's going to play 'Whistle While You Work'," exclaimed Don.

His mother placed a tall glass of orange juice before him. "How did you know that?" she asked as the record started.

"I *ought* to know. It's part of my job to get out the platters Kirk wants."

Kirk announced the time at eight o'clock and followed with a five-minute newscast. "If you haven't gone to work yet," he said, "I don't suppose there's any use talking to you. Well, go back to bed and we'll try to lull you to sleep with this restful little slumber song."

When the record started to play, the uproar that burst from the radio made Don start from his chair. It was a jive record and one of the loudest and most strenuous Don had ever heard.

"What in the world is the idea of all that noise at this time in the morning?" asked Mrs. Marshall, who had come in from the kitchen with a bowl of cereal.

"I don't know," said Don, with a worried frown. "That wasn't one of the platters I picked out." Then he remembered that he had not checked the records after placing them in Studio B.

After a few bars, the music stopped and Don heard Kirk's voice again. "That fooled you, didn't it? Well, it fooled me, too, if that makes you feel any better. We'll forget the slumber music. Here's a tune that climbed from tenth to second place on the Hit Parade last week. I don't have to tell you what it is."

Again Don heard the faint scratching sound as Kirk dropped the needle on the record. Then the music began and Don let a spoonful of cornflakes clatter to the table. The music was that of "The Bird on Nellie's Hat," a ditty that had been popular before Don, or even Kirk, was born.

"I forgot to mention the year," came Kirk's unruffled voice. "That was the Hit Parade of 1905—I think. Now I'm going to start reading the labels on these records before I play them."

"Why don't you eat your cereal?" asked Don's mother.

"I don't feel very well," Don said.

"You were all right a moment ago. What happened?"

"I wish I knew," said Don fervently. "I put Kirk on a terrible spot. Those platters were all mixed up. I'll sure enough get fired for this."

Chapter 4

WHEN Don entered the lobby of the radio station shortly before noon, Peggy greeted him unsmilingly. Everybody in the station must know about his blunder by now, he concluded. If he had followed his first impulse, he would not have come to work at all, but that, he had decided quickly, would have been like turning back at the sight of a tackler on the football field.

"Mr. Whitehead wants to see you," said Peggy.

Don nodded and went slowly to the office at the end of the corridor. Mr. Whitehead was talking on the phone but he motioned Don toward a chair.

"Did you hear Kirk's program this morning?" he said when he put down the phone.

"Most of it," said Don.

"Then you know what happened?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Whitehead picked up the phone again. "Tell Kirk I want him," he said. Then he addressed Don; "It made us look like amateurs. Complaints have been coming in all morning. Have you any idea how those records got mixed up?"

Don swallowed hard but before he could reply Kirk entered.

"I've been thinking it over, Alva," Kirk said. "I guess I'm about as much to blame as Don. I should have read the labels on the platters before I played them. I'd been assembling them myself for so long it never occurred to me anything could be wrong."

"That's mighty generous of you, Kirk," said Mr. Whitehead, "but it doesn't explain how the wrong records got in the rack. Are you sure," he said to Don, "that they were all right when you left last night?"

"I'm sure they were when I put them in Studio B," Don replied.

"Didn't you check them over again?" asked Kirk.

After a long moment of hesitation, Don said, "No, sir."

"But you're sure those two records weren't in the rack when you left it?" said Mr. Whitehead.

"Yes, sir."

Don saw Mr. Whitehead and Kirk exchange swift glances. That, he supposed, meant they did not believe him.

Mr. Whitehead took a cigarette from the box on the

desk and lit it. "You can run along," he said. "I only wanted you to see how important it is to be careful. When you're keeping books and make a mistake, you can erase it. If you're writing a newspaper story, you can always correct it on the proof and nobody ever need know it. But when you make a mistake on the radio everybody within listening distance can hear it. So you can't be too careful." He picked up a letter from the desk. Don rose and followed Kirk out into the corridor.

He was both relieved and surprised. Instead of discharging him, Mr. Whitehead had merely cautioned him. Still, he remembered that curious glance Mr. Whitehead and Kirk had exchanged. He wondered whether he had heard the last of the incident.

"I'm sorry I didn't check those platters again," he said.

"Forget it," said Kirk. "I don't think you had anything to do with it, anyway. It was too neat for a beginner to think up."

"Then why—" began Don.

"That's what I'm wondering, too."

Don took extra care with everything he did the rest of the day and he felt greatly encouraged when, just as he was leaving for dinner, Mr. Whitehead complimented him on a commercial he had typed. He needed that scrap of praise, for this was one of the nights Daphne was to broadcast and, when he met her, he did not wish to feel as though his job hung by a thread. He supposed someone had already told her he was working at WNIJ but he was no less eager for her to find him actually on the job. Of course, when she came to the station Marvin

would come along, too, but Don tried not to think too much about him.

Don managed to find some typing to keep him at the desk as the time for Daphne's broadcast neared. He was answering a phone call for Mr. Whitehead when Daphne entered. She stopped in surprise.

"Why Don," she said, as soon as Don put down the phone, "you act as if you worked here."

"I do," said Don, grinning.

"That's wonderful. What are you doing?"

"I'm not singing," he said.

Before Daphne could reply, Marvin swaggered into the lobby. He drew a hand across his eyes.

"My eyes are all right after all," he said. "I *do* see my favorite announcer."

"I hope you see better than that when you're reading the score tonight," said Don.

"Not announcing?" said Marvin. "Then what *are* you doing around here?"

It was an embarrassing question, for no one had given Don's job a name or even told him exactly what he was expected to do. He was trying to frame a reply when Marvin said, "Well?"

"If I were you, Marvin," said Daphne, "I'd go over that last number we rehearsed this morning. You finished about two bars too soon."

"You mean *you* were two bars too late."

"See you later, Don," said Daphne, starting for the studio.

Don returned to his typing and Marvin left. When the program ended, Don was busy picking out the music for

Kirk's broadcast next morning. He selected the records with especial care and, after he had placed them in the rack beside the turntables, he checked them to see that they were in order.

Jake Rumely, the engineer, was passing in the corridor as Don emerged from Studio B.

"Well, you're getting to be a veteran around here," said Jake.

"I hope I get to *be* a veteran some day," Don replied.

"You want to be an announcer, I hear."

"Sure," said Don. "But I want to learn all I can about radio first."

Jake did not smile but Don thought he saw a sparkle in his eye.

"That don't go for most announcers," said Jake. "A lot of 'em don't know a grid from a griddle cake. And, what's worse, they don't care. That's not my idea of learning a business. I want to know it from the inside out and in again."

"There's such a lot to know about radio," Don said.

After a glance at a wall clock, Jake asked, "Got a few minutes? I could show you around a little."

Don accepted eagerly. There was nothing for him to do right away and he would be within call if anyone wanted him. Jake took him first to Studio A, which was now idle, and switched on the lights.

"I guess the mikes in here all look pretty much alike to you, don't they?" he asked.

"Well," said Don, "one's a table mike. The others are standing."

"That's true as far as you went," said Jake, walking to the far end of the room where the table microphone

was located. "But there's more important differences. Take this table mike. It's what we call a pressure type. Sound waves press on a diaphragm and that, in turn, converts them into electrical waves. What's more, it's the kind we call uni-directional. That is, it only picks up sound from one direction.

"Now take this one," he went on, crossing to one of the standing microphones. "This is the kind we use most of the time. It's a ribbon type. Instead of a diaphragm like a telephone mouthpiece, it has a metal ribbon that vibrates when sound waves strike it. It picks up sound from behind as well as from in front. That way it catches the echoes, in the same way your ear does. The mike over by the podium where Daphne West broadcasts tonight is still another kind. It picks up sound from every direction. There's other types, too, but we don't have 'em here."

"I saw them broadcasting at the Orange Bowl game in Miami last New Year's," said Don. "They had regular mikes up in the announcers' booth, but another fellow outside the booth had something that looked like a big ice-cream dipper."

"That was a reflector mike," said Jake. "It's shaped like the reflector of an automobile headlight. It has a mike mounted to face the point where the bulb would be in the headlight. The sound waves strike the reflector and bounce back into the mike. It's used for outdoor events because it can pick up sound from a distance. Sometimes it's used for big indoor events, like political conventions."

Jake nodded toward the control room. "That's where I spend most of my time." From where they stood, Don

could see nothing more than the thick glass window of the room, with an electric clock above it and the sign which, when illuminated, read "On the Air." But, when Jake took him into the comparatively small space, Don found a low table next to the window, with an impressive array of panels, dials, knobs, indicators, a microphone, and something that looked like a telephone switchboard. Above the window was a loudspeaker.

"Sit down at the desk," said Jake. "From there you can see practically the whole studio."

"I'd be so busy watching all these gadgets," Don said, "I wouldn't have time to see anything else."

"You'd get used to it," Jake answered. "In fact, all this equipment is really simple to operate. Suppose we start with the jack field. I guess you'd call it a switchboard. Before the program starts, I plug in a line from each of the mikes we're going to use. Tonight for example we used only two—one for the announcer and one for the singer and the band. I switched one on and the other off as I needed 'em. A line runs from the jack field to the transmitter room.

"These knobs here are volume controls," continued Jake. "There's one for every mike, so I can make the volume from one louder than another. For instance, if the announcer wants to read his plug against a musical background, I simply turn the volume up on his mike and turn down the band's. Then there's a master control so I can raise or lower the volume on all mikes at once."

Don was looking at the speaker overhead. "Isn't it hard to tell which mike the sound's coming from?" he asked.

Jake rubbed an ear and Don thought he heard a low chuckle. "We don't listen for the sound," Jake said, "we look for it." And then, seeing the mild bewilderment on Don's face, he explained, "You see this meter on the front of the desk? Well, that needle tells me all I need to know. It swings for every little change in volume. I've got to keep an eye on it all the time. If the volume gets too high, it distorts the signal and the listeners get poor reception. If it gets too low, they might not be able to pick up the signal at all."

"You must hear *something* here in the control room," said Don. "There's a loudspeaker up there."

"I hear everything that's picked up by the mikes in the studio. But I don't pay as much attention to it as Mr. Whitehead. He's the program director as well as station manager. He sits at that desk next to mine every time we put on a live show. That mike's his. But he only uses it during rehearsals. It's called the 'talk back.' It's connected with a loudspeaker in the studios so he can give the singers or musicians directions while they're rehearsing."

Don shook his head dubiously. "It would take me about ten years to remember all that," he said, getting up from the desk.

"It isn't that bad, especially in a little station like this. In the control room of some of the big New York stations, they have a mess of stuff we never saw down here. There's a gadget called a sound effects filter. The engineer can make sound do tricks with it. And there's the echo chamber line."

"A while ago," said Don, "you said the two-way mike picked up echoes."

"Only the normal kind you hear in an ordinary room. A better name for that kind is reverberations. Those the echo chamber makes are the kind of echo you hear when you shout down a well. It's pretty clever."

"I'll take your word for it," Don said, laughing.

"Only part of the sound from the mike goes out over the air in the regular way," Jake went on. "Part of it is shunted off to the echo chamber where there's a loudspeaker. The sound from the speaker kicks around in the chamber for a while and then it's picked up by a mike and put on the air. In that way the listener hears the same sound twice—and the effect is exactly like an echo. The chamber's used when the script calls for the actors to be talking in a cavern or making a speech in a big hall."

"I remember hearing it used," Don said. "But I never knew how they did it."

"And then," continued Jake, "there's a public-address system so the audience in a really big studio can hear what's going on. You see, the actors don't have to talk loud to the mike, and the people in the studio wouldn't hear much without some help. So they have loudspeakers for the crowd. It has to be handled pretty carefully. If the sound from the speakers is too loud, the mikes pick it up again. That's known as feed-back. When it gets bad, it sets up a howl that would drive a listener right out of his living room."

Jake started for the door. "That will give you some idea of what happens before a program leaves the studio."

"Which is the line that goes to the antenna?" asked Don, stopping a moment before the jack field.

"This one," said Jake, pointing to a jack. "In a large

studio the line only goes to the master control desk. We're not big enough to have a master control. We've only got two studios here.

"The master control desk in a big studio has everything in it but a direct line to Mars. There's a line from every studio and the phone line they use to pick up programs outside the studio. And, of course, it's got a connection with the network lines. The real big stations even have a line from short-wave receivers that pick up foreign programs for rebroadcast. All of 'em have private phones to the various studios. Finally, there are the lines to the transmitters."

"It must be a terrific job trying to keep things straight," said Don.

"I know a studio in one big city," said Jake, "where the master control desk is handled by a girl. She's an engineer, though. It's really very interesting. There's an indicator to tell you which studio a program is coming from and a volume indicator like the one we saw on the studio control desk. And there are two buttons at the bottom of each panel on the desk. One is marked 'pre set,' the other 'on air.' After you push the 'pre set' button you can throw all the switches that will take the program from the studio you want and send it along to the transmitter. Then, when it's time to broadcast, you just push the 'on air' button and the program automatically goes skipping through the ether."

Don followed Jake's glance to the clock on the wall and saw that it was two minutes to nine.

"I'd like to show you the transmitter room," said Jake, "but I won't have time tonight. Ray puts on a record program in a couple of minutes." He turned away and

then stopped. "Weren't you taking a pile of platters into Studio B when I saw you?"

"They were for Kirk's morning program," Don answered.

"That's the one they had the mix-up on this morning, wasn't it?" Jake asked. "Well, if I were you I'd keep an eye on those platters." Without trying to explain, he walked off.

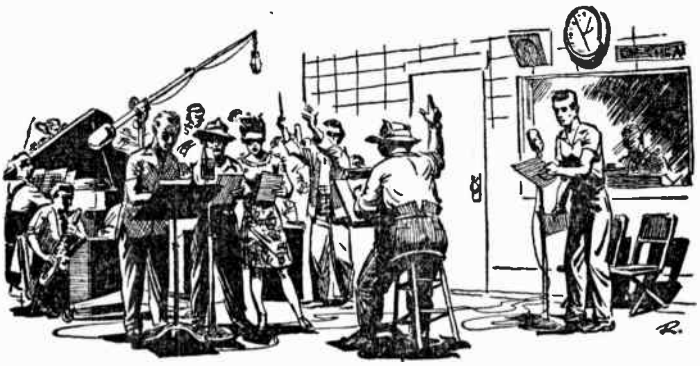
Don stood looking after him with a puzzled frown. What could happen to the records? Don decided to check them again anyway. With Kirk's list in hand, he went to Studio B, snapped on the light, and began to compare the record labels with the list of titles. He checked five records almost casually but at the next one he stared in amazement. The list called for the song "Morning" but the record was "Those Evening Bells." Quickly he ran through the rest of the records in the rack but found them all as they were when he brought them to the studio.

It was plain that somebody had switched that one record. Don was positive he had made no mistake when he picked them out. He went back to the library to get the right record but it was missing. That complicated things. He would have to tell somebody, but Kirk had already left and Jake and Ray both were busy. He went to the announcers' room to wait until one of them was free.

The minute he entered the room he saw a record lying on the desk. It was the one that should have been in the rack. Whoever had taken it from the studio had not yet had time to return it to the library. Don immediately took it to Studio B and put it back in its proper place in

the rack. After filing away the incorrect record, he started home.

He tried to puzzle out the mystery as he walked up Williams Avenue. The only person in the station besides Jake had been Ray Stott. But why should Ray go to such lengths to embarrass a greenhorn like Don? Certainly he must realize that he was hurting the station. It simply couldn't be Ray, Don told himself, but he resolved to take Jake's advice and watch the records more closely the next night.



Chapter 5

SEVERAL weeks passed before Don was able to clear up the mystery. In time, the nightly check of the records became tedious and he was often tempted to forego it, but the fear of another mix-up and its probable consequences kept him from neglecting this self-imposed chore.

Ray did not try to force Don to run any more personal errands, but when he ordered him to do something around the station he did it in a tone that never failed to make Don resentful. Don made one or two attempts to be friendly but was promptly squelched. He noticed after a time that no one ever spoke to Ray when it could be avoided.

Kirk, on the other hand, became even more friendly and helpful. He had a word of praise when Don did something well and, when Kirk had a criticism to make, he made it so considerately that Don determined not to make the same mistake again. Kirk seemed particularly inter-

ested in Don's ambition to become an announcer.

"One of the things you've got to watch," he said to Don as they sat in the announcers' room between programs one evening, "is your diction. The small stations aren't fussy. They're only broadcasting to a local audience and everybody in the area speaks with about the same accent and uses the same phrases. But the networks go to every section of the country. They have to insist on correct pronunciation and proper diction."

"I can't get away with poor English at home," said Don. "My mother used to be on the stage."

"You speak well but you've been living in Florida so long you slip into a drawl once in a while or use a 'you all' or 'sure enough.' If I were you, I'd get a recording made of my voice. There's a place down in Miami that makes recordings for tourists to send home. It won't be like a radio transcription but it will be good enough. You'll be surprised how you sound the first time you hear yourself speaking."

"Seems like a good idea."

"Everybody in radio thinks so," said Kirk. "They've all had their voice recorded at some time or other. Some have every program recorded, then play it back after the broadcast to see how they can improve their diction or delivery. Up in New York there are studios that don't do much else." He laughed and, when Don looked at him questioningly, he explained.

"I worked in a studio like that for a while when I was in New York. We used to make some of the goofiest recordings you ever heard. Old ladies would bring in their pet canaries and pooches and even cats and get us to make records of their songs, barks and meows. They'd

always say they wanted something to remember their little darlings by when the pets passed on.

"Then there was an Italian barber who never made the grade as an opera singer. He would learn all the male rôles in an opera and come in every week or two and sing three or four arias. Then I suppose he'd play the records at home and compare them with real singers. It must have kept him broke."

"All you needed," said Don, laughing, "was some fellow like me trying to break into radio."

Kirk crushed out a cigarette and rose. "No, Don. I was serious. A recording is the best teacher I know." He took a script from the desk and left. After a moment, Don went to the record library and began his nightly task of picking out records for Kirk's morning program. He placed the records in the rack in Studio B, then sat down at the desk in the lobby to type a script before he went home.

At nine o'clock Kirk stopped at the desk. "I scribbled these notes for some plugs the boss asked me to help him with," he said, "and I forgot about getting them typed. Can you do it before you go home?"

A glance at the four closely written pages told Don he would have to work overtime to complete the job, but he did not hesitate. "Sure," he said, "I'll take care of it."

It was almost ten o'clock before he finished. He stapled the typewritten sheets together and started for the announcers' room, intending to leave the commercials on the desk where Kirk would be sure to see them in the morning. As he stepped out of the lobby into the corridor, he saw Ray Stott disappearing into Studio B. That puzzled him, for the station was taking a network show

at the time and Ray should have been standing by in Studio A to make a local, as announcers called the business of breaking in on the half hour to identify their station.

Still wondering, Don left the notes on the desk in the announcers' room. As he turned to leave, he saw Ray hurry past in the corridor. Then Don remembered that he had not checked the records for Kirk's program. He went immediately to Studio B.

The third record, as well as the seventh and tenth, proved he had done well not to forget. Not one of the three records ought to have been in the rack. Every one was as different from the title on Kirk's list as it possibly could be. So it had been Ray after all! Quickly Don put the right records back in the rack, then waited outside Studio A until Ray came out.

"Haven't you gone home yet?" asked Ray.

"It's just as well I haven't," said Don.

"What do you mean?"

"While you were making that local," Don said, "I checked the platters for Kirk's show."

He saw Ray start but quickly recover himself and smirk. "So what?" He started to turn away but Don grabbed his arm. Ray jerked free.

"I know I'm only supposed to be the office boy around here," said Don, "but I don't like dirty football. So don't ever shuffle those records again."

"And if I do?" said Ray.

"I might as well get fired for socking you as for letting another show get messed up."

Ray made a swift survey of Don's muscular frame and decided this was a case that called for finesse rather than

fists. He forced a harsh laugh. "*That's* good! You thought I was after *your* miserable little job!"

The truth came to Don in a flash.

"So it was Kirk you were trying to get fired?" he said.

"I'm not admitting anything. But I don't suppose that'll keep you from blabbing to Beatty."

Don hooked his thumbs over his belt. "I guess I should," he said, "but I'm not going to. I'm not even going to check the records any more. But you won't like it if anything goes wrong again."

"We'll see about that when the time comes."

Don left the station feeling he had finally settled the matter. It was evident from the way Ray acted that he was not going to pick a fight. But, as Don walked slowly up Williams Avenue, the sense of satisfaction faded, and he began to worry about the possible outcome of his actions. Ray would hardly consider the incident closed. Suppose he resorted to another trick? Would Mr. Whitehead take Don's word against Ray's?

Still troubled when he reached the center of town, Don stopped at Knight's drugstore for a coke. He found Pete Joslyn at the counter, with a cup of coffee at his lips.

"When did you start to drink coffee?" asked Don.

"It's a newspaper vice, I guess. Every time anyone goes out on an assignment he has a cup of coffee somewhere. If he can't get out, he has the coffee sent in. But what keeps you downtown so late? I thought you finished up at nine o'clock."

"I stayed around later tonight, trying to talk myself out of a job."

"You look it. What happened?"

Glad of an audience, Don told him the story from the

beginning. "So now," he concluded, "I suppose Ray will really go to work on me."

"You know," said Pete, "I could get Terry Jones to give Stott a going over in the radio column he writes for the *Sentinel*."

"That would only make matters worse. Maybe Ray won't do anything about it. When a fellow acts the way he does, he's usually yellow."

Pete pushed his empty cup aside. "How's radio otherwise?"

"I like it," Don said. "But I haven't made much progress so far. Kirk's always saying he's going to give me a shot at announcing a record program but he hasn't done it."

"What do you expect in four months? I've been with the *Sentinel* twice as long and I never got a story on page one till about six weeks ago. You'll get along. Look what Marvin's doing."

Don looked at him in frank astonishment. "What's he doing?"

"From what I hear from Marvin he's putting the station over. He's in the office every week wheedling Terry for publicity. Terry says Mr. Whitehead is getting fed up with Marvin's swelled head."

"I hope nothing happens to him," said Don. "It would put Daphne in a spot."

"Daphne can get along without that guy. One of these days you're going to hear her on a nation-wide hook-up."

"I suppose so," said Don.

"You don't sound very happy about it. I thought you liked her?"

"I do—that's the trouble." Don finished his drink

slowly. "Daphne's starred on her own program already and I'm just a handy man around the station. I don't get much chance to see her."

"That's your fault," Pete said.

"Probably. But I'd feel different if I could only get a chance at announcing."

"You're letting that guy Stott get you down," said Pete. "One of these days you'll be announcing a network show."

"Right now, I'd be satisfied if I could just *see* a show like that," Don answered. "But I never will as long as I stay in Silver Beach."

As it turned out, Don was a poor guesser. Hardly three months passed before one of the best comedians on the air made his regular weekly broadcast from Silver Beach. And the experience greatly strengthened Don's resolution to become an announcer.

The comedian was Ted Wylie, who broadcast every Monday night over a coast-to-coast FBS hook-up. His program had ranked among the ten most popular for several years. It followed the familiar variety pattern of jokes, fed to Wylie by his wife and the band leader, dance numbers by the band, a song by a girl vocalist, and numbers by unknown youngsters. The program owed its popularity to Wylie's likable personality, natural wit and positive genius for picking future stars.

Usually the program was broadcast from the FBS studios in New York, but early in December Wylie caught a severe cold and his doctor ordered him to quit broadcasting for a few weeks and go to Florida to rest. Wylie, who had an actor's pride in never missing a show, compromised by arranging to broadcast from Florida.

It was a week before Wylie was well enough to travel but on Sunday the whole troupe entrained for Miami. The plan was to use the FBS Miami studios the next night.

The train was scheduled to arrive at Miami Monday afternoon, giving Wylie and his company time to rehearse, but a few miles north of Silver Beach the Diesel locomotive struck an automobile at a grade crossing and was derailed. The locomotive tore up yards of track, and further progress was impossible. The passengers in the automobile had leaped to safety and no one aboard the train was seriously hurt. Yet the accident delayed Wylie and his company so long there was no chance to reach Miami in time for the broadcast.

Mr. Whitehead's quick thinking saved the situation. As soon as word of the wreck reached the station, he called Kirk, who was off duty at the time, and ordered him to the scene, instructing him to return to the station to make a special broadcast. When Kirk learned that Wylie and his party were among the passengers and likely to miss their scheduled broadcast he phoned WNIJ and Mr. Whitehead immediately offered the company the use of the local station. Wylie readily accepted and Mr. Whitehead phoned New York to complete arrangements.

The first inkling Don had of events came when Wylie and his companions trooped into the lobby about an hour before broadcast time. They quickly assembled in Studio A and hurried through a rehearsal. Kirk seemed to be every place at once, consulting first with Wylie, then with Mr. Whitehead and with Jake Rumely. Finally Don was able to catch him alone for a fleeting instant.

"What's up?" he asked.

"It's the Wylie program," said Kirk. "They were in

that wreck. They're going to broadcast from here."

"There's an awful lot of people just for one show."

"It's what they call a package show," explained Kirk. "The whole thing's arranged by somebody on the outside, usually an independent producer. It has its own director and announcer and performers. The sponsor buys it as a package. All the broadcasting company does is let the show use its studios and put it on the air."

To Don, Wylie was one of the seven wonders of radio. He liked the quips he made, the band's music and everything about the program. And here it was about to be broadcast from WNIJ. He could hardly believe his good luck. But was it really so good?

"Do you think I could watch it?" he asked Kirk eagerly.

Kirk glanced at the lobby desk. "You're supposed to be working."

"I know. But I'll probably never get a chance like this again."

"It's going to be crowded in that little studio of ours," he said as Mr. Whitehead called him away, "but I'll see what the boss says about it."

While the rehearsal was in progress, Daphne West arrived for her regular broadcast, which was to start as soon as the rehearsal ended.

"You can't get in Studio A yet," said Don. "We've got a show going on."

"That's something new, isn't it?"

"It never happened around here before. It's the Ted Wylie show. He was on that train that piled up outside town this afternoon."

"Oh my," exclaimed Daphne. "Do I have to broadcast with the studio full of stars?"

"You'll slay them."

Marvin had entered the lobby just in time to hear stars mentioned. "What's this about stars?" he asked.

"Only Ted Wylie and his show," said Don.

"Oh boy," said Marvin. "What a break! Imagine auditioning for a show like that."

"But," said Daphne sweetly, "Ted Wylie already has a band."

"Temporarily," said Marvin, striding off.

While Daphne was broadcasting, Wylie and his associates made themselves at home in the lobby and the various offices. Wylie himself came out into the lobby with his program director and lit a cigarette. They took chairs near the open window. "I'm beginning to like Florida," said Wylie. "It's like New York in May—except for the smell and noise. You know, when I retire, I think—"

He stopped suddenly as Daphne's voice filled the lobby with song.

"Whose program is that?" Wylie asked Don.

"Daphne West's."

"Never heard of her."

"She's a local girl," said Don.

"You mean that's a *local* show?" Wylie said in surprise.

"Sure."

Wylie exchanged glances with his program director. "That girl's good."

Kirk, who had let Ray Stott announce Daphne's program, entered from the corridor. "The boss says it's okay, Don. You can sit with me in the studio."

"Swell," said Don.

"The lad here says that's a local show you're putting on," said Wylie, sauntering over to the desk.

"Our best one," said Kirk.

"You better keep an eye on that girl. Somebody will be stealing her away from you."

Don was bursting with eagerness to tell Daphne what an impression she had made on one of radio's brightest stars, but there was no chance to see her between programs.

The Wylie program had been under way only a few minutes before Don realized his radio education was not yet complete. One of the first things that caught his attention was the extensive use of hand signals by the director in the control room.

At intervals, the director placed a middle finger on his nose to tell the performers the program was on time, or "right on the nose." But once or twice he made motions with his hands that looked as if he was playing a concertina. That meant the program was going too fast and he wanted the cast to "stretch it." When he wished more speed, he made circles in the air with an index finger. To tell an actor to step closer to the microphone, he placed his left palm in front of his face. He told the cast everything was okay by making a circle with a thumb and forefinger. Don noticed that everybody watched these signals and followed them carefully.

Don was especially interested in Bill Edge, the big, good-natured announcer on the program. He was kept busier, it seemed to Don, than anybody on the program except Wylie himself. He announced the name of the show after the orchestra had played a few bars of the signature, and then Kirk took over, identifying the mem-

bers of the cast, and reading the first commercial. Thereafter Edge was in the thick of things, feeding lines to Wylie and his wife during the first part of the program and playing a rôle in the amusing commercial that was always a highlight of the show. Then he took part in the comedy sketch which Wylie presented during the last fifteen minutes. Kirk again stepped to the microphone for the closing commercial.

"I've listened to that program for a couple of years," Don said to Kirk after the sign-off, "but I never realized how good Bill Edge really is. If it weren't for him, there wouldn't be anything to it."

"Wylie could get another announcer," said Kirk, "but you're right about one thing. Edge is tops. And his pay envelope shows it. They say he drags down a thousand bucks a week."

Involuntarily, Don whistled.

"But don't let it upset you," said Kirk. "There aren't more than a dozen announcers doing that well. Divide all that big money into ten million guys who want to be announcers and you get something like fifty bucks a week for second-raters like me."

But Don still felt a little giddy. A thousand dollars a week!

"It's like everything else," said Kirk, "the stage, law, engineering, and all the rest. A few fellows stand head and shoulders above the mob, and they get the important dough. For the rest, it's no more than a living."

"I guess Daphne will be in the big money, too," said Don. "Did you hear what Ted Wylie said about her?"

"He was impressed. That reminds me. I've got to look up her address. Wylie wants me to send it to him."

Chapter 6

DON was genuinely pleased with Daphne's good fortune, yet it made him a little more anxious than ever about his own prospects. He felt that Daphne and Marvin, both classmates, had almost hopelessly outdistanced him in radio. If Daphne were chosen for a network program, that probably would mean they could see each other very little, if at all. Nevertheless, he stopped at her home next day to congratulate her on attracting such favorable notice from Wylie. He was amazed to discover that she was not excited.

"It would be simply wonderful to sing over a network," she said. "But I don't think my teacher would let me."

"Wouldn't let you?" said Don. "He ought to be flat-

tered. I'll bet he never had another pupil who got a chance like that."

"He'd be thrilled. But he'd say I ought to study longer. He wants me to go to Curtis or Juilliard."

"What are they?" asked Don.

"Music schools. Curtis is in Philadelphia—Juilliard in New York. I'd rather go to New York. My Aunt Letty lives there."

"I guess your teacher knows best," said Don, "but I certainly would hate to turn down a chance for a network job."

"I'm not going to worry till somebody offers me a contract."

Daphne's decision meant, Don reflected gratefully, that she would be in Silver Beach a little longer. Possibly in a few weeks more he would get a break of his own. At least he could try to be ready when and if it came.

As Kirk had suggested, he had several records made of his voice. The first was a shock. He discovered that he spoke so rapidly one word was scarcely distinguishable from another. Then he had trouble with certain letters, particularly "n" and "t."

He sought the help of his mother, who taught him to pronounce his "n's" with more resonance, and how to hold his tongue against his teeth so the "t's" sounded more distinct and did not trail off into nothing. Don was elated to find on subsequent records that his pronunciation and delivery were improved and his tone more natural.

Mrs. Marshall came into the living room after breakfast one morning as Don was playing his latest record.

"Why, you sound almost like a professional," she said.

"You're kidding," said Don.

"No, I'm not. That's really *much* better than the first one you brought home."

"I wish somebody at the station would begin to notice it," said Don. "And that reminds me—I've got to get down early this morning."

"What for? You're not supposed to go to work till noon."

"I don't know what's up. Kirk just asked me to come in early."

On his way to the station, Don could think of a dozen possible reasons for Kirk's insistence, and all of them related to things he might not have done well. But one thing was certain; nothing had gone wrong with Kirk's program. Don had listened to it only a little while before.

Kirk was in the announcers' room when Don arrived. "Come over to Studio B," said Kirk. "I'm putting on another platter show in a couple of minutes. I want you to watch everything I do and say."

After making a local for the net show that was ending, Kirk began immediately to announce the record program. It was the kind so often put on the air by small stations, even in large cities. Following each record, Kirk read a short commercial from a local merchant and then an introduction to the next music. Kirk did the program almost mechanically, but Don marveled at the way he changed records while reading the introduction and timed himself so well that the music always began on the last couple of words of his announcement.

"You didn't get me all the way down here just to

watch you broadcast," said Don when they were back in the announcers' room.

"Yes—and no. I want to break you in on that kind of show."

Don had been hoping for this opportunity, yet the discovery that he was to get it came as a complete surprise.

"That," he said, when he was able to speak, "would be swell. But we've already got two announcers."

"We ought to have another—in case Ray or I walked in front of a truck. Anyway, the boss wants you to take a whirl at a platter show now and then. Whenever I get a chance I'll let you try it.

"But before you do," said Kirk, "there are a couple of things you want to remember. Always speak naturally. If you get a touch of mike fright, your voice will drop too low. That happens to most men. Women always raise theirs when they're scared. And don't get flustered. If you make a mistake, don't start to stutter and apologize. A lot of fellows have had to get out of radio for no reason except they blew up every time they fumbled a line.

"And one thing more, Don. If anything goes wrong with a record, keep right on talking. One of the cardinal sins in radio is dead air, or white space, as some people call it. The minute a station stops sending a signal, the listener figures something has gone wrong with his set and starts twiddling the dial. Chances are he'll pick up some other program that appeals to him and you've lost him."

Several times in the course of the next few weeks Don got a chance to announce less important record programs. At first he was nervous but not enough to affect his speak-

ing and, after a few times, the nervousness disappeared altogether. The announcing made his other duties no lighter; in fact every minute he spent in a studio meant he had to work that much harder to finish his other chores in time. But he did not complain. He knew he was getting the experience he needed. He had to depend on friends to learn how well he was doing, and felt greatly encouraged by Pete Joslyn's verdict.

Early in April, after Don had been at the station for nearly a year, Pete phoned him to ask with feigned indignation; "Say, why didn't you tell me you were announcing? I didn't know anything about it till I heard you on a record program this morning."

"I'm not doing it regularly," said Don. "Kirk's only letting me handle some of his shows so I can get some practice."

"You didn't sound as if you were practicing. Those plugs you read were really professional. But I didn't call you up to give you a swelled head. How's about fishing tomorrow morning?"

"You start too early."

"This is something special," said Pete. "Tip Laughlin has offered to take out some of the boys from the *Sentinel.* Sort of showing appreciation for the publicity they've given him. I asked him if he'd have room for one no-good radio man."

Like practically everybody else in Silver Beach, Don knew Tip Laughlin and his boat, the *Bridget.* Tip was one of the best-liked and most successful big-game-fishing guides along Florida's East Coast and the *Bridget* one of the best-appointed charter boats.

"The fishing ought to be swell," continued Pete. "Tip

says the fish are getting hungry, now that the Yankees have stopped feeding them and gone home."

"Where and when?" asked Don.

"I'll see you on the pier at six."

Tip was already aboard the boat when Don reached the pier. A short, steel-muscled, sun-reddened Irishman, Tip was a generous and thoughtful host, and the *Bridget* fifty feet of sheer luxury. Tip explained that the party of six would take turns on the two fishing chairs at the stern. Those waiting to fish could loll in the chairs on the forward deck or loaf in the comfortably appointed cabin. The small galley, Tip said, had an ice box bulging with refreshments.

With Tip at the wheel, the *Bridget* stood out from shore for perhaps four miles. Don, idly watching the bow wave, saw the water change abruptly from pale green to deep indigo as they entered the Gulf Stream. Tip throttled down the motor to trolling speed. He had got the tackle ready on the way out. For those who wanted to try for sailfish, he cut live bait, for others he provided feather lures.

Don sat on the gunwale as Pete took his place in the starboard fishing chair. Pete cast his live bait far back into the *Bridget's* foaming wake.

"This is about the tenth time I've gone after sailfish," he said. "So far I haven't seen a fin."

"Do you think you could handle it if you did get a strike?" asked Don.

"I don't know. Did you ever hook a sail?"

"No. I never played anything bigger than a bonita."

Pete trolled for a half hour without a strike of any kind and relinquished his chair to Don.

"Want to try for a sail?" asked Tip.

Don hesitated. "I guess I'd better not," he said. "I'm not sure I could boat it if I did get a strike."

Tip replaced the live bait with a feather lure. Don cast and settled back into the chair. Though he wore sun glasses, the glare from the water and the easy roll of the boat made him drowsy. From time to time he raised and lowered his rod listlessly. Suddenly the rod bowed downward with a force that seemed determined to pull his arms from his shoulders. Someone bellowed: "A sail!"

Don saw a bolt of blue and silver lightning leave the water in a graceful arc, showering the air about with droplets that sparkled like gems in the bright sun. The long dorsal fin of the fish stood as erect as a battle standard.

Almost instantly Don was surrounded by frenzied companions, shouting encouragement and advice. "Don't give him any slack!" "He'll go fifty pounds if he goes an ounce." "That's a star-drag reel. Just keep grinding." "He took a feather!" "Never heard of such a thing." "Keep that rod tip up." "Boy, is he a beauty!"

Again and again, the defiant sailfish leaped into the air. Don tried to listen only to Tip's instructions and after the first few seconds he began to feel he had a chance to win the struggle. The line began to pile up on his reel and the leaps of the fish became less spectacular. Don's arms grew numb with the strain of pumping the rod and reeling in line. Once the fish began a sudden, desperate run and Don's heart sank. But he persevered and the fight went on, minute after minute. At last the fish tired. Don set his jaw and kept winding in line. Gradually he brought the fish close to the boat.

Tip reached for the gaff and the instant the sailfish came within reach he hauled it aboard. Don sank back limply into the chair, too exhausted even to look at his prize. But it was not hard to tell from the excited comment of the others that the catch was exceptional.

After resting a few minutes, Don got up and inspected the fish as it lay on the deck. It had lost some of the sparkle that made it so handsome as it leaped and flashed its sword in the air but it was still beautiful.

"Tip says it's the biggest sail hooked from the *Bridget* all season," said Pete.

"I never had a thrill like it," said Don. "When that baby struck it felt as if I'd hooked a streamlined train. If the fight had lasted ten seconds longer, the fish would have been towing *me*."

After an abundant lunch, Tip headed the *Bridget* for shore, since everyone aboard had to be at work at noon or soon after.

"You know, Pete," said Don, as they lay in the sun on the forward deck, "we've been overlooking a bet at the radio station. This is about the best thing Silver Beach has to offer the visitor—and as far as I know we've hardly ever mentioned big-game fishing on the air. There ought to be a program idea in it."

"You wouldn't have got that idea from the fishing column we run every day in the *Sentinel,* would you?"

"I think I got it the minute that sail struck. I'm going to ask Kirk about it."

Kirk seemed mildly interested in the idea when Don mentioned it later the same day.

"It's worth thinking about for next fall when the sea-

son starts," said Kirk. "How do you think we could handle it?"

Don scratched the back of his head. "I hadn't got that far."

"Maybe it has possibilities—but you never know how good an idea is—or isn't—till you've thought it through."

No more was said at the time and in the press of more urgent matters Don forgot about it. One distraction was the wire Daphne received from Ted Wylie, offering her a contract to sing on his program for eight weeks. Daphne took her time about deciding and her refusal to be hurried made Don uneasy. It was not until fall, when her old high-school sorority gave a dance in the school gym, that Daphne announced her decision. Don had begged off work an hour early that night to take her to the dance.

"Let's sit out the next one," said Daphne. "Marvin and his boys are certainly sending solid stuff tonight, as he would say."

"I hope he gets it out of his system before your next broadcast," said Don, leading Daphne to one of the tables where couples not dancing sat sipping cokes and other soft drinks. "Have you decided about your radio offer?" he continued, pulling back a chair for Daphne.

"I'm not going to take it," she said.

Don smiled. "So your teacher won?"

"I think he's right. A lot of girls my age get a chance in radio. But after a while you never hear of them again. They didn't have the training they needed. If I ever get another opportunity, I want to be able to stick it out."

"That sounds like sense to me. And, to be honest, I'm glad you're going to stay."

"Don't be too sure of that," said Daphne.

"Why not?"

Daphne smiled. "I have plans," she said. And that was all Don could get her to say. But he did not worry. He still had a chance to make good as announcer, he felt, before she left town, if that really was what she had in mind. The only thing that troubled him about getting ahead at the station was Ray Stott.

Ray had not attempted any serious mischief since Don caught him shuffling records, but he was still surly and at times almost insulting. Once Ray objected to a script Kirk handed him to read and Don was sure they would come to blows during the argument that followed. Kirk ended the wrangle by walking off. Then one evening while Don was in Studio B preparing to broadcast one of Kirk's record programs Ray wandered in.

"So Mr. Anonymous is going to make another broadcast," he said.

"Will you please close the door quietly as you leave?" said Don.

"I never found out exactly what happened to vaudeville," said Ray, "but I can see what's going to kill radio."

"Good or bad," said Don, "this is my program. You haven't got any business in here. Are you going, or shall I see Kirk?"

"That's a question. Some people around here can't see Kirk Beatty at all."

"Are you going to get out?" repeated Don.

"For the moment, yes. But I'll be around this station when some other announcers I could name will only be bad memories."

Don was tempted to speak to Kirk about the incident but decided he could still take care of Ray in his own

way, if the latter ever felt like getting troublesome again.

"Mr. Whitehead wants to see you," Peggy told Don when he entered the lobby next morning. Don went to the big office at the end of the corridor.

"We're starting a new program tomorrow," said Mr. Whitehead. "It's one you suggested to Kirk last spring —the one about big-game fishing. Kirk's going to do it and it will mean longer hours for him. So I'd like to have you relieve him an hour earlier in the morning. That will mean two record programs for you—both sponsored. You'll get a name plug on both of them. And there'll be a little something extra in your envelope Saturday."

Chapter 7

As he hurried home to dinner that evening, Don debated whether to burst in upon his parents with the good news or to let them discover it for themselves from his broadcasts. He decided the surprise would be greater if they heard it over the air. When he walked into the cheerful living room, he tried to act as if nothing unusual had happened.

Mr. Marshall looked up from the small drawing board at which he was working. He kept the board at home so he could sketch in the evening but Don had not seen him touch it in more than a year.

"Business must be better," said Don.

"They're going ahead with that new hotel on the beach front," said his father. "A builder in Miami and another one in Jacksonville are going to bid on it, but I think I've got a good chance."

"I hope you get it. That's better than building a couple of dozen private homes."

Mr. Marshall laid down his drawing pencil and got up. "This would be a good time to get into building," he said. Don watched him as he walked over to the davenport. He liked the straightness of his father's carriage and the air of quiet capability. "Things are going to be pretty active for a year or two," continued Mr. Marshall. "Think you're ready for a change?"

There was no use trying to surprise his family now, Don decided. He needed a good argument against his father's urging. He would have to explain that he had literally won a name for himself in radio.

"I couldn't quit radio right now," he said. "I'm going to start my own programs tomorrow."

"You've had programs before."

"Those other shows were really Kirk Beatty's. These are going to be all mine. I'm going to get a name plug."

"You'll have to explain that radio slang," said Mr. Marshall, laughing.

"I'll tell you and Mother all about it as soon as I wash up."

When Don returned, dinner was already on the table. "Your father says you've been promoted at the radio station," said his mother as they took their places.

"It isn't much different from what I have been doing," said Don. "I'm going to have two sponsored platter shows that Kirk Beatty used to handle. And I'll get a name plug."

"A what?" said Mrs. Marshall.

"I mean I'll get credit. Instead of only saying, 'This is WNIJ,' I'll say, 'This is Don Marshall, speaking for' and then I'll give the name of the sponsor."

"What happens to Beatty?" asked his father.

"He's starting a new big-game-fishing program and needs time to write the script."

"Big-game fishing?" asked Mr. Marshall. "Didn't you suggest something like that a while back?"

"I thought of it the day I caught that sailfish." Don looked at the fish, now handsomely mounted on the dining room wall. "I wish Mr. Whitehead had given me a chance at the show."

"You probably need more experience," said Mrs. Marshall.

"That's right," said Mr. Marshall. "The foundation comes before the roof. Beatty has been laying his foundation for years."

"I wish I knew half as much as he does," said Don. "He sold the new show without any trouble at all. He just went to the Chamber of Commerce and persuaded it to offer prizes for big fish. Then he got hold of Tip Laughlin and some of the other guides to give talks and interviews. Kirk will ask them about the catches they've made and how the fishing is going to be and other things like that. The tackle shops and stores that sell sports wear are buying the radio time. Kirk will give them all a plug on the show."

"But you'll get credit for thinking of the idea," said Mr. Marshall, "and I shouldn't be surprised if that led to something else."

It did lead to something else almost at once.

After Kirk left the station next morning, Don was alone for nearly two hours except for Jake Rumely and Ray Stott. He encountered Ray as he left studio A after announcing the first of his programs.

"Well, Cracker," said Ray, "it looks like a bright future around here for you after all."

Don's temper flared at the word "Cracker," for it was a term of contempt for the shiftless, back-country folk, but he knew Ray was deliberately trying to anger him.

"Is that the Stott way of saying you wish I'd choke?" he said.

"No. This time I mean it. If Kirk Beatty goes through with that phony fish program this evening and louses up my football forecast, Station WNIJ is going to be minus one announcer. That eight o'clock spot is mine and I'm going to keep it."

At the time, Don accepted Ray's remarks as nothing more serious than a show of bad temper. But Ray's actions during the afternoon made him a little concerned. Ray started to slam doors after him, and instead of anwering persons who spoke to him he merely glared at them. Twice while broadcasting record programs he dropped records on the turntable so carelessly that they cracked.

"Somebody," said Peggy while Don was passing through the lobby on his way to lunch, "will have to take young Mr. Stott out to the woodshed. There won't be much left of the place if he's let alone. You'd think that silly football talk of his was all that kept the station going."

"Kirk will get him straightened out," said Don.

"He can't start too soon for me."

Tip Laughlin, the fishing guide Kirk was to interview, reached the station at quarter to eight and Kirk took him immediately to Studio A. Don began to watch the door of Studio B where Ray was announcing at the time. He

somehow sensed that Ray would make a scene. A few seconds past the hour, when Ray came out, Don saw at once that he had worked himself into a state of suppressed rage. Ray started down the corridor toward Studio A, then changed his mind, and went to the announcers' room and drank from the water cooler.

When he started toward Studio A again, there was determination in his step, and Don followed at a distance. Ray put a hand to the door, hesitated a moment, and then threw his weight against the door. Don was almost at his heels as he rushed into the studio and made straight for the table where Kirk and Laughlin were talking into a table microphone. Kirk saw him coming and leaped to his feet.

Ray stopped abruptly and threw a haymaking punch from his shoe tops. Kirk sidestepped and his left lashed out. It caught Ray squarely on the chin, and the latter went into a clinch. Kirk tripped over a chair and they crashed to the floor. Pounding and straining, they rolled across the studio.

Don wavered. He had waited months for an excuse to give Ray a beating and here it was. Nobody could possibly blame him for going to Kirk's aid. Then he realized in a flash that joining the fight would only add to the confusion. The sound of the scuffle was going out over the air and listeners must be wondering if someone at WNIJ had gone berserk. Jake Rumely ran in from the control room.

"Jake," said Don, "throw me the air in Studio B! I'll play some records. Then you can take care of Stott."

Without stopping to read titles, Don snatched an armful of records from the library and within a few seconds

was putting the first one on the air. He wanted to leave the turntables and go back to Studio A to see how Kirk was faring, but the record program had to go on and he must have something to ad lib when the first record ended. The best thing to do, he decided, was to ignore the interruption altogether and simply announce the titles of the records. Luckily they were light numbers Kirk and Ray had broadcast many times and Don could remember something about them from having typed the scripts.

As the minute hand of the wall clock neared eight-fifteen, Don was assailed by a sudden fear. What was happening outside the studio? Was he playing to a live microphone or a dead one? Should he make a station announcement and go on with the record program usually scheduled?

He announced the last record on the emergency program and slipped out into the corridor. He heard loud voices from the announcers' room but a glance into the transmitter room disclosed that Jake Rumely was on the job. That was a relief. At least the program was being heard.

The voices quieted down as he walked toward the announcers' room. When he reached the door, he saw Ray Stott sitting on the davenport, his shattered spectacles beside him. Mr. Whitehead bent over him, painting a long cut on Ray's chin with an antiseptic. Ray's forehead was scraped and bleeding and one of his eyes was swollen until it was only a slit. Kirk was pacing the room, tucking his shirttail into his slacks. He was unmarked but his shirt was soiled and torn. He saw Don and forced a grin.

"You'd better take the next show, too, Don," he said. "This little business isn't finished yet."

When Don returned, a gray-haired doctor was peering over his pince nez at Ray. "You can put on your shirt now," he was saying. "You're as sound as a nut." And then he chuckled. "*Acted* like a nut, too, picking a fight with a fellow like Kirk Beatty." He replaced the stethoscope in his bag and put on his hat. "That'll be three dollars, Alva. I'll send you a bill."

"You're sure this man's all right?" asked Mr. Whitehead.

"I just said so, didn't I?"

"I want to be certain before I fire him."

When the doctor had gone, Mr. Whitehead turned to Ray. "Now, Stott, get your things together and get out of here. If I had any sense, I'd have fired you a year ago."

"And if I hadn't been a dope," said Ray, "I'd have quit a year ago." He winced as he rose. "I don't have to work on any crummy five-watter like this. One of the networks will be glad to get me. And if I were any of you guys I'd stay out of my way. I'm not going to forget this in a hurry." He put on his coat and limped past Don on his way out. "That goes for you, too, Cracker."

Mr. Whitehead closed the first-aid kit he had used on Ray before the doctor arrived. "Well," he said, "that's going to clear the atmosphere around here."

"But what are you going to do for an announcer?" asked Don.

"Strangely enough," said Kirk, "that's all taken care of."

"But who—"

Mr. Whitehead tucked the first-aid kit under his arm

and walked over to the door. He laid a hand on Don's shoulder.

"That was fast thinking on your part, Don," he said. "I'd have piled into that fight, if it had been me. But you had presence of mind enough to think about the show and the station. You pulled us out of a very awkward situation. To show you I appreciate it, I'm going to give you Stott's place. I've got to run along to a dinner. Kirk will tell you about it."

A bit dazed, Don walked across the room and sat down. Things had been happening so fast he could hardly believe what he saw and heard.

"That was a great job," said Kirk.

"But Ray was a swell announcer," said Don, "I'm only—"

"As a matter of fact," said Kirk, "Stott's a better announcer than I am. He's got a better voice and better delivery. And he's one of the best ad libbers in the business. But he'll never hold a job anywhere. He's peeved at everybody and everything.

"You've got plenty to learn about announcing, Don, but you'll make it. You've got a good voice and if you always ad lib as well as you did during the squabble tonight, you'll never have to worry. All you need is experience. And starting right now, you're going to get it. Let's take a gander at the teletypes."

Don was already familiar with the teletypes which clattered away day and evening in the office next to Mr. Whitehead's. He knew this was where Kirk and Ray always got the news they broadcast but he was hazy as to details.

"Now that you'll have to make newscasts," said Kirk,

as he stopped in front of the odd-looking machines, "it's time you started learning how it's done." Don was studying the two black metal boxes with sloping fronts, each supported on four slender steel legs. Through the window in the front of the one that was operating he could see a set of type bars, like those on a typewriter, moving rapidly from left to right. As they slid along, they slapped against the paper, leaving the impression of letters, then words, and finally sentences. The paper, fed from a roll behind the machine, jerked upward as soon as a line was completed, and the type bars began to write a new line.

"This is the United Press machine," said Kirk. "Some stations use Press Association, a few have Reuters, and here and there you'll find a station with all the services."

"I guess this is the same kind of machine Pete Joslyn says they have at the *Sentinel* office."

"Exactly," said Kirk, "but newspapers don't get the same service. The news we get is written especially for radio stations."

"There isn't much difference, is there?" asked Don.

Kirk laughed. "If I had to read newspaper writing over the air, I'd choke on the first paragraph. There are two reasons why it can't be done.

"In the first place," he went on, "you'd never have time to read a long-winded newspaper story over the air. You never get more than fifteen minutes for a newscast and most of the time only five or ten. So radio news has to be brief.

"In the second place, newspaper stories are meant to be read. The eye can follow them all right but the ear has trouble. Sentences have to be short for radio and the

words simple. And certain words are so hard to pronounce you don't dare use them. 'S's' and 'th' sounds don't go over the air very well and good radio news writers always avoid words that use them too often—words like antithesis or reminiscences.

"And there are a good many other things to remember. Radio is heard by little kids as well as adults, so we don't go in for gruesome stories or even crimes, except the big ones. They even had a rule once about using the word 'blood' on the air, but during the war they had to get over it."

"Don't you read the news exactly as it comes over the wire?" asked Don.

"That's an embarrassing question," laughed Kirk. "Some news broadcasters try to dress it up a little with their own phrases. That's supposed to give them individuality or something. And I suppose it does help. Listeners don't like to hear the very same words over two or three different stations.

"I ought to do more work on the news here but I'm too busy. The temptation to use it just as it comes from the teletype is too much for me. But don't get the idea the wire stuff is bad. It isn't. It's written and worked over by experts before it's put out. They even leave a place in the copy for the local announcer to insert his own name. 'This is blank bringing you the latest news from the wires of the so and so press.' "

Kirk watched the teletype and when the type bars had slapped down a period to end a sentence he turned up the paper quickly with a crank at the side of the machine and ripped it off. He carried the long sheet to the announcers' room and sat down at the desk.

"There's one thing I always make it a rule to do," he said to Don who took the armchair next to the desk. "That's to go over the copy carefully to see if I understand it—and incidentally to see if there are any glaring boners in it.

"As I go through it, I mark it up for easier reading. Some hotshot newscasters use a complicated code of their own to indicate how much emphasis they want to put on a word and the length of the pauses they want to make. I haven't got time. I just underline the words I want to emphasize and make a circle around the periods so I won't mistake them for commas."

He showed Don the sheet on which he had been working. His underlining, Don found, made the copy much easier to read and more conversational in tone.

"Mr. Whitehead wants you to start with the newscasts Stott used to make in the afternoons," continued Kirk. "I'll hang around tomorrow for the first one to see how you make out. But," he said as he got up, "you won't have any trouble. Just remember what I said about not getting flustered if you make a mistake or lose your place."

"How much time do you think I ought to allow for going over the copy?" asked Don.

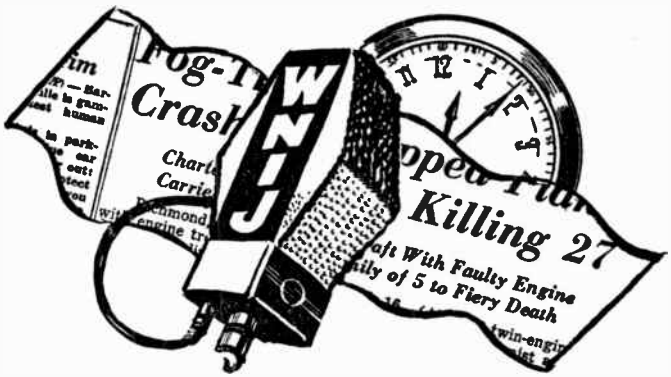
"That's something you'll have to learn to judge for yourself. You want to have enough time to get it right, but you can't start too soon because there may be some important late news. I've seen newscasters drag a mike right up to the teletype and read the story as it was printed.

"And don't be content with looking at the teletypes only when you're getting ready to go on the air. When

you're on duty, you've got to keep an eye on them all the time. You might get a flash you'd want to put on the air immediately."

"You mean break right into the middle of a regular broadcast?" said Don.

"We'd bust in on any show if the news was important enough. Fortunately, we don't get many stories that hot. But," he added as he started for Studio A, "one of the interesting things about newscasting is that you never know when you *will* get one."



Chapter 8

WITHIN two weeks, Don was making the afternoon newscasts as confidently as a veteran. Kirk kept his promise to supervise the first few programs but after the third he was satisfied that Don could handle them alone.

"You were really in the groove with that last show," he said after the newscast. "Try to slow down just a little. And don't drop your voice at the end of every sentence. It seems to be a weakness with all beginners that a period is a signal to let their voices fall. Keep it natural."

For several broadcasts, Don tried to imagine, as he sat down at the microphone, how the listeners at their receivers were acting. It gave him a thrill of satisfaction to think that many had turned on their radios only a few seconds before he went on the air, as he knew his own family did, just to hear his newscast. After a time, however, the job became more routine and he concentrated

on proper pronunciation and on getting exactly the right emphasis.

What surprised him most about his new duties was the increase in pay. First, he received a considerable rise in his regular weekly salary. Then, for each spot or tie-in announcement he read, he received an extra fee. Mr. Whitehead explained that the method was followed by most stations on the network, although some did not favor such a plan. They preferred to pay the announcer a flat salary.

Of course, Don's newscasting meant longer hours. It was some weeks before Mr. Whitehead was able to find a boy to take his place as record librarian and general helper, and, during this time, Don's work was nearly doubled. He was able to do nothing, it seemed, except work and sleep.

The week before Christmas, Mr. Whitehead hired a red-headed lad and Don soon taught him the record and typing routine. Relieved of the double burden of work, Don felt safe by New Year's eve in accepting an unexpected invitation from Marvin Caywood.

Marvin arrived at the studio in plenty of time for his broadcast with Daphne. His manner toward Don had become less patronizing since the latter was made one of the station's regular announcers and tonight there was a tone in his greeting that was almost friendly.

"I hate to admit it," he said, "but those newscasts of yours are getting to sound pretty good."

Don, who was working on the next day's program schedule in the announcers' room, did not look up from the sheets. "We don't get many kicks," he said cautiously.

"Say," said Marvin, dropping into a chair beside the desk, "do you think you could run out to the grove tomorrow afternoon? I'm holding open house for some of the old high school bunch."

Marvin's tone was so sincere that Don was a little ashamed of his first suspicion that Marvin might be laying the groundwork for some cutting remark. The invitation was tempting, for the Caywoods lived on a pleasant 200-acre orange grove, which they operated on the edge of the Everglades.

"I don't know," Don said. "I might be able to get away for an hour or two."

"I wish you would. Bring Daphne along." Marvin got up and strolled out into the corridor. Watching him go, Don tapped his chin with a pencil. Something was wrong somewhere.

"Marvin asked us out to his place tomorrow afternoon," said Don when Daphne arrived.

"I'd love it," she said.

"The only thing is, I don't know why Marvin invited *me*."

"That's easy," said Daphne, with a smile. "He asked me and I said I wouldn't go unless he invited you."

"Come to think of it, I won't be able to get away," said Don.

"But I want you to. It will be fun. It's worth the ride just to see the grove."

"Okay, if you insist," said Don.

Later in the evening, Pete Joslyn called from the *Sentinel*.

"What goes on?" he asked. "I hear you and I are invited out to Marvin's tomorrow."

"It beats me, too. Maybe he's turning over a new leaf. It's New Year's."

"I'd bet against it," said Pete. "But I'm not going to let it worry me. If I can think of the right approach, I may get dad to let me have the car. I'm taking Myra Holt."

Don arranged with Kirk to start work two hours earlier next morning and then take two extra hours for dinner. Pete, who had already stopped for Daphne and Myra, was right on time.

"You and Daphne will have to take a back seat, Don," said Pete. Myra, a plump, dark-haired girl in a rose-colored dress, stepped out so Don and Daphne could enter the two-door sedan. Daphne, Don thought as they sat down, looked particularly fresh and cool in a dress of aqua print. Both he and Pete wore brown slacks and light-colored sports coats.

"Are you still determined to be bored?" said Daphne.

"No," said Don. "It's going to be fun."

"Hold onto your seats," said Pete. "We'll have to make knots if we're going to have any time at the party."

He turned west on Ocean Boulevard, which led to the hard-surfaced road that pierced the heart of the Everglades and eventually found its way to Lake Okeechobee.

"There's an alligator," exclaimed Myra, pointing to the still, dark form on the bank of the drainage canal which paralleled the highway.

"You sound exactly like a tourist," said Pete.

"Is there any law against a native liking the Everglades?" asked Daphne. "I think they're fascinating. Look at those egrets on that old live oak."

"And did you notice that six-foot rattlesnake we just ran over?" asked Pete.

"They've got a right to live, too," said Myra.

"Not if I see them first."

They drove six miles due west through a flat wilderness of saw grass, broken occasionally by a clump of moss-draped live oaks. Once or twice they saw herds of cattle grazing, only their scrawny backs visible.

"Why don't those steers get bitten by snakes?" said Daphne.

"Old Ben Usher told me once," said Don, "that you could follow a steer through the 'Glades all day and never see a snake. Either they have some sixth sense, he says, or snakes stay clear of them."

Pete turned the car off on a narrow road lined on either side with tall bamboo. "Who's Ben Usher?" he asked.

"He used to work for Dad," said Don. "He was a carpenter but he was always interested in the outdoors. One day he said he was tired of working hard and started to hunt snakes."

"Who in the world would want snakes?" asked Myra.

"Plenty of people. Ben sells some to zoos and museums, and the rest to people who extract the venom or smoke the flesh for food."

Pete shuddered. "You mean people actually eat rattlesnake flesh?"

"It's pretty good."

"Don't save any for me," said Daphne.

"And you can have all the hunting, too," said Pete.

"It isn't dangerous the way Ben does it," said Don.

"He has a fairly long pole with a loop of wire on the end. He drops the loop over the snake's head and pulls the wire tight. The snake's helpless."

"Did you ever try it?" asked Pete.

"A few times," said Don. "I went out with Ben one summer. We didn't get many snakes but I learned a lot. Ben can find his way around the 'Glades better than a Seminole."

Two miles from the paved highway, the road passed through the Caywood orange grove. On either side, regular rows of gold-laden trees stretched as far as the eye could follow them.

"This," said Pete, as he turned the car into a sandy driveway, "is the place."

The drive cut across a neat lawn to the imposing white house, half-hidden by brilliant bougainvillea. Except for the lawn in front, the house was surrounded by strange trees, date palms and Washington palms, avocados, guavas, citron, banyans and many others. All had been imported by Marvin's father, some from as far away as Africa, to create a modest botanical garden.

Marvin ran down to greet them as the car stopped in front of the porch. His manner was cordial but Don noticed that he looked first and longest at Daphne.

"Hurry up," he urged. "The food's going fast."

On the porch, Marvin introduced Don and Pete to his mother and father. His mother was a dark-haired, bright-eyed woman who gestured expressively when she spoke. His father was a small, wiry man, dressed in a white linen suit.

"You've met Daphne and Myra," said Marvin. "Don

here is our new announcer. He's the one that keeps you up with the news."

"Only some of it," said Pete.

"I forgot," Marvin explained. "Pete is a reporter for the *Sentinel.* He and Don are always trying to see who can be first with a story."

"Radio usually wins," smiled Don.

"Papaya juice!" said Pete.

Mr. Caywood laughed. "I don't want to take sides," he said, "but I rather like a newspaper. It gives more of the story and I can read it any time I care to."

"But I," said Mrs. Caywood, with the trace of an accent, "like to hear news on the radio. It is so much easier to listen."

"This isn't getting any food," said Marvin. He led the way to the dining room, crowded with girls and boys from the old high-school class and noisy with bantering conversation. Daphne was surrounded the moment she entered the room. Don rescued her by elbowing his way to her side with a plateful of hors d'oeuvres and sandwiches and a cup of delicious fruit punch.

"I thought we were going to dance?" said Pete.

"As soon as we have a bite," said Marvin. He set his cup down on the buffet and turned to the crowd. "Now that we're all together," he said, "I guess I ought to tell you that this is a celebration. Tomorrow I'm taking my band down to Miami for an audition."

Pete glanced at Don and shook his head.

"Of course I'll be sorry to leave WNIJ," Marvin continued, "but I'll be back with my band to play dances."

"How about dancing now?" said Pete.

"I think that's fine, Marvin," said Daphne. Then to Marvin she said, "When will you be leaving?"

"Not for a couple of weeks."

Don looked questioningly at Daphne. "That's going to leave you in a spot," he said.

Daphne smiled.

"You don't seem worried," said Don.

"I'm not."

"Are you going to Miami, too?"

"No," said Daphne.

"Then what are you going to do?" asked Don.

"You'll find out," Daphne said.

Marvin had taken a small radio set out to the spacious porch. "I wish we could have some good music," he said as the others strolled out, "but I can't play all the time."

Dusk had fallen when Don glanced at his watch. "I hate to tear away," he said to Daphne, "but I've only got a half hour to get back to the station."

Daphne fluffed her blonde hair. "I've had enough dancing."

"Let's hear how you make out tomorrow, Marvin," said Pete on parting.

"Any time we get an audition," Marvin replied, "we're as good as in."

As they drove leisurely back to town, Daphne was unusually silent, and Pete chided her about it.

"I've been thinking about Marvin," said Daphne.

"We heard that remark, Don," said Pete from the driver's seat. "If you need witnesses we'll—"

"Silly," said Daphne. "I mean about his audition tomorrow. I don't think he realizes how much depends on it."

"What do you mean?" said Don. "He still has the show at WNIJ."

"But he may not."

"Oh, Daphne," said Myra, "stop talking riddles."

A suspicion was taking form in Don's mind. "You're not thinking—" he began.

"Yes," said Daphne. "I'm going to New York."

For a moment, Don tried to make himself believe that Daphne was joking. But he knew well enough she was not.

"Soon?" he asked.

"Next month. I'm going to study voice and languages."

For a few moments, no one spoke. "Well, Don," said Pete, "I guess that will leave you a little time to brush up on your news."

"What's the matter with his news?" asked Myra.

"Nothing a little newspaper experience couldn't fix."

"Any time you beat me, I'll be glad to buy you that double chocolate soda," said Don.

"Let's make it a hamburger."

"Okay."

"We're forgetting something awfully important," said Myra. "We'll have to give Daphne a going-away party."

"I'll say we will," said Don. "And it's going to break a few records."

"We'll hire the Elks' Hall," said Pete. "Will we have a time?"

Daphne's departure was hardly so joyous as Pete expected. Nearly thirty of Daphne's friends attended the party at Myra's. They brought her presents and laughed a good deal, but under the air of gaiety there was a sense of genuine regret at her leaving. This feeling was even

more apparent at the studio after her last broadcast.

As soon as Kirk had finished reading the closing commercial, the whole staff hurried into the studio. Everyone had contributed to the purchase of a handsomely fitted overnight bag, which Don presented to Daphne with a brief speech that was strangely halting. Daphne felt like crying and, when everyone but Don had left the studio she did cry a little.

"This isn't the *end* of anything," Don said. "The end for you is the Metropolitan Opera." He smiled and hoped Daphne would not suspect how forced it was.

But the person who seemed most depressed by Daphne's leaving was Marvin. He had not volunteered any report on his audition at the Miami station. "That," Pete had remarked, "means he flopped." At the last broadcast, Marvin was decidedly gloomy.

Don found him in the corridor, after everybody, except those on duty, had left with Daphne. He was smiling.

"It's going to disappoint a lot of people," he said, "but Mr. Whitehead just signed me to a new contract with the same sponsor."

"How long?" asked Don.

Marvin hesitated. "Long enough."

Don missed Daphne's program every Monday and Thursday evening, but otherwise the station routine went on much as it had before and he was too sensible—and far too busy—to let the change disturb him greatly. He did find himself planning somewhat vaguely to visit New York when the opportunity offered and even wondering when, if ever, he could hope for a network job. Meanwhile, he did more and more of the actual announcing, while Kirk devoted his time to writing commercials and

trying to develop new program ideas. Sometimes these additional duties took Kirk out of the station at hours when he was scheduled to broadcast and Don filled in for him.

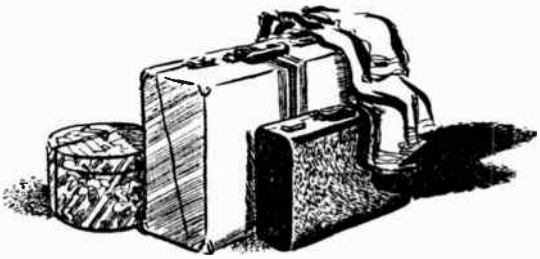
Don was standing by for Kirk the night he got the call from the Coast Guard station. Except for Jake Rumely, there was no one else in the station.

When he lifted the phone, Don expected nothing more important than an inquiry from a listener about the next day's programs or a complaint about some slip on the program then being broadcast. He was startled by the grave voice he heard.

"This is the commandant of the Coast Guard station," it said. "Will you ask any guardsmen ashore to report back to the base at once?"

"Certainly," said Don. "But," he added, sensing a news story, "can you tell me what's wrong."

"It's no secret. The liner *Metropolitan* is aground off Palm Beach."



Chapter 9

THE decision Don faced was difficult. WNIJ was taking a network show at the time, fifteen minutes of news comment by a highly rated author and traveler. Don knew that interruption of the program could bring a flood of protests from listeners and even a complaint from the network. Yet he was fully aware that the grounding of the *Metropolitan* was a big news story. The famous cruise vessel was carrying several hundred vacationers to Miami and Cuba, and interest in the mishap would be country-wide. The network program had ten minutes to run and Don could easily have waited until the chain break, but the urge to broadcast the news while it was still happening would not let him delay. He went to the transmitter room, where Jake Rumely was reading a magazine.

"Jake," he said, "can you throw me the air in B for about thirty seconds? I've got something red hot."

"Mr. Whitehead's orders?"

"He's not in."

"Where's Kirk?" asked Jake.

"He's off. It will be all right, Jake. This is worth it. The *Metropolitan* is aground off Palm Beach."

"It's sure enough news, but—"

"Then cut in the table mike," said Don.

Jake put down the magazine and glanced at the clock. He reached over to the instrument panel, then hesitated. "There may be an awful squawk from the network," he said. "This show's sponsored."

"They'll have to sue me," said Don, starting for Studio B. There was no time to write a script. He would have to ad lib.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, when the "on air" sign lighted, "we interrupt this program to bring you an important news bulletin. The liner *Metropolitan*, bound for Miami and Cuba, went aground off Palm Beach a few minutes ago. We will bring you further details as soon as they are available." Then he broadcast the Coast Guard commandant's appeal for men ashore to report to the base.

Jake, having switched back to the network, was reading the magazine again when Don returned to the transmitter room.

"You better get that down in the log right away," said Jake. "I wish we hadn't done it."

"I think we'll have to break in on the next show, too," said Don. "I'm going to call the Coast Guard again and try to get more details."

"We did enough for one night."

"But we've got to follow it up."

"Let 'em read the papers," said Jake.

But Don knew the *Sentinel* would not reach the streets until after midnight. With the vessel grounded only a few miles up the coast, he felt that local interest would be tremendous and listeners would be waiting eagerly for

the full story. He called the Coast Guard station at once and the commandant, though busily preparing to send a cutter to the scene as soon as he had a crew, sketched the story briefly.

It was customary, he said, for southbound vessels to sail as close inshore as they dared. In this way they avoided the strong northward drift of the Gulf Stream. The skipper of the *Metropolitan* had probably misjudged the tide or made some other slight miscalculation. No, the commandant said in answer to a question by Don, the vessel was not in danger and no one had been reported injured. Tugs were being hurried to the scene from Jacksonville and Miami. They would probably pull her free on the next high tide.

With his penciled notes, Don hastened to the transmitter room but Jake shook his head. "I'd like to go along with you," he said, "but it's taking too much of a chance. The boss will probably hit the ceiling when he hears what we did already."

At that moment, Mr. Whitehead strode into the room.

"Whose idea was it, putting that bulletin on the air?" he asked.

Jake glanced sympathetically at Don and started twiddling a knob on the control panel.

"I got Jake to do it," said Don.

Mr. Whitehead smiled broadly. "I'm glad Jake didn't give you any argument," he said. "That was using your head."

"I've got a lot more details on it now," said Don.

"Well, put them on the air—right away."

"Okay," said Jake.

When Don finished the special broadcast, he came out of the studio to hear the switchboard buzzing. It was Pete calling.

"You win the hamburgers," he said, "but you didn't have to rub it in. The wire service we use gave WNIJ credit for breaking the story. It scooped the other services by a full ten minutes."

"It's pretty hard to lick radio," said Don.

"Don't brag yet. Wait till you see the story we give them when we *do* come off the press."

Mr. Whitehead, passing through the lobby, paused to ask, "Some listener asking for more details?"

"Just a friend of mine on the *Sentinel*, kidding me about beating him on the story. We've got everything so far, but we could get lots more if somebody drove up to Palm Beach. If I could only get a car—"

"Don't bother. The news services will have the story before we go on the air in the morning."

"They can't get it much earlier," said Don. "It was low tide when the *Metropolitan* went aground, so it will be six hours before they can start to refloat her, even if the tugs get there in time. That will be three or four o'clock in the morning."

"If you think you can get anything worth-while, go ahead."

It was ten o'clock before Kirk came back to the station. He was as elated as Mr. Whitehead about the way the story had been handled.

"I was at a Chamber of Commerce meeting," he said, "and somebody burst in with the news. Said they heard it over WNIJ. It was only a lucky break, of course, but I've seen some stations that would have muffed it."

"I'm going to drive up to Palm Beach as soon as I get off," said Don, "and see what else I can get."

"I've got a better idea," said Kirk. "Wait till we sign off and I'll drive you up."

Although it was nearly two o'clock in the morning when Don and Kirk reached the scene, scores of cars jammed the roads below Palm Beach, and the dark beach inshore from the stranded vessel was milling with a thrill-seeking throng. Don was surprised to see how close the *Metropolitan* lay to the beach.

"I could almost walk out to her," he said. He could not see all the long, black hull in the darkness but her superstructure was brightly lighted.

"There's probably twenty feet of her under water," said Kirk. "And she's not as close as she looks—about half a mile, I'd say." He parked the car well down the beach.

"Couldn't we go aboard and ask the captain for a statement?" Don suggested as they walked down to the water's edge.

"He wouldn't talk," said Kirk. "He's in a jam. They'll probably beach him for this. He's lucky if he ever gets another job as skipper."

For a long while, they watched the bobbing lights of Coast Guard cutters as they shooed away the small boats that tried to sneak close to the liner. Then about three o'clock the first tugs arrived, but it was decided not to attempt to refloat the vessel until daybreak. By that time, other tugs had come. Lines were made fast and the mighty little craft strained and pulled bravely, their propellers throwing up great surges of foam at the stern. But the

big liner refused to move. The effort was repeated several times but at last the lines were thrown off.

"No score in the first inning," said Kirk. "They'll have to wait till the next high tide this afternoon." He looked at his watch. "Do you know what time it is? Six. I can just make it back to the station for that seven o'clock broadcast. Be sure *you're* not late. I'll be dead for sleep by that time."

Don watched the teletypes closely that afternoon for word that the *Metropolitan* was afloat again, but none came. Instead, a few minutes before he went home to dinner, he watched the type bars slapping out the news that the salvage efforts had failed again. It had been decided, the message said, to rush two Navy destroyers from Key West to assist in the undertaking. The next high tide, Don estimated, would be about dawn the following morning.

"Sure I want to go," said Kirk when Don suggested that they drive up again, "but I've got to get a little sleep first. Suppose I pick you up about four?"

It was nearly five o'clock when Kirk parked the car near the bridge over the inlet a half mile down the beach from the *Metropolitan*. The horizon was already gray with the dawn. As they crossed the bridge on foot, Don caught Kirk's arm.

"Say," he exclaimed. "There's the *Bridget*."

"Not Tip Laughlin?"

"Sure. Maybe we can persuade him to take us out."

When Don made the suggestion to Tip, the latter merely shook his head. "I wish I could," he said. "I came all the way up here to do just that. But the Coast Guard

ain't gonna have nobody in the way. The best I can do is sneak down as near open water as I can. You're welcome to go that far."

"What can these two destroyers do?" asked Kirk.

"They're hoping to wash the sand away under the hull. They're gonna race 'em up and down the seaward side of the *Metropolitan*. They figure the waves the destroyers set up will free 'er."

A few minutes later the destroyers moved north of the stranded liner and turned about. Tip nosed the *Bridget* as far down the inlet as he could without attracting the notice of the Coast Guard. The destroyers started their race south, gaining speed as they came and raising tremendous bow waves. After they passed the *Metropolitan*, the waves crashed mightily against the liner's hull and rolled into shore and up the inlet. The *Bridget* rose as if someone had released a powerful spring under her keel, then settled back into the water with a jarring thud.

The destroyers turned again and speeded north. This time the waves reached the inlet before they struck the liner. The *Bridget* was tossed almost out of the water. Don, standing with the others on the forward deck, was clinging to the mast. When the *Bridget* came down, she tried to right herself but a second wave caught her. She teetered an instant as she came down, then rolled over on her side.

Don was thrown clear. As he came to the surface, his first thought was of Kirk and Tip. He saw Tip threshing about in the water, a few feet away. Then Kirk's head bobbed out of the water but his eyes were closed and he immediately sank. Don swam to the spot and when Kirk rose again he grabbed him and held his head above water.

"Can you manage?" yelled Tip.

"I think so," said Don. He struck out for shore but the going was harder than he had bargained for. He had clung to the mast as long as he could and the strain had wrenched his right shoulder. Now he was grasping Kirk with his right arm and the shoulder was paining, but he dared not let go. Slowly he struggled toward safety and, Tip, having had no burden to delay him, was standing on the bank to help drag Kirk from the water.

Tip stretched Kirk's limp body prone on the ground and knelt over him to apply artificial respiration. He had pressed down only twice when Kirk opened his eyes.

"I'll be okay," he said, shaking his head. "I must have struck the side as I went overboard. Thanks a million."

In the excitement of their private adventure, no one had remembered the *Metropolitan*. Now they could hear cheering aboard the liner, and could see the starboard propeller churning the sea to foam. The liner was afloat again.

Though his shoulder ached, Don drove Kirk's car back to Silver Beach, and he paid scant attention to speed laws, for time was short.

"I wish you could take my program this morning," said Kirk, lying on the back seat. "We ought to give the people this story as fast as we can."

"It's your show," said Don. "You give it to them."

"This time," said Kirk, "I'm going to show you who's boss. As soon as we get back to the station, I want you to write a script about the salvage job. I'll go over it between records. And then instead of my eight o'clock news I'll put you on."

"I can't argue with the boss."

Kirk broadcast the bare details of the incident as soon as he went on the air but listeners in Silver Beach got their first full details when Don gave them his eyewitness story at eight o'clock. As soon as he finished, Kirk sent him home to get a couple of hours' sleep.

"I'm dead on my feet myself," Kirk explained. "I'll get Jake to take over when I finish this show."

Jake was a trifle grumpy when Don got back to the station a few minutes past noon. "What this station needs," he said, "is an announcer who knows engineering. I'm getting tired of being an engineer who knows announcing."

"*You're* tired?" said Don. "You should have been with Kirk and me."

"You must have had quite a time. Kirk says you saved him from drowning."

"Tip Laughlin helped," Don said.

"That isn't the way Kirk tells it," said Jake. "And, while I think of it, the boss wants to see you."

For once, Don went to Mr. Whitehead's office without any misgivings. Still he could not help wondering what he might expect on this command visit. Mr. Whitehead waved him to a chair as he entered, and laid down the previous day's studio log.

"You're always surprising me, Don," he said. "And I like surprises. We're all mighty glad you saved our chief announcer. Kirk's too valuable to lose.

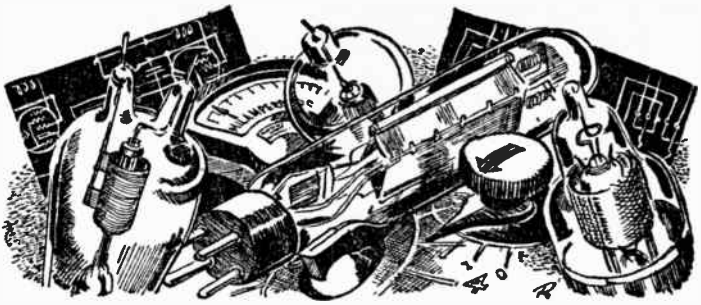
"But what I wanted to tell you," he continued, swinging around in his chair, "has to do with that eyewitness story you broadcast on the *Metropolitan*. I heard it at breakfast. It had color, action, everything. And you couldn't have read it better."

Don felt his pulse begin to race, but he tried not to show his pleasure too plainly. "I'm glad you liked it," he said.

"I did very much. And now there's something you might be able to help us with. Kirk and I have been working on several show ideas but they don't seem to click. I'd like to have you think about it. The idea is a participating program for several dress shops that cater to the tourist trade. The tourists who come to Silver Beach are mostly elderly folks, and many of them get homesick for their home towns after a while. The sponsors want something to appeal to that group."

The difficulty of the problem made Don's heart sink.

"It's a tough assignment," said Mr. Whitehead. "Kirk and I haven't done much, so I won't blame you much if you don't come up with an idea. We'd like to get some action before the season's over, so we'll be set for next fall."



Chapter 10

DON had seen and heard many experiments with new programs. A few of them, like Daphne's singing and Kirk's big-game-fishing gossip, had been successful, but the others had caused little stir and had lived only briefly. The lack of money was a drawback but even more serious was the absence in Silver Beach of talented performers. The more Don considered the obstacles in his way, the more hopeless his task seemed. He thought about it so much that Jake mistook his concentration for day-dreaming.

"You better snap out of it, Don," he said one afternoon when he was on the board in the transmitter room while a network show was being broadcast. "This radio routine gets dull in spots, but you have to keep your mind on it just the same."

"That's what I *am* doing," said Don.

"You look to me like your thoughts aren't within fifty miles of here."

"I'm trying to dope out a new program."

"Oh, oh," said Jake.

Don was a trifle alarmed at Jake's tone. "What's wrong with that?" he said.

"Nothing at all. It won't hurt to have somebody else bustin' a brain cell over it." Jake glanced at the volume indicator and turned it down. Don sat on a corner of the control desk.

"Why do we have to find a new show all of a sudden?" he asked.

"The boss isn't picking up the option of your friend Marvin."

"You mean Marvin is through?"

"Washed up," said Jake. "The boss tried to keep the sponsors sold on him but they said they could get better bands on platters."

"Marvin's boys have a lot more stuff than they used to have," said Don.

"I know. But the sponsors can get big-name bands on platters and for less money. So the boss wants to build a local show he can sell 'em. But they're not fairy godmothers. They want something good. Got any ideas yet?"

Don ran a hand over the back of his head. "I've got a couple, but they're pretty dull. Either they'd cost too much or there isn't anybody in town to do them."

"Same old story. I thought I had an idea, too, till the boss killed it. But I guess I can get along without bein' a program thinker-up. I'm engineer and announcer already."

Don laughed. "You were going to tell me something about engineering some day, but you never got around to it."

"I was waiting for you to say something," said Jake. "Like to start now?"

"Sure. I've got a few minutes."

Jake cocked an eye at the wall clock and saw that the network program had several minutes to go. "Well," he said, "since we're in the transmitter room, let's start here. This desk, as you can see, is about the same as the control desks in the studios. But it's got one thing the others don't have. That's an automatic alarm bell that rings if the transmitter goes off the air for any reason. When that happens, we make the fur fly till we find the trouble and fix it.

"But that's not what I started to tell you about. You probably wonder why we don't send the signal right from the studio mike to the radiator."

"To the what?" asked Don in surprise.

"That's the technical name for the antenna. The reason we have a transmitter room is, the mike signal hasn't got enough oomph to go any place. Here in the transmitter room we amplify the signal. And we do something else. We generate what's called a carrier wave. That's the wave that pushes the signal out into space so listeners can pick it up on their receivers. Now here at WNIJ we use the old AM system. AM stands for amplitude modulation. That means the signal from the mike changes the power of the carrier wave, or modulates it.

"There's a newer system called FM, or frequency modulation," Jake continued. "It has several advantages but the most important is that static don't interfere with it much. And it's got an important *disadvantage,* too. It won't carry as far as AM. The big difference is that in FM the signal from the mike don't change the power of the carrier wave but its frequency."

"Where," said Don, "does the crystal come in? That's one thing I've always heard about radio—the crystal keeps a station on its wave length."

"Well, in an AM station like this, it's in what we call the oscillator circuit. As I said before, we generate a carrier wave of a certain frequency—here at WNIJ it's 610,000 cycles a second. That's 610 kilocycles, or 61 on the dial of your receiving set at home; we knock off the zero for convenience. The Federal Communications Commission assigns each station a particular frequency so stations in one locality won't interfere with one another. And the stations have to stick to that frequency.

"The frequencies are actually set up by a vacuum tube but it's got a quartz crystal in it to regulate it. The number of times this crystal vibrates a second decides the frequency. You can change the rate of vibration by changing the thickness of the crystal. The only thing is, the temperature of the crystal always has to be kept the same. We do it with an electric heating element and a thermostat.

"Now here," continued Jake, rising and pointing to a huge tube encased in a metal jacket with cooling fins radiating from it, "is one of our amplification tubes for building up the signal from the mikes. We only use 1,000 watts of power but the tubes heat up plenty. Those fins you see mean that the tube's air-cooled. In a lot of the big stations, those that use 50,000 watts, the tubes are water-cooled. Some transmitters have ponds outside with pumps to spray the water in the air and cool it. In the big towns, of course, the transmitter is usually out in the country miles from the studio. They put 'em out

there so the steel buildings in the city won't interfere with the transmission. Here we've got the radiator right alongside the station.

"And here's something I'll bet you never knew before," Jake went on. "The height of the antenna tower, or radiator, is determined by the wave length we use. In the old days we used to say a certain station had a wave length of, say, 400 meters. What we meant by that was the distance one wave traveled through the air before another one started. Like the ripples you make when you toss a stone in a pond. The wave length is the distance from the crest of one radio ripple to the next.

"Here at WNIJ our wave length is 492 meters, or roughly 1,612 feet. Now an antenna radiates a signal best when it's a fraction of the wave length. In our case, the radiator is one eighth the wave length, or 201 feet high."

"Then you could tell by looking at the antenna tower of a station just what the wave length was," said Don.

"Well, you could make a good guess. It would be twice, four or eight times the height of the tower. Unless the tower has a top hat."

Don looked puzzled.

"That's a flat circular frame of steel they lay across the top of some towers. It makes the antenna look something like a top hat standing on its crown. The reason for it is, engineers found out they didn't have to build the tower so high when it had the flat section at the top."

"But you always say 'tower,' as if a station only had one," said Don. "I know we've got a single tower but I've seen pictures of transmitters that showed three."

"Directional antenna," said Jake. "Sometimes a station

only wants to transmit in one direction. It may be along the coast like we are, and don't want to waste power broadcasting over the ocean. It sets up two or three towers a fraction of its wave length apart, say one quarter. In our case, that would be around 403 feet.

"Now say our first tower is farther inland than our second," he continued. "We arrange to get the carrier wave to the first tower a quarter of a wave length—or as engineers call it, a quarter of a cycle—late. It takes the radio wave another quarter of a cycle to reach the second tower. That makes it a half a cycle late. When that happens, the two signals cancel each other and only a feeble signal is broadcast in that direction.

"In the meantime, a signal has started from the second tower a quarter of a cycle ahead of the one from the first tower. It loses that head start on the way and when it reaches the first tower it's exactly on time, or in phase, as we say. That builds up the signal from the first tower, and so we push a lot stronger signal toward land than we do toward sea. There are a good many ways of beaming a radio signal but the way I just told you about is the one we use in regular broadcasting.

"Well," he added with an eye on the clock, "that's about all we'll have time for."

"But," said Don, intent on Jake's explanations, "you haven't said a word about short wave."

"It's exactly what you'd expect from the name. It's broadcast at high frequency, and high frequency means shorter wave length. There's a good reason for using it on long-distance broadcasting. Ordinary radio waves travel along the ground which soaks up a lot of the energy. But short-wave speeds right out into space."

"But if that happens—" began Don.

"It does happen," said Jake, "but there's a region above the earth where the air is said to be ionized. When the short waves strike this, they bend back toward the earth. And they keep on doing it for thousands of miles till all their energy is gone. The height of the ionized zone varies according to the time of day and year. Engineers have figured out ways to overcome some of this by changing frequencies but not altogether. That's why you get better short-wave reception at certain hours and seasons than you do at others."

Jake turned to the desk to study the instruments. "I hope you learned something."

"I learned you have to know an awful lot to be a radio engineer," Don said.

"Is that all?" asked Jake, secretly pleased at Don's admiration. "I was hoping you'd be able to sit in for me a couple of hours tomorrow so I could go fishing."

"I'm afraid you'll have to wait a long time for that," said Don.

"I guess so. Well, it's time you were skipping back to Studio B to make your local. I hope you get an idea for the boss's new show."

But Don needed more than Jake's good wishes. He was still searching for an idea several days later when Pete Joslyn asked him to go along to the finals of the shuffleboard tournament which Pete had to cover for the newspaper. Don had never found anything interesting about shuffleboard as it was played chiefly by elderly visitors. But so many persons took part in the annual championship tournament that the *Sentinel* always gave it good space.

"I wish it were a football game or a boxing match," said Pete, stepping out of his father's car, which he had borrowed for the morning, and starting across the park to the stands.

"It's all right for the old folks," said Don. "Gives them a chance to get acquainted. They come from everywhere and don't know anybody when they get here."

"They don't come from so many places. Did you notice the license plates on those cars in the parking lot. Practically all of them are from Michigan, Indiana and Ohio. People from the same part of the country seem to pick the same town when they come to Florida. Look at Miami. Most of its visitors are New Yorkers."

Taking a seat beside Pete in the stands, Don watched the shuffleboard players thrusting the wooden disks down the boards. "You'd think," he said, "a person from one state would be interested in meeting somebody from another section."

"It doesn't seem to work out like that. As soon as a person gets away from home he wants to make pals with anybody that comes from his own state or town."

"If that's true," said Don thoughtfully, "I wonder why somebody hasn't started a home-state club—an Indiana club or a Michigan club."

"Somebody has," said Pete. "I'm going to cover the organization of the outfit tonight. It's called the Ohio Club."

Don slapped Pete on the knee. "That's it!" he exclaimed.

"That's a shattered kneecap," said Pete, rubbing his knee.

"Listen," said Don. "The boss has been looking for a

new show that will interest visitors. Why," he continued, thinking aloud rather than speaking to Pete, "couldn't we build a show around different states? If it were Ohio night, we could play 'Beautiful Ohio' and platters like that and songs of the colleges in Ohio. Then," he went on, growing enthusiastic, "we could have a prominent visitor tell something about his work or hobbies. Then we could throw together some odd and interesting facts about the state and some of its cities. We'd have everybody from Ohio listening."

"Sounds good so far," agreed Pete, busily making notes on the progress of the tournament. "But how about the people from other states?"

"We'd take them in turn. We'd only have to cover a dozen states or so. Then we could start over."

"Maybe you've got something, Don. There might be some way we could tie it in with the *Sentinel,* too."

"I'd have to see Mr. Whitehead about it first."

As he thought about presenting the idea to the station manager, he began to wonder whether it was really as good as it seemed. Surely it must have occurred to anyone with as much experience in radio as Kirk and Mr. Whitehead. Still Don did not quite lose faith in it. He continued to think about it all morning, working out the details in his mind.

Next morning at breakfast he asked his mother's opinion and was encouraged when she said she liked it. He went to the station a half hour early and waited until Mr. Whitehead was free. Then he entered the big office at the end of the corridor, feeling far from confident.

"I've only got one idea about a new program," he said, "but it might do."

"We never worry about how *many* ideas a man gets," said Mr. Whitehead, laying aside a letter he had been reading. "It's *how good* they are that counts. What's yours?"

Carefully, Don outlined the show as he thought it should be presented. He mentioned some figures from the Chamber of Commerce on the number of winter visitors and the states from which they came. Mr. Whitehead heard him through and then turned back to his desk and picked up a pencil.

"What makes you think these visitors would be willing to coöperate?" he asked.

"A friend of mine on the *Sentinel* mentioned the idea at a meeting of one of the new clubs last night," said Don, "and everybody was keen for it."

Mr. Whitehead set down some figures on a pad of paper, then tossed the pencil aside. "Don," he said, "I think you've come up with what we need."

Don felt almost as satisfied as though he had eluded the last tackler on the football field and the way to the goal line lay open before him.

"The sponsors ought to go for it," said Mr. Whitehead. "When I think of the job I had selling them Marvin's band, this will be easy."

The mention of Marvin chilled Don's elation. He knew he had nothing to do with Marvin's losing his program, but it somehow made him feel guilty to realize that his own show would be supplanting it. He wondered, too, how Marvin would feel about it.

Chapter 11

"THE boss is certainly steamed up over that show you're working on," said Kirk a few days later when he discovered Don hard at work on the script in the announcers' room between programs. "How's it coming?"

Don scratched out the last sentence he had written and looked up. "I guess script writing's out of my line. I've been working all afternoon on the interview with the old fellow who collects match books, but it's still a lot of drool."

"Let's see it," said Kirk. He took the sheets which Don handed him and read them through. "It looks good to me," he said. "What don't you like about it?"

"No sparkle. It sounds like some old man telling a friend of his about his screwy collection."

"You think that's bad?" asked Kirk. "Some script

writers go cuckoo trying to get characters to talk naturally. You do it the first time and then worry about it." He dropped onto the davenport to face Don. "Of course, this show's strictly from Silver Beach. But that's what WNIJ happens to need."

"I guess it would sound pretty silly on a network."

"Its Hooper rating would probably be zero," said Kirk, laughing.

"What's that—some kind of poll?"

"One of the surveys that check up on listeners to see how well a network show is going over. They call up while the show is being broadcast and ask listeners what show they're listening to. Hooper's probably the best-known but Crossley is about as important."

"Who pays for all that work?" said Don.

"Advertisers and advertising agencies chiefly. They want to know how many people they're reaching. The surveys tell them. A Hooper rating of, say, fifteen means that fifteen per cent of all the homes with radios in the section surveyed were tuned in to a particular show. And fifteen, incidentally, is mighty good. Tops for a commercial show is around thirty.

"But you won't have to worry about ratings. Small stations can't afford surveys like that. But at least this will be *your* show. You'll learn how one is built and you'll 'emcee' it. That's something to talk about if you ever go after a bigger job. So give it all you've got. When you get the sponsors in the fish bowl, you want to wow them."

"Every time I think I've picked up a little radio slang," said Don, in a despairing tone, "you come along with some I never heard before. What's the fish bowl?"

"It's only figurative as far as we're concerned. In big stations they set sponsors behind soundproof glass. And they just sit there with sour pusses and watch you fighting for your job. If they turn thumbs down, your show is a dead pigeon."

"Well," said Don, "even if the sponsors don't go crazy over the script, they may like the music."

As Mr. Whitehead had guessed, the sponsors liked the program in audition. He had tinkered with the script a little, but in the main Don could claim it as his own. He not only wrote the introduction and the commercials, as well as the introductions to the musical numbers, but also helped the featured speaker—a retired physician—put his talk into radio language. He coached the old match-book collector with his lines in rehearsal and did all the announcing when the complete show was auditioned.

The sponsors, who were to divide the cost of the program if accepted, sat at one end of the studio for the audition, but Don was so busy with his several duties that he hardly noticed them. He had no idea how they felt until they had left the station. Mr. Whitehead, smiling broadly, clapped him on the shoulder.

"We sold it!" said Mr. Whitehead. "They're taking it for twenty-six weeks beginning in October. It's the best piece of business we ever signed at WNIJ. Just to show you we think so, I tacked on a nice talent fee. You're the only paid talent on the show."

Don's parents shared his enthusiasm when he told them that evening about the success of the audition.

"You can be thankful your mother's talented," said Mr. Marshall, gallantly.

"I never did anything but read lines somebody else wrote," said Mrs. Marshall. "Don thought up a whole show. That's creative—like planning a house."

"Maybe I ought to be thankful," said Don tactfully, "that I have *two* talented parents."

But, pleased as he was, Don could not forget that his program was taking the place of Marvin Caywood's. He wanted to try to explain but he feared that Marvin would be bitter, so he kept putting it off until the night of Marvin's last broadcast. Then Marvin himself mentioned it. He lingered behind when his band left the station.

"It looks as if you were right," he said to Don in the lobby. "It was Daphne who put us over. As soon as she leaves, we get the old heave-ho."

"You know my show is going to take your place next fall?"

"Sure," said Marvin. "But I don't hold that against you. Somebody had to do it. I'd rather it was you than a lot of records by some band that wasn't as good as mine."

Studying Marvin's dark eyes, Don saw a mixture of hurt pride and indecision, emotions to which Marvin ordinarily was almost a stranger. "Can't you sit down a minute?" said Don, and Marvin dropped into a chair.

"I thought your band was getting pretty hot," said Don. "It's a shame they didn't give you a little longer trial."

"Don't try to kid me, Don. Almost everybody here thinks my band stinks." He leaned forward earnestly. "But that's their hard luck. People think I'm too cocky, but I have a right to be when it comes to my band. It *is* good. And just because my arranging is different, they say I don't know music. Some day the people who have

been taking cracks at me will be paying heavy dough to hear me. I mean it."

"What are you going to do?" said Don.

"Nothing right now. I've got to break up the band. It was all right to play school dances and things like that in the old days but the boys have to have money to live on now. So they're going to try to get jobs with bands that can get engagements."

"Maybe you could find a good spot, too."

"Not me," said Marvin. "I've got to have my own band. Right now I'm taking a vacation. I'm going over to Cuba for a few months to visit some relatives of my mother's. After that, we'll see."

Don was impressed with Marvin's seriousness, so different from his usual airy confidence. "Well," he said, getting to his feet, "whatever you do, I wish you luck."

"Thanks." Marvin's handclasp was firm and warm.

Don remarked on this fact a few mornings later while he and Pete were resting, after a long swim, on the beach above Don's home.

"I guess it takes a little tough luck to bring a fellow to his senses," said Pete. "Remember how Marvin used to say Daphne was the vocalist with his band? Now Daphne's had a network offer and Marvin is off the air." He gathered a handful of small seashells and laid them in a pattern before him. "Heard from Daphne lately?"

"Had a letter from her last week," Don said. "She's crazy about New York. But she doesn't see much of it —studying all the time."

"Has she had any more radio offers?"

"She hasn't even thought about it," said Don. "You know," he went on after a moment's silence, "I ought to

get up to see her. New York will probably change her a lot."

"Not Daphne," said Pete. "She's real."

"People *do* change. Look at Marvin."

"But even in his case it was all for the good," Pete answered.

"I hate to see him break up his band," said Don. "I'm no expert, but I thought it was getting better right along."

"His boys were always good musicians. The trouble was Marvin's arranging. But even that wasn't so bad the last time I heard them."

"I wonder if he'll stick to music," said Don.

"Certainly. Marvin isn't interested in anything else. But I don't know why he's downhearted about going to Cuba for a vacation. I wish I could get out of this town for a while."

"The Chamber of Commerce would put you in jail if it heard you running down Silver Beach."

"I'm not running it down," insisted Pete. "But when you're on a newspaper you get so you want some excitement. Here it's the same old routine all the time."

"There's always plenty happening down at the radio station."

"I don't mean thinking up new programs and picking up a remote broadcast once in a while. I mean fires and hold-ups and maybe a shooting. Something you can try your wits on."

"Keep tuned to WNIJ," said Don. "If it's big news, we'll have it."

"Okay," said Pete. "I know you beat us on the *Metropolitan* going aground. It will be different the next time a big story breaks."

Actually, neither the *Sentinel* nor WNIJ had much chance to beat the other when a really important news story broke the following October. A commercial transport plane, on its way from New York, failed to reach Miami on schedule and shortly after midnight the airline announced that the plane was overdue. The *Sentinel* received the news a short time before it went to press, but most Silver Beach residents did not read the story until breakfast and by then WNIJ had been on the air with the news.

The lost plane aroused country-wide interest since, in addition to its crew of three, it carried eighteen passengers, many of whom were nationally prominent. One was a Broadway actress, another the president of a big corporation, and one an aviator who had been a pursuit pilot during the war and had since set several transcontinental speed records.

The missing plane had been reported as far south as Jacksonville, so it was apparent that it had crashed somewhere between that city and Miami. Search planes were in the air as soon as it was light next morning, but no trace of the airliner could be found. The news services covering the accident suggested that it might have come down in the Everglades.

"That doesn't help much," remarked Kirk to Don that evening as they stood reading the news as it came over the teletype. "They might as well tell us the plane crashed in the Arctic. There are places in the 'Glades where those search planes could fly over that transport for a week and never see her."

The story stayed on the front pages of newspapers for nearly a week but, when further search failed, interest

gradually subsided and the newspapers dropped the story.

"I think it's exasperating," said Mrs. Marshall at dinner one evening. "The papers print more stories than you can read when something like this happens. And then suddenly they stop printing anything about it. I want to read about those poor people till they find them."

"There isn't much hope for them now," said Mr. Marshall. "Every spot in this part of the state has been covered."

"If all those search planes couldn't find them," said Don, "I don't suppose anyone could." He paused as a faint hope glimmered in his mind. "Unless," he said, and paused again.

"Unless what?" said his father.

"Where's Ben Usher these days?" asked Don.

"He was in town about two weeks ago, but he said he was going back into the 'Glades again. He's got an order from some zoo for rattlesnakes. What made you think of him?"

"He knows the 'Glades so well I was thinking what luck it would be if he ran across that plane."

"That would be wonderful," said Mrs. Marshall. "But he'd never be able to bring in the passengers even if he found them."

"They'd find some way of getting them back," said Don, "if someone only found them."

The idea persisted all day. Don told himself it was idle to hope that the plane passengers, even if they survived the crash, could be rescued after nearly a week in the wild, snake-infested Everglades. The start of a tennis tournament at the country club took him out for a remote pick-up in the afternoon and he went home to

dinner without returning to the station. Afterward he sat on the porch with his father and mother for a few minutes before starting for work. He had turned up the living room radio so it could be heard outside.

"Don't misunderstand me," said his father. "I'm glad you're in radio and doing so well. But," he added with a wry smile, "I wonder if it's absolutely necessary to have the radio turned on every minute of the day to be a good radio man."

"It's a habit you get into," said Don laughing. "I listen to it all the time at the station and I don't feel right unless I listen to it here, too."

"You could turn it to a bigger station," said his mother.

"I'd feel like a traitor."

"In that case," said his father, "we can stand it, I suppose—at least until you go."

Suddenly Don leaped to his feet. "Did you hear that?" he asked.

"What did he say?" asked Mrs. Marshall.

"Kirk's repeating it."

"The airliner that disappeared a week ago on a flight to Miami," came Kirk's voice in tones that told Don he was struggling to conceal his excitement, "has been located in the Everglades thirty miles from Silver Beach, according to word reaching the local police. Discovery of the plane was reportedly made by Benjamin W. Usher, well-known Silver Beach naturalist. Usher told police seven passengers and the stewardess of the plane are still alive. A rescue party is already being organized. We will interrupt all programs this evening to bring you further details as they become available."

"I'm so glad!" said Mrs. Marshall.

"I'll have to get going," said Don. "It will be plenty busy down at the station tonight—even if it's only phone calls from listeners."

Jake was talking on the lobby phone when Don reached the station. "I'm sorry," said Jake, "but we don't know anything new." He replaced the phone and looked up at Don. "It's about time you got here," he said. "A fine job for an engineer—answering the phone." He nodded toward Studio A. "Kirk said to tell you to keep an eye on the teletype if you came in."

"Okay," said Don, "but I've got a hunch that any news we get tonight will come right out of Silver Beach."

He went to the office where the teletype was clattering out news, but there was not a word about the rescue. A few minutes later Kirk walked in. "Nothing new?"

"Not on the teletype."

"We've got to cover this somehow. The *Sentinel* will have two or three men on it."

"If you wanted to drive out—" began Don.

"I don't like to leave the station at a time like this." He studied the wall clock for several seconds. "But there's no reason why you can't go. I'll stand by for you. If your friend on the *Sentinel* hasn't left yet, he might give you a lift."

Don smiled. "I couldn't do that. We'd be trying to beat each other. Maybe I can borrow Dad's car."

"It would take too long for you to pick it up. I only live a few blocks from here. Run over and get my car. I'll phone my wife you're coming.

"And when you get the facts, drive back here as fast as that crate of mine will roll. The whole country's waiting for this story."

Chapter 12

It was dark when Don reached the cluster of ambulances, police cars and fire trucks on the hard-surface highway through the Everglades. Floodlights, powered by the throbbing motors of fire trucks, cast an eerie glare over the scene. Rescuers in flat-bottomed boats were already threading their way through the jungle-like growth to reach the "hammock" where the plane had crashed. Policemen, firemen and ambulance surgeons walked about restlessly, trying to ease the strain of waiting.

These "hammocks," Don knew, were curious elevations in the marshy Everglades where cabbage palms and other native trees grew thickly. He had camped on some of them the time he accompanied Ben Usher on a snake-

hunting expedition. It did not surprise him that even so large a plane as the transport could find concealment in such a place.

Pete Joslyn and an older reporter from the *Sentinel* were already on the job. With them, Don got the first details of the crash from policemen who had talked with Usher on the way out from town. Some of the survivors had been painfully hurt and Major Lykens, the speed flier, had been pinned helplessly beneath the wreckage. It was the major's flying experience, however, that had saved his companions. In their pain and weariness, they wanted to light cigarettes but he warned them that the wrecked ship was saturated with gasoline and that striking a match would mean almost instant death. His pleading won and he and seven others were still alive, though almost exhausted, when Usher found them.

One by one the survivors were brought in. Don and Pete obtained the names as they were placed in the waiting ambulances. The last boat to appear bore Ben Usher and the still conscious major. While the latter was being lifted from the boat, Don spoke to Usher.

"You ought to get a medal for this, Ben."

"Oh, it weren't nothin'," said Ben. "Just goin' about my business, that's all. I weren't lookin' for no medals. I need sleep. I'm plumb wore out."

"I'll drive you into town."

Ben yawned mightily. "Reckon that's a good idea."

Don dropped him off at his modest bungalow at the edge of town, and sped to the radio station. Kirk was in Studio B, checking over the records for the next morning, when Don rushed in. Kirk glanced at the clock. It was ten minutes to midnight.

"We'll have to move fast, if we're going to put anything on the air," he whispered. "Can you ad lib it?"

"I'll try," said Don, striving to slow down his breathing.

Kirk reached over to one of the turntables and raised the arm, and at the same time started speaking into the microphone. "We interrupt this program," he said, "to bring you Don Marshall with an eyewitness account of tonight's rescue of the airplane passengers who were virtually given up for lost in the Everglades. Don Marshall."

For more than nine minutes of the ten before Station WNIJ closed down, Don gave a simple but moving account of the rescue. He read the names of the survivors, described their apparent injuries and praised the part played by Usher.

"Fine job," said Kirk after the sign-off. "Tomorrow we'll have to check the hospital on the condition of the passengers. It will still be a big story."

Morning papers all over the country gave the story streamer headlines and applauded Major Lykens for the cool-headed way in which he had taken command of the situation. The *Sentinel* put its biggest headlines over its account of the rescue, and Don saw, when he opened the paper at breakfast, that Pete had done a special story on the major. There was no mistaking the authorship, for Pete's name was printed above the story in blackface type, his first by-line. After breakfast, Don called him at home to congratulate him, but Pete was not yet up. Don phoned the *Sentinel* office in the afternoon.

"Sure it makes me feel good to get a by-line," said Pete. "But the worst part of it is the owners know newspapermen are vain. So they give you a by-line instead of a raise."

"You're doing all right," said Don. "It was a swell

story. Of course," he added with a laugh, "it was a little old by the time people saw it in the paper."

"I know. A few people heard your broadcast—but we still sold nearly 1,000 extra copies this morning. The *Sentinel* always gets the real story. And we were all set to get another one. I went down to the hospital a little while ago to get an interview with Major Lykens. But they won't let anybody in."

"It's still a good idea," said Don. "I might use it myself."

"Sorry, chum. They've got a dozen flat-footed cops guarding the place."

As he set down the phone, Don wondered how he had come to overlook the possibility of putting an interview on the air. Now Pete had given him the idea, but also had made it clear that it would be impossible, for today at least.

He went to Studio B and began to announce the record program then scheduled but, as he changed records and read the commercials, he kept thinking about the opportunity he was missing. If only— An idea came to him suddenly. He wanted to leave the studio immediately and ask Kirk's advice but he realized he would not have time to discuss it thoroughly. Gradually the idea began to take more definite shape. When the program ended, Don went to the announcers' room and studied the day's schedule. Having found what he sought, he slapped the paper down on the desk and began looking for Kirk.

Peggy at the reception desk told him Kirk had gone downtown but ought to be back soon. Don eyed the clock anxiously. He'd have to be back in the studio within a half hour. He paced the corridor impatiently, then re-

turned to the lobby in time to meet Kirk coming in.

"Do you think we could break into the 'Meet Your Neighbors' show tonight?" he asked.

"Meet the Neighbors" was broadcast coast-to-coast every week. It presented three or four persons from various walks of life who had lately been in the news because of some extraordinary achievement or experience.

Kirk stopped and studied Don's eager face. "Break into a net show? Not a chance."

"But this would be something different."

"No doubt," said Kirk. "Just what would it be?"

"An interview with Ben Usher," Don said.

Disbelief pulled Kirk's brows together in a frown. "You're not serious?"

"Of course I am. Didn't Ben find the wrecked plane? Didn't he lead the rescuers to it? The story he could tell would top anything on the program. The other networks will try to get interviews with Major Lykens as soon as he's able to talk. Nobody in radio knows Ben except me."

Walking slowly across the lobby and out into the corridor, Kirk kept his eyes on the linoleum underfoot. "That show goes on at eight, doesn't it?"

"You think we could do it?" asked Don.

"I'm trying to figure how much time we've got left. It's three now. You'd have to find Usher and write him a script and rehearse it with him. That's a big order for only five hours."

"Let me try it."

"It isn't up to me," said Kirk. "The boss would have to okay it. Is he here?"

"He's in his office."

Mr. Whitehead rubbed his close-cropped gray mustache as Kirk outlined Don's idea. Don studied his eyes for some hint of his thoughts but found none.

"You're sure you can get this old snake hunter to do it?" he asked Don when Kirk paused.

"I could almost swear it."

There was a long moment of silence, then Mr. Whitehead reached for the phone. "Get me the Federal Broadcasting System in New York," he said into the instrument. He turned to Kirk. "I'll sound them out. If they've got any sense, they'll jump at it. And you, Don, had better start scouting around for your snake hunter. Get him over here fast. We don't want to let him out of our sight. If the network can't use him, we'll put him on locally."

Don found Usher, in dungarees and polo shirt, rocking on the porch of his bungalow. He puffed on the broken stem of a brier pipe and his sun-browned face reflected thorough contentment.

"Mr. Usher," said Don, taking a stiff-backed chair, "we'd like to have you come down to the radio station and tell the people about finding the airplane. We'd pay you, of course."

The rocker abruptly stopped rocking, and Usher took the pipe from his mouth. "Pay me for talkin'?"

"Certainly. Almost everybody who talks on the radio gets paid."

"Oh," said Usher, as if Don's words explained volumes. "You all want me to talk into one of them there microphonies?" He put his pipe back in his mouth and resumed rocking. "I reckon I don't need money that bad."

If Usher could not be moved by a promise of money,

some other way must be found to persuade him. Don thought fast.

"Somebody has to tell people what actually happened," he said. "All they know about it is what the newspaper reporters and the police say. You'd think it was the newspapers and the cops who made the rescue."

"They couldn't a done nothin' if 'n I hadn't a found the plane."

"Right. And the people ought to know how you did it. Can you go down with me right now? I've got a car."

Usher surveyed his dungarees. "I reckon I ought to smarten up some." He rose and walked to the screen door, but there he stopped and turned. "Sure you all want me to tag along? I ain't one for talkin' much."

"You'll do all right. We'll write down what we want to say and then when we go on the air we'll simply read it off."

Usher shook his head. "I ain't no hand for readin', neither," he said.

"It will be easy," said Don, growing fearful that Usher might yet decide against going. "Everybody will help you all they can."

"Well, I reckon I will."

By the time they returned to the station, Mr. Whitehead had completed arrangements with New York. The idea had been liked so much that the entire "Meet Your Neighbors" program was being rearranged so Usher could go on as the last guest, the feature spot of the show.

"Take your friend into the office," said Mr. Whitehead to Don, "and get started on the script. They're going to give us four minutes. Try to keep it lively but natural."

Usher, who had changed to a dark green slack suit and

had slicked down his sparse gray hair, was plainly nervous. He kept putting his hands into the pockets of his slacks and taking them out again. His quick eyes pried into every corner of the big office. When Don took him into the next room, his eyes widened as he beheld the teletypes. Don had to explain them. He gave Usher a chair at a desk, sat down beside him, and began to question him. Usher's nervousness passed.

Slowly, the story of how Usher had discovered the plane began to take shape on paper. Usher, like everyone else, had been mystified by the disappearance of the plane. He tried to imagine how anything so large as a transport could vanish in the Everglades and after a time he had concluded that a large, heavily grown hammock was the only place where it could long remain hidden. He had deliberately visited several hammocks and had at last come upon the plane.

"Now," said Don, when he had written out the interview in longhand. "I'll type this out and then we'll rehearse it."

Usher was all confusion again. "Rehearse it? We ain't goin' to play act it, are we?"

"No. We'll just sit down at a table with a microphone and read this interview back and forth to each other."

"I don't know," said Usher.

When Don took him to Studio B and sat down with a table microphone between them, Usher eyed it suspiciously.

"Now just read the lines with your name in front of them," said Don. "I've checked them with red pencil."

He read his own brief introductory remarks and then, still reading from script, he said, "Now, Mr. Usher, tell

us why you thought there was still hope for the plane passengers?"

"Well," read Usher slowly, "I—" But the next word seemed to stick in his throat. He looked at the microphone with something like terror. The veins in his temples stood out and Don could see perspiration on his leathery hands. He moved his lips but made no sound.

"Just relax, Mr. Usher," said Don. "We're only rehearsing. This mike is dead. No one except me can hear what you're saying."

But instead of relaxing, Usher got up. "I can't do it," he said. "Get me out of here."

Fear froze Don to his chair for a second or two. If Usher walked out of the studio, he knew, the network program would go with him. Don leaped to his feet and grasped Usher's arm.

"Won't you please try it again?" he pleaded.

"I ain't no hand for talkin'—specially to one of them there microphonies." He started toward the door and was about to take the knob when the door was opened from the outside and Mr. Whitehead walked in.

"Finished already?" he said.

Usher looked at him a little sheepishly.

"Mr. Usher doesn't think he can go through with it," said Don.

"Of course he can," said Mr. Whitehead. "It's only natural to get a little upset the first time you face a mike. I'm sure you could do it if you tried again, Mr. Usher. But, if you really can't, I suppose we'll have to get the police chief to tell about it."

"Why, he don't know nothin' 'bout it!" exclaimed Usher.

"I know. But we've got to have somebody. Are you sure you won't try it?"

Usher swallowed hard and clenched his fists. "All right. I'll do it."

Usher frequently paused too long and sometimes he mispronounced words but he persisted. Don had him go through the interview once more and then took him uptown to dinner, as much to keep him from worrying about his coming ordeal as for food.

As the "Meet Your Neighbors" program began, Don was sitting with Usher in Studio A and the latter seemed to be enjoying the experience. Then, as the clock showed that only five minutes more remained, the master of ceremonies in New York explained that the program would be taken to Silver Beach for an interview with the man who had found the missing airliner. Don, watching the "on the air" signal, began to read the opening lines of the interview. He was still a trifle fearful that Usher would be seized with another attack of mike fright but, when he asked the question that was the old man's cue to begin, Usher read his lines without hesitation. Don smiled encouragement and the interview was concluded without a hitch.

"Now," asked Usher as soon as Don had read the closing lines, "how much do I get paid?"

"Plenty," said Don, rising. "There's fifty dollars waiting for you in the office."

"Fifty dollars!" repeated Usher with his eyes bulging. "That's more 'n I make in two weeks huntin' rattlesnakes. But," he added, shuddering slightly as he looked at the microphone, "I know how to handle snakes."

Once he clutched his check, he lost no time getting out

of the station. Mr. Whitehead laughed as Usher disappeared through the door.

"You wouldn't want a job chaperoning a man like that every day, would you?" he asked.

"I'm practically worn out," said Don. "I was so worried about him I forgot to get mike fever myself."

"*You* get mike fright?"

"Sure. That was my first coast-to-coast broadcast."

"Nobody would have suspected it," said Mr. Whitehead. "It may have been your first network show but I'll wager it isn't your last."

Chapter 13

NEXT day everybody at the station echoed Mr. Whitehead's good word for Don's broadcast. Peggy, the receptionist, was the most enthusiastic. "You certainly put WNIJ on the radio map," she said. "It's a good thing Ray Stott wasn't here. He'd have passed out with jealousy."

"Or started a rumpus," said Don, grinning. "I wonder whatever happened to him."

"I don't know. And it's one thing I never worry about."

But, almost as quickly as it had been arranged, the broadcast was forgotten. In time to come, somebody in the business might cite it as an example of radio enterprise, but for the present it was a closed chapter and Don's work slipped back into its regular routine.

As the "season" began and northern tourists descended upon Silver Beach, a swimming meet and a tennis tournament and other events were held to entertain them. Some of these took Don out of the station for remote pick-ups

but none was so stirring as the airplane mishap. Even his "State Night" programs, which went on the air in October, lacked the rousing interest of a nationally important news happening. The extra fee he received for announcing the participating program helped to keep him interested, but he found it impossible, when he stood before the microphone now, to forget that not so long before he had spoken over a network of more than 160 broadcasting stations in every corner of the country. It might be a long time, he reflected ruefully, before he would have another such opportunity. That was only two days before Kirk called him to the announcers' room.

"Know where I can find a good announcer?" asked Kirk, sitting down on the davenport and lighting a cigarette.

"The only one I know is Ray Stott," said Don, taking the chair at the desk.

"We can skip *him*."

"Are we going to hire a third man?" said Don.

"No. I've got a hunch somebody will be leaving."

Don looked at him in amazement. "You aren't—" he began. And then the realization burst upon him that he might be the one Kirk was talking about. "You mean that I—" He was cut short by Kirk's hearty laugh.

"I mean you, all right," said Kirk, "but not the way you think." He slipped two fingers into the pocket of his shirt and withdrew a letter. "I had a note this morning from Garry Bell. He's program director for FBS." As he took the letter from the envelope, he glanced toward the door.

"You might be interested in a couple of paragraphs," he went on, lowering his voice. "He says 'I was surprised

when WNIJ came on with that old Everglades character the other night and I didn't hear your voice. But, after I heard the announcer, I knew you had competition. I haven't any idea who it was but I have got a hunch he might be useful up here. If he ever gets a yen for the big time, tell him to look me up.' "

It was some seconds before Don could speak. He watched Kirk fold the letter and put it back in his pocket.

"Well?" said Kirk.

"It sounds swell."

"If Garry knew the whole thing was your idea, he'd *really* get excited. But you can tell him that when you ask him for an audition."

"You think he's *that* serious?"

Kirk flicked the ashes from his cigarette and leaned back on the davenport.

"I've known Garry for more than fifteen years," he said. "We started in radio together up in St. Louis. He doesn't leave himself open like that unless he's prepared to do something. And he's got an ear for talent. That's one reason FBS programs are as good as they are. If I were you, I'd get in touch with him as soon as I could. And," he added with another glance at the door, "I wouldn't say much about it around here."

Don remained silent a time and Kirk studied him narrowly. "I know what you're thinking," he said. "Here am I, a good friend of Garry's—I could get a job with him any time I wanted—and I'm working for a bush-league station in Florida. Isn't that it?"

"Not exactly," said Don. "I was only wondering if I ought to go to New York."

"You'd like to go?"

"Certainly."

"Then go," said Kirk. "I'm a lot older than you. I worked in New York for another chain and I liked it. But I had a chance to come down here when this station opened and be a big frog in a little puddle. I like this easy-going Florida life and so does my wife and my two boys. I've got things exactly the way I want them.

"But every once in a while I get to wondering whether a man's doing right when he doesn't try to get as far in his chosen work as he can. Sure, it takes plenty of ability and plenty of hard work to make good. But you've got talent and you've never shirked a job. A chance like this doesn't come along too often. It's pretty discouraging when you try to crash the networks without some kind of reputation.

"Of course," he continued, knocking the fire from his cigarette in an ashtray, "you'll have to work long, crazy hours, and some jobs will wear you down or even scare you to death. But it's radio and, for my money, it's fun."

For the rest of the afternoon, Don could hardly keep his mind off the letter he meant to write Garry Bell the moment he got enough free time. He decided not to mention the subject at home until he had a reply from Bell but, when he came home to dinner, he so plainly showed his excitement that his father questioned him about it. Before he quite realized it, he had revealed the news.

"You're awfully young to be going to New York alone," said Mrs. Marshall.

"We're getting a little ahead of ourselves, aren't we?" asked Mr. Marshall, as he served the chops from the platter in front of him. "So far, there isn't any reason

for going. Even if Don does get an audition, it isn't certain he'll get a job in New York. This man Bell may want him for a station the company owns in some small town."

That was a possibility Don had not foreseen and it troubled him. "Kirk didn't seem to think so," he said, "but it could be."

"You won't like it up there as well as you do in Florida," said his mother. "It's crowded and dirty and frightfully noisy."

Don looked at her earnestly. "I'd like to go up for an audition. If I made good, then I could decide about taking a job in New York."

His father smiled. "If they offered you a job, it would take a tractor to pull you back to Silver Beach."

"Your father has done all right without going to New York," said Mrs. Marshall.

"But he's in a different line," said Don. "Radio is like show business. You haven't got much chance unless you're in New York or Hollywood."

"We'd like to have you home a few years more," said his father slowly, "but we wouldn't stand in the way of your career. I'm just wondering if you've had experience enough."

"I've been in radio over three years! Don't you think that's enough background?"

"I'm sure you'd make good," said his mother.

"Then I'd like to try."

When it came to writing a letter to Bell, Don wished that he shared his mother's confidence in his own ability. The knowledge that Bell was an important executive

with one of the big networks made him realize the smallness of WNIJ and the insignificance of his own work. But at last he got his thoughts down on paper.

Nearly two weeks passed before he heard from the letter. As he waited impatiently, he tried to convince himself that the answer when it did arrive would be favorable but his common sense always argued that it could just as easily put an end to his dreaming. Luckily he had enough work at the station to keep him from worrying too much.

His mother brought him the letter from Bell one morning as he was eating breakfast. He had more or less prepared himself for a flat refusal but he hardly knew how to interpret Bell's restrained language.

"I remember your broadcast very well," Bell wrote. "As I wrote Kirk Beatty, I was impressed with the way you handled it. However, I didn't intend to give the impression there was a network job ready for you to step into. Network announcing is exacting work and ordinarily takes years of preparation.

"Education is important and I notice you haven't been to college. It isn't an iron-clad rule that announcers be college men, but it takes exceptional ability to overcome the lack of it.

"I wouldn't want you to take the long trip to New York for an audition if you have no other reason for coming. But, if you should be in this section, by all means drop in and see me. We have auditions twice a week."

Don looked up to see that his mother had been watching him intently. "What does it say?" she asked. Don handed her the letter.

"It isn't very encouraging, is it?" said his mother.

"I'm going to ask Kirk what he thinks about it."

When Kirk finished reading the letter at the station, he studied Don's frown a moment, then laughed.

"Garry wants to see how much you're interested," he said. "If I were you, I'd hop the next train to New York."

"It'll take me three days."

"You've got a few days left from your vacation," said Kirk. "Jake and I will get through somehow. Jake will grumble, but he'll really enjoy it." He handed the letter back to Don. "How's your Spanish?"

"A little rusty by this time, I guess," said Don.

"Brush up on it. Network announcers have to have a second language. And spend some time with a good dictionary. The script they hand you will have words in it you never saw before. Lots of good announcers would muff some of them. But don't let that worry you. Write Garry and tell him you'll be in New York Monday. I'll make arrangements here."

The streamliner which Don took Sunday morning reached Pennsylvania station in New York early Monday. He had found the reclining seats a trifle too hard for comfortable sleeping but his mind was so filled with speculation about his audition that he could not have slept much under any circumstance. Since he would be returning by streamliner that evening, he did not go to a hotel, but bathed and shaved in a dressing room at the railroad station and checked his baggage. Then he had breakfast and took a cab to the apartment house in Sutton Place where Daphne was living with her aunt.

Daphne came down to the lobby of the swank apartment building to greet him. Clad in a long, blue house

coat, she looked taller and more self-assured than when Don had seen her last. But her smile was as quick as ever and, to Don, every bit as bewitching.

"I knew you'd get to New York some day," she said. "I'm more excited about your audition than you are."

"If you're talking about the way I'm shaking," said Don, "that isn't excitement. I'm scared to death."

"Aunt Letty is perking the coffee. A cup will steady your nerves."

Don liked Daphne's aunt the moment he saw her. She was older than his mother and not quite so reserved, but her blue eyes shone with the same friendliness. And her handclasp was sincere.

"I'm so glad you were able to get to New York," she said, sitting down in the bright, spacious living room, and waving Don to a comfortable chair. "I know Daphne is."

Don thought he saw Daphne blush a little. "Of course," Daphne said, "I think it's simply wonderful that he's getting a network audition. I'd be so nervous I couldn't sit still."

"You weren't nervous the time you auditioned with Marvin Caywood for WNIJ," said Don.

"That was different. I felt I knew everybody." She clasped her hands around a knee. "You know, I've never heard from Marvin. How is he?"

"I thought I wrote you that he left the station. He's in Cuba now, visiting relatives."

"I shouldn't be surprised if he got an orchestra together down there," laughed Daphne. "Marvin's the boy whose band played for me in Silver Beach," she explained to her aunt. "I never saw anyone who liked music so

much. I suppose the old school crowd has drifted apart," she added.

Don thought a moment. "Not far," he said. "Of course, a few are still away at college, but the rest stick pretty close. Pete Joslyn gets a by-line regularly now."

"I'd love to go back," said Daphne. "But Mother and Dad get to New York quite often and I hate to take the time away from school. Sometimes, though, New York gets awfully tiresome."

"But you wouldn't go back to Silver Beach to stay," said Don.

"She most assuredly wouldn't," said her aunt. "There's no opportunity for a singer outside New York. And Daphne *is* a singer."

"I've known that for a long time," said Don, "and one of the best. Are you doing any singing at all?" he said to Daphne.

"Only at school."

"But that," said her aunt, "will soon be over. And then we'll have a new star in the concert hall and on the air."

"You exaggerate," said Daphne.

"I'm confident. You should be, too. Confidence is everything."

"I could do with a little right now," said Don.

"When is your audition?" asked Daphne.

"Two o'clock."

"Then you can stay to lunch."

Don enjoyed the appetizing meal which a maid served in the apartment dinette. Then after a hurried good-bye he took a cab over to the tall midtown studios of the

Federal Broadcasting System. He stepped out of an elevator into a glamorous lobby and gave his name to one of the smartly dressed receptionists who sat frigidly behind a wide desk. A page escorted him to Garry Bell's office.

Bell rose from a leather swivel chair and offered his hand across a corner of the desk. He was a rather gaunt man, with slightly stooped shoulders, and heavy black hair lightly touched with gray.

"It's nice to see you," he said. "Kirk Beatty said some flattering things about you. How is Kirk by the way?"

"Fine. But he's working too hard."

"He always does," said Bell, sitting down. "I hope you didn't travel all the way up here just to let us hear you talk."

"Not exactly," said Don, choosing his words carefully. "There were some other people I wanted to see."

"That makes me feel better." Bell waved Don to a chair. "I tried to be frank with you. It's a long gamble. Everybody has to produce. I was impressed with that one broadcast I heard of yours, but a one-shot performance isn't a radio career. You often hear somebody say after he's heard an amateur singer, 'I don't know why he isn't in opera.' The answer is easy. The amateur doesn't have the background—or perhaps the ability—to sing a whole operatic rôle."

He chatted for several minutes, asking searching questions and listening carefully to every fact Don disclosed about himself. Then he picked up the phone and said, "Ask Wes if he can step in for a moment." He addressed Don:

"I'm going to turn you over to Wes Graham. He's our

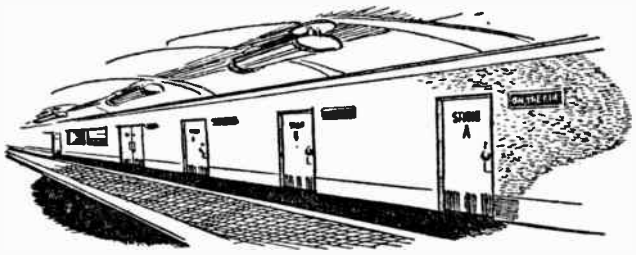
supervisor of announcers. He'll audition you. He has four or five other lads lined up for this afternoon."

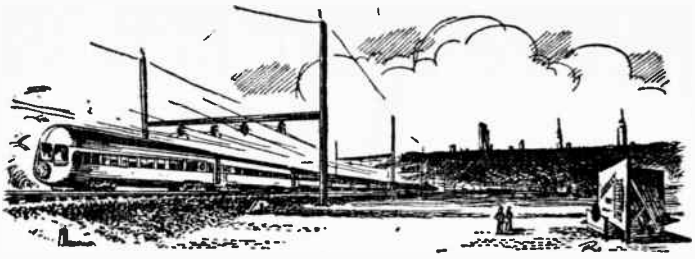
The door opened and Don looked around to see a pleasant-faced man who reminded him somehow of Kirk Beatty. Wes was about thirty-five and quite a bit heavier than Kirk but his hair was light and his blue eyes had the same frankness and friendliness as Kirk's.

"Something on your mind?" he asked, and his voice fascinated Don. It was deep and musical and had a smile in it.

"This is Don Marshall, from Florida," said Bell, "the lad I asked you to audition today." He swung around to face Don. "Wes will take care of you."

"Ready?" asked Wes, and Don stood up.





Chapter 14

WES led Don down a long corridor and turned into a small studio that had no furnishings except a table, a table microphone and a chair.

"Where have you been working?" he asked. "Miami?"

"No," said Don. "WNIJ—up in Silver Beach."

"Oh," said Wes, and Don thought there was disappointment in his tone. "You must have made quite an impression on Garry Bell."

"Why?"

"Well, you're pretty young—and you don't seem to have had a whole lot of experience. I hope Garry told you what you're up against." He glanced toward the control room where the engineer was taking his place. "Just a minute. I'll get you a script."

When Wes left, Don felt perspiration starting on his forehead. He raised a handkerchief to dry it and found his hand was trembling.

"Here's the one we're using today," said Wes, returning with three sheets of paper stapled together. "Look it over for fifteen minutes—but don't mark it. I want to hear you read naturally." He pointed to the first sheet.

"You'll notice there's a minute and a half ad lib there. When you reach it, I want you to tell me about yourself—education, what shows you've worked, what shows you've helped build and so on. Take it exactly as you would a show back home. I'll be in the control room."

Glancing at the sheets Wes handed him, Don felt as if a load had fallen from his shoulders. The opening was nothing more complicated than a statement that he was trying to persuade FBS to give him a job as announcer. Then after the ad lib came the names of a dozen Italian composers. The next sheet contained a one-minute commercial announcement, written in a formal, serious vein, and the third sheet was another commercial, this one chatty in tone. It was far from the difficult script, crammed with strange words, which Kirk had warned him to expect. He read it through carefully three times and then tried to decide exactly what he would say when the time came to ad lib.

At a signal from Wes, he started to read. He watched the wall clock closely as he ad libbed the information about himself and then started to read the names of the Italian composers. Luckily, the WNIJ record library contained works by almost all of them and he had no trouble with pronunciation. The commercials were easy.

He looked toward the control room as soon as he had finished but Wes was already on his way out. He came over to the microphone table and dropped a sheet containing four short news bulletins. "Start reading them as soon as I get back in the control room," he said.

Even this was not disconcerting, for Don had often read news at sight at WNIJ. When these had been read, Wes came out into the studio again, carrying more sheets.

"Try these," he said, and went back to the control room.

Don took a quick look at the sheets. He imagined he could feel his heart stop. The first was a page of narration from a dramatic program, the second two stanzas of verse. His hand shook annoyingly as he held the sheets.

This will never do, he told himself angrily. If he let a few unfamiliar words frighten him, he might as well give up. But he had no intention of doing that. He gripped the sheets firmly and plunged into the narration. It was hard to give the words the proper emphasis, reading them for the first time, but he did the best he could and, when he came to the verse, he trusted entirely to ear, trying to give the lines as much feeling as he thought they should have.

"I owe you an apology," said Wes, coming out into the studio and gathering up the sheets. "You went to town with that stuff."

It was heartening to hear Wes speak so encouragingly but what Don wanted to hear was an invitation to go to work for FBS. Wes must have read the question in his eyes.

"Of course," Wes continued, "I can't tell you anything definite right now. I've still got to hear five other candidates and there'll be more along Thursday. And I don't know offhand what spots we'll have open. But I'll let you know one way or another in a few days."

Don had no chance to see Daphne again before he left New York. In fact, he stood in line so long at the baggage checkroom, trying to recover his luggage, that he had barely time to catch his train, but he made it and was back in Silver Beach before six o'clock Tuesday evening. He went straight from the train to the radio station.

"What's the verdict?" asked Kirk as they met in the corridor.

"I don't know," said Don. "Wes Graham said I'd hear from him."

"You don't sound very confident," said Kirk.

"I'm not. They slipped me a couple of pieces of narration and verse to read at sight. They were terrific."

"After you read the plugs?" asked Kirk.

"I thought I was all finished."

"Sounds encouraging. They wouldn't go to that trouble if you'd flopped on the regular script. But all you can do is keep your fingers crossed. But you can stop worrying about one thing. I've got a pretty good lad lined up if Wes gives you the nod. And I hope he does."

Somehow the thought of another announcer doing his work at WNIJ made Don uneasy. Up to now, he had not considered what it would mean to leave Silver Beach. His home was here and all his high-school friends, except Daphne and Marvin. He had grown to like everybody at the radio station. He felt that his job was secure and that everybody, especially Kirk, was interested in his progress. In New York, he would not know anyone save Daphne and her aunt.

The decision seemed to grow harder as Don thought about it in the days that followed but, when a week and then two elapsed without word from Wes Graham, he decided it was to be no problem at all. It began to look as if he was not to get the job. He confessed his disappointment to Pete one morning when they rode down to Miami to look at some sports clothes in a shop on Flagler Street.

"I wouldn't feel too bad about it," said Pete. "It's a

big jump from Williams Avenue to Broadway. Some fellows never make it."

"Some never try."

"Right," said Pete. "But you and I are going to make it some day."

"I didn't know you wanted to go to New York," said Don.

"I don't particularly," Pete said. "I've been there two or three times and as far as I'm concerned Silver Beach puts it all over the Big Town. New York's too colorless —even the sky is gray most of the time. Down here we've got color in the sky and in the houses and flowers. In New York people spend half their lives ducking in and out of holes in the ground like prairie dogs. We can stay out in the sun and breathe clean air."

"You sound as if you've been covering the Chamber of Commerce meetings," said Don.

"But," continued Pete, ignoring Don's remark, "New York's got the best newspapers in the country. If you're a newspaperman, you go to New York. So I'm going some day. I may not stay, but at least I'll prove I could make it."

"I hope you have better luck than I did," Don said.

"Keep trying," said Pete. "That's how you got your job at WNIJ. Remember?"

Don did not have to try again, for the letter from Wes Graham arrived while he was in Miami. As he walked into the living room at dinner time, he noticed that both his mother and father looked at him with a strange interest.

"There's a letter for you from New York," said his mother. She nodded toward the knee-hole desk.

Don's eyes grew round as he read it. A job! Wes Graham actually offering him a job. And the salary! Even compared with the extra fees he earned at WNIJ, the salary Wes named seemed fabulous.

"There's no use asking you what was in it," said Mr. Marshall from the davenport. "Your eyes are bulging like a frog's. When are you leaving?"

"As soon as I can, I guess," said Don, and then he hesitated. "I mean, I'd like to go as soon as I can, if it's all right with you."

His father laid aside the Miami evening paper. "You're over twenty-one, Don, and your own boss. Even if I did have any objections, they wouldn't be legal."

"But you don't have any, do you?"

"Of course we haven't," said his mother, smiling. "We'll miss you, and I hope you'll miss us a little, too, but it's really a big chance for you, Don. We're proud that you've deserved it."

His father knocked the fire from his pipe. "How are they going to take it down at the radio station?" he asked. "Do they know you're trying to get out?"

"Kirk does. In fact, he helped me. But I haven't told Mr. Whitehead yet."

"Be sure you give them enough notice," said his father. "You always want to leave a job with good feelings all around." He paused. "What kind of work do you suppose you'll be doing in New York?"

"Wes says I'm to be a senior announcer."

"It seems like quite a job to me," said Mr. Marshall. "But don't worry. If things don't work out, you're welcome to come home."

"More than welcome," said Mrs. Marshall.

But Don knew he would find it hard to face his parents again if he did not succeed. Even the thought of failing made him feel a bit weak. But, when he told Kirk, the latter laughed at his fears.

"You may not get ahead as fast as you think you should," Kirk said. "Bell and Graham believe in bringing men along slowly. But they'll give you every chance. When a man makes good, it helps their reputation for picking winners. Now you'd better let the boss in on the secret."

Although Don was almost as nervous when he walked into the big office at the end of the corridor as he had been the day he entered it to ask for a job at WNIJ, Mr. Whitehead soon put him at his ease.

"Naturally I'm sorry to lose you," he said. "But it shows you've got ambition. If it were only a matter of money, we could make a deal. We're doing much better than when you first came with us. But I know you want a wider opportunity. That's something we can't offer you. We're limited by the size of our listening area."

He stood up. "I don't know where we'll get a young announcer who'll do the job as well as you have. But that's our problem." He extended his hand. "You've come a long way since you started here. I hope you've only started. Good luck."

For a few moments, the night the station staff gave him a small farewell party and a handsome traveling kit, Don felt as if he must change his mind. They were a swell crowd, these people at WNIJ. But, he reflected, he had not known any of them until he went to work here. Perhaps he would be as lucky in his new job.

The first thing to be done in New York, even before he reported for work, was to find a place to live. His salary was comparatively good but still not large enough to let him stay at a first-class hotel. Daphne's aunt recommended a club hotel in the east Fifties. Its rates were moderate but the room to which he was shown was quite comfortably furnished. It looked south toward the tall buildings in the Grand Central area and east toward the river and Long Island City.

Don ate a satisfying lunch in the attractive dining room, then walked across town to the FBS Building. Wes Graham came out to the reception desk to meet him and led him down a long, brightly lighted corridor, past a succession of solid doors that bore small name plates. Opening one that carried his own name, Wes showed Don into an office that would have been comfortable except for the bookcases and filing cases along the walls. Wes took a book from one of the bookcases on his way to the desk. He pushed an armchair close to his own.

"Sit down," he invited. He lit a cigarette and handed Don the book. "You might as well begin to soak up this," he said. "It's the FBS pronunciation book. We got tired wrangling over which dictionary was right and wrote our own. You can quarrel with it if you like, but that's the way you'll pronounce words and names as long as you're here."

"My old boss told me I'd have to watch my pronunciation pretty carefully."

"You'll find a lot of differences between a small independent station and network broadcasting," said Wes, "especially size. How many studios did you have down in Florida?"

"Two," said Don.

"We've got eighteen right here in the building. Some of them seat as many people as a good-sized theater. Sometimes we have three or four shows on the air at the same time and as many rehearsals also going on."

Don showed his surprise.

"It isn't usual," said Wes, "but it can be done. We could be putting on a show for stations east of the Rockies and another for the Pacific coast. We often do that because of the difference in time. A seven o'clock show in New York would be heard in San Francisco at four in the afternoon. That's a bad listening time out there, so we put it on a second time so it will be heard later in the evening.

"Then," he continued, "we could be putting on a show for overseas short-wave transmission. And, besides all that, we could have a video show."

"Video?" repeated Don.

"Television. We call it that to distinguish it from a broadcast that carries only sound. In the business, regular radio is known as audio."

"I never realized FBS was so big," said Don.

"Only one other net is larger. We've got a key station here in New York and our own studios in Washington, Chicago and Hollywood. And we can hook up better than 160 stations all told. We don't do it except for the big shows in the evening because most advertisers don't feel like spending that much dough. Our full network costs $20,000 an hour for time alone. And sponsors have to pay the talent besides. So a lot of them buy what we call our basic network. It's got forty-five stations which we either own or have pretty close ties with. We call the

other stations 'affiliates.' The sponsor can either take them or leave them alone."

"You make it sound pretty tough for sponsors."

"I didn't mean to give you that impression. But the networks could get plenty tough if they thought it was good business. There are only twenty-four hours in the day and only about four hours when people really listen to radio. For instance, at three o'clock in the afternoon only one radio set out of every eight is turned on. At nine o'clock at night, one out of every three is tuned in. So all the big sponsors fight to get evening hours—and there aren't enough to go around."

"What kind of shows do people like best?" asked Don.

"Variety and comedy," said Wes. "The top shows all have music and funny men. And after that people like shows in which the studio audience takes part. Straight drama is third choice."

"You'd think there wouldn't be anything else on the air."

"As the title of one radio shows goes," said Wes, " 'People Are Funny.' Some of them don't like comedy. If you want to reach them, you've got to give them classical music or serious discussion. But you can reach practically everybody with some kind of show. Did you know more people have radios than telephones?"

"It doesn't seem possible," said Don.

"The census takers prove it. Nine out of ten homes have radio sets. Only half as many have phones."

As Wes spoke, his own telephone rang. He held the instrument to his ear a moment and then said, "Okay." He rose and gestured toward some radio magazines on one of the bookcase shelves. "You'll find something

there to read for a few minutes," he said. "Garry's calling a conference. That's one of the penalties of getting ahead in radio—you spend half your time getting your ears bent in conferences. This one won't take long. Then we'll make a quick tour of the shop."

While Wes was gone, Don glanced through a copy of *Variety,* a weekly paper show and radio people read to keep in touch with the entertainment world and with each other. The curious language in the headlines puzzled him but it was a thrill to know that a good portion of the paper was devoted to the radio business—his business. Wes, when he returned, was a trifle anxious.

"We'll have to make this fast," he said. "Garry's auditioning a new show this afternoon and wants me to be there."

Despite the hurried pace set by Wes, Don saw a good deal of radio on the tour. He saw the huge news room, with its battery of teletypes and copy desks, where news poured in over telegraph, cable and radio from the four corners of the earth to be edited for broadcasting. He visited the tiny stand-by studios where announcers doodled or read books until it was time to make local identification announcements for the key station in New York. He was amazed at the size of Studio A, in which hundreds could hear broadcasts by eighty-man symphony orchestras, and he was especially interested in the television studio with its stage scenery and bulky television cameras. He resolved to see a show actually being telecast.

"Look at that ham actor mugging the mike," said Wes, as they stopped before the soundproof window of a studio in which a quarter-hour serial was being rehearsed. Don looked bewildered.

"Overacting," explained Wes. "In the theater they call it 'chewing the scenery.' It's odd about radio slang," he continued, as they proceeded to the next studio. "Every so often somebody compiles a list of the slang we use but most of it didn't originate in radio at all. Take words like '88' for a piano and 'woodpile' for xylophone. Lots of musicians use that slang, in radio and out. Then there are terms like 'dog watch' for a late shift and 'white space' for silence. They came straight to radio from a newspaper office. Then the engineers say 'West of Denver' when they can't locate trouble in the equipment. That's an old telegraphers' expression.

"Of course," Wes continued, "we do have plenty of our own—like 'cushion' for the music at the end of a show that you can cut short or stretch out, according to whether the show itself runs too long or not long enough. Then we use the term 'cornfield' for a show that takes a lot of standing mikes."

As they continued the round of the studios, they met dozens of persons hurrying along the corridors. Wes introduced Don to several, all of them announcers.

"Might as well meet them now," said Wes. "You never know when you may be working with them."

"They look like a swell bunch," said Don.

"We take pains to pick good ones. I don't think you'll find a better announcing staff in radio."

They were on their way back to Wes's office when Don noticed a tall, slightly stooped man coming down the corridor toward them. His eyes were glued to the script in his hand but Don had no difficulty recognizing him. He was Ray Stott.

Chapter 15

For the first three weeks, Don found himself with little to do. Wes told him that, like all announcers, he would work first on sustaining programs.

"You stay on sustaining," said Wes, "until the advertising agencies or the advertisers themselves start asking for you on sponsored shows. Usually it's three or four years before they know you exist. But there are exceptions. We've got one announcer who was making more money inside of three months than anybody else on the staff."

Don had wondered about being called a "senior" announcer and asked Wes what it meant.

"We start most young fellows as pages," Wes explained. "If they show any promise, we make them junior announcers and send them out to our small stations."

"Like a big league baseball team farming out a rookie to the bushes," said Don.

"Exactly. We keep tabs on them and, when they look as if they're ripe, we call them in and make them senior announcers."

As he waited for regular assignments, Don found it hard not to become impatient. He did not actually doubt that he would be put to work but he wanted to get started. With more leisure than he wished, he was able to get better acquainted with New York. Usually he went alone, for Daphne was in school most of the day. He toured Manhattan Island from the Battery to the Harlem River by bus, visited the Art Museum and the Museum of Natural History in Central Park, went up to the Bronx to wander through its remarkable zoo, and rode the little steamer over to the Statue of Liberty in the Upper Bay. Frequently he dined with Daphne and her aunt at some foreign restaurant, eating French food at a place in Greenwich Village, Chinese dishes on Forty-third Street, Italian spaghetti on Forty-fifth, and strange Armenian delicacies on Lexington Avenue.

"You'll offend the proprietor if you don't order *shish kabeb,*" said Daphne the evening they ate at the Armenian restaurant. "He thinks it's the best in New York."

Don had not the slightest desire to quarrel, for the lamb was the tenderest and most flavorful he had ever tasted.

"I wouldn't fret about loafing," said Daphne's aunt when Don complained about the lack of work at the studios. "You'll find you'll be busy enough. Nobody ever pays anybody else for sitting around."

"Do the other announcers keep busy?" said Daphne.

"I don't know," said Don. "I don't get to see them often. In fact, I really know only one other announcer. And he's an old friend of yours."

"Of mine?"

"Yes—Ray Stott. He used to be at WNIJ."

"Some of the things he used to do down there were awfully mean," said Daphne. "I hope he's changed."

"So do I. I haven't had anything to do with him so far, and I won't, if I'm lucky."

Don's luck held for several months. In the meantime, he was assigned to his first regular program. It was a quarter-hour talk by a woman who had once played supporting rôles in the movies and was now commenting on news in which women seemed likely to be interested. The network hoped to sell the program to a manufacturer of women's apparel or cosmetics.

The commercials were long, as on most daytime programs, and called for the syrupy expression which so many people imagine has an appeal for women. Don read them well enough in rehearsal but, as the hour of the actual broadcast approached, he found himself getting as nervous as he had before his first radio program in Silver Beach. When he went on the air, he had to fight against mike fright but he managed to get through the job without serious mistakes and Wes praised his work. The network liked the show and tried hard to sell it, but failed to interest a sponsor and soon dropped it.

After that, Don spent several weeks in stand-by studios, waiting for half hours to pass so that he might make a local announcement for the key station. It was tedious business and soon became discouraging. Don thought of the thousand and one things he would be doing if he

were still at WNIJ and sometimes almost wished he had stayed there. Before he became desperate, Wes assigned him to an unsponsored daytime serial.

"The chap who was to announce it," said Wes, "jumped off for Hollywood to try his luck in the movies. I think you'll get some fun out of it."

The serial dealt with the experiences of a beautiful woman spy, who had a habit of getting into situations from which her male confederates had to rescue her with mad automobile driving and unbelievably expert pistol shooting. Don discovered that the introduction had to be read with almost as much excitement as the serial dialogue itself and it was some days before the program director was satisfied. After a week, Don got the knack and the show caught on. Paul Baker, an announcer who had made a special effort to be friendly to Don, seemed concerned about its prospects. He was about twenty-seven and a bit heavy but he was almost as tall as Don and liked strenuous sports. He had a good voice and a manner that inspired confidence. He had been with FBS several years and had four sponsored programs of his own.

"How's the dishpan drama?" he asked one noon when he and Don went to lunch at a small restaurant around the corner from the studios. Don looked blank.

"The soap opera to be," explained Paul. "The grapevine says they'll be selling it to a soap company one of these days. How do you like it?"

"It's pretty corny, I suppose. But I've heard some I like less. If they sell it, do you think they'll give me a chance to announce it?"

"I doubt it," said Paul. "The ad agency will probably pick somebody who's done several strip shows. But don't

let it get you down. It's good experience. If you can make a sudsy serial sound good, you can handle almost anything."

Paul's prediction that the serial would be sold came true. A soap company bought it within the week, but Don was passed over in favor of an older announcer. Though Paul had hinted that this would happen, Don was disappointed and went back to making locals a little glumly. Still he was glad he had done the program, for it had given him a chance to meet Joe Townsend, who handled the sound effects.

At WNIJ, few sound effects had been necessary, since the only programs originating in the studios had been Kirk's personality broadcasts, musicals and newcasts. Don had heard stories about the marvelous things sound men could do and somehow expected them to be a distinct and uncommonly clever race. Joe was small and thin and always seemed bored.

"Oh, we do our share of clever things," he said after a rehearsal when he had done little except play records. "But that usually happens when a script writer has had a brainstorm and wants to put some terrifying sound on the air. We stabbed a watermelon one time when the writer wanted to imitate the sound of a knife plunging into a man's heart. I don't know where he'd ever heard a sound like that. He didn't say.

"Mostly, sound equipment is standardized. We clop-clop half coconut shells in a box of sand to imitate horses' hoofs, the way we did the time the female spy was making her getaway. We have a set of wheels we roll around a circular track to make it sound like a heavy

coach. And we squeeze a ball of cellophane to get the effect of a crackling fire.

"But," Joe continued, "we get most of the odd sounds we need by going out with a mike and recording them. Of course, we use 'crawkers'—that's animal imitators—when we need comedy effects but, if we want a genuine frog croak for example, we can do better with a record of a real frog."

"Wouldn't it be pretty hard," asked Don, "to get a record of a frog croaking if you had only a day or two before the show?"

"We've got a whole library of sound records," said Joe. "We have the sound of crowds cheering, of automobiles colliding, of trains starting—practically anything you could name."

Despite Joe's insistence that putting sound on the air was only a matter of going out to record it, Don had opportunity, as he came to do various programs, to hear how closely sound was interwoven with the dialogue to create dramatic effect. One of the best examples was the dramatic show he announced a few months later.

It was a play written by a man who had a unique talent for bringing realism to his radio work. The story told of the heroism of deep-sea divers who descended to rescue the crew of a sunken submarine. When the cue came for the rescuers to tap out a message in Morse code on the submarine's hull, Joe Townsend struck a metal tank partially filled with water. Then, after a few seconds of terrific suspense, the trapped men were supposed to answer with taps of their own. Although Don could see that Joe simply moved the tank a few feet back from the

microphone and saw him raise the mallet with which he was to strike it, the muffled sound of taps that went out over the air was startlingly real.

Soon afterward Don had the chance to satisfy a longing that had been growing stronger in recent weeks. He was happy enough in his work but after a year he found himself eager to see his parents and his old friends in Silver Beach. When Wes Graham gave him a two-weeks vacation, Don caught the first streamliner out of Penn Station, delaying only long enough to wire that he was coming home.

His father and mother were at the station when he stepped off the train with a topcoat over his arm. He returned his mother's embrace and would not have minded if she had kissed him.

"It's wonderful to see you again," she said. "You'll have to get a good rest. You've lost all your tan."

"I guess we'll have to drive home by the back streets," said his father with a chuckle. "I wouldn't want the Chamber of Commerce boys to see a son of mine carrying a topcoat in Silver Beach."

Instead, Mr. Marshall drove straight across the causeway to the beach.

"There's the new hotel your father is building," said Mrs. Marshall.

"Why, it's almost finished," said Don. "It's a beauty."

"Make you wish you were in the building game with me?" asked his father.

Don hesitated.

"I'll try to change your mind before you go back."

Next day Don called Pete Joslyn at the *Sentinel* office

and made a date to have dinner downtown. Pete was eager for details about big-time radio.

"I've hardly got my foot in the door," said Don after they had ordered. "All I seem to do is make locals and announce sustaining shows they never sell."

"Don't try to kid me. I heard you introducing that Senator the other night."

"That doesn't take genius," said Don. "You just say 'Ladies and gentlemen, I present Senator Breeze' and after he's finished you say 'Ladies and gentlemen, you've just heard Senator Breeze.' "

"Okay," said Pete, "but those public service programs are important. More people ought to listen to them."

"But they don't. If the law didn't make them do it, I don't think many stations would give them time. But that's enough about me. How's the *Sentinel* treating you?"

"Fine," said Pete. "But it's still bush league. I'm looking around."

"If your gaze ever strays as far north as New York, I can have an extra cot put in my room."

After dinner, Don walked down to WNIJ. The stucco and glass-brick building seemed smaller than he remembered it, but the lawn looked greener and the royal palms taller. As he entered the lobby, Peggy, the receptionist, looked up with her eyes wide.

"Why, Don!" she exclaimed. "You're dressed like a Yankee." She spun on her swivel chair and called, "Oh, Kirk! Don Marshall's here." She turned again to Don. "You sure enough look prosperous," she said. "What shows are you on?"

"Let's have a long talk," said Don. "Ask me the ones I'm *not* on."

Kirk entered and studied Don soberly. "Looking for a job, son?" he asked.

"Well—"

"Sorry," said Kirk. "We're not auditioning announcers today." Then he grinned and grasped Don by the hand. "Let's sit down where we can be comfortable," he said. He led the way to the announcers' room and motioned Don toward the davenport. "Tell me about things," he said, lighting a cigarette.

"There isn't much to tell," said Don. "Garry and Wes asked to be remembered to you."

"That's fine, but what about you?"

"Making locals and announcing a few sustainers."

"You're still working, though, aren't you?" Don nodded. "Well," Kirk continued, "you wouldn't be if Wes had any doubts about you. And remember you're in big time." He was silent a moment and then added: "WNIJ must seem like pretty small potatoes to you now."

"It'll always look good to me," said Don. "Coming back is like—well, like putting on an old pair of shoes. It's comfortable."

"But still a five-watter, as Ray Stott used to say."

"Size doesn't make any difference," said Don. "I learned an awful lot of radio here—more than I'd have learned if I'd started with a big New York studio. The pace is faster up there. Nobody has time to waste on beginners."

Kirk was smiling. "It's flattering to hear you talk like that about the old station. Still, there's a good deal in

what you say. There's lots to be learned—and lots of fun—in a small studio. I don't suppose you ever think about coming back here to work?"

"Often. But I think I'll try New York a while longer."

"Think?" said Kirk. "You *know* you will."

Don's routine work seemed less monotonous when he returned to New York, rested and ready to tackle another year of work. A few weeks later Wes assigned him to a news program which FBS put on the network every night after 11 o'clock.

"That's a break," said Paul Baker one afternoon as they lounged in an announcers' room between programs. "Newscasting isn't what it was back in the days when we were fighting a couple of wars at the same time, but a late news spot is still okay. People who keep up with what's going on like to hear news before they turn in. They're the people certain sponsors want to reach."

"I like it well enough," said Don, "but it would be better if it weren't so late."

"The earlier spots are all taken by big sponsors—and it takes years for them to find out you're around. I've been here a long time and I've still got only four small shows. None of them pays much."

"I wasn't thinking so much of the money," said Don. "What I want is something besides straight news. I've been trying to get Wes to let me try some special events."

Paul shook his head gravely. "Stick to strip shows. You'll live longer."

"But you get to *see* things," said Don. "I'd have given a lot to see that submarine rescue off Block Island last week."

"So would anybody," admitted Paul. "But you'll get

your share. I've done parades, airplane tries for altitude records and beauty pageants. But every so often I've drawn a headache. That battleship launching over at the Brooklyn Navy Yard last Saturday was one of the worst. I was under the stern, trying to tell what the workmen do down there before a launching. Something went wrong up at the bow and I was stuck for half an hour. There wasn't a thing to say but I had to keep talking till Ray Stott got a man down there."

"Stott?" said Don. "Did he get that job?"

"It was all his idea—and a pretty bad one, in case anybody asks you. Keep your fingers crossed and hope you never have to work with that guy."

"I have worked with him."

"That's right," said Paul. "Stott said something about knowing you. I gathered he isn't exactly fond of you."

"I don't worry about it," said Don. "I'm only *one* fellow he doesn't like."

"Well, I certainly don't want to work with him again. And I told Wes the same thing when I got back. If Stott didn't think up these screwy assignments he probably would have been fired long ago."

Don saw Stott frequently around the studios but the latter never spoke except for an insulting, "Hiya, Cracker!" It would be a relief, Don thought, to punch that leering mouth just once, if only to keep the promise he had made in Silver Beach, but that, he knew, could lead only to trouble. Stott gave him no real annoyance until the day a huge new plane flew into New York from Siberia to set a nonstop record. Wes told Don about the assignment the night before.

"I want you to be out at Municipal Airport about six

in the morning," he said. "The city's going to give these fliers the biggest hand anybody's got since Eisenhower got home from the war. The mayor's going out to greet them at the airport before they go down to City Hall for the official reception. There'll be a mob of spectators on hand, so we'll have several mikes around the field. Ray Stott will tell you what he wants you to do when you get there."

"Ray Stott?" said Don with a note of alarm in his voice. Wes glanced at him curiously.

"Stott said you couldn't do the job. I said you could."

Don was busy enough the rest of the day to keep from worrying, but after his late-evening newscast he was free to think about the coming ordeal and his thoughts were far from comforting. Stott might give him the meanest job on the field, Don decided, but he would hardly try any prank that could mar the program. And Don was encouraged by the confidence Wes had placed in him. He resolved to do a conscientious job, no matter how distasteful. At the same time, he would be on his guard against trickery.

When he reached the airport, it was not yet six but police cordons were already holding back huge crowds. He found Stott in the administration building, discussing last-minute plans with the engineers, who had placed microphones at advantageous spots on the loading apron, along the edge of the crowd and in the space inside where the mayor was to welcome the fliers. Announcers and engineers from the other networks were on hand and the floor of the building was a tangle of microphone cable.

"Hiya, Cracker!" said Stott. "Take that mike over near the crowd. The fliers are due here at six-twenty. When

I throw you the air, start ad libbing on the crowd. And it better be good."

It was difficult to pick out the huge monoplane in the misty September dawn until it was almost over the field. Don, with earphones clamped to his head, watched it circle wide and then slide gracefully down into the wind.

"The crowd has gone wild," he could hear Stott saying. "We'll try to picture the scene for you. Take it Don Marshall."

Watching the crowd closely, Don started to describe its behavior. He singled out individuals—the man frantically waving his hat—the mother holding up a sleepy youngster—a girl dancing and babbling with excitement—and tried to translate the movement and spirit into words. Through his earphones he could hear nothing now, but he knew the plane must have landed and that the crew must be getting out. He turned from the crowd to see a gangplank being rolled up to the big ship and the tired airmen straggle out. Anxiously he waited for the cue from Stott to stop talking. But none came.

Something was wrong. The suspicion flashed across Don's mind that this was another of Stott's tricks. When he saw the fliers escorted to the administration building, he knew that Stott must certainly have taken over for the meeting with the mayor, but there was nothing Don could do but keep on talking. He described the field again and the crowd surging around the administration building for a glimpse of the fliers. And, when the party emerged from the building after what seemed hours, he told of their walk to the waiting cars and their departure, along with the mayor and other city officials, for the ride

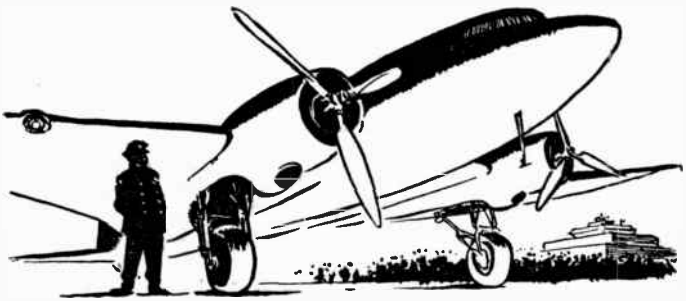
to City Hall. Only then did Don stop talking and go to the administration building.

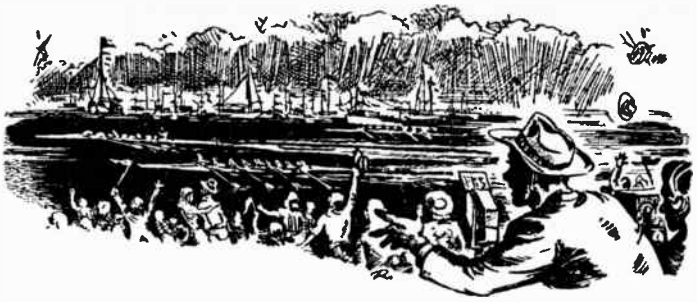
Engineers were already packing up the portable equipment and Stott was sauntering toward an exit. Don was thoroughly angry but he decided to give Stott a chance to explain.

"Well, Stott," he asked as though nothing had gone wrong, "how did I do with the crowd?"

Stott turned with a smirk. "It might interest you to know, Cracker," he said, "that you spent the morning talking to a dead mike."

Before Don could reply, Stott melted into the crowd.





Chapter 16

STOTT was to pick up the party again at City Hall and cover the ceremonies there, but Wes felt Don would not be needed so the latter returned directly to the studios. He had a rehearsal for a new daytime serial at 10 o'clock and went to one of the announcers' rooms to study his script. Paul Baker was about to leave.

"You don't look as if you and Stott threw any punches at each other," he said.

"No, but I wish we had."

"Stott must have been in his usual jovial form."

"I don't know," said Don, "but he was trying to pull something. I'm going to find out what it was." Briefly he described the mix-up at the airport.

"I can't imagine anybody in his right senses taking chances on a show like that, but—" Chancing to glance at the door, Paul stopped speaking and his eyes widened. "Did you see who that was that just passed?" he asked.

"No," said Don.

"Stott!"

Don sprang to his feet and went to the door. As he looked down the corridor, he saw Stott turning into Wes's office. Don came back into the room and sat down, his brows drawn together in a frown. "That's odd," he said. "Stott ought to be at City Hall."

Before Paul could speak, the phone rang, and Paul answered it. "You'll soon unravel the mystery," he said to Don as he put down the phone. "Wes wants to see you."

Many explanations of the morning's events occurred to Don as he went to Wes's office but, for once, he refused to let himself get upset. It was clear that he was again the victim of one of Stott's malicious pranks and this time he was determined to have it out right on the spot.

Entering the office, he saw Wes sitting grim-faced behind his desk, with Stott and Art Buchanan, the engineer who handled the pick-up, sitting tensely on either side. "Sit down," said Wes. "Tell us what happened out at the airport."

In as few words as he could, Don explained how Stott had given him the cue to ad lib a description of the crowd and how he had waited in vain for a cue to cease speaking.

"I never gave him the cue to start," shouted Stott.

"But you heard it, didn't you, Art?" asked Wes.

The engineer nodded.

"There's something wrong with you when you start hearing voices," said Stott.

Art reddened slightly and started from his chair but then thought better of it and sat down again. "I heard Stott give Marshall the cue to begin," he said.

"But you saw me *wink*," exclaimed Stott, his voice shrill with rage.

"That's enough," said Wes. "You deliberately tried to ruin a network show."

"I *winked,* I tell you!" Stott shouted. "I didn't want that Cracker lousing up the show. I told Art about it before we started."

"We don't recognize winks at FBS," said Wes. "We'd have been scooped completely if Marshall hadn't kept on talking. You didn't get a word on the air."

"If you had only let me go on down to City Hall—" began Stott.

"You can go any place you wish from now on—but not for FBS."

"You don't mean—"

"I mean you're through," said Wes. "Get out!"

Stott leaped to his feet and took a step toward Wes's desk, but stopped and wheeled to face the engineer. "You double-crossing louse!" he cried. Then he turned to Don. "And you—"

"Careful," said Don.

Stott did not finish. He glared again at Wes and Art Buchanan, glanced again at Don, then strode from the office.

"That was first-class ad libbing in a tough spot, Don," said Wes. "It wasn't what we planned, but it was okay, considering. That's all."

Paul was still in the announcers' room when Don got back. He was eager to learn what had happened. After one look at Don's grave face, he resumed reading the script he had been studying. "Wes a little rough on you?" he asked.

"We got along all right," said Don, dropping into a chair.

"You look fairly dreary to me."

"I'm thinking of Stott," said Don. "That's twice I've seen it happen to him—once in Silver Beach and now—"

"Stott fired?" exclaimed Paul. "They ought to give us a day off to celebrate."

"He's going to have a tough time finding another radio job."

"A guy like that should never have been in radio in the first place," said Paul. "With Stott's sense of humor he should have been head man at a guillotine. But," he continued, lighting a cigarette, "he's going to leave a few good spots open. That six o'clock newscast of his was a honey. There's one sponsor who doesn't mind parting with a little folding stuff. The fee on that one show is as big as a week's take for me."

"You ought to be in line for it," said Don.

"That's up to the sponsor."

Don knew Paul deserved another sponsored program. None of those he handled were big money-makers, although his total income was considerable. Of course, Don did not have a single sponsored program. He had auditioned several times for sponsors but they had always picked an older, more experienced announcer. Since Wes had said nothing about auditioning for the newscast vacated by Stott, it did not occur to Don that Wes might have him in mind for the job. He was surprised shortly before lunch when Wes sent for both Paul and him.

"I suppose," said Wes, offering them chairs, "that you've been wondering whether Stott is going to keep his sponsored shows. That answer is 'No.' We had that out with his sponsors before I let him go. And if you've

been wondering about who is to get the nod for his newscast, I can tell you that, too. The sponsor asked for you, Don. He liked the way you've been handling the late-evening news."

Wes's words were so unexpected that Don did not immediately realize their importance, but when he did he felt like giving a cheer. He was restrained only by the presence of Paul. The latter gave no sign that he was disappointed but Don was sure he had been counting on the program. Don was about to thank Wes when the latter resumed:

"As for you, Paul, I'm going to lean pretty heavily on you for special events. Stott was good but I think you can do better. Anyway it will give you a chance to get more attention. You ought to pick up another sponsored show or two."

As soon as they left Wes's office, Don turned to Paul. "I'm sorry it had to turn out this way."

"Forget it," said Paul. "I'm doing all right. It's about time *you* got hold of a little extra change around here. Some announcers start making real money a lot sooner. Others take three or four years. But it doesn't matter so much *when* you start. The big thing is to put yourself over with listeners. If they like you, they'll buy a good deal more of the sponsor's product than if they don't."

"Is that really true?" asked Don.

"It's been shown by surveys time after time."

Apparently the listening audience found Don's announcing more than acceptable, for the first fan letters began to trickle in a few days later and increased slightly as time passed. Many young men Don's age would have been satisfied with this one forward stride, but Don knew

that, except for a few commentators, the future was not too bright for newscasters, and the commentators usually came to radio with reputations already made. His own future, Don concluded, depended on his ability to attract the attention of sponsors. One of the best ways, Paul told him, was to build his own show. If a sponsor liked the program, chances were about even he would like the man who thought of it.

Don worked up several ideas and submitted them to Garry Bell but nothing came of them. Bell did send for him one day to talk over a suggestion he had made for a series of representative plays from different countries.

"You're getting warm," said Bell, handing him back his script. "It's a good idea but I don't think we could ever sell it—a little on the high-hat side. And it would be too expensive for sustaining. But I've been interested in your ideas. You think them out carefully."

Don submitted other ideas from time to time but they had no better success than his earlier attempts. Meanwhile, he was kept busy not only with his sponsored newscast but also with his sustaining programs and the special events which were now usually supervised by Paul. Through the fall and winter he helped Paul cover a rousing political convention at Madison Square Garden, the opening of a new under-river tunnel, and innumerable dinners for various celebrities. He had chosen spring for his next vacation but had to postpone it so he could accompany Paul to New London, Connecticut, for the boat race on the Thames River between Yale and Harvard. Paul announced the actual contest while Don described the color and expectancy of the crowd at the start and the frenzied excitement at the finish.

After the race, Wes told him he had been picked to audition for a new program.

"You'd enjoy it," said Wes. "It's along the lines of that dramatic show you suggested to Garry. But it'll keep till after your vacation."

Don had dinner with Daphne and her aunt the night before he was to leave for Silver Beach. "Am I ready for a rest?" he said. "I've been working hard enough the last week to do me for a month."

"You're going home, aren't you?" said Daphne.

"As fast as I can get there."

"You'll be more eager still to get back to New York," said Daphne's aunt.

"Probably—now that I feel I'm getting some place," said Don.

Daphne sighed. "I wish *I* were going back to Silver Beach."

"You know very well you wouldn't think of leaving New York till after your audition," said her aunt.

Don, who was about to raise a cup to his lips, let it clatter down upon the saucer. "Audition?" he echoed. "You never said a word about it. Where?"

Daphne smiled. "It isn't for FBS."

"I'll stay over to hear it, anyway," said Don.

"You'll be back in plenty of time," said Daphne's aunt. "It isn't until next month."

Don wanted to say something about his own coming audition, but thought it best not to mention it. Let this be Daphne's evening. He leaned forward earnestly. "You know I wish you luck."

"Thank you."

"She'll be a great success," said her aunt. "They haven't heard a young singer like her in years."

"I wish I had that much confidence in myself," said Daphne.

"That will come," said her aunt.

Don left New York the next afternoon and, as he sped south in the comfort of a Pullman, he wondered at the curious reversal of events that had occurred in the last few years. In high school, it was Daphne who was established in radio and Don the one who was striving to break in. But, he told himself, Daphne would not be long making a place for herself on the air, just as she had at Silver Beach.

At home, Don found little changed, except that both his mother and father welcomed him with unusual warmth at first and then seemed to treat him like a guest.

"We don't often get the chance to entertain a big-time radio personality," said his father.

"An announcer with one, lone sponsored show," said Don.

"But there'll be more important shows," said his mother.

"When I get them, you'll have to come up for the premier."

"Are you studying French as you promised?"

"Parlez-moi en français," said Don.

His mother responded with a long, rapid sentence in French. Don could understand no more than three words.

"I guess we'd better stick to English," he laughed. "Or Spanish. *Hablo español* as much as I can."

He rested at home a day, then went downtown the

following morning. He wanted to see Pete Joslyn but Pete would not yet be at the newspaper office, so Don went first to WNIJ. Kirk greeted him with a hearty handshake.

"I'd almost forgotten what a nice layout we had here," said Don.

"We're always looking for a good announcer. Wouldn't care to come back, would you?"

Don considered a moment. "Well, not the year round," he said. "Maybe we could fix it so I could work in New York in the summer and in Silver Beach over the winter."

"It might not be bad. Of course, we'd have to lop about ninety per cent off your salary."

"You know," said Don, stretching out on the davenport in the announcers' room, "I get to wondering sometimes why I get paid so much in New York. I don't work as hard as I used to down here."

"You're in big-time," said Kirk. "You're working for more than 160 stations—not just one."

"I've only got one sponsored show so far."

"It takes time for sponsors to learn about you," said Kirk. "Have you tried a show of your own?"

"Dozens of times," said Don. "Garry Bell says they're good ideas—but he hasn't bought any."

"I wouldn't give up."

"I'm not going to."

Mr. Whitehead came in for a brief chat and later Don visited the transmitter room to see Jake Rumely.

"Been out to the new FBS transmitter on Long Island?" asked Jake.

"Why, no. I—" began Don.

"I didn't think you had. That's the trouble with you

announcers. Start making a lot of money and you forget all about learning radio."

"But I thought announcing was part of radio," said Don.

"Hmph. Anybody can talk. But, if that's what you like to do, the best of luck to you."

In the afternoon, Don went to the *Sentinel* office. In his new sports outfit of fawn-colored tweed coat and dark brown slacks, he sauntered into the local room to find Pete at his desk, snipping small stories from a Miami paper. When Pete saw him, he let paper, clippings and shears drop to the floor and grabbed Don's hands in both his own.

"Why didn't you announce yourself?" he demanded. "That's your business."

Don, looking slowly around the room, saw three reporters lounging at desks and two copy readers glumly penciling copy at the horseshoe desk at one end of the room. "You know, Pete," he said, "there's something about the appearance of a newspaperman you'd never mistake. You look as if you were born to be one."

"The city editor would give you an argument on that," said Pete. "Let's scram and grab a hamburger over at the old barbecue stand."

"With coffee?"

"Naturally."

As they reached Williams Avenue, Pete changed his mind about eating at the barbecue stand. "We don't get to see each other much," he said. "Let's try the Seaside for a decent meal. We can talk better."

"You'll have to do the talking," said Don. "I'm on vacation."

"So what?"

"Talking is work with me."

Pete laughed as they entered the restaurant. "Then we're going to sit and look at each other. Nothing happens down here that's worth talking about." He led the way to a table near a window.

"You fill a newspaper with local news every day," said Don as they sat down.

"Tittle tattle," said Pete. "Building permits, new arrivals in town, daily ballyhoo from the Chamber of Commerce. Oh, yes. And a wedding once in a while. Exciting, isn't it?"

"Anybody getting married that we know?"

"Yes. Most of the girls in our high school class. Some of the fellows, too."

"Ever hear from Marvin Caywood any more?" asked Don.

"Almost too much." Pete paused while they ordered. "Marvin's got a Latin-America band down in Miami and going places like a jet plane. Played at the Miami-Waldorf all winter and was on a Miami radio station three times a week. The town's nuts about him."

"I had a hunch he'd come through," said Don. "But how did he ever get a Latin-America band?"

"Organized it the summer he went over to Cuba. Everybody in it is Cuban except Marvin. Terry Jones, who does our radio column, says the boys are really terrific."

"Marvin deserved a break. How are things going at the paper?"

Pete buttered a piece of roll thoughtfully. "I was going to keep it for a surprise," he said, "but since you ask I

might as well break down. I've got a job with a paper in Miami. I'm going to do a column. I've had one on the *Sentinel* for a year now and they seem to like it down in Miami."

"Congratulations," said Don. "Maybe you'll be able to syndicate it."

"I'm hoping." Pete was silent a moment, then asked: "But I've been talking too much. What's new with you? I hear your newscast pretty regularly, but that can't keep you busy all the time."

"That's the only sponsored show I've got," said Don. "I do special events with Paul Baker and work a couple of sustaining shows. I'm getting a chance at a new sponsored show as soon as I get back."

"That's great. You ought to be sitting pretty with a couple of daily shows."

Don toyed with a water tumbler. "I ought to be, I suppose. But I've still got a long way to go. What I want to do most is 'emcee' a big evening show. And," he added somewhat wistfully, "I want to build it myself—right from the ground up."

Chapter 17

THE morning Don reported at the studios after his trip to Silver Beach, Wes Graham called him to the office.

"You certainly accumulated a coat of Florida tan," said Wes. "Feel rested?"

"I could lick my weight in wildcats," said Don, "if they weren't *too* wild."

"Save some of your pep for tomorrow morning. We want to get a line on announcers for that new show I mentioned before you left. We've had it in rehearsal for over a week and we're about ready to show it to the sponsor. Be in Studio J at ten."

Wes volunteered no further information about the program but later in the day Don learned from Paul that the latter was not a candidate for the job. At least Don would not be running the risk of taking another sponsored program away from Paul.

Next morning he went through the audition almost

mechanically. The commercials he read had to do with coffee and, even though he was not especially fond of the drink himself, he had heard Pete Joslyn praise it often and tried to get some of Pete's enthusiasm into his reading.

"I won't know anything definite till later on," Wes told him during the afternoon. "We want to audition for the sponsor next week."

The first question Paul asked when he and Don went to dinner was about the morning's test. Don repeated what Wes had told him.

"I hope you don't get it," said Paul.

"Why not?"

"Wes didn't tell you about the sponsor?"

"No," said Don.

"What a sponsor! It's a coffee importing firm. They've got bundles of dough but they keep a big rubber band on it. And still they want to buy a show with a Hooper rating of twenty or better. Everybody in town has tried to build them a show but they're still looking."

"Wes sounded as if he hoped they'd go for this one," said Don, as they found their usual table in the restaurant around the corner from the studios.

"I wouldn't bet on it. It's a dramatization of South American history and stuff like that. Probably it's good but listeners would rather have a story out of the movies. So, if you're lucky, you won't get it. Then you won't have a flop on your record."

"I'm not going to worry. I've got a more important audition coming up next week."

"Why all this sudden demand for those silvery tones of yours?" asked Paul.

"It isn't my voice this time. A girl I know is being auditioned for a spot on another web."

"I hope she makes it." Paul studied the menu. "You know, this auditioning business gets a little tedious. You'd think after an announcer had been in the game a while everybody would know what he could do. But no. Every time a new job comes along he has to try out for it like any greenhorn. Take me. I've been around for years. They've just tumbled to the fact I don't look bad. So I'm getting a shot at television."

"Television!" exclaimed Don.

"You haven't heard about television?" said Paul with an amused smile.

"I've heard plenty about it. That was one of the things I wanted to see when I first came to New York. But I never seemed to get time."

"Well, if you're stuck for something to do Friday morning, look me up. I'll be mugging for a video camera."

Don wanted to hear Daphne's audition but he had no chance to get out of the FBS studios. He was sure she would sing her way into an immediate contract but, on the morning she sang for the rival network, his thoughts were as often on the small studio farther uptown as they were on his own work. By noon, he could stand the uncertainty no longer, and called Daphne's apartment.

"Well?" he asked, as he recognized Daphne's voice.

"It was perfectly wonderful," said Daphne. "They made me sing four songs—all the way from lullabies to opera."

"And they were crazy about them, weren't they?"

"They said they liked them. I'm going to sing on a Tuesday night variety—just one song."

"That's what you think!" said Don. "After the listeners hear you once, the show will be yours."

"You've got to be quite a flatterer since you came to New York," said Daphne.

"It's my business to say kind words about things I like. But I never believed in anything quite as much as I do in you. Have dinner with me tonight and I'll tell you why."

Actually Don had nothing to say to Daphne he had not said many times before, but he was so pleased with the outcome of her audition that he wanted to celebrate.

"I've got a long way to go before I'll have a following as big as yours," said Daphne. "And you may have another sponsored show in a week or so."

"From what Paul Baker says," said Don, "that may be a step backwards."

He had heard nothing further about the new program by Friday morning and found himself facing an hour of leisure when Paul told him the television rehearsal was going on in a few minutes.

"We might as well drift over and watch the property men and the engineers getting things ready," said Paul.

Don had seen the large television studio on his tour of the station while he was still new on the job, but nothing was being televised at the time. Now the place was bustling with property men, engineers and cameramen. An oddity that struck him immediately was the different settings ranged about the walls. One represented the corner of a living room, another an office, a third a

hospital, and a fourth the front door of a small cottage. At one end of the studio there was a kitchen set with an electric washing machine.

"That's one of the advantages of video," explained Paul. "You can put up most of your sets before you start. Instead of changing the sets as you go along, you merely dolly your camera up to one and then another."

"Wouldn't that look strange to a person watching the show on his receiver at home?" said Don.

"He never sees it. What happens is, one camera shoots the scene at, say, the front door over there. Meanwhile the other camera is moved over to the living room set. When the actor enters the front door, the control room switches off the camera scanning that scene and switches to the other. The person watching the show at home sees one scene after another the way he would in a movie."

"That makes it pretty easy for the property men."

"They have to strike a set once in a while," said Paul. "Sometimes the script calls for more sets than the studio will hold at one time, so they have to build a new one during the show. The people watching the show don't see the property men because they're out of camera range. But in any case, the sets for television are expensive and there's a whole lot more movie film televised than live talent. There's an even better reason for using film, too.

"The high-frequency waves that carry the video impulses don't follow the surface of the earth like audio waves," Paul continued. "Even when you have an antenna fifteen hundred feet high you can't send a video signal more than about sixty-five miles. And you can't send the signals a long distance over an ordinary telephone line

the way we do in network broadcasting. That means you've got to have a special line called a co-axial cable to carry the program from one city to another and they're so expensive we don't have many of them. On the other hand, a movie can be televised all over the country because all you have to do is send prints of the film around."

Don strolled with Paul over to one of the massive television cameras which an engineer was examining.

"I read somewhere," said Don, "about hundreds of thousands of images a second in television."

Paul turned to the engineer. "Suppose you tell him about it, Horace," he said. "I'm over my depth."

"You're both right," said Horace. "But we'd better start at the beginning. You see, the heart of a video camera is a big tube called the iconoscope. This has a plate in it with thousands of tiny particles arranged in horizontal lines. When the light the camera picks up falls on these particles they take a positive charge of electricity.

"Now when the camera is working the cathode in the neck of the tube shoots electrons at this plate. They bombard one horizontal line, then skip the next and travel along a third and so on till they reach the bottom. Then they go back and cover the lines they missed the first time. That's called interlacing."

Don was following Horace's words closely but it was evident from his slight frown that the explanation was not entirely clear.

"What happens," continued Horace, "is this: Every time an electron hits a particle that's positively charged, it causes it to discharge a bit of current. That impulse is sent over the air and is picked up by the receiving set.

There's a tube in the receiver called the kinescope. It's got a fluorescent screen in the big end and, when the cathode shoots an electron at it, a tiny dot lights up. The electron stream moves so fast it covers every one of the hundreds of thousands of dots thirty times every second. So what you really see when you look at a television receiver is not a whole picture but those thousands upon thousands of dots, some light, some dark."

"Something like the half-tone pictures you see in newspapers and magazines?" said Paul.

"Yes, but a whole lot finer. And now they've got a tube called the Orthicon that sends even better pictures, especially when the light is poor."

"It would be swell if they could have color in television the way we have in the movies," said Don.

"We have," said Horace. "We don't use it much yet. It takes a little different kind of camera but the method is quite simple. We merely spin a filter drum with three colors—red, yellow and green—in front of the camera. The receiving set has a color disk between the kinescope and the screen. The picture you see is in full color."

By this time some of the actors had begun to drift into the studio for the rehearsal and some of the engineers had already taken their places in the control room.

"They need more engineers to handle a video show," said Paul. "They've got to monitor the picture as well as the sound. But I think you can squeeze into the control room if you want to see the show."

Through the thick glass panel of the control room, Don watched the cameramen dolly their cameras into position and a sound engineer place the microphone, which was suspended from a boom so it would be above camera

range, over to the spot where the first scene was to be shot. Presently the actors took their places and then light, brighter than Don had ever seen, flooded the studio. There were banks of fluorescent lights, and mercury-vapor lamps that get so hot they have to be cooled with water. And finally there were intense spotlights, turned directly on the actors.

As the play began and cameras were moved about in obedience to strange motions by the technician in charge, Don found the scene somewhat confusing. But over the shoulder of a video engineer he could see one of the television screens and here the action flowed as smoothly as if he had been watching a moving-picture screen. Between acts, the engineer switched to a camera at the far end of the studio where the kitchen set was now lighted up.

Paul stepped before the washing machine and introduced the radio actress who was to do a laundry-soap commercial. The actress, as she talked, went through the actual operation of washing clothes. At the end of the demonstration she lifted a few pieces of the spotless, almost dry clothes from the washer to clinch her argument for the soap. It was much more convincing, Don felt, than a spoken commercial.

"You looked like a matinee idol on that television screen," Don said to Paul as they left the studio after the telecast. "You've got that show for keeps."

"It was only experimental," said Paul.

"It looked more like magic. That's the side of radio I'd like to get into some day."

A page came up to Don. "Mr. Graham has been looking everywhere for you," he said.

Wes seemed a trifle irritated when Don walked into his office.

"I was watching the video rehearsal," said Don.

"That's okay," said Wes. "I didn't want you for anything too important. I thought you'd be interested in the coffee show."

Don knew that the program, if the sponsor bought it, would go on the full network at a choice time every night. It was a spot any announcer would like. Don dropped into a chair.

"Are they ready to audition it?" he asked.

"They don't even want to go that far. They've dropped it."

Don had not counted too heavily on getting the program to announce, but, now that the sponsors had turned thumbs down, he felt he might have had something to do with the failure.

"I hope it wasn't my plugs that killed it," he said.

"These coffee people don't know what they want," said Wes. "But they don't want anything we've been able to offer them. We might as well give up."

"But we won't," said Don.

"Of course not. It's too nice a slice of business."

Don was still thinking about the program when he stepped out for a quick bite with Paul at noon.

"I wish I could pitch up an idea they'd go for," he said.

"Well, don't sit up nights waiting for inspiration," said Paul. "They've listened to dozens of shows. I'm beginning to think some other web is paying them to annoy us."

"It won't hurt to try."

"It's your brain. If you want to cudgel it, it's all right with me."

A number of ideas occurred to Don but, when he thought them out, he always discovered some possible objection. The trouble in most cases was a discouraging lack of originality. Twice before summer ended he suggested audience-participation shows with new twists, but Garry Bell shook his head. The latter wanted to have a program ready by the time the big-name performers returned to the air in the fall, but nobody was able to turn up an idea with promise. In September Don drew a job that for a time crowded everything else out of his thoughts.

On his September fifteenth program, he broadcast news about a hurricane that was making up in the Caribbean. All next day he kept close watch on the teletypes to see whether the storm would strike close to Silver Beach.

He had never actually seen a tropical hurricane but all his life he had heard about the fearful destruction such a blow leaves in its wake, and he had often seen people in Silver Beach pull boats from the water and fasten down shutters when one threatened. The erratic path of the present storm whirled toward the Bahamas, across the Straits of Florida from Silver Beach, and Don wired his mother and father to make sure they were safe. Happily, the storm veered out to sea and Don felt a sense of relief.

Storm warnings were being hoisted along the Carolina coast, however, and the hurricane, after passing Cape Hatteras, turned almost due north and fears began to be felt for even more northerly states. Don reported the progress of the storm that evening on his newscast. The

following day it seemed that the hurricane would strike the New Jersey coast but again it swung eastward and southern New Jersey was spared.

Late in the afternoon, a drenching, wind-driven rain began to lash New York and the Weather Bureau predicted the storm would hit New England with destructive force. About five o'clock, Paul dashed into the small office where Don was writing the news into the script for his newscast.

"Forget that script!" Paul shouted. "We're leaving."

"But—" began Don.

"Wes is taking care of your newscast. This hurricane is going to hit New England smack-dab in the middle. And we're covering it!"

Chapter 18

It was getting dark when Paul reached the Bronx and turned into the Boston Post Road against a wind-driven wall of rain. So much water cascaded down the windshield that the wipers could not brush it off and Don wondered how Paul could see the road. Every time the car passed over a low spot it splashed water up against the floor with such force that the car shuddered. Don had no fear about the drive ahead but he was decidedly uncomfortable in his wet clothes. Both he and Paul had stopped to put on overshoes and raincoats, but even the dash in and out of the hotel had been long enough to soak their hats and the legs of their trousers.

"We'd have been drier," said Paul, "if we hadn't stopped."

"Don't mind a little thing like getting drowned," said Don.

"We're going to get a whole lot wetter when we get out of this car," went on Paul. "I don't know why they can't keep these hurricanes down in Florida where they belong."

"You're speaking of the state I love," said Don, laughing. "I never saw a blow down there. I had to come north to find one."

"Well, you've got one now. This is terrific. Look over on the left. There's an elm tree down already. And the blow hardly started. All we need is to run into a tree lying across the road."

"Where are we headed?" asked Don.

"New London. That's where the storm is going to hit the hardest, according to the Weather Bureau."

"Wouldn't it have been faster to take the train?"

"The trains can't get through. The New Haven skirts the shore of Long Island Sound all the way and some of the track is under water."

Don peered ahead at the trees, bending and whipping violently in the wind. The road was covered with a litter of leaves and broken limbs and the car slithered uncomfortably from time to time as the wheels struck a mass of leaves. At intervals, Don saw other cars standing helplessly along the roadside, their ignition dead from the drenching rain.

"We might make better time on the Merritt Parkway," said Don.

"Probably," said Paul, "but that doesn't hit many

towns. We want to see what the storm is doing to places where people live."

The farther they drove, the more fiercely the wind blew. Don could feel the car lurch as great blasts struck it and he saw Paul struggling to keep it on the road. After they passed New Haven they saw more and more fallen trees and, over long stretches, broken telegraph poles dragging the wires to earth. Near Saybrook a forty-foot cabin cruiser had been blown clear out of the Connecticut River and up to within a dozen paces of the highway.

"If this gets much worse," said Don, "it won't do us much good to get to New London. All the wires will be down."

"We'll broadcast on stand-by power," said Paul.

As the car approached New London, darkness fell and Don could distinguish nothing except the trees and buildings which the headlights picked out along the road. Electric current had failed and the streets were dark. Windows in buildings were a dim, yellow glow against the night's blackness. The streets of the city were almost impassable with fallen trees, wind-battered store signs and windrows of roofing material.

"This isn't pretty," said Don, "but it's one story you don't need a script to broadcast. You could ad lib this stuff all night."

"I hope we don't have to," said Paul.

The only persons on the street as he parked the car almost a block from the local FBS station were firemen, trying to clear away debris, and telephone and power company linemen, striving to restore service.

"We're going to have to wade the rest of the way," said Paul. Don followed him out of the car. Paul looked

around in surprise. "It's all over!" he exclaimed. "The wind's died down."

"That means we're right in the center of the storm," said Don. "It's always a dead calm. But in a few minutes the other side will hit us from behind. It will be just as bad as what we've gone through."

"Sort of slipping us the rabbit punch. Let's get up to the studios and see if they've got anything for us to do."

There was something eerie about the studios. Instead of the bright, cheerful light Don had come to associate with broadcasting studios, the place was a fantasy of long, wavering shadows, cast by numerous candles and one kerosene lamp. The current generated by the stand-by Diesel-powered generator was being hoarded to supply the actual broadcasting equipment.

Otis Hardy, the station manager, was moving around the half-lighted station like the ruler of a strange spirit world. Paul found him hurrying out of the one studio that was being used.

"You can go on any time you're ready," he said. "But I may have to interrupt you. All the wires are down, so the radio stations are the only means of getting messages out of New London tonight. Except for a few hams, of course. See much damage on the way up?"

"Quite a bit," said Paul, "but nothing like this town. You really stepped into a haymaker."

"It's frightful," said Hardy. "Boats washed all the way up to the railroad depot. And the water's getting higher every minute. If it reaches the basement of our building, we're through." He held his wrist toward a candle to read the time. "Want to go on now?"

"We could," said Paul. "Don and I will ad lib about

fifteen minutes on what we saw coming up. Then I'd like to get out around town for a while to see what's happening."

"If you've got any sense," said Hardy, "you'll stay indoors."

"We didn't drive all the way up here just to be cozy."

"It's your funeral. And I'm choosing my words."

For fifteen minutes, Paul and Don described their experiences on the drive from New York. An FBS station near New York picked up the broadcast and the program was rebroadcast over the regular FBS network.

Hardy came into the studio as they signed off. "You made it sound plenty real," he said. "Are you still determined to go wandering around town? The wind's starting to rise again."

"It looks as if you were right, Don," said Paul. "But we'll have to take a look anyway." He turned to Hardy. "Like to go with us?"

Hardy shook his head. "Not even if I could," he said. "But, as it happens, I can't leave. Too many police and Red Cross messages to handle. We got an SOS a minute ago from a little town on the coast over toward Westerly, Rhode Island. Lights and power gone—and no phone service. Houses tumbled right into the water. Lord knows how many are dead."

Paul grabbed Don's arm. "What are we waiting for?"

Hardy looked at him in amazement. "You're not going over there?"

"Nowhere else. What's the name of the place?"

"Aldrich," said Hardy, "but you can get the story right here in the station. The firemen who came over for help are still here."

"What do you say?" Paul asked Don.

"We'd better get it first-hand," said Don.

"See you later," said Paul starting to leave. He and Don stopped only long enough to put on their hats and raincoats, then ran down to the street. Both turned their backs against the wind as they emerged from the building, but even then the raging force of the gale carried them several yards down the flooded sidewalk before they could regain their balance and turn toward the car.

"I hope we can get started," said Don.

"That won't be any trouble. What I hope is we can keep that jalopy of mine on the road."

As Paul expected, the car started readily. He turned up Bank Street. "I used to know this country well," he said, "but I haven't been here for several years except for the boat races. I hope I can find the way." He pushed cautiously through the littered streets, and made a turn to the right. "So far, so good," he said. "There's the bridge."

The wind struck the car with a violence that made Don clutch at the seat. The car swung crazily to the left despite Paul's effort to hold it in the right lane.

"I'll be glad when we get across the Thames," said Paul. "This bridge is a long one."

After a struggle that seemed to last hours, the car reached the eastern end and began to descend. Presently, it reached the comparative shelter of trees and scattered buildings, which broke the tremendous sweep of the wind. Both Don and Paul breathed more easily.

But the relief was only temporary. The rest of the ride to Aldrich was a nightmare. Once Paul had to turn out

to clear the prow of a motor boat which had been tossed up to the road. Twice he stopped while he and Don tugged and strained to clear the road of fallen trees. A little farther on, they came to the roof of a house which almost blocked the road. The headlights showed the house from which it had been blown, standing beside the road, a headless victim of a reign of terror.

"We ought to be getting mighty close to Aldrich," said Paul. "If I remember right, it's around the next bend and down the hill. There's a small stream through the town."

When the car slid down the hill, Don saw no small stream through the town, but a maelstrom of water, cluttered with debris. "This looks like the end of the line," he said.

"We'll have to get across somehow," said Paul. He unlatched the door and the wind almost tore it from the hinges. Don followed him out into the wind-whipped downpour. At first the only sounds were the beating of the rain, the fitful whine of the wind and the angry rush of the swollen stream.

"I don't think we can make it," said Paul.

After a moment's silence, he turned back toward the car. "There's no use trying it. We might as well start back to New London."

Don had just put a hand on the door handle when he heard a plaintive cry.

"Did you hear that?" he asked Paul.

"Nothing but the storm."

"Sounded like a cry for help," said Don.

Both stood tensely for a moment, trying to catch a repetition of the sound.

"There it is again," said Don. "Down near the water on the right. Sounds like a child."

As if they had both heard a starting signal, Paul and Don ran down to the water. They could see nothing in the blackness but again they could hear the cry.

"Run back to the car," said Paul, "and turn it enough to throw the headlights over here to the right."

After turning the car so that the headlights stabbed the night in the direction from which the cry had come, Don hurried down again to the water's edge. Paul was pointing to a skiff a dozen feet out in the swirling water. In it was seated a thoroughly frightened boy of about seven. The boat bobbed and spun like a chip as tree branches, fence palings and roof shingles eddied about it. The boy cried out again and Don stepped out into the water.

"Come back!" yelled Paul. "It's over your head out there."

Don's next step put him in water up to his waist and he turned back reluctantly. "We've got to get him," he said.

"If we could find a pole—" began Paul. He started to walk along the edge of the water but tripped over the limb of a fallen tree, and went down heavily. Don glanced swiftly at the boat, trying to fix its position in his mind and its probable course. Then he went to Paul's aid.

"Are you all right?" asked Don.

Paul groaned as he tried to stand. "Must have torn something in my leg," he said.

Don helped Paul to the car and made him comfortable, then he returned to the water. Stripping off his coat and shoes, he jumped into the flood and swam in pursuit

of the skiff. A few strokes took him out of range of the car headlights and in the darkness the flotsam bruised his head and arms. But he was soon alongside the skiff. He tried to tow the boat toward the bank but the current was too strong. He pulled the boy into the water. A few powerful strokes carried him to safety.

"Hurt, sonny?" asked Paul when Don lifted the boy into the car.

"I want my daddy," said the boy.

"That's a large order," said Paul. "We'd better get moving."

The boy cried a little as Don turned the car around and started toward New London. The wind was still raging and more litter was constantly being blown across the road.

"We'll certainly have something to tell the folks about when we go on the air again," said Don, swerving to clear an up-ended chicken house.

"If we ever get back," said Paul.

But, though the driving was difficult, they had no trouble until they were about a mile from the bridge. There, a huge elm lay squarely across the road. Don braked the car to a stop, and started to turn it around. "We'll see whether there's another road."

He had hardly completed the turn when the headlights of an oncoming car flashed into their eyes. He dimmed his headlights and stopped. As the other automobile drew closer, Don saw that it was a highway patrol car. He got out, and walked up the road a few steps to meet it.

"Any other way to get to the bridge?" he asked.

The square-jawed sergeant next to the driver shook his head. "Nope. This is as far as we go."

"But we've got to get back," said Don. "We have to go on the air with a story on this storm. Besides," he added, "we've got a kid in the car we pulled out of the water over in Aldrich."

"You have?" asked the sergeant with professional interest. "Let's have a look at him."

Opening the door of Paul's car, the sergeant questioned the boy a few seconds. His father had put him in the skiff, the boy said, and had gone back into the house for his mother, but the painter broke and the skiff drifted free.

"I'll have to tell the barracks," said the sergeant. "Maybe they can get word to the kid's parents. I don't know how. But it's worth tryin'."

Suddenly Don grabbed Paul's arm. "If that patrol car is equipped with radio, why can't we broadcast right here? They could pick us up over in New London and rebroadcast us."

"That's marvelous!" said Paul. "Think we could, sergeant?"

The sergeant rubbed his chin. "I dunno. I can ask the barracks." He returned to the patrol car and reported the rescue of the boy. A minute later, he and the driver stepped out of the car. "They want to talk to you," said the sergeant to Don. "Me and Riley will set in your car till you're through."

"Think you can walk that far, Paul?" said Don.

"I'd like to. This is going to make history or something. But you'll have to take it."

Minutes passed while Don, wet and cold, sat in the police car pressing the phone instrument to his ear. At last,

the police barracks told him that the New London station was ready.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen," said Don. "We're speaking to you from a highway patrol car just across the river from New London. The rain is beating against the windows with the power of a fire hose. The wind is lunging at the car like a mad bull. We've just come from Aldrich, the town that seems to be taking the greatest punishment of any." . . . Then simply but forcefully, he told the story of the town's plight.

Chapter 19

It was past noon next day when Don sat up in his hotel bed and sneezed. The sound awakened Paul, who stretched himself in the other bed and yawned. "Catching something?" he said.

"I hope not," said Don. "I want to get back to New York in time for my broadcast this evening."

Paul turned over and shut his eyes. "Lie down," he said. "Start worrying and the first thing you know you'll have pneumonia."

Don lay down, and almost immediately dozed off. When he awoke again he was still tired, for it had been after seven o'clock that morning when he got into bed, but aside from another sneeze or two he felt no ill effects from his soaking. Paul, still in his pajamas, was limping away from the window.

"You'd never think we had a hurricane last night," he said when he heard Don stirring about. "It's a beautiful day to drive back."

"How's your leg?" asked Don.

"Still hurts but I can hobble on it."

Don looked at his watch. It showed two o'clock. "If you can make it," he said, throwing himself from the bed, "we ought to get started."

"Not before I have breakfast," said Paul. "Then we'll have to stop at the studios. They might want us to go on the air with an aftermath story."

They ate a leisurely breakfast in the room and, after dressing, went to the studios. Electric and phone service both had been restored and the local station was broadcasting as usual.

"It was tough enough for us last night," said Paul, "but it must have been a lot tougher for electric and phone linemen. You certainly have to hand it to those guys."

Otis Hardy told them that Wes wanted them both to return to New York.

"Heard anything about the kid Don rescued?" asked Paul.

"The police took him back to his family this morning," said Hardy. "The boy and both his parents are okay."

As Paul climbed into the car for the long drive down to New York, he was a little disgruntled. "Hurry back to New York, they say," he complained. "That's the way it is in radio. You risk your neck to give them something special. And that's the thanks you get."

"They always seemed fair to me," said Don.

"Yes? Well, wait till you've been around longer."

They stopped at Bridgeport for dinner and reached the FBS studios in New York about nine o'clock. Wes had left word at the reception desk asking them to come directly to his office.

"Welcome home," he said, rising to greet them, "FBS is proud of you. We put it over the other chains like a Texas leaguer over a shortstop's head. That broadcast of yours from the police car wowed even the tank towns."

Don glanced at Paul, who merely shrugged.

"Okay, Paul," said Wes. "You can't pay your hotel bill with thanks, as you say. How would a bonus do?"

"You don't actually mean *money?*" said Paul.

"It'll look enough like it to fool people."

"We can use it," said Paul.

"Thanks a lot," said Don.

"I just remembered, Don." said Wes as they were turning to leave. "Garry Bell wants to see you in the morning." He saw Don raise his eyebrows. "It hasn't anything to do with the hurricane coverage," he added hastily.

Out in the corridor, Don said to Paul, "Must be a secret mission or something."

"There's one thing you don't have to worry about," said Paul. "You don't get a bonus and the bounce at the same time."

Bell came straight to the point when Don saw him next morning. "We're going to pitch up some more ideas for this confounded coffee gang," he said. "Got any sure-fire winners you feel like contributing?"

Don looked at him blankly. "We've tried about everything that's ever been heard of. I guess we'll have to try something absolutely original."

"Not necessarily," said Bell. "It's a case of finding the weakness of these particular sponsors. They're human, so they must have one. I thought the idea we gave them

on Latin-American history would hit them in a soft spot, but it didn't."

Don ran his fingers through his hair and studied the ceiling. "I've been thinking over a couple of things," he said, "but they haven't jelled yet." He looked at Bell. "How soon would you have to have something?"

"The sooner the better."

"I'll see what I can do," said Don. "But I didn't help much the last time."

"Keep trying."

Don was too busy the rest of the morning to give much thought to Bell's request. At noon he left a little early to have lunch with Daphne and her aunt. Daphne had phoned him at his apartment the night before to congratulate him on his hurricane broadcasts and had insisted that he have lunch with her next day to tell about his experiences.

"I had no idea radio announcing would ever be so dangerous," she said after Don had sketched his adventures during the storm.

"You rescued a boy, didn't you?" asked Daphne's aunt.

"Well, I happened—"

"Oh don't be afraid to tell us about it. Modesty is a virtue you can carry too far."

Reluctantly Don told about pulling the child from the water. "But that was night before last," he said. "Next week everybody will have forgotten about it. You know the old radio saying, 'Hero today, bum tomorrow.' "

"But I don't believe it," said Daphne.

"It may be true as far as I'm concerned," said Don.

"I've got to think up an idea for a new show and I can't spark a thing."

"You never used to have any trouble down in Silver Beach."

"That was different," said Don. "Any idea was a good one down there." He broke a roll thoughtfully. "When I get in a spot like this, I wish I were back in Silver Beach —announcing the program for you and Marvin Caywood."

"You know," said Daphne, "I had a letter from Marvin last week."

"He's making quite a name for himself in Miami," said Don, "or so Pete Joslyn told me when I was down home last spring."

"He isn't satisfied. He says his band is getting more popular every day, but he wants to get out of Miami."

"Is that the boy who has the Latin-American band?" asked her aunt.

Before Daphne could answer, Don struck the table with his open palm and exclaimed, "I've got it!"

"I certainly hope it isn't contagious," said Daphne's aunt.

"It's an idea, Aunt Letty," explained Daphne. "I've seen Don get them before."

"It seemed more like an electric shock."

Daphne looked at Don. "What is it," she asked, "a new show?"

Don took a sip of coffee. "I don't know. When it first struck me, it looked like a natural for a sponsor we've been working on for a year. But it's so simple somebody must have thought of it before."

"There's very little new under the sun," said Daphne's aunt. "It's the way it's presented that counts."

"We'd just been speaking of Marvin," said Daphne. "Does he have anything to do with the idea?"

"You can't expect Don to reveal network secrets," said her aunt, smiling.

"It isn't that," said Don quickly. "I want to talk it over first with Garry Bell. When he starts cutting down ideas, he reminds me of a man mowing hay."

Don was not able to find Bell in his office until late in the afternoon, a half hour before time to start getting his script together for his six o'clock newscast. Bell was tired after a strenuous day of rehearsals and his response to Don's greeting was spiritless.

"I've got an idea that might appeal to the coffee people," said Don.

"See me tomorrow," said Bell. "They've waited long enough to make up their minds. Another day won't bankrupt them."

"But I've been thinking about it all afternoon," persisted Don. "And unless you kill it I'll be thinking about it all night."

"Okay," said Bell, wearily. "Let's have it fast."

Don pulled a chair up to the desk. As he spoke, he leaned forward earnestly.

"These coffee people import all their coffee from Latin America," he said, "Brazil, Guatemala and countries like that. A show with a Latin-American flavor ought to be a natural."

"We tried them on that historical highlight series," said Bell drily.

"But the one I've got in mind is a musical—a Latin-American band—"

"I could think of several things more original."

"This band has plenty of stuff," said Don. "It's playing one of the biggest hotels in Miami and has a show on the air three times a week. The arrangements are terrific and the boys really know how to play them."

Bell shook his head. "A band won't carry a half hour net show."

"I know," said Don. "But a couple of stand-out Latin-American stars would. There's a Brazilian soprano named Inez singing at a hotel uptown. She's a sensation. And Ted Wiley has a Mexican guitarist and comedian on his program named Manuel Avâcho. With a good 'emcee,' that ought to make a real show."

Bell rocked slowly in his swivel chair and pinched his lower lip. After a minute's thought he shook his head. "I couldn't bring a band all the way up from Miami."

"You don't have to," said Don. "They can cut a record down there and send it up."

"That's an idea. Tell them to go ahead, if you really think they've got what it takes."

Don jumped to his feet. "Do you think we can get Inez and Avacho?"

"I wouldn't worry about that yet," said Bell. "Wait till we hear the band."

"Okay."

"And when they make that record tell them to get some variety in it," said Bell. "And I want to know who does their arranging."

"Marvin Caywood—the leader."

"What! How did a guy with a name like that sneak into a Latin-American band?"

"His mother is Cuban," said Don.

"That name would ruin him. Let me know how you get along. We have to move fast."

That evening, Don sent a night letter to Marvin. He worded the telegram carefully so Marvin would not jump to the conclusion that a contract was being offered him. Still he wanted him to know the opportunity was genuine. Next day, as he waited impatiently for an answer, Don realized he was asking Marvin to go to a good deal of trouble and expense for what he knew was actually a doubtful reward. The afternoon passed without a reply, and Don became puzzled. He felt that Marvin would answer even if he rejected the suggestion. But shortly after dinner, a page boy brought him the telegram:

"Making record tomorrow," it said. "Will ship immediately. Thanks for the plug. Marvin."

Three days passed before the record arrived. Don wanted to play it back for Bell but the latter was tied up with appointments and rehearsals so Don waited a day until Bell had more leisure. When Don told him the record was ready, Bell asked Wes to accompany them to a small studio for the playback. Don dropped the needle into the groove and sat down to study Bell's face as they listened.

Even Don was surprised at the unusual effects achieved by Marvin in his arrangements of rhumbas, tangos, congas and sambas. The music had a fire and lilt that made it almost impossible to sit still. The intricate rhythms of the dances were faultless. "They've got to

like this," Don told himself. "That music is out of this world."

But, though his eyes seldom left Bell's face, Don saw no flicker of appreciation. And, when the record ended, Bell simply turned to Wes and asked in a matter-of-fact tone, "Well, what do you think of it?"

"I think it's about tops," said Wes.

"So do I," said Bell.

Don, as he rose to take the record off the turntable, felt as if the floor was carpeted with deep-piled velvet. The toughest hurdle, he decided, had been taken, and little remained except to sign the singers. But Bell immediately raised new obstacles.

"We'll have to find out about their contracts in Miami," he said. "We'll probably want them to come up here for several days. But we won't know when till we see what we can do about the vocalist and comedian."

Up to now, Don had said nothing to Paul about the program idea. He imagined the latter must have heard rumors but he did not like to talk about it himself until definite progress had been made. Now that Bell had approved Marvin's band, Don lost no time in speaking to Paul. Lounging in a modernistic metal-and-leather chair in his favorite announcers' room, Paul listened courteously until Don had outlined his idea for the program.

"If the band's as good as you say," he said, "it ought to be a fairly good show. But if I were you I wouldn't let my hopes soar too high. We've tried everything but a revival meeting on those caffein caterers and they're still sitting on their hands."

Don had learned to respect Paul's judgment, but he

did not share his pessimism about the proposed program. "I thought the Latin-American angle ought to appeal to them," he said.

"Don't get me wrong," said Paul. "I'm not criticising your show. It's the kind of stuff lots of listeners go for —if the comedy's fast and the singers and band are smooth. But I just don't believe these coffee people can be sold a radio show. They're in love with newspaper and magazine advertising."

"It would be a big break for me if they did happen to like this new show."

"I suppose you're figuring on 'emceeing' it?" said Paul.

"I'd like a shot at it," admitted Don, "but I don't think I stand much chance."

"I think you could handle it. But that would be up to the sponsor, more or less. They might like the way you do the plugs."

"I don't care what I do. Announcing wouldn't be too bad," said Don.

"*I'd* settle for a spot like that," said Paul. "But, of course, it would be better to be in the show. There's more dough in it—and there's always a chance to put yourself over with the audience. Once you get a following you don't have to worry. But," he said, frowning slightly, "you'd need a little Spanish dialect in a show like that."

"I used to speak Spanish pretty well," said Don.

"That doesn't mean you can do dialect. But it doesn't matter what I think. The sponsor's vote is the only one they count."

Don knew as well as Paul that in the lives of radio entertainers the sponsor is a despot. A shake of his head

can shatter the hopes of an aspiring comedian or singer; his nod can start a talented, young artist on the climb to stardom and fortune. Don could only hope that in his case the sponsor would nod.

He heard nothing from Bell for ten days. Then late one afternoon a page summoned him. When he entered the office, Bell was brisk and businesslike.

"We're all set on this end with the coffee show," he said. "I've straightened things out with both Inez and Manuel Avacho. Humphrey Swain has agreed to produce it. He's going to pick a top-flight writer to do the script. Wire that band leader of yours down in Miami and see how soon he can get his boys up here. We'll need them next week. We want the show to be clicking before we let the sponsors look at it."

Bell picked up a letter and started to read it, but Don deliberately overlooked his cue to leave.

"You'll need an 'emcee,' " he said.

"That's all settled," said Bell, without looking up. "Swain doesn't see any reason why you couldn't do it."

Chapter 20

WHEN Marvin arrived with his band, Don told him about Wes's insistance that he change his name. Marvin, to Don's surprise, raised no objection.

"I'm not going to let a little thing like a name keep me off the networks," he said. "Tell him to call me—Pereza. That's my mother's maiden name."

For the next week no one connected with the program had time to do much except rehearse and sleep. As producer, Humphrey Swain set a grueling pace. Don, who had often seen Swain about the station but had never worked with him, was deceived by his appearance. A big, fleshy man, he looked to Don like a person who would always take the easy way, but once he took charge of a studio rehearsal he became a virtual dynamo. And he was fresher at the end of a rehearsal than anybody in the cast.

As with most variety programs, the singer and comedian did not rehearse with the musicians at first, but Don

worked with both. Swain had insisted on having not one but three of the network's best script writers and gag men do the program. He cut and polished the dialogue himself until it glittered. Don found his own lines so bright and witty that it seemed almost anyone could get laughs with them. Swain was not so easily pleased.

"Spit out that honey, Marshall," he said after the first rehearsal. "You're not coaxing people to buy Dr. Pixey's Pain Pills. You're trying to make them laugh. Get some expression into it."

Before the next rehearsal, Don went over his lines with special care, deciding exactly what expression each one called for. But next day, Swain was still critical. "Slow down," he said before Don had read a half dozen lines. "We expect to get laughs with some of these lines. You'd talk right into them."

Don began to lose heart. He had not counted on being master of ceremonies but, now that he was, he hated to think he might fail to make good. "If Swain didn't think I could do the job," he asked Paul, "why did he pick me?"

"Were you the only one he bawled out?"

Don thought a moment. "He was pretty rough on everybody."

"Then I wouldn't worry."

Still Don felt uneasy. That evening he had dinner with Daphne and Marvin. Daphne, in a dark blue dinner gown that supplied exactly the right contrast for her blonde hair, tried not to seem too excited about the new program.

"There's a little more glamour here," she said, laughing, "than there used to be in the school cafeteria in

Silver Beach. You two have come a long way since then."

Neither Don nor Marvin replied.

"What's happened?" said Daphne. "Have I said something wrong?"

"No," said Don. He kept his eyes fixed on the table. "But I think I've *done* something wrong."

"But what could—"

"The show isn't going so well," said Marvin. "And Don thinks it's because *you're* not in it."

"Inez is an excellent soprano," said Daphne.

"That isn't the point," said Don. "The three of us got our start in radio together. Now I get an idea for what looks like a big show. I send for Marvin, but I never even think of you."

Daphne laughed. "I'd never do on a show like that. Besides—" she paused. "I was going to keep it secret but I suppose I'll have to tell you now. I'm going to audition for opera."

"Opera!" exclaimed Don and Marvin in unison.

"Oh, it isn't the Met. Just a company over in Philadelphia."

"That's wonderful," said Don.

"We always knew you'd do it," added Marvin.

"So you see," said Daphne, "I can't be in your show. But I'll be in the front row at the premier."

Rehearsal the next day went more smoothly and, though Swain was continually ordering the writers to point up lines and pleading with the performers to "get some life into it," his comments were less acid than they had been previously and at times he seemed almost pleased. After four strenuous days, he combined the re-

hearsals and announced that the prospective sponsors would audition the program two days later.

Don knew he was practically a radio veteran and auditions were now an old story, yet the nervousness of his earlier days at WNIJ returned as soon as Swain mentioned sponsors. The evening before the audition, Don fluffed several words on his six o'clock newscast. He had no real cause to worry since Swain was apparently satisfied with the program in dress rehearsal. Still Don knew the audition would be a fateful one. Here was an evening show on a coast-to-coast network almost within his grasp. His earnings would skyrocket, of course, but Don was more concerned with the effect on his standing in radio. Others might work for established stars and make far more money, but at least he would enter the small, select circle of really big-time radio announcers. He would, that is, if the sponsors liked the show.

The morning of the audition, Don was at the studios before eight o'clock although he did not go on the air with his first program—a daytime sustaining serial—until nine. He found Paul in the announcers' room when he came in after signing off on the serial. "When do you run the gantlet," Paul asked, "eleven o'clock?"

"If I last that long."

Regarding him appraisingly, Paul said, "You might as well relax. There's nothing you can do about it now." He lit a cigarette and blew out the match with a cloud of smoke. "I slipped into the control room during rehearsal yesterday. The show looked good to me."

"If *you* were only the sponsor!"

A few minutes before eleven, the entire cast assembled in Studio F. From where he stood beside a microphone

Don saw six men file into the sponsor's booth above the control room. Just the right number, Don reflected dolefully, to act as pall bearers. With their firm mouths, they seemed to be defying anyone to amuse them.

On the studio floor, everything was nervous activity. Marvin, on the podium, was glancing through the score while his guitars and saxophones ran through difficult passages. Inez, small and vivacious, sat chatting with Manuel Avacho, who occasionally fingered a pointed black mustache. One sound man, beside his table full of equipment, read over his script. Don stood with Tom Inness, the announcer who was to read the commercials. Humphrey Swain signaled from the control room and Marvin tapped his music stand with the baton. The studio was silent. A second later the "On Air" sign flashed and the audition was under way.

The band played a few bars of the signature song and Don stepped to the microphone to read the introduction. His throat was tight and the script trembled slightly in his hand but he was determined to do his best. He read so distinctly and with such well-placed emphasis that no one would have suspected his nervousness. As Don finished, Tom Inness read the opening commercial and Marvin began the first number, a catchy rhumba.

After Inez sang her first song, Don was ready at last for his debut as an entertainer. Manuel Avacho, speaking with his characteristically heavy Spanish accent, was the one who got the laugh lines but Don realized that the straight lines had to be read and timed exactly right or Manuel's comedy would fall flat. Don concentrated so hard on this portion of the program that he forgot his nervousness entirely and the dialogue went off without

a slip. Then Manuel played the guitar, with the band furnishing background music.

During the remaining minutes of the program, Don stole several glances at the sponsors but their stony faces revealed no emotion. He did notice that most of the group leaned forward on their chairs while Inez was singing but this could mean much or nothing.

The program finished almost on the second and Don watched the sponsor's group file out of the booth. One stout man lingered behind a moment to survey the studio but then he, too, disappeared. Marvin wiped his forehead with a handkerchief and stepped down from the podium. He came over to Don.

"Do you think we're in?" he asked.

"Even if we aren't," said Don, "they saw a swell show."

"How long does it take to find out, as a rule?"

Don gave a nervous laugh. "That gang will probably be standing outside the studio door and greet us with a chorus of 'No's!' "

Actually it was some time before anybody on the program knew the verdict. The sponsor's group went into a conference with Garry Bell and the network executives and had not emerged from the conference room when Marvin, Paul and Don went to lunch. The meeting was still going on when they returned to the studios.

About quarter past one, Don saw the coffee men filing down the corridor toward the elevators, their faces still somber. He waited anxiously for a call from Garry Bell but none came until almost three o'clock. Then Bell, chancing to pass Don in the corridor, asked, "Like to drop into my office for a minute?"

Don followed him into his private office like a boy

who is not sure whether his father is heading for the tool house to get the fishing tackle or to the woodshed for a shingle. Bell sat down and leisurely lit a cigarette. "Have a chair," he said.

"Well," said Bell as Don sat down, "we sold the coffee show right across the board. Twenty-six weeks on the full network."

For an instant, it seemed to Don that the room swayed, but then it steadied and he saw that Bell, for one of the few times in his career, was grinning broadly. Don found himself grinning, too, as he realized that all the long, hard work of building the show was to pay dividends. At last, he told himself, he was to be a featured artist on a coast-to-coast network program.

"We'll premier the first week in December," Bell was saying. "For one thing, we'll have to find another man for your newscast. The coffee people don't want you working for anybody else."

"That won't be hard," said Don. "Anybody could do that newscast as well as I."

Bell crushed out his cigarette. "Don't sell yourself short," he said. "You've got your break now, Don. If this show clicks, you'll go places fast."

During the next few weeks, the chief worry on everybody's mind was the listeners' reaction to the show. Network and sponsor might both like the program but the final judge would be the public. Of course, the program would continue for the twenty-six weeks in any event, but, if it failed to catch the listeners' fancy, it would then go off the air and everybody connected with it would have a failure to live down.

No one knew this better than Don, yet a mere ap-

pearance on a coast-to-coast program was a thrill in itself to anyone who hoped for a successful career in radio, and Don was no exception. He wrote his parents about his good fortune as soon as he could and next day he dropped a half serious, half bantering note to Pete Joslyn. Daphne wanted her aunt to give a celebration dinner at once, but both Marvin and Don objected.

"Wait till you hear the premier," said Don.

"And read the notices in *Variety*," said Marvin.

Don could see no particular reason to worry about the premier. Except for the commercial announcements, which would be rewritten and brought up to date by the sponsors' advertising agency, the program would be exactly the same as the one they had rehearsed so long. But he had reckoned without his friends and parents. Two days before the premier Don was awakened at his apartment by a call from Pete Joslyn. "You must be in the chips," said Don, "calling all the way from Miami."

"Shake yourself," said Pete. "I'm not in Miami. I'm downstairs in the lobby. How's about breakfast?"

As they ate breakfast, which Don had sent up from the dining room, Pete explained his presence. "I'd been intending to come up to see if there's any chance to syndicate my column," he said. "This looked like the only time I could do it and catch a radio premier on the same trip." He noticed that Don did not seem to be paying attention. "There isn't any question about getting in, is there?"

"Oh, no. None at all," said Don. "But it hadn't occurred to me before that we'd be playing to an audience. That's going to make it tougher, especially with Daphne and you out front."

"Always counting your bridges before they're built," said Pete. "Nobody will be rooting for you harder than Daphne and I."

As things turned out, Don was to have even more earnest well-wishers in the audience. The night before the premier he was called to the phone in one of the announcers' rooms. As he answered it, his eyes popped open in surprise. "Mother!" he exclaimed.

"I simply had to come up," said Mrs. Marshall. "Your father said he had business in New York, but I think he really came up to see your show."

Don took them to Greenwich Village for supper after he announced his last program of the day. His mother, he thought, looked even younger than when he had seen her the previous spring in Silver Beach, and her eyes were brighter. His father was in a jocular mood when Don first met him, but at supper he suddenly became grave.

"What I actually made the trip for, Don," he said, "was to see whether you'd changed your mind about going into the building business with me."

Don saw the twinkle in his eyes and answered with equal gravity: "See me after the show tomorrow night. I may jump at the chance."

The premier was broadcast from Studio B, not so large as Studio A where the symphony concerts were broadcast, but big enough to seat more than three hundred persons. Don, when he walked out of the wings onto the stage, saw that every seat was occupied, and noted especially that his parents, Daphne and her aunt and Pete were in the first row. Like the other men in the cast, he wore a dinner jacket and looked distinguished.

The dress shirt made him uncomfortable but so far as anyone in the audience could see he was entirely at his ease.

There was little need of applause signals during the program; the audience applauded willingly and laughed heartily at the comedy of Don and Manuel. After the sign-off, the hand clapping and cheering went on for almost three minutes.

Garry Bell came out of the control room to congratulate everyone in the cast. "The only thing that worries me," he said, "is getting enough trucks to haul the fan mail up from the post office in the morning."

"You think they'll really like it?" asked Don.

"They'll love it," said Bell. "Now don't any of you leave. We're all going down to George's place for a bite."

Don felt Marvin nudging him. "You're keeping your folks waiting," said Marvin.

As Don went down from the stage, Daphne grasped his left hand, his mother his right.

"The show was wonderful," said Daphne.

"You read your lines beautifully," said his mother.

"Worth a plug in the columns," added Pete.

Mr. Marshall looked at Don narrowly. "Made up your mind about going in with me?" he asked.

"I guess the only thing I'll ever build," said Don, laughing, "is radio shows. But what do you say if we all go up on the roof? We've got half an hour to kill before supper."

As they walked out on the roof, with the lights of Manhattan glowing like a jeweled web hundreds of feet below, Don felt an elation he had never before known. The clear, brisk air made his nostrils tingle as he drank in

deep breaths of it. His father and mother stood almost spellbound, looking down upon the city, its noise hushed at this height to a deep-toned hum. Don felt Daphne squeeze his hand.

"It must be a wonderful feeling, Don," she said, "to know you've reached the top."

Don smiled but shook his head. "Not quite the top. You see the spire of the Chrysler Building over toward the East River? In daylight you can see short rods sticking out up near the point. They're antennae for broadcasting television. That's *really* tops."