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.
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.
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.

(OJIM 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.

(OSASSISTANT 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 weading.

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? Really? 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, uts, I thought you really 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. Drugs 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 problems 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 weason 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 celeberties 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 recall. 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 Fwank, 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 wobbed 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 threat.

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 religious icon.

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
(blowing 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 (blowing 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 (blowing 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 streaks 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 treat 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 attaché, 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 correspondent.

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 great 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 read that you invented a new kind of bomb.

DELBERT
You did?

KITTY
Yes, a cockroach 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 right.

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 aristocrat.

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 interwesting.

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 anywhere 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

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