

THE EVENING NEWS  
a play by Steven Lehrer

CAST

- Oscar Klinger: Network anchor of the United States Broadcasting Company (USBC). A huge, hulking man, a star football player in college, now age 65. Although ill with heart disease, he still gives the impression of considerable physical strength.
- Dan Kleinbart: Producer of the USBC Evening News, a distinguished looking, smooth company man in his fifties.
- Jim Lake: Chairman of the United States Broadcasting Company, age 70 but youthful. He built the USBC almost from scratch, is a man who accepts power, and the deference of others, as his due. He frequently has a large cigar clamped between his teeth.
- Kitty Litter: A very attractive network correspondent in her early forties with a mild speech impediment, a "w" for "r" substitution.
- Frank Pangborn: A handsome self-confident correspondent in his mid forties, a loud, vital, boisterous man.
- Dick Evans: A young, obsequious desk assistant.
- Assistant Director (Sam Zuckerman): A company man in his forties.
- Delbert Knudson: A tiny man, Chinese, with thick glasses, who dresses foppishly and is quite effeminate, yet dangerous when armed. He speaks with a polished British accent.
- Lynn Meadows: A correspondent in her twenties; a young reporter
- Prelate: A conventionally dressed minister
- Cameraman: A network technician
- Dr. Singh: A very dark-skinned Indian physician with a full black beard and turban, dressed in a well-tailored three-piece business suit.

The entire action of the play takes place in the broadcast booth of the United States Broadcasting Company during the 1984 Democratic National Convention at Madison Square Garden in New York.

The scene is the broadcast booth of The United States Broadcasting Company in Madison Square Garden. There is a large anchor desk with space for at least three widely separated correspondents. On one corner of the desk is a small phone. A television monitor is stage right. An ancient Underwood Typewriter on a typing stand with chair is USR. A television camera on a camera pedestal is SL. The entrance door to the booth is USL. An entrance door to the control room is USR. There is a glass window for the control room near the door, but very little can be seen through it.

At the rise, OSCAR KLINGER and JIM LAKE are speaking. Initially only a spotlight is on them, and at first they should give the impression of two ordinary, elderly men talking about retirement. Only after the stage lights come up and the spotlight dims, after their first few lines, do we realize who they are.

ACT ONE

JIM

So how're you planning to spend your retirement, Oscar?

OSCAR

You're asking me already, Jim?

JIM

You should think about it. You've only got a few weeks left here.

OSCAR

I'll work my last few weeks, then I'll think about retiring.

JIM

But then you'll already be retired. Retirement's like a career. You didn't go through your career without definite career plans, goals, objectives. Retirement's the same.

OSCAR

During my career, I made my plans to reach a particular place. After I retire, I'm going to reach a particular place whether I plan or not.

JIM

Florida. You should think about Florida, Oscar.

OSCAR

I try not to.

JIM

Palm Beach is magnificent. You've been to my place. Doesn't that appeal?

OSCAR

A little out of my price range, Jim. Sorry.

JIM

Not the house. The ambience. Get yourself a condo. Why, those big buildings, they're full of widows. You'll have women chasing after you day and night.

OSCAR

My accident insurance policy doesn't have a herpes clause.

JIM

What about your guns, all those Lugers and Mausers and Brownings and Colts? You're still shooting, aren't you?

OSCAR

I sold them.

JIM

Whatever for? I know, you just couldn't bear to kill an animal, ecology and all that.

OSCAR

Not at all. Those animals weren't a good substitute for what I really wanted to shoot at.

JIM

Now, Oscar, you shouldn't take it so hard. You've been our anchorman since 1961 -- twenty-three years. It's time for a change, for us and for you.

OSCAR

I suppose.

JIM

You're a little bitter; that's understandable. But you shouldn't be.

OSCAR

Why sack me because I'm sixty-five, dammit?

JIM

I'm just the chairman of the company. It wasn't my decision. It was the news director's decision.

OSCAR

Bernie Goldfine does what you tell him. "It's Jim's candy store," isn't that his expression?

JIM

Our ratings are falling. Your news broadcast is now in third place, behind NBC. Every point costs us millions in advertising. We have our stockholders to think of.

OSCAR

Last month we were up two points.

JIM

Only because of Kathy Litter's interview with Bubbles LaRue.

OSCAR

A San Francisco topless dancer with three tits.

JIM

Kitty created a sensation with that interview. She's the best female interviewer, the best newswoman we have. CBS and ABC are mad to get her. Her book was a best seller.

OSCAR

Who would want to read a book with that title, *How to Talk to Practically Anybody Who's Not a Nobody*.

JIM

Kitty has an enormous public following.

OSCAR

I suppose that's why she's a contender for my job.

JIM

There's no decision yet.

OSCAR

I can't believe it. Kitty has a speech impediment. How can the anchor have a speech impediment?

JIM

She has a slight lisp; it only appears when she's highly agitated.

OSCAR

What do you mean, a slight lisp? It's a "W" for "R" substitution. Whenever she gets mildly nervous, she sounds like Elmer Fudd.

JIM

I told you, everything's up in the air.

OSCAR

You're thinking about Frank, too?

JIM

Of course we are. You know he's threatened to go over to CBS if we don't make him anchor.

OSCAR

My god, a dyslexic anchor. He can hardly write; he can't spell; he stumbles reading words over two syllables long.

JIM

Why does he have to write or spell? We have writers who can do that. They know which words he has trouble with, and they don't use them. He's one of the best news readers in the business. When he reads the news, he's sexy; people get excited. You, Oscar, you sound as though you're teaching a civics class. There's no thrill in your voice. You'd read the end of the world the same way you'd read the telephone book.

OSCAR

What about my Peabody award? Doesn't that mean anything? What have Frank and Kitty won?

JIM

They've won a following. Look, don't take it so personally. I happen to like your style. It's intellectual, highbrow. And, as I said, nothing's decided. (JIM pats OSCAR on shoulder, glances at wristwatch) Jeese! I'm supposed to meet the governor for a couple drinks -- got to get going.

(JIM exits. DICK EVANS, a desk assistant, hurries in, clutching a piece of paper, wire copy torn from a teletype. DICK is a very attractive young man in his early twenties, nattily dressed in blazer, tie, and nicely pressed slacks.)

DICK

Bulletin just off the AP wire, Mr. Klinger.  
(Hands paper to OSCAR)

OSCAR

(After reading bulletin) Where's Dan Kleinbart? Have you seen him?

DICK

He's down on the floor someplace. Shall I page him?

OSCAR

Yes. (DICK heads for exit.) Evans. (Dick stops)  
Evans, see if you can find Sam Zuckerman also.

(DICK nods and exits. DAN KLEINBART enters. He is a distinguished-looking producer in his mid-fifties. He wears no coat, but a nicely pressed shirt and silk tie. His convention press credentials hang around his neck by a chain. He carries a clipboard in his hand.)

DAN

What's up, Oscar? You want to change the lineup again?

OSCAR

Look at this, Dan. Where should we put it?

(Hands wire copy to DAN) You're the producer. I'll let you decide.

DAN

(Reads copy)

I don't believe it: Delbert Knudson again. He threatened to shoot the Commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service four years ago. I thought he was still in prison.

OSCAR

What do you mean? He was found not guilty by reason of insanity. He claimed that paying so much income tax had driven him crazy. They put him in Rockland State Hospital, in a ward for the criminally insane.

DAN

Some judge crazier than he is must have let him out.

OSCAR

So now he calls the White House, threatens to shoot the Democratic presidential candidate, in the midst of the Democratic National Convention.

DAN

Here's the lineup. All we've got left is twenty-five seconds in the number fourteen spot.

OSCAR

Come on, Dan, this is an important story. It needs more than twenty-five seconds.

DAN

So what am I supposed to pull for more time?

OSCAR

How about this piece, number twelve: Russian violinist defects. That's the seventh Russian violinist who's defected this year.

DAN

But how many of them defect to Red China?

OSCAR

The story is screwy. We shouldn't even use it yet. I think Dick Reynolds botched the interview. His Russian is terrible. No Soviet citizen defects because he can't find a decent Chinese restaurant in Moscow.

DAN

We're checking out the tape of the interview. Anne Garrels is going to listen to it. Her Russian is better than my English.

OSCAR

Look at this piece: number 25 on evolution, four minutes and forty seconds, all for the discovery of a little jaw bone in an African gopher hole. Cut it down to twenty seconds and give me the rest of the time for Delbert Knudson.

DAN

Twenty seconds? Are you kidding? We want to cover the whole theory of evolution. How can we get from slime to Nixon in twenty seconds?

(ASSISTANT DIRECTOR and CAMERAMAN enter. CAMERAMAN begins to adjust and place camera, puts headphone on head. ASSISTANT DIRECTOR puts headphone on head.)

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
Thirty seconds to the 5 PM lead in, Mr. Klinger.

OSCAR  
Look, Dan, you fit that piece on Knudson in. I'm going to lead with it.

DAN  
You win, Oscar -- as always.

(OSCAR puts on a blazer, shoots cuffs, runs a comb through his hair. He sits behind anchor desk at his place; ASSISTANT DIRECTOR helps him conceal wire as OSCAR inserts a small earpiece in his ear. ASSISTANT DIRECTOR walks out of camera view. Bright lights come on)

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
Stand by for air, ten seconds...nine...eight ...seven...six...five...four...three...two...one...

(Chattering of teletypes is heard, followed by voice over of ANNOUNCER)

ANNOUNCER  
This is USBC, The United States Broadcasting Company.

(A red light lights on top of camera)

OSCAR  
A demented man has just threatened the life of the democratic presidential candidate. Stay tuned to USBC for the local news in an hour and the USBC Evening News at seven o'clock. Tonight we will have special reports and interviews from the convention floor, here at Madison Square Garden in New York, from our correspondents Kitty Litter and Frank Pangborn. Thank you. This is Oscar Klinger.

(Red light on top of camera goes off. Bright lights on OSCAR go off. OSCAR relaxes, takes out earpiece, takes off coat. DAN, who has been out of camera view, sits down next to OSCAR.)

DAN  
(holding clipboard)  
Well, I guess I'll just have to eighty-six this story about Chrysler paying for Lee Iacocca's masseur again. Then you should have enough time for...

(OSCAR begins to cough violently. He holds a handkerchief over his mouth  
God, Oscar, have you been to your doctor?

OSCAR  
It's nothing. My heart's failing a little. Lungs congested.

OSCAR  
(lights a cigarette and takes a few deep drags.)  
Smoking helps it -- the nicotine constricts the vessels.

DAN

I think you need to get away from this stress. Maybe it's a blessing in disguise that you don't have to anchor much longer.

OSCAR

Well disguised.

DAN

You think you need it; you don't. I've worked with you twenty years. Every day, you get made up; you put on the high heels, the fucking girdle, and you go to war. Anyone else would say "screw it" now and then.

OSCAR

I like war.

DAN

You like the power, charging out of your office late in the afternoon: "Get Irving at the State Department", "Get London on the phone", "Find out what Dick knows about this budget bill". You even seem to like the fans fawning over you. You chat with them when they interrupt your meals in restaurants. How you've never been killed by a mob of them in a public place, I don't know.

OSCAR

Nelson Rockefeller saved me there. You know what he once told me? Always keep moving. Chat, wave or shake hands, but never stop, even for a second, or you've had it.

DAN

You know why you need the power? You're too anal. An anal personality has the need to control everything. Your gun collection means the same: anal people like to collect things.

OSCAR

You've convinced me. I'm anal.

DAN

I've told you to get a little therapy. You never listened to me. A few years with a good analyst can help anybody.

OSCAR

Now that I'm almost finished career-wise, analysis might be unnecessary.

DAN

You've had bad luck.

OSCAR

When Dan Rather started wearing those sweaters, I was through.

DAN

Even now, if you could raise your Nielsen ratings by just a few points, they'd keep you on.

OSCAR

I don't know how.

DAN

You were our hottest correspondent in the old days. I remember in the fifties, when the Stockholm hit the Andrea Doria in the middle of the Atlantic, how you hired that plane yourself and flew over the wreck with a cameraman. What an eye-witness report. The other programs had their pictures narrated by somebody who hadn't been at the scene.

OSCAR

It was sensational. Now everyone is doing eye-witness reports.

DAN

Did Fred Friendly call you again?

OSCAR

Last week. Last Tuesday.

DAN

He wants to make you professor of journalism at Columbia?

OSCAR

I suppose.

DAN

Oscar, you should take that Job.

OSCAR

I'll think about it, but teaching journalism to a bunch of kids is quite a step down for someone who's been doing the real thing his whole life.

DAN

Come on, Oscar. Do you really think you're a Journalist?

OSCAR

What a question -- of course, I'm a journalist.

DAN

I mean now.

OSCAR

When I was at the Kansas City Star in the thirties, I was a journalist. When I was the chief UPI correspondent in London in the forties, I was a journalist. How many reporters do you know who flew in B-17 bombing raids over Germany? I'm just as much a Journalist now as I ever was.

DAN

This isn't journalism; this is show business. Why deny it? Don't you know that denial is one of the primary Freudian defense mechanisms?

OSCAR

You ought to know about show business, Dan: you and your casting couch.

DAN

The couch came with my Office.

OSCAR

You're one of the worst heterosexual harassers in the whole place.

DAN

I have a very strong id and a weak superego.

OSCAR

You're just plain horny. Every young woman who applies for a correspondent's Job, you give her the same line: You tell her she looks very good on camera and her writing is high quality. Then you tell her she has to fuck you; otherwise, she doesn't get the Job.

DAN

So what? So what, as long as she gets what she wants.

OSCAR

Aren't we losing talented candidates who don't want the job badly? Maybe that's one of the reasons our ratings have fallen.

DAN

Our ratings are down because your Q number is down. I just got a look at the latest Q's. Of a thousand people the Marketing Evaluation Company polled, 500 said they were familiar with you. Of those 500, fifty said you were one of their favorites. That's a Q rating of 10. Cronkite almost always had at least a 33.

OSCAR

Even so, only forty percent of the success of the broadcast depends on the anchor. Sixty percent depends on the quality of the newsgathering and the presentation.

DAN

You sound now like you sound on the air: numbers, figures, statistics. How can you expect to hang onto your job if you don't jazz up your act?

OSCAR

I am a journalist. My act, as you call it, is reporting the news, accurately, impartially, fairly.

DAN

Oscar, you are not at The New York Times. Our viewers are the lower middle class: the steelworker with a beer can in his hand; the steelworker's wife with the curlers in her hair, who thumbs old copies of COSMOPOLITAN in the beauty salon, trying to liven up her sex life.

OSCAR

Whether they're steelworkers or the president of United States Steel, the news is still the news.

DAN

I try to save your job for you; I try to tell you; don't give them news, give them vaudeville: a little soft shoe, a little sock-'em-in-the-gut, a little sex, a little blood, a little Hollywood gossip, and always keep it moving. Why won't you listen to me? Even now they'd keep you on if you could just raise our Nielsen rating a few points.

OSCAR

I want to stay on, but I refuse to compromise my journalistic integrity.

DAN

Who's talking about journalistic integrity? Am I asking you to read commercials? Am I telling you to push vaginal deodorants and remedies for athlete's foot?

OSCAR

What about the movie review you wanted to run the other night?

DAN

An important new film: it's going to be a triumph, a landmark, an immortal work of cinematic art.

OSCAR

*Exhausted* starring Big John Holmes?

DAN

Hollywood is big with our audience. And you know Jim Lake likes us to run pieces on his celebrity pals.

OSCAR

Jim Lake may be the chairman of the United States Broadcasting Company, but I am the editor of this news broadcast. I determine what stories are included and what stories are not.

DAN

Be a little flexible. Anyone else around here would throw himself in front of a train in Times Square if Jim Lake or Bernie Goldfine told him to.

OSCAR

What does Jim Lake know about news? A two-bit tobacco peddler who buys a television station.

DAN

He was one of the largest cigar manufacturers in the northeast: Rabbi's Kosher Cigars.

OSCAR

He thinks he's a genius, that he knows it all, because he beat out his biggest competitor, the Priest Tobacco Company, with a dumb slogan: "Call for a Rabbi instead of a Priest."

DAN

He knows entertainment; you have to admit it. He took a tiny, foundering television station and built it into a network that rivals the big three.

OSCAR

When he was in the cigar business, his name was Lashevsky. Now it's Lake. If only he would fall into his new name and drown.

DAN

Do I detect an undertone of jealousy?

OSCAR

Jealous. Why should I be jealous?

DAN

After all, some people are born with the ability to run a business, with the knack for making money; others aren't. It's like being born with the talent to play the violin.

OSCAR

In other words, Jim Lake is Heifetz; I'm Jack Benny.

DAN

What about that farm of yours in New Jersey?

OSCAR

Bad luck. I hired a manager who robbed me blind.

DAN

Even if he'd been honest, how could you have come out ahead with the deal you gave him?

OSCAR

That deal involved some very sophisticated tax planning.

DAN

Sure, oh sure. He'd keep the proceeds from the sale of the cows, and you'd keep the money made any natural gas emanating from the cow dung.

OSCAR

I was supposed to get a big energy tax credit for exploiting an alternative energy source.

DAN

And instead an energetic thief exploited you.

OSCAR

Look, Dan, I needed a tax shelter; I'm being eaten alive. Every time I mail in my quarterly estimated payment to the IRS, it's a struggle stifling my urge to scribble obscenities on the check.

DAN

So you ended up losing the whole farm to the bank.

OSCAR

Biggest write off I ever had. Another couple like that and I'll never pay tax again.

DAN

Another couple like that and you'll end up in debtors' prison.

OSCAR

I am eminently solvent.

DAN

Who are you kidding, Oscar? They could plug the Holland Tunnel with the money you've lost. Do you have any left at all?

OSCAR

I'm a journalist. I never pretended to be the world's most astute investor.

DAN

But the things you invested in. I still remember that cemetery company you wanted me to put money into.

OSCAR

One of the soundest companies I ever owned a piece of. They had three big graveyards in Brooklyn, a dozen roving salesmen, newspaper, television, and radio ads. Thirty thousand direct mail solicitations a year -- just think of it.

DAN

Face it, Oscar. As a marketer, they were very unsophisticated.

OSCAR

Personally, I liked their ads.

DAN

Oh, they were unique, all right: A sexy girl in a tiny black bikini, with a scythe and hourglass -- Miss Grim Reaper -- walks up to the man in the street and says, "Joe, you ought to buy some cemetery plots." He buys, then he suddenly drops dead, and his wife says, "It would have been hard for me to make that decision on my own."

OSCAR

Those TV ads were an inspiration. The graveyards, the pretty flowers, they looked great in color. You know who wrote the ads? One of the best copywriters, the biggest creative talents in New York.

DAN

You should have buried that copywriter in your cemetery before he wrote the first ad. How many plots did they end up selling? Two?

OSCAR

I admit that they didn't do well, but that's because people are living longer. The death rate is down. People are being cremated.

DAN

Your wife keeps your remains in an urn on the piano, she doesn't need a cemetery. It stands to reason.

OSCAR

Of course, that's it exactly. Not that any of my wives would want me on the piano.

DAN

If only they all watched you at seven, our Nielsen's would go over the top.

OSCAR

You're exaggerating again. You make me sound like Mickey Rooney.

DAN

I'm not exaggerating. God, all those divorces. You've been subdivided so many times, you're beginning to resemble Levittown.

OSCAR

Look, Dan, when a man's devoted to his work, a marriage suffers. I was never home.

DAN

Your devotion was misplaced. You can love a network news show, but it's never going to love you back. You have to find something else in life.

(DICK EVANS enters)

DICK

Mr. Klinger, Senator Ratchet is downstairs ready to be interviewed. The camera crew is standing by.

(OSCAR looks around a little ruefully, then puts on coat, picks up some papers, and exits.)

DAN

(Shakes head) Listen to Uncle Dan, Dickie boy. Don't end up like that poor schmuck.

DICK

Poor schmuck.

DAN

Of course he's a poor schmuck. I'll bet ten million bucks have passed through his hands. What's he got to show for it, eh? Bupkis.

DICK

Bupkis?

DAN

Nothing.

DICK

Oh, right. You're absolutely right, Mr. Kleinbart.

DAN

Right? Naturally I'm right. I'm always right. The United States Broadcasting Company -- you think they made me the producer of this show because I'm wrong half the time?

DICK

Oh, no, Mr Kleinbart.

DAN

No? Of course, no.

DICK

Of course.

DAN

Kid, you're going to go far in this business.

DICK

Thank you, Mr. Kleinbart.

DAN

You know how I know?

DICK

How is that, Mr. Kleinbart?

DAN

You know how to say yes, kid. Don't look surprised. It's a big asset. Now take our friend Oscar. He's an arguer. He should have been a lawyer, not a broadcaster. He says he fights for his ideals. He's idealistic, he says.

DICK

Yes he does. He's told me that many times.

DAN

Horseshit. He only thinks he's got ideals. You know what he's really got? Unresolved oedipal conflicts. Don't you know what those are? When he was three years old, he lusted after his mother and saw his father as a rival.

DICK

I see.

DAN

Simple, isn't it? First he fought with his father. Then he fought with Jim Lake and the news directors. But all that fighting, it didn't make anybody love him, and it finally began to show up in our Nielsen ratings.

DICK

It came across to the audience?

DAN

He fought to show clips of fur trappers killing baby seals. Would you want to watch trappers killing baby seals after you had a hard day at the office and got chewed out by the boss?

DICK

Oh, no.

DAN

No? Of course no, Besides, Jim Lake is allergic to seals. Sealskin makes him break out in welts. He has to have special allergy shots before he can even sign over the corporate seal on our annual report. So now I make sure there are no more seals on our broadcasts. I watch Oscar while he's writing his copy. If I see him start to type the word "seal," I rip the paper out of his typewriter.

DICK

I'd give anything if only someday I could know a fraction - just a fraction -- as much about the news business as you know today.

DAN

Just stick with me, kid, and you're going to learn a thing or two. You can't help but. I've been in television news since the beginning. Did you know I started in radio news? I worked with Ed Murrow at CBS.

DICK

Really, Mr. Kleinbart? Gee!

DAN

Murrow was the greatest, a brilliant communicator. He could take something that was happening in one part of the world and make it understandable to people thousands of miles away. Jesus, he was handsome, ungodly handsome, and that voice; it had just enough drama in it to make what he was doing work. Simplicity and understatement were his secret.

DICK

(He pulls out a small pad and pencil and writes.)  
Simplicity and understatement. Got it.

DAN

I was in the control room when Murrow made his big broadcast denouncing Joe McCarthy. I can still hear Murrow's voice: "We will not walk in fear of one another; we will not be driven by fear into an age of unreason. If we dig deep in our history and our doctrine, and remember that we are not descended from fearful men, not from men who feared to write, to speak, to associate and to defend causes which were for the moment unpopular..."

DICK It sounds like great television.

DAN

In 1954, Murrow got away with it, though it was the beginning of the end for him at CBS. Bill Paley didn't want a noisy employee like Murrow in his candy store, no matter how handsome he was and how elegant his manners were. Murrow upset too many people -- powerful people. You'd think Oscar could learn a lesson from that, but I don't know that he has.

DICK

What lesson, Mr. Kleinbart?

DAN

What lesson? he asks. Don't rock the boat; don't make waves; do what you're told; make the sponsors happy. Are you getting all that, kid?

DICK

(Scribbling furiously in his pad)  
Yes, sir.

DAN

Good work. Maybe now you'll avoid getting put out to pasture like Oscar.

DICK

But he's not being shut out. I heard he'd be like Cronkite at CBS, doing specials and commentary.

DAN

Is that what you heard? The rumors in this place are unbelievable. Look, kid, Oscar is not Cronkite...

DICK

Oh, no.

DAN

I feel sorry for Oscar; I really do. He was always a soft touch for anybody with a hard luck story. He worked so hard, he was never home, and his wives all cheated on him. He was so kind-hearted, he never shot animals with those guns of his, just rocks and tin cans. Now he'll probably end up in Florida living on cat food. Too bad.

DICK

Cat food-- yech.

DAN

Well, some kinds of cat food maybe aren't so...

(ASSISTANT DIRECTOR races in holding wire copy)

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Dan, look at this. We have an unconfirmed report that some guy, a crank named Delbert Knudson, has shot the mayor.

DAN

What? Let me see that. (reads report quickly) You mean it took the AP correspondent to pick this up? Where's our city hall correspondent? Listen, Sam, get a camera crew and a reporter on this right away.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

I've already done that. What I have to tell you is, we've got a former girlfriend of this Knudson in London. Lynn Meadows is ready to interview her.

DAN

Did you order the bird?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

You want to use the bird? We're not even sure the mayor was hurt.

DAN

Look, we've got the satellite; we've got the transponder. We may very well have to go with that interview in a hurry.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

(He picks up phone receiver on corner of anchor desk, punches some buttons.)

This is Sam Zuckerman in the broadcast booth at the garden. I want central switching...Central switching? Bernie? This is Sam. Listen, you're going to be getting a feed over the London to New York bird, an interview. Can you channel it to our control room at the Garden? Great. Can you transfer me to network operations? Great ... Network operations? Jack? This is Sam. I'm at the Garden ... Yeah, that's right, the interview with the girl in London. Bring it in on the London to New York bird; then it's going to be channeled, here. Great.

(ASSISTANT DIRECTOR hangs up phone.) OK. It should be coming up on the monitor in just a sec. Ah, here we go.

(The whole set darkens. A spotlight lights a small area DSR in front of monitor. An attractive REPORTER in her 20's is revealed, holding a large microphone with the logo USBC. She is about to interview a dignified-looking Anglican PRELATE, about 40 years old. REPORTER wears a small earpiece and wire.)

REPORTER

This is Lynn Meadows in London. Are you receiving me, New York?

DAN

(He has put on headset and microphone from anchor desk) Lynn, this is Dan Kleinbart at the convention booth in New York. You've got this Delbert Knudson's old girlfriend there? I don't see her on the monitor. Are you ready to begin your interview?

REPORTER

I am, Dan, and you're going to love this one.

DAN

Just a second, Lynn. Sam, I want you in the control room. Monitor videotape and projection.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Check. (He exits, and a few seconds later his voice is heard through a speaker.)

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (voice)

Videotape ready, Dan. Projection OK.

DAN

Begin your interview, Lynn.

REPORTER

This is Lynn Meadows, USBC News, London. I have with me Mr. Cecil Workum. Mr. Workum, will you explain how you came to know Delbert Knudson.

PRELATE

Yes, Lynn, in answer to that question, I first met Delbert Knudson through an ad in the Village Voice some years ago. We were later engaged for a short time.

REPORTER

Engaged?

PRELATE

Oh, I should mention that at the time my name was Cecily Workum. I've had a sex change operation.

REPORTER

I see. Can you tell us anything about Mr. Knudson?

PRELATE

What would you like to know?

REPORTER

We understand he may just have shot the Mayor of New York. Why would he do that?

PRELATE

Ah, poor Delbert. Perhaps he became frustrated trying to find an apartment in the city.

REPORTER

Would you say Delbert displayed any violent tendencies when you knew him?

PRELATE

He had a fondness for whips.

REPORTER

Bullwhips?

PRELATE

No, cream whips, like Readywhip and Dreamwhip.

REPORTER

You mean he was violent during dessert?

PRELATE

He never ate whipped cream. He was afraid of getting fat. He liked to spray it at the police during demonstrations.

REPORTER

Political demonstrations?

PRELATE

Vacuum cleaner demonstrations. For a while he peddled portable vacuum cleaners on street corners. He'd suck up the whipped cream with the vacuum cleaner to demonstrate it. But he never had a peddler's license, and sometimes the cops would try to make him move on.

REPORTER

Can you tell us any more about his violent tendencies?

PRELATE

Oh, yes, they originated with his mother. She liked to dress him in purple skirts and blouses before puberty. Chartreuse afterward.

REPORTER

No, not violet, violent.

PRELATE

Chartreuse is not violet, it's yellow green.

REPORTER

(more loudly) Violent tendencies. Violent, not violet.

PRELATE

Ah, violent.

REPORTER

Antisocial tendencies.

PRELATE

Delbert never was very social. I don't remember anyone ever inviting him to a party.

REPORTER

No parties in his whole life?

PRELATE

Except for the Communist Party. He was enthusiastic about them for a while.

REPORTER

And then?

PRELATE

Delbert complained that they were too bourgeois. The biggest Soviet Agents, the KGB men with the fanciest trench coats: after they were in New York for three or four months, they defected and bought taxicabs.

REPORTER

Did Delbert do any other work besides peddling vacuum cleaners?

PRELATE

When I knew him, he was writing things.

REPORTER

What sort of things?

PRELATE

Oh, things; you know the things that writers write: those sorts of things.

REPORTER

Can you be a little more specific?

PRELATE

How is that?

REPORTER

Can you tell us the focus of his literary endeavors.

PRELATE

How is that?

REPORTER

What did he write?

PRELATE

Oh, you know: words, sentences, paragraphs. He didn't spell so good, though.

REPORTER

Tell me, Mr. Workum, did Delbert show any distinct personality change or mood change?

PRELATE

Yes, he did. About a year and a half ago, he seemed to become depressed.

REPORTER

What, do you think, was the cause of his depression?

PRELATE

I talked to him for a long time about it. I had to spend many hours talking to him, trying to reassure him, trying to gain his confidence. Finally I found out the cause.

REPORTER

Yes, yes, what was it?

PRELATE.

Delbert said he was despondent over the breakup of AT&T and the Bell System.

REPORTER

You mean the dismantling of the phone company?

PRELATE

The New York Telephone Company was very dear to him. Some of his most early, cherished criminal experiences involved robbing coin boxes of pay phones in Grand Central Station.

REPORTER

I see.

PRELATE

He often spoke tenderly of one special pay phone that he liked to stuff.

REPORTER

Stuff?

PRELATE

You know, he'd shove a wad of cotton in the coin return chute, then come back later, pull out the cotton, and collect the money.

REPORTER

I'm amazed that Delbert felt so strongly about any big industrial enterprise.

PRELATE

Oh, he did; he most certainly did. Once, after he had stolen some pocket computers from Macy's, he spent an hour lecturing me on how much computer miniaturization technology, integrated circuit technology, had been developed at Bell Laboratories.

REPORTER

Did you try to influence Delbert for the better? Did you try to instill him with morality or religion?

PRELATE

Religion? How would I do that? I'm a model.

REPORTER

You mean you serve as a model of decorous, proper behavior.

PRELATE

No, I model clothes.

REPORTER

Clothes?

PRELATE

When I lived with Delbert, I modeled brassieres, panties, and girdles, an occasional slip.

REPORTER

What about now?

PRELATE

Today I'm posing for an Irish beer ad, Blarney Stone Dew. This is a wig I'm wearing. (PRELATE removes red wig to reveal a full head of green hair.)

REPORTER

Thank you very much, Mr. Cecil Workum. Now back to New York.

(REPORTER and PRELATE exit. Lights come up.)

DAN

A nut. A nut who's also a fruit. (yells) Sam, Sam get in here.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (runs in)

The reception was great, Dan. We've got' the whole interview on tape.

DAN

Sam, so help me god, if you ever do a thing like that again, I'm going to shake that empty head of yours until you foam like a daiquiri.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

What did I do?

DAN

What did you do? You made me use the bird for that ridiculous interview. Our studio in London should have sent the videocassette surface mail. Do you know how much that time on the bird will cost? Jim Lake would be furious if he found out; you know how he is about saving money.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

I'm sorry.

DAN

Next time, think for a minute.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Yes, Dan.

(OSCAR enters holding some notes)

DAN

How did the interview go, Oscar?

OSCAR

Don't ask.

DAN

Senator Ratchet is certainly photogenic. What an attractive man. He once told me that his waist now is exactly the same as it was in college, a 34.

OSCAR

That's about five points higher than his IQ.

DAN

I hope you weren't doing your Mike Wallace imitation during the interview, grilling the man...

OSCAR

Until he began to sizzle.

DAN

Oscar -- Oh, what's the use?

OSCAR

I had to do it, I'm sorry.

DAN

That journalistic integrity again. God, Oscar, your interview was supposed to be the key part of a Ratchet documentary. You know how hot Jim Lake is to see old Ratchet reelected to the Senate.

OSCAR

I'm goddam tired of hearing about what Jim Lake wants and doesn't want, and...

DAN

Please, not so loud. He's down there on the floor someplace.

OSCAR

You don't have to whisper; we're not broadcasting.

DAN

(to ASSISTANT DIRECTOR)

Sam, find the tape of that interview. Destroy it.

OSCAR

What?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

A-roll and B-roll, both?

DAN

Everything.

OSCAR

Sam, you will not do that. I am the editor of this broadcast.

DAN (to DICK)

Evans, find Senator Ratchet. Tell him the tape of his interview was...was...was not of an adequate technical quality to broadcast. That sounds good, doesn't it?

OSCAR (to DAN)

What in hell do you think you're doing?

DAN

This is for your own good. Sam, see if you can find another reporter to re-do the interview. Allez-y. Go to it.

DICK

Do we have a reporter named Alezy, Mr. Kleinbart?

DAN

I thought you spoke French, kid. Didn't you write that on your résumé? Forget it. Just do what I tell you.

(DICK and ASSISTANT DIRECTOR exit)

OSCAR (to DAN)

You have about as much integrity as a toilet seat.

DAN

We've been friends a long time. I'm not going to let you insult me.

OSCAR

You were never my friend. You were my producer.

DAN

I can tell you're venting your Oedipal feelings. Go ahead. It's good for you.

OSCAR

You are systematically, methodically trying to undermine my authority.

DAN

No matter how loud your voice gets, your father is never going to hear you.

OSCAR

If you just heard me, I would feel I had accomplished something.

DAN

You should have resolved these conflicts before adolescence.

OSCAR

At least you could have the decency not to turn my last few broadcasts into oatmeal.

DAN

You're asking for too much.

OSCAR

Alright. It's OK for me. I've been through this before with newspapers. But you're going to get it too. Don't kid yourself.

DAN

Think whatever you want to.

OSCAR

If little Danny is a good boy and can raise the ratings of his show, maybe Uncle Jim will make him president of the network.

DAN

I never plan so far in advance. I try to live from day to day.

OSCAR

But not chairman, remember. Only Uncle Jim can have that job. And when you're of no more use to him, out you go.

DAN

All this anger and bitterness aren't doing you any good. Try and control yourself.

OSCAR

I've done that all my life. Now maybe it's time for a change.

DAN

There's still a chance they might keep you on as special correspondent.

OSCAR

Where did you hear that?

DAN

A very reliable source-in the industry,

OSCAR

Who? Don't tell me: your brother-in-law, the television repairman.

DAN

A good journalist never reveals his confidential sources.

(ASSISTANT DIRECTOR rushes in with a handful of wire copy)

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Look at this. We've got to change the lineup again.

DAN

What now?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

The mayor hasn't been shot.

OSCAR

Thank goodness.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

He's choking to death.

DAN

Where? How do you know?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Our city Hall Correspondent just called. It's on the AP wire too. His Honor was eating in a Chinese restaurant. You know how he gobbles his food. He inhaled something, a hunk of food.

DAN

What about a camera crew, Have you ordered a camera crew?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

They're on the way.

DAN

Have they got the color minicamera with the indoor filters and the balanced lighting? I want good shots of his face if they get there when it's still purple.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

They've got the right camera; don't worry.

(JIM LAKE enters)

JIM

What a mob down there. Twice I was nearly crushed or trampled. It's dinnertime. Why aren't they at dinner?

DAN

Hello, Jim, how are you?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Hello, Mr. Lake.

JIM (to ASSISTANT DIRECTOR)

I don't believe we've met.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR(shakes hands with JIM LAKE)  
Sam Zuckerman, Mr. Lake. I'm one of the assistant directors of the evening news.

JIM  
Learning the ropes from Dan, here, eh?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
Yes, Mr. Lake.

JIM  
Call me JIM.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
Yes, Jim.

JIM  
(to ASSISTANT DIRECTOR)  
Fighting that crowd made me awfully thirsty. Run downstairs, will you, kid, and get me a large Budweiser from the refreshment stand.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
Yes, Jim.

(ASSISTANT DIRECTOR exits)

JIM  
So, boys, how's it going? Any news?

DAN  
We just got a bulletin, Jim. The mayor is choking to death in a Chinese restaurant.

JIM  
On his own words, no doubt. Hah, hah.

(DAN gives a long, loud forced laugh. OSCAR barely smiles.)

JIM  
Dan, have you got the finished script for the Ratchet documentary?

DAN  
Yes, Jim. The writer finished it about two hours-ago.

(DAN picks up script from anchor desk and hands it to JIM.)

JIM  
This looks like a half hour script. I thought I told you that I wanted an hour show.

DAN  
Oh, yes, Jim, you did tell me. You see, we figured on fifteen, maybe twenty minutes of interviews, spontaneous and unscripted.

(JIM opens script and begins to read. He sits down next to OSCAR at anchor desk.)

JIM  
I hope the son of a bitch dies.

OSCAR  
Senator Ratchet?

JIM  
Not Ratchet. Where is your brain, Oscar? That horse's ass of a mayor.

DAN  
He is a horse's ass.

JIM  
Goddam crude bastard. He talks like a Seventh Avenue delicatessen counterman. And abrasive as hell. A year ago I was at City Hall to receive a medal of commendation for advising the emergency financial control board and the Municipal Assistance Corporation. You know what His Honor said to me? He'd give me another medal if I stopped stinking up the place with my cigar.

(JIM continues to inspect the script)

OSCAR  
Jim, I've been meaning to ask you...

(ASSISTANT DIRECTOR enters with beer.)

JIM (to ASSISTANT DIRECTOR)  
What took you so long? I told you to run, didn't I?

ASSISTANT-DIRECTOR  
I'm sorry, Mr. Lake...

JIM  
Jim, call me Jim.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR I'm sorry, Jim, the line was enormous.

(JIM takes a sip of the beer.)

JIM  
This isn't Budweiser.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
They only had Miller.

DAN  
You should have gone to the store across the street, Sam. Go back and get the Budweiser.

JIM (to ASSISTANT DIRECTOR)  
Next time. This is OK for now. (JIM begins reading through script. He does not take his eyes off script during next few lines.) Did you say something Oscar?

OSCAR  
We can talk about it later. It's nothing.

JIM

Tell me now. I hate surprises.

OSCAR

I wondered about staying on as special correspondent. My agent called the news director about it but hasn't heard anything.

JIM

Who wrote this script, Dan?

DAN

Sherman Kagan.

JIM

Here he's describing the Senator's birthplace in Mierda, New Mexico. Doesn't he have the sense not to do that when the birthplace has been turned into a funeral home? Oscar, have you ever heard of such a thing?

OSCAR

Not recently.

DAN

We'll delete it. Sam, call Sherman Kagan. Tell him we want him here immediately, immediately -- have you got that?-- to rewrite his Ratchet documentary script.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Yes, Dan.

(ASSISTANT DIRECTOR picks up phone, begins punching buttons.)

JIM

Look at this; can you believe this? Here the fool has written a description of the Senator's boyhood basement workshop and orders shots of it today.

DAN

That should be inspirational for young viewers.

JIM

The workshop is now the embalming room of the funeral home.

DAN

Sam, have you gotten hold of Sherman?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (into phone)

Thanks, Mrs. Kagan. (to DAN) He said he was going to be working late.

DAN

Try his mistress, that oriental girl.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

She's not oriental; she's recovering from hepatitis.

(ASSISTANT DIRECTOR is punching buttons on phone again.)

OSCAR

I'd love to do one program a month, Jim.

JIM

One program of what? What are you talking about?

OSCAR

As special correspondent.

JIM

Oh, that.

OSCAR

I'd like to do programs on science, astronomy. Some of my highest rated broadcasts were on the lunar probes.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (into phone)

Is this Thelma Nagel?

JIM (to ASSISTANT DIRECTOR)

I want to talk to Kagan. I ought to fire him on the spot, the blockhead.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR(into phone)

This is Sam Zuckerman at USBC...Hi, how're you? ...Listen, Thelma, is Sherman there?...It's important, it's urgent...Oh...Thanks. (He breaks connection.) They were making love; Sherman ejaculated prematurely. She thinks he ran off to see either his sex therapist or his analyst. (He writes down phone number.) She only knew the phone number of the sex therapist.

DAN

Jesus.

(ASSISTANT DIRECTOR punches buttons on phone.)

OSCAR

Twelve reports a year: I could easily handle that.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR The sex therapist doesn't answer.

DAN

He's probably getting laid.

OSCAR

What do you say, Jim?

JIM

Dan, I want that script rewritten in 24 hours.

DAN

Yes, Jim.

OSCAR

Twelve broadcasts, Jim.

JIM

I don't know.

OSCAR

Eight shows. They'll be the best I've ever done.

JIM

I'll think about it.

OSCAR

Think about it? What is there to think about? I've been with this company thirty years, twenty-three as anchor. I was once the highest rated anchor in the northeast.

JIM

Once you were, Oscar -- once.

OSCAR

You can't shut me out.

JIM

Look, I'm only the chairman of the company. I have a responsibility to our stockholders. The audience simply doesn't respond to you anymore.

OSCAR

Respond? What does that mean?

JIM

You're a great journalist. But you've got a brooding sense of life. You're a very difficult fellow, very dark outlook. You always took too many risks during the war. You flew on B-17 bombing raids when you could have gotten the same information interviewing the returning pilots.

OSCAR

How dare you say such a thing. How dare you. I won a Pulitzer Prize for the story I wrote on the bomber pilots.

JIM

You're not a happy fellow. Too bad, really, but our audience wants a happy fellow.

OSCAR (He bangs his hand on the desk)

A happy fellow? That's a ridiculous thing to say. I've devoted eighteen hours a day, six, sometimes seven days a week to produce accurate, objective journalism, and...

JIM

Objective, are you? You journalists are all alike. You say you're objective, but none of you is. You, especially, Oscar. I've had to watch you constantly. You always want to make personal remarks and inject your own opinions. I'm tired of fighting with you.

(JIM stands and walks to exit)

JIM(signals with his hand)

Dan.

DAN (Runs to JIM)

Yes, Jim.

JIM (He puts his arm around DAN and speaks in a stage whisper)

Oscar's contract has three and a half weeks left to run. I want you in the control room whenever he's on the air. If he should ever begin to denounce the

network, cut him off. I'll see that he's immediately terminated. Watch him carefully.

DAN  
Yes, Jim.

(JIM exits)

DAN (walking slowly back to anchor desk)  
Oscar, you're a ... you just don't know when ... What's wrong with you?

OSCAR  
(A mildly terrified look has crossed his face. He begins to breathe in larger and larger gasping breaths while clutching the left side of his chest with his right hand.)  
It's nothing.

DAN  
Nothing? What do you mean, nothing?

OSCAR  
My heart. I think it's my heart.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
I'll call 911. We'll get an ambulance.

OSCAR  
No. No ambulances. No hospitals. (He struggles to reach into his pocket, extract his wallet, pull out a business card.) My doctor. Call him.

DAN (Takes card and reads it)  
Krishna Singh, M.D. 620 Park Avenue. Oscar, you need to be in a hospital.

OSCAR  
No.

DAN  
Alright. Have it your own way. (He picks up phone and dials.)

Curtain

ACT TWO

Twenty minutes have elapsed. OSCAR is now stretched out in a chair in front of the anchor desk. His arms and legs are wired to the leads of a small portable electrocardiograph. His shirt is partly raised and a chest lead with a balloon is attached over his left breast. DR. KRISHNA SINGH, a very dark-skinned Indian physician with a full black beard and turban, dressed in a well-tailored three piece business suit, is tearing the cardiogram from the machine. DAN KLEINBART looks on. DR. SINGH holds a hypodermic syringe in one hand. OSCAR is much improved and breathes only slightly more rapidly than normal. His right sleeve is rolled up.

DR. SINGH

Are you feeling better, Mr. Klinger?

OSCAR  
Yes, thanks.

DR. SINGH  
I've given you an injection of digoxin. You should be taking more. How many are you taking a day?

OSCAR  
One pill.

DR. SINGH  
That's 0.25. You should be taking 0.75, three pills a day.

OSCAR  
I will.

(DR. SINGH kneels, raises OSCAR's pant leg, and presses for a moment with his index finger at various points along OSCAR's shinbone)

DR. SINGH  
You say you will; then you don't. Now you have two plus pitting edema of your ankles.

DAN  
Say that in English, doc.

DR. SINGH  
Without the digoxin, the heart is failing; it can't pump enough fluid. Mr. Klinger, you are the worst patient I have ever had. In India when I was a medical student, I had patients who were peasants, Dravidian coolies; and even they had more concern for their health than you have for yours.

OSCAR  
Don't worry, Dr. Singh, I think I'm getting better.

DR. SINGH  
The last patient who said that to me was the Rajah of Hyderabad. He was bitten in the leg by a king cobra that had slithered under the front seat of his Bentley.

DAN  
What happened to him?

DR. SINGH  
He junked the Bentley and bought a Honda.

OSCAR  
What about my cardiogram.

DR. SINGH  
It's not worse, but it's not better, either. (He looks over cardiogram) You still have very abnormal ST segments and T waves, especially in the chest leads. Your heart is not getting enough blood. (He takes a stethoscope from his pocket and listens to OSCAR's heart).

OSCAR

(After DR. SINGH has finished listening with stethoscope)  
How's my aortic valve? (To DAN) I have a leaky aortic valve.

DR. SINGH

Your diastolic murmur isn't any louder, which means the leak isn't worse. But your cardiogram shows a heart block. You need a pacemaker.

OSCAR

I may need one, but I don't want one. (He lights up a cigarette and takes a few deep drags.)

DR. SINGH

Without the pacemaker, Mr. Klinger, your heart failure is becoming harder to control with drugs. And you should stop smoking. (DR. SINGH reaches into his black bag, inserts a new ampoule into syringe, and tears open a cotton swab.) Roll up your other sleeve, please.

OSCAR

What now?

DR. SINGH

I'm going to give you an injection of Lasix, a diuretic, to help get rid of some fluid. (He does, then removes the cardiogram wires and repacks the machine.) It's going to make you urinate.

OSCAR

I wonder if transcendental meditation might help me. Tell me, Dr. Singh, can you give me a mantra?

DR. SINGH

I am a cardiologist, Mr. Klinger, not a guru.

DAN

I remember an article about a guru named Krishna Singh.

DR. SINGH

Singh is a very common Indian surname. It belongs to the warrior caste, the Sikhs. Krishna is also a popular name, the name of a god, an incarnation of Vishnu.

DAN

I love the oriental religions: so many gods; I hated Hebrew school when I was a kid. Monotheism is boring; it's like a bad play with only one character.

DR. SINGH

Krishna is a favorite god in India. He was a great lover, very attractive to women.

OSCAR

But he could slay and destroy, too.

DR. SINGH

Ahh, I did not know that you were so well versed in Hindu mythology, Mr. Klinger.

OSCAR

I interviewed Robert Oppenheimer after the first atom bomb was detonated at Los Alamos. Oppenheimer knew Indian mythology from studying Sanskrit and reading the Bhagavad-Gita. After the glare of the bomb had faded, Oppenheimer told me that some words of Krishna's in the Bhagavad-Gita floated through his mind: "I am become death, the shatterer of worlds."

DR. SINGH

Krishna was trying to persuade a prince to do his duty. As a doctor, I have often coveted Krishna's powers of persuasion. Why can't I persuade you, Mr. Klinger, to do what you should?

OSCAR

The deeds of Krishna and his prince changed history, changed the way men thought about their world. I can't do that.

DR. SINGH

Your broadcast is excellent, Mr. Klinger. It is an asset to our society.

DAN (To Oscar)

Where was this guy when Nielsen was sticking his little boxes on the backs of people's TV sets?

DR. SINGH

Call my secretary for an appointment, Mr. Klinger. I would like to repeat your cardiogram next week. Good evening, gentlemen. (He exits)

(OSCAR straightens his clothing and rises a little unsteadily to his feet.)

OSCAR

Can you believe that I was a star tackle on the Ohio State football team in my college days?

DAN

You still have fans, Oscar. The Sikhs love you.

OSCAR

Probably because I'm part Indian.

DAN

Really? I didn't know that.

OSCAR

My great grandmother was a Comanche.

(KITTY LITTER enters. She is an attractive woman in her forties and wears sunglasses. She is furious.)

KITTY

Oscar, you did it again, dammit.

OSCAR

Did what, Kitty? What are you talking about?

KITTY

You called me Kitty Litter on the air.

OSCAR  
No I didn't.

KITTY  
Don't lie to me. You called me Kitty Litter during your 5 PM lead in today.

OSCAR  
(He thinks for a moment, then puts his hand against his cheek.)  
Oh, I think I may have...

KITTY  
(She angrily reaches into her small briefcase and pulls out a contract.) Oscar, you know very well the terms of my new contract. (She thumbs through contract, finds appropriate section, switches sunglasses for half moon reading glasses in the briefcase) On page 6, clause 22, line 4, my contract clearly states, and I quote, "On the air, the aforementioned artist shall hereinafter be referred to only as Kathy Litter or Ms. Litter, Any names heretofore used, specifically Kitty Litter, are hereby strongly interdicted and will not be hereinafter tolerated."

OSCAR  
I'm sorry, truly I am. I've known you so many years, and you were always Kitty. I promise not to let it happen again.

KITTY  
(somewhat mollified, she returns contract to briefcase)  
It must be over a hundred outside, and it's past 5 PM. Eighth Avenue feels like the inside of the Pink Pussycat Baths. Thank god for air conditioning.

DAN  
This is definitely the hottest day we've had all year.

KITTY  
(She suddenly looks around nervously)  
The teleprompter, where's the teleprompter? Oscar, did you have the teleprompter taken away again? If you did, I'm going to...

DAN  
Don't worry, it's...

KITTY  
(She reaches in briefcase again for contract)  
My contract clearly states on page 10, clause 47...

DAN  
Kitty, there was something wrong with it. They took it back to the studio about 4:30, right after Sam Zuckerman saw it wasn't working. We'll have a replacement before your broadcast. Relax.

OSCAR  
You'll do just as well without the teleprompter. Reading from a script on your desk is more natural.

KITTY  
We've been through this a hundred times, I'm too hot and tired to argue with you about teleprompters today.

OSCAR

Teleprompters are nothing but a showbiz gimmick. I'm a journalist, and the audience knows I'm a journalist, and I read from my script on the desk.

DAN

A little practice and you would have mastered teleprompters easily.

OSCAR

I used a teleprompter once on the air; that was enough. First the director began writing strange words in the margin of the script, like "Full-Frame Adda." I had no idea what they meant. I thought "Full-Frame Adda" was the name of a hooker,

KITTY

If you didn't know what the words meant, you should have asked.

OSCAR

Then the girl operating the damned teleprompter started rolling the script by me too fast. I was speaking so rapidly I sounded like a Munchkin.

DAN

She was probably trying to adjust her speed to yours.

OSCAR

Finally, as I was reading, a whole bunch of gibberish appeared in place of my script.

KITTY

We all know that teleprompters are unreliable, Oscar; you have to flip the script pages on your desk to keep pace with words on the screen. Then if something happens, you look down and keep reading.

OSCAR

I started as a print journalist. I'll stick to printed pages, thank you.

(KITTY sits at her place at anchor desk, flips through some papers)

KITTY

You won't believe the two interviews I did this afternoon: Otis T. Favel and Sheikh Abdul Azziz.

DAN

Favel? Isn't he the leader of the National Nudist Party?

KITTY

Nope, he's the presidential candidate of the National Vegetarian Party. You might be interested to know, Oscar, that the economic problems facing the country today can be traced to a single root cause.

OSCAR

What's that?

KITTY

Chronic constipation.

DAN

I knew it all along.

KITTY

According to Otis T. Favel, Americans eat too much meat, and meat is constipating. All of the time we spend stwaining on the pot is sapping our economic strength.

OSCAR

Is Sheikh Abdul Azziz the Arab who's one of the New Jersey delegates?

KITTY

Wrong. Sheikh Abdul Azziz is the New Jersey delegate.

DAN

New Jersey has 47 delegates this year.

KITTY

Last week they had 47 delegates. As of this week they have only one.

DAN

What happened to the other 46?

KITTY

Last week, Sheikh Abdul Azziz wanted to buy a sweater for a eunuch who guards his harem in Bahrain. The Sheikh was staying in the Waldorf, and he asked his slightly retarded bwother, Prince Ahmed, to go downstairs to the shop across the street, a clothing store, to buy the sweater.

DAN

So?

KITTY

Prince Ahmed went to a real estate office by mistake; and Sheikh Abdul had asked him to buy a new Jersey.

DAN

Oh, no.

KITTY

It took the broker two hours to buy the entire state for them, and James Watt sold the fedewally owned land in another 45 minutes.

DAN

You look a little pained, Oscar.

OSCAR

It's nothing, only Dr. Singh's medicine working on me. I wish they had put this booth a little closer to the men's bathroom.  
(OSCAR exits)

KITTY

Poor Oscar. It's sad to see him like this. I remember him when I first started as a local news weporter. He was so driving, so energetic, until his son died last year.

DAN

The miraculous thing was, all that driving energy, all that intense competitiveness never appeared on screen. It probably would have frightened his

audience. He always looked so calm, so impartial, like everybody's Uncle Oscar. People trusted him.

KITTY

People trusted him because he's truly a moral, trustworthy person. Even though I fought with him many times, I respect him. When I was hired, I was the only woman reporter. I did stories on fashion, children, cooking. The bosses I had, all men, told me I had to go to bed with them if I expected to succeed.

DAN

No kidding.

KITTY

Oscar was the only boss who never harassed me.

DAN

Soon maybe you'll be the boss, Kitty.

KITTY

What? Weally? How do you know? Who told you?

DAN

Well...

KITTY

I saw Jim Lake leaving. Did he reveal something.

DAN

He said everything is still up in the air.

KITTY

Oh, wats, I thought you weally had something to tell me.

DAN

Oscar's out of the running: that I can tell you.

KITTY

Are you sure? I thought Jim was going to wait for a survey from Marketing Evaluation before he made up his mind.

DAN

His mind is made up.

KITTY

This suspense is driving me crazy, not knowing whether we're going to have to move to Washington or not. Evelyn hasn't slept in weeks. She tosses and turns and then I can't sleep.

DAN

Evelyn worked here for three years, didn't she? She knows what kind of life a journalist has. What's she doing now, anyhow?

KITTY

Carving things. She's selling some of them.

DAN

You both should try to relax. It's between you and Frank; and you have an edge.

KITTY

You mean because I'm female.

DAN

Of course, your being the only female national anchor would be a plus. But that's not all you've got going for you. Everybody saw what Frank did last month.

KITTY

The little flub on camera?

DAN

It was no little flub.

KITTY

The teleprompter malfunctioned. The press attention it got was ridiculous.

DAN

I checked that teleprompter myself right after it happened. The thing was working perfectly, and still Frank managed to slur one word after another on the air. His report ran twice the length we had allotted it, and during prime time. We had to cut a seven-hundred-thousand dollar commercial that General Motors had already paid for.

KITTY

It was an expensive little flub.

DAN

You know Frank's agent, Ira Feldstein?

KITTY

Bottom line Ira?

DAN

They should give Bottom Line Ira a Clio for his excuse. He claimed that Frank had suffered a deviated septum when he was struck in the face by a sailboat boom last summer. Sailboat boom, hell, he got the deviated septum when he was struck in the face by a big blond sailor in the East Village whose balls he was fondling.

KITTY

I thought the reconstructive surgery on his nose had fixed it.

DAN

According to Bottom Line Ira, Frank was still in pain and had considerable reaction to the accident and the surgery. He was taking codeine for pain, Ira said, and returned two weeks too soon. The lights were hot, he hadn't eaten, he was weak, etcetera, etcetera.

KITTY

I believe him.

DAN

Come on, don't be so gullible. We all know old Frank is snorting coke.

KITTY

As much as I dislike him, I have to tell you that's nothing but a silly wumor.

DAN

Yesterday I saw a photograph of Frank in the hallway. Somebody had taped a straw to his nose.

KITTY

Oscar taught me many things about this business, especially about the importance of eyewitnesses and their testimony.

DAN

I know at least one person who's seen the cocaine, the pipes, and all the rest of Frank's drug paraphernalia. I know of another who saw him when he was so doped up, she was scared to be in his presence.

KITTY

I can't believe any of these wumors. Have you ever seen Frank drink? A glass of wine in a week is a lot for him. Dwugs are not his problem. Ambition is his problem.

DAN

His problem was probably a distant relationship with his mother. I bet she never breast fed him. So now he's using coke; it's clearly an oral fixation.

KITTY

It sounds more like a nasal fixation. But even with whatever pwoblems he may have, he's still a superb weader of news. I can't compete with him there.

DAN

Why do you have to?

KITTY

I don't know how many hours I must have spent with speech thewapists by now. I wish I had a dollar for every time I repeated, "Around the rugged rock, the ragged rascal wan -- er, ran."

DAN

I've told you a hundred times, that problem amounts to very little. You shouldn't be self-conscious about it. If anything, it's your self-consciousness that might be a problem.

KITTY

It makes me different. It's always made me different, and I don't want to be different.

DAN

Viewers are willing to accept differences in people like you who are identifiably different. Look at Dan Dorfman, the CBS News Business Expert. He's short, he's bald; he has a mustache, a high-pitched voice, a Brooklyn accent.

KITTY

Maybe they think I have a Bronx accent.

DAN

My only suggestion would be to correct a little flaw in your interviewing technique.

KITTY

My interviewing technique? I'm the best interviewer in the network. I've had offers from CBS and NBC to do nothing but interviews. Haven't you wed my book, *How to Talk to Practically Anybody Who's Not a Nobody*? It's used in journalism courses to teach interviewing.

DAN

Kitty, when you have an interesting subject, your interviews are excellent. But you can sometimes lose interest quickly; when you do, you have a tendency to telegraph the fact to your viewers by leaning back in your chair. My suggestion is to be aware of your boredom; when you begin to feel it, sit up straighter and lean forward slightly. Then the viewers will get the impression that you're becoming more interested rather than less interested. The thing that counts is not whether you're interested, but whether you seem interested.

KITTY

I think Frank has me beat, the bastard, no matter how interested I seem.

DAN

Don't be so pessimistic. He's as worried as you are.

KITTY

He doesn't look it.

DAN

Lately he's been talking about heroic deeds. He thinks that if he can convince the audience he's a hero, he'll finally be a shoo-in for anchor.

KITTY

Have you told him to try reading three syllable words? With his dyslexia, that would be definitely hewoic.

DAN

He keeps talking about how Dan Rather dressed himself in native garb to interview Afghan rebels. Frank is looking for some kind of stunt like that, mark my words.

KITTY

What I need is another stunt like the one with the twelve-year-old boy in Philadelphia. Only this one needs a little publicity.

DAN

Frank's being more careful now. I think he's spending more time in the tea room under Bloomingdale's.

KITTY

Tea room under Bloomingdale's? What are you ... there's no tea room under Bloomingdale's.

DAN

The men's lavatory in the subway stop: the most popular tea room in the city.

(OSCAR enters, carrying a piece of pie and glass of milk)

DAN

How are you feeling, Oscar? Any better?

OSCAR

A little, thanks. I bought some pie and milk. I thought a bit of food might help me; but my stomach is queasy from the stench of that men's room. It smells like a Polish cathouse. (OSCAR sets pie and milk on anchor desk, picks up some papers from desk, then goes to ancient Underwood Typewriter USR and begins typing quite rapidly)

KITTY

Did you have to cart that noisy antique here, Oscar?

OSCAR

Antique? Are you talking about Geraldine?

KITTY

I'm talking about that 1910 Underwood you're banging on.

OSCAR

I've had a longer and more amicable relationship with Geraldine, here, than with any woman I've ever known -- except maybe you, Kitty. She's been with me every day, and yet I still love her.

DAN

You're the last of a dying breed. All the rest of us have gone to computers and word processors; you're still pounding away on that piece of junk.

OSCAR

Geraldine has been with me since I was a kid working on the Kansas City Star, and she's going to be with me when I die. Today, old is bad. Everyone and everything has to be young and new. You don't have integrated circuits, or you get to be sixty-five, and somebody's going to walk up to you, tell you you're a piece of junk, and try to toss you on the scrap heap. I can pound out a better lead on Geraldine than any of these kids they're hiring today can produce on fancy IBM word juicers; hell, most of them can't even write.

DAN

You came up through the world of print journalism.

OSCAR

What's wrong with that? Ink has purity, a kind of holiness.

DAN

Electronic journalism is different. You've never been able to accept that simple fact, despite all the years you've spent here.

OSCAR

How should I accept it? By becoming an actor? A media pretty boy?

KITTY

Everyone and everything must adapt. That's the story of life on earth; that's the reason for evolution.

OSCAR

I fail to see the relationship between evolution and journalism.

KITTY

Look at what a woman has to do to adapt to a man's world: At the first meeting I attended when I started work here, someone said, "That sounds like a panic pass."

OSCAR  
So?

KITTY  
How is a woman supposed to know what a panic pass is? That's football jargon. When I found out what a panic pass was, I thought the metaphor was silly. What do sports have to do with business? I only began to understand what was going on after I started attending football games.

DAN  
Women would be better off without the kind of adaptation you're talking about. A woman with femininity has been taught from childhood that it's impolite to interrupt. After she's worked here for a few months, she'll barge right in on anyone who's speaking. She loses all her femininity.

KITTY  
You know what happens if she doesn't interrupt? She sits waiting for hours for her turn to speak, while her male colleagues at any meeting will continually grab the floor by interrupting the speaker. Competitive turn taking, they call it. Pretty soon, she begins to look dumb; the men think she doesn't have anything to say at all.

DAN  
Not necessarily. You know what they say about still waters running deep.

KITTY  
In our male-dominated culture, still waters form the pool of the unemployed.

DAN  
Women should make some effort to sound like women.

KITTY  
You know how a woman sounds? Tentative. In a restaurant, a man will say, "I'll have a chopped liver sandwich," or "Gimme a chopped liver sandwich." A woman will say, "I'll have a chopped liver sandwich, please?" In a business meeting, nobody will pay attention to her if she always turns declarative sentences into questions. At a news conference, she might say, "Don't you think it would be better to report that story first?" Then a man would agree; he'd say, "Yes, it would be better," Everybody else at the conference will think it was the man's idea, because the woman never claimed it was hers.

DAN  
These ideas of yours are nothing but rationalizations. You know the real problem?

KITTY  
Tell me the real problem.

DAN  
You have a castration complex, a classic case. What you're demonstrating is nothing but pure penis envy.

KITTY

Now let me tell you something, Dr. Freud. The penises in this place wouldn't provoke anybody's envy.

OSCAR

Touché! Score one for Kitty. (He applauds)

DAN

Is that so? Then why do you always wear that little gold penis?

KITTY

What little gold penis?

DAN

The one on your charm bracelet.

KITTY

(Holds up bracelet)

You mean this? (She points to charm) Put on your glasses, Dan. See, it's not a penis; it's a uterus.

DAN

My god, you're right. Isn't it cute. Where did you get it?

KITTY

I bought it on Mother's Day at Cartier.

DAN

Your concession to motherhood?

KITTY

I don't think celebrities should have children. Fame and child rearing are like oil and water: they don't mix.

DAN

Not necessarily. Look at Walter Cronkite's three kids; they seem to have survived adolescence.

KITTY

Have you talked to Nancy, the oldest daughter, recently?

DAN

A beautiful girl, an actress. She had a role in the film Murphy's Law.

KITTY

How will she make personal appearance tours? "I'm frightened in planes," she says. "I'm frightened in sailboats. I get bored on trains; I get sick on buses; I get frightened in other people cars half the time." She doesn't even drive.

OSCAR

(quietly and ruefully) When the child is crushed by the parent's fame and starts on drugs, then...

DAN

You shouldn't keep blaming yourself. You did everything you could.

KITTY

You promised to show me that last picture, Oscar, and...

DAN

Kitty, stop, will you? We have a broadcast to put together here.

OSCAR

No, it's all right. (He pulls out wallet, takes out snapshot and hands it to KITTY)

KITTY

What a handsome boy. What show was this?

OSCAR

He was playing Bert Jefferson in The Man Who Came to Dinner at the Riverside Art Theater. Look at the review Frank Rich wrote in the Times. (He removes a carefully folded newspaper clipping from wallet and hands to KITTY)

KITTY (reads) ...But undoubtedly the finest performer is Peter Klinger in the role of Bert Jefferson. Mr. Klinger's ebullience, combined with a consummate professionalism, creates a thoroughly engaging portrayal of the small town newspaper editor...

DAN

Life goes on. We all have to keep going.

(KITTY hands clipping back to OSCAR, who carefully returns it to his wallet. OSCAR then begins typing rapidly. KITTY reads over his shoulder.)

KITTY

Delbert Knudson? Why are you writing about him?

OSCAR

Haven't you heard? He's threatened to upset this convention.

KITTY

With one of his little bombs?

OSCAR

Bombs? What bombs?

KITTY

There was a small story about him in the paper last year -- the Post, as I wecall. He was arrested trying to sell a new bomb he had invented to Libya.

OSCAR

What kind of bomb?

KITTY

The ultimate weapon for urban guerrilla warfare -- the exploding cockroach. (The sound of a march played by a brass band is heard)

DAN

There they go. Pretty soon we'll get to hear the planks in the platform.

KITTY

Hearing planks is better than smelling delegates. Most of them week of liquor.

DAN

Just remember, it was worse when we had to do gavel to gavel coverage.

(The music stops suddenly in the middle of a march)

DAN

That's funny. I wonder why the music stopped.

(After a moment, sirens are heard in the distance)

OSCAR

Could those be the sirens of a motorcade?

KITTY

Can you get hold of Frank, Dan? He's down there someplace.

(DAN goes to pick up phone, but as he does, FRANK PANGBORN enters. FRANK is about the same age as KITTY, in his forties. He is wearing a blazer open, his tie loosened, his press credentials hanging around his neck. The seat of his pants has a jagged rip, and some underwear is showing.)

FRANK

I expect hazardous duty pay for covering this convention.

DAN

Frank, what's going on down there?

FRANK

Going on? What isn't going on? Didn't you hear the sirens?

OSCAR

We thought they were for a motorcade.

FRANK

Motorcade? Those sirens were the police bomb squad. I got too close to one of their German shepherds. (He indicates his ripped pants.) Kitty, go get a needle and thread and sew these up for me like a good girl.

KITTY

Don't provoke me, Frank, I'm warning you.

DAN

I'll get Dick Evans to sew you up. (He picks up phone, punches some buttons.) Evans? I want you to run down the block to Woolworth, get a needle and some thread.

FRANK

Gray thread.

DAN

Gray thread and come back here with them.

FRANK

(He grabs phone from DAN) Make it snappy, Evans, you hear? Chop, Chop...We need a photo of a bomb to illustrate the story.

OSCAR

Some footage of the bomber would be better.

FRANK

That's a good idea. Why don't you go out and get some, sweetheart?

OSCAR

Who made the bomb threat?

FRANK

How would I know that? You think the German shepherd told me?

OSCAR

If he did, he'd be a more reliable source than most of the ones you've used in the past.

FRANK

(He starts running around, mimicking a German shepherd) Arf! Arf! Corruption in the canine corps. A German shepherd, two Dobermans, and a Chihuahua are on the take. Arf! (He runs to KITTY, tries to lift up her dress with his teeth)

KITTY

(Not amused) Cut it out. You're going to tear my dress. (FRANK starts to bark and sniff at KITTY's behind.) Stop it, I said. (FRANK runs to other side of KITTY, mimes lifting his leg on her skirt)

KITTY

You're repulsive.

FRANK

(German accent) Was ist das? Was ist das? German shepherd versteht no English.

KITTY

At last I understand why you can't write a decent lead.

FRANK

(straightening up)

Now you listen to me, girlie. I get my leads right more often than anybody here. Yes.

DAN

(walking between FRANK and KITTY) Will you guys cut it out? We've got a broadcast...

KITTY

Ha! You make me laugh. My favorite was the lead you broadcast for that bank robbery. (She mimics Frank's voice.) "The Harlem branch of the Chemical Bank was wobbled today by a group of three armed men."

(KITTY and OSCAR begin laughing together)

All night long, people were phoning, asking for pictures of men with three arms.

FRANK

You want to see a man with three arms? Here, I'll show you. (He starts taking down his pants)

KITTY

Please spare us.

FRANK

(Hesitating) As you wish. (He pulls his pants up) But you're missing something.

OSCAR

You spent too much time with Lyndon Johnson when you were Washington correspondent. I saw him unzip his fly and display his equipment at a meeting of the National Security Council. (Texas drawl) "Yuh think Ho Chi Minh's got anything like this?"

FRANK

The last time I interviewed Lyndon in the White House, he was sitting on the toilet.

KITTY

You missed your golden opportunity to flush him down and end the Vietnam War.

FRANK

Why should I have done that? I was a hawk.

KITTY

You do have a certain odd affection for right wing dictatorships. Why is that?

FRANK

I'm from a military family. I went to the Citadel. Atten-Hut! (He snaps to attention) About face! (He does an about face) About face! (another about face) Present arms! (He rolls up one sleeve, then the other; finally holds his bare arms up in the air)

DAN

What did you learn in military school? I mean, that you think was most important.

FRANK

How to masturbate.

KITTY

God, do I weally have to listen to this?

FRANK

By my senior year, I'd been in more circle jerks than Latin classes.

KITTY

When casual conversation descends to this level, it's time to do some work. I think I'll go down to the floor, see what happened to your bomb thweat.

OSCAR

I'll go with you. Maybe there might be a story there.

(KITTY and OSCAR both exit, OSCAR a little slowly and unsteadily)

FRANK

(calls out when KITTY is out of earshot)

Watch out for that third arm, girlie ...Cunt! (He picks up a glass container with pencils, heaves it angrily at the door through which KITTY and OSCAR have just exited. Container crashes against frame, scattering pencils and other writing paraphernalia)

DAN

Take it easy, Frank.

FRANK

Where is that goddamned kid with his needle and thread?

DAN

He'll be here.

FRANK

I've taken all I'm going to take from that decrepit old gasbag of an anchor and that fat lipped cunt.

DAN

Please, not so loud.

FRANK

I'll say it as loud as I want. (mimics KITTY) "At last I understand why you can't write a decent lead." I get my leads right more often than anybody here. Don't I? Don't I?

DAN

Of course you do.

FRANK

If I were the boss here, the editor, the anchor, I'd show her.

DAN

Soon maybe you will be the boss.

FRANK

What? Really? How do you know?

DAN

Well...

FRANK

I heard Jim Lake was just up here. Did he tell you something?

DAN

Well...

FRANK

Spill it, dammit.

DAN

He said everything is still up in the air.

FRANK

Shit. I thought you knew something.

DAN

Oscar's finished. You can be sure of that.

FRANK

What about the survey from Marketing Evaluation? Jim wanted to see that before he made up his mind.

DAN

His mind is made up.

FRANK

Christ, this suspense is killing me.

DAN

Relax, it's between you and Kitty now; and you have an edge.

FRANK

You mean because I'm male.

DAN

Everybody knows that our viewers don't want a female anchor. But that's not all you've got going for you.

FRANK

You mean the little gaffe she made last month?

DAN

When you make an off-the-cuff remark, and it ends up in the New York Times, Time, and Newsweek, it is not a little gaffe; it's a blooperoo.

FRANK

(He mimics KITTY in a hot, sexy way)

I loved it: "A senator will tell you more over a martini at midnight than he will over a microphone at noon." (He humps erotically) Unhhhh!

DAN

That one remark confirmed everything our viewers have thought about Kitty for years. They see her as a smug, competitive little cock-teaser, and they don't like it.

FRANK

You heard from them?

DAN

Didn't anyone tell you? We were getting angry letters by the carload. Even more than when she made the remark reacting to the story on migrant children.

FRANK

Which one was that?

DAN

You know, after we ran the story on the exploitation of migrant children last year, Kitty recalled on the air how she used to resent being made to clean up her room as a child.

FRANK

Aw, that one blew over months ago.

DAN

But look how long it took to quiet down. Every day at three o'clock the kid would deliver the papers, and boom -- another blast. Kitty would start to cry.

Torrents of mascara would drip down her face onto her scripts. She was hysterical. She couldn't handle it.

FRANK

Even so, Jim Lake has always liked her.

DAN

Jim Lake likes high ratings.

FRANK

He likes a high doodle. I think a dyke stimulates him. He's aroused by the thought of two women fucking each other.

DAN (He looks around nervously.) Please, not so loud.

FRANK

I wonder what Mr. and Mrs. Christian Middle America would think if they knew about that bull she lives with -- what's her name?

DAN

Evelyn.

FRANK

The cunt is nothing but an opportunist anyway; she's not a real reporter. She came up reporting on food, women's fashions. Suddenly she's sitting between Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin, holding a microphone. The three of them would have made a good Cuban sandwich.

DAN

That interview was a coup, all right.

FRANK

She should have come up the way I did, the hard way. I still remember the first day I started as a reporter at KNXT in Los Angeles. Madame Nhu had arrived from Saigon and was staying at the Beverly Wilshire, For two days I staked out her hotel to get an interview. My boss was furious. He threatened to fire me if I came back a third day empty handed. So I threw myself in her path, down on my hands and knees. (He jumps down on his hands and knees.) I begged her: "Please, Madame Nhu. You've got to speak to me. If you don't. I'll be fired."

DAN

What happened?

FRANK

(rises to his feet) She walked right past me, the arrogant gook, She didn't even glance at me. I was fired.

DAN

You were lucky to have survived.

FRANK

Every other station in town had filmed me groveling. They all showed me on the air that night. Next day, I was rehired.

DAN

They admired your persistence.

FRANK

I want this anchor job. I've waited for it thirteen years.

DAN

Quite honestly, I believe it's going to be yours.

FRANK

I'm a man who's not easily dissuaded when he wants something. I'm willing to take risks.

DAN

I'm behind you one hundred per cent; you know that. But you have to keep one more possibility in mind.

FRANK

What?

DAN

You and Kitty might end up as co-anchors.

FRANK

Never. I'll go over to CBS. I'll take the audience with me.

DAN

Be reasonable. You two would make a dynamite team. Our publicity department is already testing the idea. (DAN pulls from behind anchor desk a large poster, a photograph of FRANK and KITTY standing together, looking earnest, with caption underneath in bold letters, "USBC News -- The Team to Beat.")

FRANK

No.

DAN

(He goes over to wall and hangs poster) Think about it. You two would be the anchor team of the century. You could make history together. (He looks at poster admiringly.)

FRANK

The day I share an anchor desk with that loathsome woman is the day you start shitting strawberries and cream, understand?

DAN

But you wouldn't share a desk. You would be in New York; Kitty would be in Washington. Maybe vice versa, whichever you prefer.

FRANK

No.

DAN

This bitterness is interfering with your economic interests; it's conflicting with your career goals.

FRANK

You know my career goal? As soon as possible, I never want to see that cunt's face or hear her Elmer Fudd voice again.

DAN

As long as you work here, you may have to.

FRANK

She's dug into me too often. I don't want to hear from her any more about how I do or don't write my leads, or about my spelling or grammar.

DAN

Close your ears. Tune her out.

FRANK

Let her go to the New York Public Schools to play English teacher.

DAN

She didn't like teaching. She was raped in the front of her classroom at Harlem High.

FRANK

You don't say. Maybe that's why men don't arouse her.

DAN

I doubt that's the reason. The rapist was the captain of the women's basketball team.

FRANK

The cunt can tell her problems to Oscar Gasbag. I don't want to hear them. Let the two of them start their own show, just so long as I don't have to look at either of them.

DAN

If you'll only be patient, things will work out.

FRANK

I've been patient for too long. My patience is wearing thin.

DAN

By the way, do you have the story you want to read on Patience Schwartz? (He looks at his clipboard) I think I have thirty seconds for it at the end of the broadcast.

FRANK

(Pulls page from inner breast pocket) Sure. It's right here.

DAN

Let me see it. (FRANK hands page to DAN, who reads it) Wow! This is a lurid one. I don't know.

FRANK

I like it. I'm going to read it.

(OSCAR and KITTY enter)

DAN

What's going on down there? What did you find out?

OSCAR

(A little winded)

I can't climb stairs like I used to. I found that out. (He lights a cigarette, takes a few deep drags.)

KITTY

The bomb squad is still poking around but hasn't found anything. No one knows who made the thweat.

OSCAR

I'll say a few words about the bomb threat in my opening story.

DAN

You want to write them down?

OSCAR

No, I'll ad-lib them.

DAN

Here's a nice little feature for the end of the broadcast. We still have thirty seconds free.

OSCAR

Let me see the lineup.

DAN

(Hands OSCAR clipboard) It'll fit in nicely.

OSCAR

Let me see the story.

DAN

Frank's going to read it; don't worry.

OSCAR

I said, let me see the story, Dan. (DAN reluctantly hands page to OSCAR, who reads it over)

DAN

Stop frowning. The audience will like it. The story has human interest.

OSCAR

(reading) "Patience Schwartz, the first Jewish woman chosen to be Miss Canarsie, was forced to relinquish her title tonight."

DAN

I love it. There'll be real viewer empathy.

OSCAR

(continues reading) "The contest judges learned this afternoon that Hustling Magazine, in its September issue, will publish nude photos of Miss Schwartz making love to a Saint Bernard."

KITTY

How shocking. A Catholic weligious ikon.

OSCAR

No. A dog.

KITTY  
Oh, dear.

OSCAR  
(Hands clipboard back to DAN) This story simply will not do.

DAN  
Now wait a minute. We have the time to fill.

FRANK  
You're goddamn right. I'm reading that story.

OSCAR  
Frank, you should try very hard to limit your swearing if you want to succeed as a broadcaster.

FRANK  
I'll swear as much as I damn well please.

OSCAR  
You've always had the bad habit of swearing in ordinary conversation. Swearing limits your vocabulary, particularly the adjectives.

FRANK  
It does, does it?

(ASSISTANT DIRECTOR and CAMERAMAN enter)

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
Five minutes to broadcast, Mr. Klinger.

(CAMERAMAN puts on headset, begins adjusting camera. ASSISTANT DIRECTOR goes over notes and papers, preparing for broadcast)

OSCAR  
I notice that you sometimes find yourself tongue-tied when you have to clean up your speech. You should practice using other adjectives so that you get more color in your reports.

FRANK  
Why, you pompous old ...Pretentiousness like yours I rarely see.

OSCAR  
I'm not pretending. I'm trying to help you improve your delivery.

FRANK  
I don't need your help. I don't want your help.

OSCAR  
Then let me give you the name of a consultant.

FRANK  
Don't tell me what to do. Your advice isn't worth a thing to me. What you know about broadcasting I could shove into a rat's ass.

OSCAR

Now is not the time for us to delve into your sex life.

DAN

(Stepping between OSCAR and FRANK) Stop this bickering. Stop immediately. (Looks at his watch) We've only got four minutes.

FRANK

I am going to read that report.

OSCAR

Take your story to the National Inquirer. I won't have it on the evening news. I am the editor of this broadcast.

FRANK

You are nothing. You're washed up, a has-been, a never was, a never will be. I don't have to listen to you.

KITTY

As-long as Oscar is still the anchor, we should abide by his decisions.

FRANK

His decisions have made this news department into the flea-bitten operation it is. Look at where they put this booth. We can't see the rostrum; all we can see is the backs of the CBS, NBC, and ABC booths. We're even behind the print journalists. There's hardly any backup staff. And where is that goddamn kid with his needle and thread. I'm going to kill him when I see him.

KITTY

Why blame Oscar for where they put this booth? He had nothing to do with it.

DAN

That is true. It was Jim Lake's decision

KITTY

Jim has never liked to spend money on news. To him the news department is just a loss leader.

FRANK

(Pulls out a handkerchief and blows his nose noisily) Of course it's a loss leader. Who would want to watch a news broadcast like this one? World affairs, economic analyses: fifty percent of our audience can't understand the stories we run, another forty percent is bored with them. No wonder our ratings are low. No wonder the news department loses money. And who do we have to thank for our stunning success? Why, our distinguished editor here. (FRANK gestures toward OSCAR, who has been ignoring him and reading through a script)

OSCAR

Now is not the time for a critique of the broadcast. (OSCAR puts on blazer, shoots cuffs, places earpiece in his ear)

FRANK

(Goes to OSCAR, grabs story on patience Schwartz) When a good story comes along, a story that can hold the interest of an audience, our editor won't let us read it.

KITTY

Let me see that story. (She takes paper from FRANK)

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR  
Three minutes to air.

OSCAR  
I've never understood your taste for the lewd and sensational. I sincerely believe that you're in the wrong business.

FRANK  
(blows his nose-again) I see. And just what business should I be in, oh wise one who in less than three weeks will have his bloated ass kicked out the studio door.

OSCAR  
Pharmaceuticals. The drug industry would be more appropriate.

FRANK  
Just what do you mean by that crack?

DAN  
Oscar, I'm sure Frank's story is appropriate for...

FRANK  
You want to talk about drugs, do you? Why don't you tell us about drugs.

OSCAR  
I take lasix and digoxin for my heart. Those are the only drugs I'm familiar with.

FRANK  
What about that junkie son of yours, eh? Some father you were.

OSCAR  
Now see here, I won't have you...

FRANK (blows his nose)A two-bit, failed actor. What was he full of when he committed suicide? Heroin? Mescaline? LSD? Sterno?

OSCAR  
That's none of your...

FRANK  
He must have thought he was a peregrine falcon, the way he sailed off the twelfth floor of the Playboy Club. Did they ever make you pay for the crate full of bunny costumes that he crashed into and ruined?

KITTY  
His dwug problem is over. Yours isn't.

FRANK (blows his nose)  
I don't know what you're talking about.

KITTY  
Why do you keep blowing your nose?

FRANK  
I have a summer cold I can't seem to shake.

KITTY

I see stweaks of blood on your handkerchief.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Two minutes to air.

FRANK

It's nothing, a nose condition, rhinitis. It started when I was hit in the nose by a sailboat boom last summer. A nose and throat specialist is treating me for it.

KITTY

(nods head) I see.

FRANK

(Fishes in his pocket, pulls out a slip of paper) Here's his bill. (He shows bill to KITTY)

KITTY

A thousand dollars? For that kind of money he could tweat an elephant's nose.

FRANK

What do you expect? He's a Park Avenue specialist, not a medicaid mill.

KITTY

Tell me: This nose condition, is it making you slur your words on the air?

FRANK

Why, you devious bitch. You're trying to imply that I'm a, coke freak. Well, I'm not, get me? (He blows his nose.)

KITTY

You said it; I didn't.

FRANK

I said nothing.

KITTY

You're an illiterate, a newsman who can't even write. (She holds up script for FRANK's story by edge) The parts you added to this story glare like a neon sign: misspellings, mispunctuations, bungled syntax.

FRANK

Don't you hold my script like a turd. Give it to me. (He snatches it)

DAN

Kitty, you're being too harsh. It's a good story. I'm sorry, Oscar, but Frank is going to read it. Now all of you can stop arguing, OK?

FRANK

(to KITTY) You pretend to be a journalist, to have gotten where you are on your merits. How could you have done that? You have the speech of an imbecile.

KITTY

The viewers like me. The women identify with me. That's how I got where I am.

FRANK

Hah! Don't make me laugh.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

One minute to air.

FRANK

You got where you are by fucking every news executive in this company.

KITTY

That's a wotten lie.

FRANK

I've always wondered why you bother to put on your panties in the morning.

KITTY

I won't listen to you. You're incapable of telling the twuth.

FRANK

Imagine: a dyke who fucks men to get to the top.

KITTY

You've always preferred young boys, haven't you.

FRANK

You shut up.

KITTY

You ought to wot in jail for what you did to that twelve-year-old boy in Philadelphia.

FRANK One more word out of you and...

KITTY

He nearly died after you got finished horsewhipping him.

FRANK

You don't know what you're talking about, you scum bag.

KITTY

How much did you have to pay those parents of his to keep quiet? It must have been a pwetty penny.

FRANK

You devious slut.

KITTY

You psychopathic, perverted, subhuman slime.

FRANK

You scheming, vengeful whore.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Absolute quiet please. Ten seconds to air...nine..eight...seven...six..five...four...three...two...one...

(While ASSISTANT DIRECTOR is calling off seconds, KITTY and FRANK are standing close, glaring at one another. Suddenly, FRANK grabs OSCAR's glass of milk from corner of anchor desk and tries to dump it on KITTY. KITTY defends herself, and the milk splashes wildly, mostly over FRANK. At the same time, KITTY picks up OSCAR's piece of pie on plate from corner of desk and manages to squish pie into FRANK's face and over the top of his coat, tie, and shirt. FRANK tries to spit a mouthful of pie at KITTY but misses. As voice over of ANNOUNCER is heard, FRANK and KITTY stand glaring at each other again.)

ANNOUNCER (voice over)

(Four musical tones are heard) This is USBC, The United States Broadcasting Company. It's seven P.M., eastern daylight time. (Teletypes are heard) Now, direct from our newsroom at the Democratic National Convention at Madison Square Garden in New York, here is the USBC Evening News with Oscar Klinger. (Red light lights on top of camera. ASSISTANT DIRECTOR exits through control room door SR.)

OSCAR

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. There has just been a bomb threat received here in the convention hall. At this moment, the police bomb squad and specially trained dogs are hunting for the explosive device. No group has yet taken responsibility for making the threat, and...

(shouts off: "stop him," "don't let him escape," "shoot". There is a terrific fusillade of gunfire.)

OSCAR

What's happening out there?

(DICK EVANS staggers through the door. He stands for a moment and coughs up a huge gush of blood, then falls headlong to the floor. As he falls, he drops the contents of a bag in his hand, and a few rolls of thread, packages of needles, and cloth come tumbling out. He is dead)

DAN

Evans, what happened?

(More gunfire, and in runs DELBERT KNUDSON. DELBERT is a tiny man, a chinese, with thick glasses. He is foppishly dressed in a tight-fitting ice cream suit, a maroon silk cravat with sapphire stickpin, matching pocket handkerchief, highly polished dark patent leather shoes and fawn spats. He wears white kid gloves on his hands. He carries a leather attach, case in one hand and a gun in the other. He is quite effeminate and speaks with a polished British accent. When agitated, he breathes noisily through his nose. Though in appearance a pansy, he is a dangerous man when he has a gun in his hand, a nightmarish, surrealistic figure.)

OSCAR

(to DELBERT) Who are you?

(DELBERT fires two shots through the door at his pursuers, then the gun jams.)

DELBERT

Jammed. Bloody cheap Korean import. (He throws the gun out the door in disgust, pulls a second smaller gun from his pocket, then slams and locks the door.)

OSCAR

Who are you?

DELBERT

Who am I? I, my dear fellow, am Delbert Knudson, and you are now my hostages.

Curtain

ACT THREE

scene one

The characters are in the same positions as they were at the end of Act Two.

DELBERT

What an interesting place. I've always wondered what a television studio looked like. (He walks around, inspecting the roan with quite a proprietary air.) Until further notice, feel free to regard me as the new owner. (He pulls a cigarillo from his pocket, then a match, walks up to the body of DICK EVANS, strikes match on sole of corpse's shoe, and lights cigarillo.) Tell me, who are those surprised looking chaps behind that big glass window? (He gestures stage right) (There is a pause. DELBERT breathes noisily through his nose to show his annoyance.) Well?

DAN

They're our director and assistant director.

DELBERT

What are they doing in that little room?

DAN

That's our control room. The images from all the cameras and the sound from all the microphones are channeled there. The director decides which ones should be broadcast.

DELBERT

Can the two gentlemen hear me when I speak?

DAN

Oh, yes.

DELBERT

You two gentlemen will stay where you are, and keep your hands where I can see them ... Very good. Remember, I'm an expert marksman. I've been shooting since I was a boy.

DAN

Oh, we will.

(Three beeps are heard)

DELBERT

Please excuse me a moment. (He opens his coat and removes a radio relay pager clipped to his belt. He sets down his attaché case)

VOICE FROM BEEPER

Mr. Knudson, the ABC Gun Shop called. You have not yet paid your bill for introductory shooting lessons.

(DELBERT breathes noisily through his nose, stares malignantly at the beeper in his hand, then clips the beeper on his belt again.)

DELBERT

(to FRANK)

You, what do you do here?

FRANK

I'm Frank Pangborn. I'm a correspondent.

DELBERT

Why is your clothing splattered with food?

KITTY

He's a sloppy eater.

DELBERT

I see. And what do you do?

KITTY

What do I do?

DELBERT

Yes, what is your function?

KITTY

I'm Kathy Litter, a cowespondent.

DELBERT

Why, during a political convention, are correspondents sitting here idle? Shouldn't you have been out working, gathering news?...Well?

DAN

Pardon me, sir, if you please, they are working. You see, our evening news broadcast had just begun when you...uh...stopped by.

DELBERT

I tend to be quite critical of the press. Many of my most newsworthy accomplishments have received scant attention, or none at all.

DAN

Ahh. I sympathize with you. We often hear that complaint.

DELBERT

You were broadcasting, you say?

DAN

We are broadcasting. What's happening here right now is being witnessed in thirty million living rooms across America.

DELBERT

How delightful. (He pulls out a comb, runs it through his hair, straightens his cravat; brushes his clothing. Then, to OSCAR:) Who are you?

DAN

May I introduce you to our anchorman, Oscar Klinger. He was just beginning the broadcast.

DELBERT (to OSCAR)

You're the anchorman?

OSCAR

For a short time longer, yes.

DELBERT

Why don't I recognize you?

OSCAR

Perhaps you're wearing your reading glasses.

DELBERT

By god, you're right. (He takes off glasses he is wearing, reaches in pocket, puts on another pair of glasses.) Now I recognize you.

OSCAR

You see, Dan, there's hope for me yet.

DELBERT

I've never liked you. I always preferred Dan Rather.

OSCAR

I'm sorry to hear that.

DELBERT

Nothing personal, I assure you. It's just your face. It has a lived in look.

OSCAR

It should. I've lived in it for quite some time now.

DELBERT

(to DAN, pointing gun) Not so close. You're coming too close to me. I must insist that you step back a few feet.

DAN (jumps backward) Yes, of course. Anything you say.

DELBERT

Should you come that close to me again, I regret to say that I would have to shoot you.

DAN

Yes, of course, anything you say.

DELBERT

Very good. Now that we've gotten through the introductions, I'd like to hear what you know about me. (to FRANK) You, sir, what have you heard or read of me?

FRANK

(thinks a moment) Very little, I'm afraid.

KITTY

He's not a gweat reader.

DELBERT

Silence! (He breathes noisily through his nose.) It's incredible. If you're a news correspondent, how is it that you haven't heard of me?

OSCAR

Maybe you need a new press agent.

DELBERT

(turns on OSCAR menacingly, points gun at his chest) I've killed men for less than that remark...but this time, I shall let it pass. Just keep in mind, all of you, that my forbearance has distinct limits.

DAN

Yes, yes. We will, we will.

DELBERT

(with a little bow) Thank you. (to KITTY) Now you, what have you heard of me?

KITTY

I've wead that you invented a new kind of bomb.

DELBERT

You did?

KITTY

Yes, a cockwoach with a nuclear warhead.

DELBERT

No, you couldn't have read about that. I'm still working on it -- top secret, actually, although I've shown the plans to Colonel Khadafi and he's quite interested. You must have read about my exploding cockroach.

KITTY

Oh, yes, I believe you're wight.

DELBERT

The exploding cockroach has been my greatest achievement. But I regret to say that at this time it remains a succès d'estime. I'd only sold a few to the Libyans when your federal agents swooped down and closed my manufactory. They were shockingly thorough; they confiscated every roach in the place.

OSCAR

Free enterprise has a tough time surviving in this country today -- too much government regulation.

DELBERT

Precisely. And despite the fact that I was furnishing gainful employment to one man, who has since moved to England and turned to modeling to support himself, I was incarcerated by your legal authorities.

(The telephone beeps. Oscar picks it up.)

OSCAR

Hello ... Yes, just a moment. (to DELBERT) It's for you.

DELBERT

Thank you. I must ask you to get up and step over there, if you please. (DELBERT gestures stage right. OSCAR gets up from anchor desk and sits in chair stage right. DELBERT sits in his spot at anchor desk and picks up phone.) Knudson here ...yes...you shall hear my demand shortly, and I intend to begin killing my hostages if it is not met ... yes ... a pleasure speaking with you. (DELBERT hangs up phone) Your police commissioner.

FRANK

What demand do you have? What do you want?

DELBERT

Patience, patience. That is the great problem with you Americans; you simply cannot wait for anything.

DAN

No, no. We'll be patient.

DELBERT

Thank you. (To OSCAR) Now you, sir. What have you heard of me?

OSCAR

I heard that you were involved in some sort of income tax protest, and that you had been in Rockland State, a mental hospital.

DELBERT

That's a lie. (He breathes noisily through his nose.)

OSCAR

It's only something I read.

DAN

That's right. You can't believe everything you read.

DELBERT

A damnable, atrocious calumny. A horrid falsehood. (Beeper beeps three times. DELBERT removes it from his waist.) Pardon me.

VOICE FROM BEEPER

Mr. Knudson, your psychiatrist from Rockland State Hospital, Dr. Duck Kim, called. He says you have missed your last three appointments.

(DELBERT breathes noisily through his nose. He walks around desk, angrily throws beeper to floor, blasts it once with his gun, then gives it a good swift kick.)

DELBERT

(calmly) I see that there have been a number of misconceptions about my life. I want now to be interviewed in detail so that these misconceptions may be cleared up.

DAN

Of course, of course.

DELBERT

Which one of you correspondents would like to interview me, so that the national television audience may know the truth? (There is a pause. No one answers.) Well?

OSCAR

I'll interview you.

DELBERT

Very good. You may proceed.

OSCAR

First I'd like to ask about your childhood, your name in particular. You're obviously oriental, yet you have a western name.

DELBERT

Quite right. But, you see, I'm only half oriental. I was born in Shanghai, where my father was the British Consul, Lord Knudson.

OSCAR

And your mother?

DELBERT

Ah, well, since you ask, my mother was a...ah...hostess.

OSCAR

A hostess?

DELBERT

Yes, in an opium den. That's where she met my father.

OSCAR

Then you are a member of the British aristocracy.

DELBERT

In spirit, yes, certainly. But there was a slight legal impediment. My father was not married to my mother.

KITTY

Oh! That means you're a...uh... (DELBERT breathes noisily through his nose) partial aristocwat.

DELBERT

To call me a partial aristocrat is actually to understate my social rank. I was educated at Eton. One of my half brothers is now Lord Knudson of High Dudgeon, having inherited the title from my father.

OSCAR

Tell us about the other brothers.

DELBERT

I have one other half brother, Simpson Knudson. He's the black sheep. Every family has one.

DAN

Oh, yes.

OSCAR

Why do you call him a black sheep?

DELBERT

In England Simpson became known as the Cuisinart Killer.

FRANK

He destroyed food processors?

DELBERT

No, not exactly. He had a peculiar loathing for prostitutes. He liked to kill them and chop them up in a Cuisinart.

KITTY

How odd.

DELBERT

Quite an enterprising fellow, really. He added onion and snails to the remains. He sold the stuff to restaurants as French chicken salad.

DAN

You see, Oscar, you bought a piece of the wrong funeral parlor.

OSCAR

Was Simpson Knudson apprehended?

DELBERT

Yes, about two years ago -- an interesting story. It seems a girl who was quite popular among the homicide inspectors at Scotland Yard somehow found her way into Simpson's Cuisinart. This girl had a little rose tattoo on one breast. Well, about a week after the girl's disappearance, the chief homicide inspector was in a restaurant when he spotted the tattoo in the middle of his plate of French chicken salad.

OSCAR

Lucky that he liked nouvelle cuisine.

DELBERT

Not for poor Simpson, I'm afraid. He's been in Highgate Prison ever since.

OSCAR

Would you like to tell us more about your own background?

DELBERT

I think I've said quite enough for the time being. Perhaps we should get on to the demands I wish to make.

OSCAR

Yes, let's.

DELBERT

I have in my attaché case an object that will cause the biggest explosion ever witnessed in this city (He picks up attaché case.)

DAN

No, no, please don't.

DELBERT

And why shouldn't I?

DAN

Please don't set off your explosion. Please. I have a sick wife. I have 2 kids in college. I'm under-insured.

DELBERT

You said you wanted to learn more about me. Now you will.

DAN

Please don't. Please don't set off an explosion. The company will pay ransom. Whatever you want.

DELBERT

Silence!

DAN

Please reconsider, I beg you.

DELBERT

Don't come any closer or I shall have to shoot you.

DAN (jumps back) Oh, I'm sorry.

DELBERT

Now then. (He slowly opens briefcase. DAN turns away and covers his ears. DELBERT withdraws from the case a telephone book-sized manuscript in a binder.) What I have written here will cause the greatest explosion this city has ever seen.

DAN

Written?

DELBERT

Yes, it's a diary I compiled during my short incarceration in Sing Sing, a shocking expose of conditions in prison.

KITTY

How intewesting.

DELBERT

And, furthermore, it's a work of literature. I've written much of it in unrhymed iambic pentameter.

FRANK

Most impressive.

DELBERT

Yet every publisher I've sent it to has refused to publish it. They've sent it back to me with a form letter. So I intend to read it, now, on the air, so that a publisher will accept it. Then I shall take this lady with me to the airport, where a plane must be waiting to fly me to Libya. Those are my demands. I shall now begin. (He opens manuscript) The title of my book is *In the Bladder of the Beast*.

FRANK

Pardon me, but how did you pick that title?

DELBERT

(breathes noisily through nose) I was placed in a cell with a leaky toilet, and the floor was always wet.

FRANK

I see.

DELBERT

I must insist that there be no more interruptions. Now then. (He puts on reading glasses, begins to read) "It was a dark and stormy night. The rain was pouring down in torrents, and the wind was whipping through the treetops. There were flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder..."

(the telephone beeps)

DAN

May I answer the phone?

DELBERT

Be quick about it.

DAN

Oh, yes, sir.

DELBERT

An author should not be interrupted when he's reading from his own work.

DAN

(answers phone) Yes? Quentin, yes, how are you?...You do?...You would?...Yes, just a minute. (to DELBERT) A famous author would like to speak with you. He wants to publish your book.

DELBERT

Just lay the receiver down and back up, if you please. (DAN does so. DELBERT walks behind anchor desk and picks up receiver.) Hello?...Yes? ...Oh, yes, what an honor to speak with you ... Yes, I just finished reading your book, *Ancient Genitals* ... Yes, I was...I never knew Babylonians had such colorful sex lives ... Yes...(As DELBERT is talking, he becomes more engrossed in conversation and turns stage left. As he does so, FRANK begins edging up on him from stage right. FRANK suddenly rushes at DELBERT, but as he does, DELBERT sees him and shoots. KITTY screams. FRANK is knocked backward by the impact of the bullet. He falls, writhes in agony, then is still.)

DELBERT

That was truly foolish of him, was it not? But then, I found him a boring person. He didn't have much to say.

OSCAR

(He begins advancing slowly on DELBERT) Alright, you've had your little game.

DELBERT

What? Do you wish to be another target?

OSCAR

(still advancing slowly)Hand over the gun.

DAN

Oscar, are you crazy?

DELBERT

Where do you prefer to be shot?

KITTY

Oscar, don't; you're committing suicide.

DELBERT

In your heart? In your fat stomach?

OSCAR

(to DELBERT)I'm only going to ask you nicely once more.

DELBERT

(He is becoming progressively more desperate and frightened.) Don't you come any closer; I'm warning you. Don't come closer. Don't. (DELBERT pulls trigger on his gun; it clicks but does not fire.)

OSCAR

(As he advances and grabs DELBERT) Empty?

DELBERT

Don't you touch me. Take your hands off me, you hulking ox.

(OSCAR has grabbed DELBERT's coat lapels and has hoisted him physically over the anchor desk. He slams DELBERT into front of desk, still gripping him tightly.)

DELBERT

No, no, please. Please don't hurt me. I beg you not to hurt me. (DELBERT meanwhile has managed to reach into one pocket and extract a handful of bullets.)

KITTY

Look out, Oscar. He's got more bullets. He's trying to reload the gun.

OSCAR

Yes?

(OSCAR now takes DELBERT by the throat with one hand and begins to squeeze. DELBERT-'s breathing becomes noisy.)

DELBERT

No, stop, please; you're squeezing my throat. You're choking me. I can't breathe. I can't...(DELBERT struggles for a moment, then the bullets and the gun clatter to the floor, as DELBERT goes limp. There is banging on the entrance door and voices are heard off: "Open up! Open up! Police!")

Blackout

ACT THREE

scene two

Two hours later. OSCAR is sitting alone at his typewriter typing. After a minute, DAN enters.

DAN

What a night. You should have seen Roosevelt Hospital. You couldn't get near the entrance without fighting your way through the picket line of the striking hospital workers and the police guards. On the inside, you couldn't get anyplace without fighting through the mobs of reporters.

OSCAR

I'm surprised. I thought every reporter in the northeast was jammed into this room. For the first time in my career, the media had become the story.

DAN

You know Frank is dead.

OSCAR

I heard.

DAN

He was dead on arrival, shot through the heart. They had to take his body to the morgue on First Avenue for the medical examiner's autopsy.

OSCAR

Did you notify his family?

DAN

Finally, but I had one tough time. He has a mother and a sister in Shawnee Mission, Kansas; I knew that, but I couldn't find the phone number. The operator wasn't even sure of the area code. I called Frank's secretary; she had to come in from Woodmere and go through his desk.

OSCAR

How did they take it?

DAN

Terribly. His mother was hysterical. She was screaming. His sister was a little better, but not much.

OSCAR

Too bad.

DAN

The funeral and the burial are going to be in Kansas. His secretary said she'd make the arrangements to ship the body.

OSCAR

What about Evans?

DAN

I know that his parents live in Hawaii, but I haven't been able to reach them. It's going to be terrible if they have to hear it on television before someone can talk to them.

(KITTY enters)

KITTY

(She runs up to OSCAR and kisses him on cheek) Oscar, my hewo. (She kisses him again) I've never been so scared. What an awful little man.

DAN

Worse than you think. The British police believe that Delbert is the Cuisinart killer. He matches their description, not that there's any urgency about the situation now.

KITTY

Why not?

DAN

He's in the medical intensive care unit at Roosevelt Hospital in a deep coma on a respirator. The doctors doubt he'll ever wake up. His larynx was fractured and he was hardly breathing when he got to the hospital. There was apparently considerable brain damage.

OSCAR

Perhaps I was a little too rough with him.

KITTY

You were not. We thought he was going to kill you.

DAN

You were damned lucky his gun was empty.

OSCAR

I knew it was empty.

DAN

You knew? How did you know?

OSCAR

The gun was a derringer two shot magnum pistol. I used to have one in my collection. Delbert fired the first shot at his beeper, the last shot at Frank.

DAN

Amazing. I saw your gun collection, and I'm trying to remember which gun it was.

OSCAR

I showed it to you, Dan. It was the black one with the intricate gold inlay on the barrel.

DAN

Ah, now I recall: the one with the gold crucifix inlaid on the barrel.

OSCAR

Gold crucifix? No, no, that gun was the Luger that Mussolini gave to Pope Pius XII. The pontiff used to sleep with it under his pillow in the Vatican.

DAN

I guess I still have something to learn about guns.

(JIM LAKE enters with a sheaf full of papers in his hand.)

JIM  
Oscar, you were sensational.

OSCAR  
Thanks.

JIM  
What great television -- best I ever saw. The way you captured that little monster -- amazing. And you looked absolutely fearless.

OSCAR  
I may have looked that way. At any rate, only my laundryman will know how scared I was.

JIM  
The wires in our headquarters are burning up. We've had to call in the entire daytime staff of operators to handle the phones. I've never seen anything like it in all my years in the business. Look at what they've been saying. (He hands some of papers to OSCAR, some to DAN, some to KITTY.)

DAN  
(after leafing through papers) Here are five who say you should get the Congressional Medal of Honor.

KITTY  
Look at this. A call from the British Ambassador. The Queen wants to give Oscar the Victoria Cross. (The chorus from *Hail Britannia* is heard).

(The phone beeps. DAN answers it.)

DAN  
Broadcast booth.

JIM  
You know, Oscar, I've been meaning to talk to you about your new...

DAN  
(into phone) Yes, just a moment...Oscar, it's the White House. (DAN hands receiver to Oscar.)

OSCAR  
Uh, oh. Somebody there probably didn't like the story I did this morning on the deficit. (into phone) yes, I'll wait...Yes...Oh, yes, Mr. President, how are you?...I'm fine, thank you...You did? My goodness, it seems almost everybody in the country was watching that broadcast. I never had such a large audience before ... Thank you, sir, but I must tell you that I think you're giving me too much credit. I was very lucky that the gun held only two bullets...Oh, thank you, Mr. President, that's very kind... Well, in fact, I'm going to be retiring...

JIM  
No, no, Oscar, don't say that.

OSCAR

...in three weeks. I probably won't have a lot to do for a while afterward, so if you want me to come down to Washington next month, that would be fine...Very good...A pleasant evening to you, too, sir. Good-bye. (OSCAR hangs up phone)

KITTY

What did the President say?

OSCAR

He said that he wants me to come to Washington to a ceremony next month. He's going to give me a certificate of commendation for bravery. He says that I've set a fine example of courage for all young Americans. I guess he thinks I'm a Republican.

JIM

Oscar, I want to talk to you about your new contract.

OSCAR

You do?

JIM

I certainly do. I have it right here. (JIM pulls contract out of pocket)  
I had it drawn up an hour ago. I've always said that you're the best anchorman in the business. (to DAN and KITTY) Haven't I?

DAN

Yes, Jim. Yes, Jim.

OSCAR

(looks through contract) How did you get the whole thing drawn up at this time of night?

JIM

I called in our chief contract negotiator from home.

OSCAR

Marvin Horowitz?

JIM

No, not Marvin. I fired Marvin last week.

OSCAR

Why did you do that?

JIM

Because he was never around late at night and on the weekend to take care of situations like this, that's why.

OSCAR

I see.

JIM

Don't worry, Oscar. This is the best contract I've ever given you.

OSCAR

The terms are quite generous.

JIM

Of course, they are. Look, you don't have to sign the thing tonight if you don't want. Show it to your agent. Show it to your lawyer. I'm sure they'll have no complaints. But there's one thing that I would like you to do.

OSCAR

What's that?

JIM

It's now nine thirty. I'd like to have a special news bulletin, let our viewers know that you're going to be with us another five years. You might also include a little follow-up of the events of tonight, but only if you want to. What do you think, Dan? Don't you think our viewers would like that?

DAN

Yes, Jim.

JIM

What about it, Oscar?

OSCAR (Thinks a moment)

OK.

JIM

Great. Dan, arrange it at once. A five-minute announcement.

DAN

Yes, Jim. (DAN picks up phone, punches buttons) Network operations? Jack? This is Dan Kleinbart in the broadcast booth at the Garden. I need emergency air time, immediately, on all network stations and affiliates. We have an urgent special news bulletin...Listen, I don't care what show you have to cut into ...I don't care if it's our most popular program...(to JIM) They didn't want to cut into Gilligan's Island. (punches more buttons on phone) Central switching? Bernie? This is Dan Kleinbart. Listen, we're going to broadcast a bulletin from our booth at the Garden. We've requisitioned emergency air time. The broadcast is to go to all network stations and affiliates ... That's right, a couple of minutes. Good. (DAN hangs up phone) Alright, Jim. We'll have the time in a couple minutes.

JIM

Oscar, I want to tell you how pleased I am at everything that's happened. For the last few months I've worried about the future of the company, what with the price of our stock falling the way it has.

OSCAR

I've noticed that.

JIM

It's all the fault of a numbskull I hired out of Harvard Business School, Myron Levin. I fired him two weeks ago. I wish I'd never seen him.

OSCAR

Is he the programmer who bought the sit-com series with the family of orangutans in it?

(ASSISTANT DIRECTOR and CAMERAMAN enter and set up)

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

One minute to air, Mr. Klinger.

(OSCAR sits at anchor desk, prepares to broadcast)

JIM

No, no; that was someone else. Myron Levin was vice president in charge of acquisitions. Before I realized what he was doing, he'd lost three hundred thirty million dollars.

OSCAR

(whistles) A nice piece of change. What did he lose it on?

JIM

Bad ideas, poorly planned, poorly executed: cable TV, porno videocassettes, some graveyards in Brooklyn.

OSCAR

Myron Levin: I think I remember him now.

JIM

Anyhow, the losses have shown up on our balance sheet and our stock has taken a beating. The price has been so low, I've heard two rumors that a raider is going to try and take control of the company.

OSCAR

And oust the current management?

JIM

You don't have a thing to worry about. Your news broadcast is going to take us over the top again. I can't tell you how pleased I am.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Ten seconds to air...nine...eight ...seven ...six...five...four...three...two...one

VOICE OF ANNOUNCER

We interrupt this program for a special report from USBC News.

(Red light lights on camera. Bright lights come on)

OSCAR

A demented, armed man named Delbert Knudson broke into our broadcast booth tonight but has now been apprehended. Our correspondent, Frank Pangborn, and a desk assistant, Dick Evans, were killed. Knudson is now in critical condition in Roosevelt Hospital, and the doctors do not expect him to recover. British police suspect that Knudson may have been responsible for the murders of many women in London. Our British correspondent is investigating, and we should have more details for you soon. (slight pause) In the past few weeks, many of you have written and phoned, asking whether I am going to continue as anchor of this broadcast. I wish to report to you tonight that I have decided to retire from this network.

JIM

(stage whisper)What?

DAN

(stage whisper) Oscar, what are you saying? Are you crazy?

OSCAR

To my many loyal viewers, I extend my heartfelt thanks for your interest and your support. This is Oscar Klinger, USBC News, good night.

(Bright lights go off. Red light goes off on camera.)

JIM

How can you do this? Haven't I always treated you fairly? Look, Oscar, you can retract your retirement tomorrow. Just name your price. Just tell me what I can do for you. What can I do?

OSCAR

(Rises, and as he exits he turns to JIM) You can take this job and shove it.

The End