

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ERNIE

by Sean Sancel

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Inspired by & Dedicated to Craig Alpaugh

Lights up:

The play begins with a desk and chair  
STAGE RIGHT. STAGE LEFT there's nothing  
but a rusty tin coffee can used to hold  
cigarette butts.

SEAN sits working at the desk.

CRAIG ALPAUGH enters STAGE LEFT and  
crosses to SEAN.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

*(makes exaggerated "smoking" motions to the man at desk. Two  
fingers back and forth to his lips.)*

SEAN

*(watches CRAIG's display for a second) What?*

CRAIG ALPAUGH

*(more exaggerated "let's go smoke" gestures.)*

SEAN

You wanna go play trombone?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

*(makes a face) C'mon, Sean, let's go smoke...*

SEAN

*(getting up) Okay, okay...*

They walk to stage left and stand by the coffee can. Sean begins to smoke a cigarette. Craig pats his pockets and then looks at Sean.

SEAN (cont'd)

What's the matter?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

You got a cigarette?

SEAN

Oh, no... I thought you said you were gonna quit...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Sean, you were gonna quit and you're smoking.

SEAN

Yea, 'cause I have a cigarette.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Would you give me one! I'm workin' on a script thats killin' me...

SEAN

Why? what's wrong with it?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

I don't know. The author is nuts.

SEAN

Oh, you're workin on one of your scripts.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Can't you be nice? Ya crazy Mick...

SEAN

Half Mick...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Half mick? Why what's the other half? Yea, what the hell is "Sanczel"?

SEAN

Hungarian.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Hungarian? What's a Hungarian?

SEAN

Umm.. someone who comes from Hungary.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Really? I thought a Hungarian was the only guy who could follow you into a revolving door and come out in front of you...

SEAN

My father came from Budapest. He didn't speak any English, just Hungarian. He went to work every day and they go to this diner for lunch but he can't order...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

'Cause he doesn't know any English.

SEAN

Right. So, he comes to me and he says, "Seanie, teach me some English so I can order lunch." So I say, "Oh, okay.." And I teach him how to say 'apple pie and coffee'. 'Apple pie and coffee', he says real proud and he practices it all weekend ... "apple pie and coffee, apple pie and coffee.." So Monday rolls around and he's at the diner and the waitress says, "What'll I bring you?" And he says, "apple pie and coffee!" Now a couple of weeks go by and he comes to me again, "Seanie, every day I eat apple pie and coffee. I'm up to here with the apple pie and coffee. Teach me to say something else." So I teach him to say "ham sandwich". "Ham sandwich" he practices, really relieved he's gonna get somethin' else for lunch. "Ham sandwich, haamm sandwichh". So Monday...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Have I heard this?

SEAN

Who cares? Just listen! "Ham sandwich", so Monday the waitress says "What'll ya have?" And my father goes "Ham sandwich!" And she says "You want that on wheat or rye?" and my dad goes "...apple pie and coffee".

Craig doesn't laugh much at this joke.  
Instead he just smokes and reflects on  
what he's heard.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

That's okay, I guess.

SEAN

*(not too concerned)*

Yea, whaddyou know about funny...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Hungarians just aren't funny, that's all.

SEAN

Oh, they sure are.. Funnier than you, you... what are you?  
Some kind of Norseman? No, I know, you're Finnish...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Look, I'll let you know when I'm Finnish... Name me one funny  
Hungarian. In fact name me any famous or important Hungarians  
at all...

SEAN

Okay, I will...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

You got none, do you? Go ahead...

SEAN

Well, give me a minute! Let's see.. um - Zsa Zsa Gabor..

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Sheesh, that's all ya got?

SEAN

Wait a minute Eva Gabor! The good one. And... and.. what  
about Bela Lugosi!

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Well, it's gettin' a little better. Not much, but a little...

SEAN

Wait a minute - I got one for ya - Ernie Kovacs! He was Hungarian! There ya go, Ernie Kovacs! Whaddya say to that, buster? A comedy genius!

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Was he Hungarian?

SEAN

He sure was!

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Okay, I'll give you that one. Yea, he was great.. What did he do again?

SEAN

You know.. he was on TV and stuff.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

In the fifties...

SEAN

Yea, and he did all the cool things you could do with a TV when no one else was doin that. It's like if a you got a bunch of funny friends together and were let loose in a TV studio and just did whatever you thought was funny...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

And he was Hungarian?

SEAN

Yes, he was Hungarian, why is that so hard to believe?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Y'see there ya go. We should do a play about Ernie Kovacs. In fact that's a great idea...

SEAN

Yea..?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

And what more unlikely a main character than a funny Hungarian? Do you think it'd be too unbelievable?

SEAN

You know, I've had just about enough of that.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

You'll star and I'll direct, it'll be great. And we'll call it...

SEAN

Yes?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

(starts to laugh to himself uncontrallably) "The Importance Of Being Ernie"!

SEAN

That's great!

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Isn't that a great title? With a title like that, it's sure to be a hit...

SEAN

Great, now all we need is a play to nestle in underneath the title.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Yea, I guess we have to do a little research..

SEAN

The Importance of Being Ernie.. What was the importance of being Ernie...?

Music starts. Da-da-da-duh-da!

CRAIG ALPAUGH

What the hell was that...?

More music...

CRAIG ALPAUGH (cont'd)

Did you lean on something?

SEAN

(pause) No I didn't *lean* on something...!

A woman bursts in between Sean & Craig and starts singing the opening number.

She is dressed in 50's styled clothes that are colored only shades of grey. She appears to be in black & white. A single spotlight follows her as she sings. Sean & Craig sing backup.

She is essentially a young Edie Adams (Ernie Kovacs 2nd wife).

EDIE ADAMS

**"What's The Big Deal?"**  
**by Sean Sanczel©2003**

Why?

What's the sense, what's the point

What's the use of it? And who cares?

Why do we try when we all have to die in the end?

Ohhh, what's the big deal?

(Her skirt gets caught on Seans ring and tears off as she walks.)

Tell me why?

Do we laugh, do we cry

Do we harmonize, in a song?

Can you find a clue in this meaningless goo we call life?

Ohhh, what's the big deal?

Once I thought I could see a point,

Then I thought again and I thought "No.."

But then I stopped thinking 'cause hey, I have places to go..

Why go high?

Why go low, why go down and then up again?

Right in here?

Why I implore, it's all been done before anyway...

Ohhh, what's the big deal?

Once I thought I could see the point,

Then I thought again and I thought "No.."

Then I stopped thinking 'cause hey, I have places to go...

(MORE)

EDIE ADAMS (cont'd)

Tell me why?

What's the sense" What's the point"

Why the use of it? And who cares?

Why should I? Why would you? Why did they? Why do we all?

Ohhh, what's the big, hairy deal?

Towards the end of the song she makes her way up a spiral staircase and on the last note - falls through the floor.

The theatre goes completely black. Suddenly light emits from the TVs that are facing the audience. Actor 1 as ERNIE KOVACS appears on screen.

ERNIE KOVACS

Bet you thought it was your set. It's just me, I have a slow focus. Hi, I'm Ernie Kovacs. I want to thank you for inviting me into your living rooms tonight. It's just a shame you couldn't have cleaned up a little first...

The theatre goes completely black again. The German version of "MACK THE KNIFE" starts to play...We hear in the darkness huge, noisy footsteps approaching.

MUSIC FADES OUT. Actor 1 as ERNIE KOVACS steps out into a single beam of light. His shoes are causing the loud footsteps. He stops to speak - his voice coming over the house speakers.

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

Well, here I am, you lucky people, you! I'm Ernie Kovacs. So this is the theatre, huh? It's okay, I guess. A little noisy. But there's a lot to be said for good acoustics in a room. Sound is a tricky thing...

He puts the cigar in his mouth to light it but his voice over the speakers continues...

ERNIE KOVACS (OVER SPEAKERS)

I'd like to take this time to thank you for coming out to the show.. umm.. I mean... "puff, puff"..heh, heh ...ummm, "puff"...

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

*(now normally speaking)* Um, sorry about that folks. Like I was saying.. tricky...

He starts to walk forward and the loud footsteps are back. He takes off his shoes.

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

I should rip their tongues out. *(He throws the shoes back stage)* Well, I was never too crazy about live theatre, I guess. It's a little over-rated, I mean. Take Broadway- there's just as much lousy, mediocre stuff there as there is on television - and with less excuse.

He walks a little and the huge noisy footsteps are back. He takes off his socks, and throws them backstage. He tries a few steps only this time we hear loud squishy noises with each step. He looks at audience.

ERNIE KOVACS

Except this, now this is good quality stuff. But the theatre hour's just all wrong, is all. It fouls up the whole evening. How many of you out there aren't considering your evening fouled up already? But believe me, the theatre is just as bad for the performers as it is for the audiences. So we're all here suffering together. 'Cause if you're in a bomb that closes, it's hardly worth the trouble. And if you're in a big hit, it's a long boring drag. But on the other hand, tonight we have some terrific subject matter, so I'm game. I mean, I'm not just here for the money, The money means nothing. The money is nothing so the money means nothing. Well, I could go on all night and probably will, but I have to get to the first sketch. A little first sketch music please!

Music swells up as Actor 2 enters. The desk turns into a bed and Ernie starts to gets in it while Actor 2 becomes ANOUNCER .

ANNOUNCER (ACTOR 2)

It's time for "The Importance of Being Ernie". A short play - it just seems long. *(The ANNOUNCER then turns back into CRAIG ALPAUGH and rubs his neck in thought)* I don't know, is this how we're gonna start it?

ERNIE KOVACS

*(Becoming SEAN)* Yea, what's the matter with it?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

I don't know, you got him putting down the theatre and insulting the audience. I don't think you should insult the audience in the first five minutes.. And are you sure he was Hungarian...?

SEAN

Jiminy crickets.. YES! He was Hungarian. You can't get past that can you?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

It's just that when you think of Hungarians you think of gypsies stealing your children and all...

SEAN

Look - his parents, Andrew and Mary, were both from Trenton. Just like my Dad.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Trenton's in New Jersey, not Hungary.

SEAN

Might as well have been. There were tons of Hungarian immigrants.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Okay, but Kovacs did plenty of theatre, too, don't forget, he did all that summer stock with his mentor Harold Van Kirk... Plus I still think it should be a one-man show...

SEAN

I'm beginning to think that myself. How are we supposed to do the Nairobi Trio with only one guy? And I was gonna talk about Van Kirk...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

You know how important mentors are...

SEAN

Would you get outta here?

CRAIG exits.

ERNIE KOVACS

*(back in bed)* Can you believe two guys like that are gonna tell my story? No wonder I never used writers that much. Yea, Harold Van Kirk.. what a top-notch guy. My drama teacher. He's the one who got me into show business. I was only eighteen and didn't know what the hell I wanted to do with my life. Of course, before that, I did play Old King Cole in the seventh grade...

ACTRESS walk out.

ACTRESS (SCHOOL FRIEND)

Yea, that's because his parents were the only ones who could afford the big ol' King Cole costume. You should have seen the thing. We had to go crazy trying to make the queen's costume stand up to it.

ERNIE KOVACS

Nonsense, my dad was a meager former policeman...

ACTRESS

Yea, you mean bootlegger... *(she exits)*

ERNIE KOVACS

He was an Inebriant Facilitator Engineer.. But what's in a name? Ahhh, prohibition. What a time.. got me a pony. Only one on Union Street, too.

At this point we hear sounds of a door opening, house left, and horse footsteps walking from one side of the theatre to the other while Ernie watches. When the hooves get to house right, sound of a door opening and closing.

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

Just passin' through, I guess.

Actress and Actor 2 enter as Mary and Andrew Kovacs.

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

Mom! Dad!

MARY KOVACS

Sure we had money - for awhile! Didn't last all that long did it, Andrew?

ANDREW KOVACS

Well, I didn't repeal prohibition, y'know.

MARY KOVACS

Yea, you didn't stop it either...

ERNIE KOVACS

We went from really well off to really broke. My Mom and Dad eventually split up.

MARY KOVACS

Ohhh, we were so poor - (to Andrew) 'cause you couldn't find anything besides bootlegging.

ANDREW KOVACS

The one thing I'm good at and they have to go and make it legal.

MARY KOVACS

So when our little baby got so sick, ohh my little love, he wound up at Welfare Island, that horrible roach infested hospital for charity cases.

ERNIE KOVACS

Yea, right across the river from Manhattan!

ANDREW KOVACS

I did the best I could. But when we had it, boyyyyy, we were spendin' it! *(he starts to exit, then, as CRAIG)* You gonna stay in that bed for the whole show?

ERNIE KOVACS

Dad never said that...

ANDREW KOVACS (CRAIG)

Yea, but it's too long. You're already on page 10 and you're still talkin' about when you got sick. Let's not make this *Long Day's Journey Into Night*. *(He exits.)*

MARY

*(going to bed)* Ohh, you were only 20 years old, my little baby. You were working so hard in the theatre and going to classes in New York. Why do you work so hard? Ohh, my little Cherké!..

ERNIE KOVACS

You just called me a jerk?

MARY

What? No! Cherké, cherké! It means chicken. *(hits him playfully)* Don't tease me Ernie.

ERNIE KOVACS

You remember Van Kirk, don't ya Ma?

MARY

Oh yes. The acting teacher. He came to me and asked me to let my little love go work in the theatre. He knew you were so talented. *(she kisses his cheek)* Oh, my love, I have to go to work now.

MARY exits.

ERNIE KOVACS

Actually he just thought I was a wise-ass. But, I guess he liked me, he got all my acting tuitions payed with scholarships. I'll never forget the guy. I wish he was here now.

(MORE)

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

But I'm layin' here in this dirty little room at Welfare Island with a bunch of other sick, penniless misfortunates. I'm twenty years old and tryin' to make it on my own in New York City doin' odd jobs in the theatres. Mom thinks I burn the candle at both ends and that's why I got sick. But really - dumb story. One summer I got a such a bad sunburn I couldn't bear to wear pajamas or even have the sheets touching me. I was so hot but it got cold that night and I didn't even know it. So I got sick. By the time I got here I had pneumonia and pleuresy.

ACTRESS

*(steps into scene)* A year of living on 25 cent spaghetti dinners didn't help...

ACTOR 2

*(stepping in)* And poker games all night...

ACTRESS

He was an insomniac, you know...

Sad music swells up.

ERNIE KOVACS

*(singing opera-like)* And then something happened, that made it all worse... *(he stands in a classic theatre monologue pose and speaks very seriously)* They mixed up my records with those of a man who had just died. I was put into the turbuculosis ward. *(putting his hand to his forehead melodramatically)*

ACTRESS

So of course he got turbuculosis, too...

ACTOR 2

And it didn't look good..

ERNIE KOVACS

Who cared about some poor kid from Trenton....

Ernie then loses his "dramatic scene" stance and begins to tap dance to music. The other two leave and he gets back in bed.

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

Oh well. Poor me. But, I remember laying there alone and looking out the window. I saw a big guy digging a hole in the street and I'd have given anything to take a shovel and dig. Or a guy would drive by in a convertible with a girl and I lay there realizing I may never get out of bed. Eighteen months I layed there. I saw a lot of people die. It really affected me deeply. I decided then and there if I got out of this, I was not gonna waste a single minute. Life's too short and I'm gonna live every second like there's no tomorrow. From now on - Nothing in Moderation - that's what I say. Of course, that's *if* I get out of here...

We hear ACTOR 2 as Harold VAN KIRK offstage.

VAN KIRK

Kovacs. I'm looking for Ernie Kovacs. Aww, forget it...

HAROLD VAN KIRK enters. He rushes over to Ernie. Ernie jumps frailly out of bed.

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

Well, I'll be damned! Mr. Van Kirk!

VAN KIRK

Ernie! I came as soon as I heard. I just got back from Cambridge.

ERNIE KOVACS

I heard you ol' sly dog you! Congrats on the new missuss..

VAN KIRK

Oh yea, she's great. But what the hell are you doin' in this rat trap? I blame myself for losin' touch, son. I'll never forgive myself.

ERNIE KOVACS

Ahhh, come on...

VAN KIRK

Look, I took up a collection and we're moving you to Deborah Sanitarium in Brownsville. They're very good with turbuculosis treatment...

ERNIE KOVACS

Oh, you're nuts. Thanks, but I don't need no handouts, I'm fine..

VAN KIRK

Fine, huh? Look, kid, I got a lot of faith in you. Your'e gonna be one of the great ones. And I'm not gonna stand by while you waste away in this place. You're going. I gotta go get the paperwork started...

VAN KIRK exits. Ernie stands up smiling.

ERNIE KOVACS

What I tell ya? Top-notch. Sometimes you're just glad certain people are in your life. Well, goodbye ratty bed. Goodbye ratty walls. Goodbye ratty rats.

Ernie exits. Van Kirk re-enters.

VAN KIRK

My wife and I would go up to see him at Deborah every Sunday. Here he was surrounded by all these sick people and he was putting on routines for everybody. This kid was funny. He had them all in stitches - and a captive audience, too. I think it was one of Ernie Kovacs greatest shows, but it was never filmed. He read every book in the place. Started up late-night poker games and listened to classical music. The kid was nuts about music. After a year and a half in bed I guess Ernie thought he had enough and one day he just left the sanitarium...

ACTRESS (EDNA VINE)

(enters) Did you hear? Ernie's home!

VAN KIRK

Yes, I guess they finally released him.

ACTRESS (EDNA VINE)

Released him nothing! He snuck out. He didn't have permission to leave...

ERNIE enters.

ERNIE KOVACS

"Permission" is highly over-rated.

ACTRESS (EDNA VINE)

Ernie! (*hugs him*) Oh my God, don't move! There's a little rodent living on your upper lip...

ERNIE KOVACS

This happens to be the hallmark of maturity and sophistication... Who are you anyway?

ACTRESS (EDNA VINE)

Oh, great, his brains have turned to mush. I'm Edna, remember? Your good friend Edna Vine?

ERNIE KOVACS

Yea, yea, I know... but no one else does. Here...

He slaps a little sticker sign on her that reads "Edna Vine"

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

and I got one for you, too..

ACTOR 2

But, I'm Van Kirk.

ERNIE KOVACS

Not anymore you're not. See, it's a good thing I came up with these signs, you don't even know who the hell you are.

He puts a sticker on ACTOR 2. It reads: "Non-descript Friend"

ACTOR 2

"Non-descript friend"?

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

(*gallantly gives a flower to EDNA*) And here this is for you..

ACTRESS (EDNA VINE)

Ohhhh, who's the other one for...?

ERNIE KOVACS

*(looks at Actor 2, then alá Dovetonsils)* Don't you wish, you big, sweet thing you... No it's for my Mother. She'd be jealous as hell if she knew I gave you one and not her... Y'know they gave me three months to live at that hospital and the only reason I got better was because Mom snuck me in cigars and steaks.

ACTOR 2

Sure, and sneaking out at night to go into town and make merry...

ERNIE KOVACS

Well, her name wasn't Mary, it was Suzane, but you get the point... Hey, why are we hangin' around this musky theatre? Let's go outside...

ERNIE opens an imaginary door and lets EDNA and EDDIE walk out. SFX COMES UP: COUNTRYSIDE, BIRDS CHIRPING, ETC.

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

Wait a minute, you guys come back in here.... wrong door.

He opens up another imaginary door and they walk through it. SFX: CITY STREET SOUNDS.

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

Ahhh... downtown Trenton! *(breathes in deeply)*

ACTOR 2

Well, I'll see you guys later!

He exits.

EDNA VINE

Um... bye. *(to ERNIE)* Well, that was sudden...

ERNIE KOVACS

It was meant to be. *(to audience)* I mean, how long can you talk to a "non-descript friend", anyway?

EDNA VINE

Hey Ernie, have you seen that big yellow Cadillac toolin' around the neighborhood?

ERNIE KOVACS

Seen it? Oh, man, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. That guy is a big theatre promoter. And get this.. he wants to produce 'Dark Victory' and he wants lil' ol' me to direct! He must have got my name somehow...

EDNA VINE

What? That's great! Where'd he come from?

ERNIE KOVACS

I don't know he just pulled into town I guess. He's a big shot something... a shot of immense bigness...

EDNA VINE

*(slightly suspicious)* I don't know... You don't know anything about him?...

ERNIE KOVACS

What difference does it make? He's got a big yellow Cadillac! And he's makin me the director of this thing, so he must be fairly intelligent. Come on there's a part in it for you, too....

She's not convinced.

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

Listen, Ed, I've been working behind the cigar counter at the drugstore since I got back and if I don't get on the stage again soon, I'm gonna go nuts! It's the only thing I want to do!

EDNA VINE

Okay, okay.. I know, Ernie. *(a little excited)* Well, is he gonna promote it?

ERNIE KOVACS

Oh sure, are you kiddin'? We've already sold three thousand dollars in advance tickets...

EDNA VINE

Holy cow! Well, what are we waitin' for? Let's go!

They begin to exit as ACTOR 1 re-enters Upstage dressed as a large old woman with a pretty flowery dress on and a large brimmed hat. She walks slowly with a cane.

ERNIE KOVACS

(to old woman) Lady, couldn't you wait for intermission?

ERNIE and EDNA exit. The old woman ambles slowly to centerstage and begins to sing "FISH"

OLD WOMAN

FISH

(Tony Burrello - Tom Murray)

Six days in the week I go hungry

'Cause I can't get my favorite dish

I never can wait till it's Friday

'Cause Friday is my day for fish, fish, fish, fish

Friday is my day for fish

Now you can give me squab or cod, picarell or pike

I don't care what kind it is, 'cause fish is what I like

Now some folks might say that its awful

But I say its simply delish

I'm just like a seal in a circus

You may think I'm lazy or daft as a daisy

But I'm simply crazy for fish, fish, fish, fish, fish

I'm simply crazy for fish

ACTRESS re-enters carrying a small table with a bowl containg two goldfish. She sets the table DOWN CENTER and exits. The fish begin to speak to each other with bubble sounds in background. The scene plays out on the television screens as well.

GOLDFISH 2

What the hell was that?

GOLDFISH 1

I have no idea. But wow, it sounds like a good deal for the young Ernie Kovacs, huh? That directing job....

GOLDFISH 2

Well, you would think. But didn't you read the book I gave you yet? What do you do all day? Blow bubbles?

GOLDFISH 1

I'm getting to it, I'm getting to it...

GOLDFISH 2

As soon as they sold all the tickets the guy went to Ernie and said his partner broke into the safe and left town. What actually happened is, there was no partner - the guy was just a con man and made off with around \$5,000. No one ever saw him again.

GOLDFISH 1

Damn! I knew I smelled something fishy.

GOLDFISH 2

Oh.. that was me. Sorry.

GOLDFISH 1

And you complain about me blowing bubbles. So that's it, huh? No show? It was back to the cigar counter for Ernie?

GOLDFISH 2

Oh, he went back to the cigar counter 'cause he needed the money. But get this - he did manage to do the show.

GOLDFISH 1

Really? With no money?

GOLDFISH 2

He didn't want to let the audience down, so he got everyone together and they made a deal with the theatre owner and he directed the hell out of that thing. He painted scenery, got together props, everyone got their own costumes.. he even swept floors.

GOLDFISH 1

You gotta cigarette?

GOLDFISH 2

No. It was 1941 and they managed to do more productions through the summer. But get this..

GOLDFISH 1

I can't hold my breath any longer..

GOLDFISH 2

... when they did *Our Town*, Ernie got a local undertaker to provide a real coffin for the burial scene. He thought it was great. He loved shock.

GOLDFISH 1

I mean it. I think I'm gonna pass out. Hey, did you just pee? Why does it feel warm? You're not peeing in here are you?

GOLDFISH 2

Where do you want me to pee? Anyway, Van Kirk came and saw the show and explained to Ernie that it was too greusome a blow for the audience, so the next night he got rid of it. Overall, though he was a really great director.

GOLDFISH 1

Oh. *(pause)* I can't believe you peed in here.

ACTRESS enters.

ACTRESS

Sean! Craig! What the hell are you guys doing?

GOLDFISH 2

Whaddya mean 'What are we doin..?' What does it look like we're doin'? We're in our fish costumes.

ACTRESS

*(picking up table)* You're not supposed to be in fish costumes!...

GOLDFISH 1

What! You know how long it took me to squeeze into this thing?...

As the ACTRESS carries the bowl & table offstage. We hear a lot of splashing and bickering.

Splash, splash, splash from STAGE LEFT to STAGE RIGHT where ERNIE KOVACS enters. He is wearing huge fish eyes over his eyes. He wrings his handkerchief full of water.

ERNIE KOVACS

I can't believe those guys are writing my story...

He lays down and falls asleep. The TV monitors come to life with a huge smiling pair of lips. It is Ernie's mother, MARY. Very Cheshire Cat-like.

MARY KOVACS

Ernieeeee, Ernieee wake up. Wake up, my little cherké....

ERNIE KOVACS

Hmphh..whazzat..? I dreamt fish were discussing me...

MARY KOVACS

Again? Get up, my love. You'll be late for work.

ERNIE KOVACS

Huh? Oh yea... I got a job as a staff announcer on the radio. Why didn't the fish say anything about that?

MARY KOVACS

You didn't get any sleep, did you? Up all night playing cards again... tsk, tsk.. You can't go on without any sleep.

ERNIE KOVACS

I got a couple of hours. I had some ideas for the radio show... hey there's an idea! I'll do a bit with talking fish...

MARY KOVACS

But, how will people know on radio that it's fish talking?

ERNIE KOVACS

You're right, I better make it buffalo.

MARY KOVACS

Ernie, what you need is to meet a nice girl.

ERNIE KOVACS

Why do I need a nice girl?

MARY KOVACS

You need someone to make you dinner, someone to love you..

ERNIE KOVACS

*(eschewing the idea)* Awww, mom, I don't have time to think about...

MARY

..someone to give you sex...

ERNIE KOVACS

You know, I really could use a nice girl.

MARY

Awww, my sweet little boy...

ERNIE KOVACS

*(looks at his watch)* Omigosh! I'm late again! *(gets up and starts tying his tie and fixing his hair)* Well, I guess this is a good a time as any to tell you. I already met a nice girl, Ma. We're getting married. ....Ma?

MARY

I said get sex not throw your life down the drain....

ERNIE KOVACS

Now ma...

MARY

Who is the little tramp?

ERNIE KOVACS

Now ma, her name is Bette Wilcox and she's very nice. Of course she'll never be as nice as my dear ol' ma....

MARY

*(pause)* Go do your radio.

TV's go green then black.

ERNIE KOVACS

Ma could be very jealous and possessive. Aww, she loves me - who could blame her? I just had to know how to handle her. If I get Bette a mink coat, I get ma a mink coat. Easy. OhmiGod! Now, I'm really late. Gotta go.. *(he makes like he's in a car holding the steering wheel driving very fast)* Now you gotta remember, at this time, everyone listens to the radio. So I'm becoming pretty big in Trenton.

At this point ACTRESS walks by side stepping. The idea is that she's standing still and Ernie's passing her veery fast. He looks out his "car window".

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

Hi Edna! *(Wolf whistle)* Whoo! Look at those pretty legs!

ACTRESS

Ernie! Slow down! You'll kill yourself!

She exits LEFT.

ERNIE KOVACS

Can't! I'm late for my show! *(to audience)* Besides, a coke bottle got lodged under my brake pedal. I love working in radio. I finally have a purpose in life. And nothing will ever kill radio. WTTM, here I come.

He walks off SR still driving.

ACTRESS and ACTOR 2 enter SL. She puts an old style microphone on the desk. She is MINERVA DAVENPORT dressed in a frumpy womans hat with netting, very prudish and snobby voice characterization. He is a tired-looking STATION MANAGER named LOU.

DAVENPORT

You have just got to do something about that awful Ernie Kovacs!

LOU

He's late again, isn't he? Do something about him? He's one of the funniest people I've ever met! People love him.

DAVENPORT

I don't love him. I intensely dislike him. And he doesn't fit in here at WTTM. He's rude and eccentric. A bad combination, if you ask me.

LOU

Well, I didn't ask you, Davenport.

DAVENPORT

Do you know Frank asked him asked him to stop chipping golf balls in the studio? And do you know what that Kovacs did? The next day he cut a golf ball in half and glued it to the booth window and drew grease pencil cracks all over the glass!

LOU

What? That's hysterical!

DAVENPORT

Well, Frank almost had a heart attack when he saw it. I don't think that's funny. And he's late again.

LOU

*(looks at watch)* ...late again...

DAVENPORT

He's probably flying over State Street right now, endangering woman and children alike...

Just then, Ernie bursts in, his long coat flailing behind him. He rushes over to the table and grabs the microphone.

ERNIE KOVACS

This is W A-to-Z your Alphabet Soup network, going on the air. The first hour of braodcasting is sponsored by the Dunka Company... Dunka, the only caffeine on the market with the coffee completely removed. And now Dunka presents "Texas Dallas".

(MORE)

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

The program that seeks the answer to the question on every woman's lips, "Can a woman of thirty-three find teen-age romance?"

He throws down the mike and crosses to the other two.

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

I'm here, you lucky people, you! (*strikes a match on the back of the actress*).

DAVENPORT

Ohhh! How dare you!

ERNIE KOVACS

Well, your up, Davenport! I mean up your Davenport! No I was right the first time... You're up, Daven...

DAVENPORT

Oh shut up!

ERNIE KOVACS

Please! You're supposed to be a society dame!

DAVENPORT

(*to ACTOR 2*) He seems bent on putting everyone around him off balance..

ERNIE KOVACS

Say you seem a little bent yourself... you getting enough iron?

DAVENPORT

Where did he come from anyway? Here at WTTM, we should be trying to up our standards, not this slap-shod, off-the-cuff type of..

ERNIE KOVACS

Miss Davenport, it just so happens that I just recently "upped" my standards... Now up yours. (*to ACTOR 2*) That's two! Hee hee!

DAVENPORT

You're lucky I have to go do my show!

ERNIE KOVACS

Yea, but Trenton's not....

She crosses to the desk and starts doing her "society-type" show. Basically miming "Good evening ladies..." etc.

LOU

Ernie, please stop torturing her.

ERNIE KOVACS

Ah, forget it. Listen, Lou, I just gotta get more air time.

LOU

But you're on half the time as it is! You got Coffee with Kovacs, contest shows, radio plays...

ERNIE KOVACS

I know, I know.. but well, guess who's pregnant?

LOU

I hope you're not gonna say Davenport...

ERNIE KOVACS

No! Bette. I gotta get more money coming in. A little more airtime. Let's do another remote.

LOU

Ahh, Ernie, not another remote. That damn wire recorder weighs as much as a horse!

ERNIE KOVACS

Yea, but I got a great idea! We put the wire in the backseat and we drive in the Christmas parade. But get this - I'll be strapped to the hood of the car, giving my play-by-play report of the parade to all our listeners!

LOU

Strapped to the hood?

ERNIE KOVACS

It'll be great! I gotta go! You think about it....

He crosses on his hands and knees over to the desk where DAVENPORT is giving her show. He climbs underneath the desk..

DAVENPORT

And so ladies, if you want to impress that certain man in your life, be sure to raise your pinky and keep it there when drinking your favorite beverage, because as every distinguished woman knows...

At this point Ernie holds up the microphone plug as if he's unplugged it. DAVENPORT starts to panick as she continues to speak and follows her mike cord to make sure it's plugged in. It is. She then tries to shoo him away but he's back under the desk. She has to continue...

DAVENPORT (cont'd)

...it's important for a woman to be demure and elegant..WHOOOO! (*apparently Ernie pinched her*)...when you're trying to, umm trying to, you know - impress a man and society in general. Umm, anyway, the point is if you get a little wine on your blouse... a sure way to get that sucker out is with a little club soda...

During the preceding, Ernie has reached up and set her script on fire. She doesn't notice until it's almost too late.

DAVENPORT (cont'd)

Just keep rubbing and don't lose your cool until that little irritating, stubborn, obnoxious piece of wine stain spot is obliterated from your life. That's all for now from me, ladies. Ta ta. (*To Ernie*) I hate you so much.

ERNIE KOVACS

Aww, don't be sore. You were great. Look, I need your help.

DAVENPORT

Ha!

ERNIE KOVACS

You're a writer, aint ya?

DAVENPORT

'I'm a writer, aren't I?'

ERNIE KOVACS

Damn, I was hopin' you would know.

DAVENPORT

Yes! I am, you idiot.

ERNIE KOVACS

Oh, good... I want you to write me a radio story where I play more than one character. Won't that be a scream?

DAVENPORT

The living end.

ERNIE KOVACS

Yea, you get the idea, maybe you could even do a character....

They discuss it sans sound.

LOU

She wound up writing "The Last Time I Saw Paris". A half hour series starring Ernie as roguish detective Paris Greene and he also played his own tough side kick. Davenport played an old maiden lady who "loved him like a son".

DAVENPORT

*(picturing it in front of her)* "Kiss me again, Paris!... Screams... Gunshots.... and then Voice Over: Music... romance...adventure. That to me means Paris!" And then we're out, see?

ERNIE KOVACS

Yea, yea.. I love it! This sounds great! You're amazing....!

They exit together.

DAVENPORT

*(flattered)* Well, it needs work, but I think we may have something....

LOU

Ernie had a way of getting people excited about what he wanted to do. And he was becoming pretty well known in Trenton. The guy did it all. He would sell his own shows, 'cause he thought sales people in general were cheap, aggrandizing people who never got the announcers an even break – money-wise. Once, he cooked up a deal to do a big remote from the New Jersey State Fair. Billboards went up that WTTMs own Ernie Kovacs was to broadcast from the fair for an entire week straight. No sleep, 24 hours a day. And he could do it, too 'cause he hardly ever slept much. Maybe two, three hours a night.

During this, ACTRESS steps out as a waitress and throws a tablecloth over the desk. SEAN comes out and sits at desk. After the preceding SEAN talks to waitress.

SEAN

I'm not ready to order yet. I'm waiting on a friend.

The lighting changes and ACTOR 2 crosses to table. He is now CRAIG ALPAUGH.

SEAN (cont'd)

Well, look who decided to show up. The old man himself, Craig Alpaugh.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Sorry. I got caught up. And I don't feel very well. (to waitress) Chips and that cheesy sauce stuff. (to Sean) You like that, don't ya?

SEAN

I love the cheesy stuff. But if you don't feel well...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

(to waitress) Don't scrimp on the cheesy stuff...

WAITRESS exits.

SEAN

So, maybe that's what's important about Kovacs. He never slept. That'll be the whole slant of the piece. Be an insomniac and you'll live in the annals of history....

CRAIG ALPAUGH

I don't know. "No sleep"? What's so interesting about that?

SEAN

I don't know. It shows a work ethic. Sort of.

The WAITRESS brings out the chips and "cheesy stuff". Sean & Craig are about to light up cigarettes.

WAITRESS

I'm sorry but there's no smoking in here.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Oh, okay..

WAITRESS

Oh my God! I can't believe you were gonna smoke in here! This is a public place! Of all the nerve! I mean, haven't you heard about second hand smoke? God!

SEAN

Okay! We get it!

WAITRESS

And it's so cramped in here! What's the matter with you?! What do you think this is - 1948?

SEAN

And then even with all the work he was doing at the radio station, he started writing that weekly column for the newspaper.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Yea, yea.. the Trentonian. Got to be a pretty big paper, too. It's still around.

SEAN

He just wrote whatever came to mind. Whatever happened to be going on around town.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

*(eating chips)* Yea, do one of the columns, that'll be great!

SEAN

Are you sure you wanna be putting that stuff in your body?  
Y'know you're not a young man, Craig.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Thanks. Look, I get a few minor pleasures in life, and the cheesy stuff is one of 'em. Now c'mon, we should do one of the columns...

CRAIG picks up the chips and dip and pulls the tablecloth off the table.

WAITRESS

Hey! Whattya doing?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Lady, would you mind? We're trying to write a play here...

SEAN pulls a typewriter out from under the desk and starts to pace as he becomes ERNIE KOVACS.

ERNIE KOVACS

Midnight deadline. Midnight deadline. I can make it. *(sits down and starts to type)* "Well folks, I went to the optometrist and it seems I need glasses. Seriously, I can't wait to get my new glasses, I've been dying to read one of these columns and see for myself what you people have been complaining about."

CRAIG ALPAUGH

*(still eating chips)* Not that one! Now what about when Bette had the baby?

ERNIE KOVACS

She had two..

CRAIG ALPAUGH

No, I know. The first one. Elisabeth. He wrote about the waiting room.

SEAN

Oh, yea. He was so happy. (*typing*) "Leave us bend your fat ears with this tale of anxiety. There was nothing to read at the maternity ward, so we stuck another cigar into our spacious mouth without bothering to remove the other two and a half-filled pipe and continued pacing. (*he gets up and paces*) A couple of medical types gave us some comfort. The first to enter said...

The WAITRESS (ACTRESS) grabs a broom and walks over to KOVACS.

ACTRESS

Oh, Mr. Kovacs, your F.W. is resting comfortably...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

(*to audience*) F.W. stands for "favorite wife". That's what Ernie always called Bette.

ACTRESS

...and you should expect some news in an hour or so. (*she exits*)

ERNIE KOVACS

...and the second came through and said...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

(*as cleaning person*) Don't worry, Mr. Kovacs. Everything's going fine. You should know something in a minute or two...

ERNIE KOVACS

The third person to come out...

ACTRESS comes out as BETTE with a huge belly and dark wig.

ERNIE KOVACS (*cont'd*)

...was the F.W. herself! Who came up to sit with us.

BETTE

No one to talk to.

ERNIE KOVACS

She said.

BETTE kisses him and exits.

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

*(sits down to write again)* Finally — It's a girl! Rizzolved! Never again will we laugh at cartoons about nervous fathers. And the fact that MY daughter, Elisabeth Kovacs, is the cutest baby ever to be born in Mercer Hospital is serious business. Anyway, about as serious as we ever are."

ACTOR 2 enters as EDDIE HATRAK.

EDDIE

Ernie! You're due back at the radio station.

ERNIE KOVACS

Eddie! *(he slaps a sticker sign on him reading "Eddie Hatrak")* My friend! Cover for me, would ya? I got to get my column down to the paper. *(He rushes offstage)*

EDDIE

*(to audience, a little uncomfortable)* Ummm, heh, heh. I'm Eddie Hatrak. A good friend of Ernie's. Piano player. Bette wound up having another daughter, Kippie. And Kippie and Elisabeth were Ernie's pride and joy, no doubt about it. And he was just nuts about Bette. But Ernie likes to work ALL the time. Thirteen hour days and it was startin' to strain the marriage. And...*(confidentially)* I think Bette was beginning to resent feeling tied down. She was young and a dancer and I think she was feeling like she gave up too much. Anyway, I talk too much, they'll probably be just fine...

EDDIE exits. ERNIE enters trying to light a cigar. LIghts all down except on ERNIE. The TVs sputter to life with the face of a beautiful woman. Her face IS the screen.

TV WOMAN

Hello there, tall, dark and outrageous. *(ERNIE looks around confused, then dismisses it.)* Hey, psst, Kovacs! Over here. Didn't you hear me?

ERNIE KOVACS

I heard you but I had a little too much Gin last night. Who's there?

TV WOMAN

It's me. Don't you know what I am?

ERNIE KOVACS

Yea, you're one of those television set doodads.

TV WOMAN

I'm the future, pussycat.

ERNIE KOVACS

Now wait a minute. You're pretty and all that, but if you think you'll ever replace radio, you're nuts, sister. You're a novelty for the rich. You're too damn expensive.

TV WOMAN

*(seductively)* Oh, but I'm getting cheaper all the time. And it's only 1950.

ERNIE KOVACS

Yea?

TV WOMAN

Look at me Ernie Kovacs. Look deep into my face. You know you want it. We could have a great future..

ERNIE KOVACS

You are beautiful. Yea... yea... But NO! NO! I can't.. besides, your screens so small...

TV WOMAN

*(insulted)* Hmmph, big-screen-man, huh?

ERNIE KOVACS

Look, I've seen some of your shows. It's just rehashed vaudeville or talking heads with the news. No, it'll never work... *(He rests his head on top of the front TV)*

TV WOMAN

It doesn't have to be that way. You could change me... You make me want to be better.. *(she blows in his ear)*

ERNIE KOVACS

*(very childlike)* Hee, hee, hee.. don't do that... Well, I have some ideas. But do you think you could go for it, baby? I mean, I wouldn't treat you like those other guys.

(MORE)

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

I would treat you like the unique, special thing that you are. Sure, you're just a box. But, you got it all, tootsie, the immediacy of live theatre, the moving pictures of the movies and all the buttons and gadgetry of radio.

TV WOMAN

Yes, yes.. and so much more.... They're looking for a staff announcer at WPTZ in Philadelphia! Why don't you send in an audition record?

ERNIE KOVACS

I'll do it!

TV WOMAN

Oh, change me, sugar, change me...!

ERNIE KOVACS

All right. *(He changes the channel)*

Now on the screen is EDDIE HATRAK. He is calling Ernie. Ernie responds to the TV but then EDDIE appears on stage.

EDDIE

Ernie! You're radio show! You're late! What's the matter with you?

ERNIE KOVACS

*(turning to EDDIE)* Eddie! I'm gonna do it! I've met the most fantastic thing!

EDDIE

You met a thing?

ERNIE KOVACS

TV! Have you heard of it?

EDDIE

Yea. It'll never last.

ERNIE KOVACS

Well, I'm going to Philadelphia with one of my wrestling coverage broadcasts. WPTZ is looking for a staff announcer!

EDDIE

But what about your radio shows and your newspaper column?

ERNIE KOVACS

I'll do those too! It's just weekend work! TV, Eddie! TV! My future!

TVs light up and woman starts to laugh ominously. Climactic music swells. Lights go to black, then fade up slowly on Ernie sitting on a stool with a headset on.

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

This is WPTZ coming to you live from Philadelphia. Stay tuned for your local weather and news and then another simple-minded game show. (He takes off the headset, and yawns) So this is TV. This is my future. Big fat deal. Ohh, why did I fall for her seduction? That alluring little tramp....

Ernie starts to drink some water. A STAGE MANAGER enters with a headset on. He's very frenzied.

STAGE MANAGER

Kovacs! (*ERNIE spits out the water*) You Kovacs? Ernie Kovacs?

ERNIE KOVACS

Yes, yes, I'm Kovacs. Whaddya want?

STAGE MANAGER

Look, they need you upstairs! There's no one else.

ERNIE KOVACS

Whaddya mean? There's no one else upstairs?

STAGE MANAGER

No, the host for the cooking show never showed. We're five minutes to airtime.

ERNIE KOVACS

Five minutes?! What do I have to do?

STAGE MANAGER

Just host the show. Talk to the chef while he makes his recipe. Be interesting, that's all. Can you do it? Otherwise we're going black...

ERNIE KOVACS

Five minutes, huh? Sure... sure, I can do it. I'll have to meet the chef. *(They start to exit)* What's the name of the program?

STAGE MANAGER

Deadline for Dinner.

ERNIE KOVACS

*Dead lion* for dinner? That's disgusting...

STAGE MANAGER

No, not dead lion.. deadline, deadline...

ERNIE KOVACS

Boy, you aint kidding...

They leave.

The Televisions flicker on with the image of Andrew Kovacs (Actor 2) on a telephone.

ANDREW KOVACS

Come on, damnit, pickup!

MARY KOVACS enters holding a telephone.

MARY KOVACS

Hello? What is it?

ANDREW KOVACS

Mary! It's me, Andrew, your husband.

MARY KOVACS

You're not my husband. I don't have time to talk to you.

ANDREW KOVACS

You will talk. Where's my son?

MARY KOVACS

He's not here, Andrew.

ANDREW KOVACS

He's my son, I want to talk to him...

MARY KOVACS

He's working! He's not...

ANDREW KOVACS

How is he doing? Y'know, because of the girl?

MARY KOVACS

If I ever see that litte harlett again... She broke our little boy's heart, the way she walked out on him...

There is interference and satatic on the TV screens...

ANDREW KOVACS

What? Mary? I can't hear you! We must have a bad connection... Mary? Hold on! Wait a minute.... *(The actor on the TV walks out of frame and the real actor enters the stage)* Is this better? Can you hear me now?

MARY KOVACS

Yes, much better. Can you hear me?

ANDREW KOVACS

Yea. Mary, how is he doing?

MARY KOVACS

He was upset. Very upset Andrew... She just left. Ernie and those poor little girls. Oh! I have to go. His TV show is coming on... He's been working so hard since she left.. He works and works... He's doing two shows now in Philadelphia - plus the radio and newspaper here in Trenton... Oh how do you turn this damn thing on...?

ANDREW KOVACS

Good, maybe that's what he needed.

MARY KOVACS

Oh here it is. There's our little cherké, Andrew. *(waving to Ernie)* Hello my little boy..!

ANDREW KOVACS

He's not a little boy, Mary, he's a grown man...

The TVs switch to Ernie's show. It is DEADLINE FOR DINNER.

Ernie is wearing a huge chef's hat with polka dots. There is a chef with him doing the cooking.

CHEF (ON TV)

And you just pat the meat together like so, and drop it into the pan. And there you have it. Perfect little hamburgers.

ERNIE KOVACS (ON TV)

Well... that's just wonderful... heh, heh... and now...

CHEF (ON TV)

And now *what*? That's how to make a beautiful hamburger.

MARY

Oh my God, Andrew. The chef made his dish in the first five minutes. What's my boy going to do? He has to fill 25 more minutes...

ERNIE KOVACS (ON TV)

Well, chef, that's just beautiful, you know? But, now..Ah, what do you serve on the side?

CHEF (ON TV)

Ohhh, anything you want.

ERNIE KOVACS (ON TV)

Yes, but uh, what would you suggest? Surely you have just the side dish..

CHEF (ON TV)

People can serve whatever they want as a side dish.

ERNIE KOVACS (ON TV)

Yes, but...

CHEF (ON TV)

I wouldn't presume to tell people what to serve with their hamburgers...

ERNIE KOVACS (ON TV)

Yes, well... *(pause)* Now look, it doesn't take any mental giant to make a hamburger! Now what do you do to brighten them up?!

CHEF (ON TV)

I beg your pardon...?!

MARY

*(turning off the TV)* Last week the guest chef didn't show up at all, so Ernie made his own "Eggs Scavok". *Scavok* - spell it backwards... mm-hmmm. Oh, Andrew, I have to go. He'll be home soon and I should have some dinner for him and get the girls to bed. What? Yes, I know he's still doing his show in Philadelphia but this is the theatre and we're not waiting two hours... There's people in the audience who already have to pee... *(she hangs up and calls off stage)* Girls, get your pajamas on, your father will be home soon!

We hear little girls voices "Yaaay!" and giggling. ERNIE KOVACS enters.

ERNIE KOVACS

Ma! I'm home you lucky mother you! *(He picks her up and kisses her)* Mmmmwah! Where are my other little girls?

MARY

They're getting their pajamas on. I'm making you a nice stuffed cabbage...

ERNIE KOVACS

No, no time, Ma. I gotta get over to the radio station. Did ya see the show today?

MARY

Ohh, that man. Hamburgers!

ERNIE KOVACS

What a dope, huh? I got a lot of big laughs, though. Let me go kiss my little babies...

MARY

Let them get ready for bed. Have a little bör. Relax...

ERNIE KOVACS

Have... have you heard from her?

MARY

Why would I tell you if I heard from her?

ERNIE KOVACS

Ma...

MARY

You think she would call even to check on those beautiful little girls...

ERNIE KOVACS

Yea..

MARY

Your father called.

ERNIE KOVACS

Pops? No kidding. Is he watchin' the shows?

MARY

Can he afford one of those television sets?

ERNIE KOVACS

Well, listen to this, Ma... They've offered me another show!

MARY

Oh, Ernie, no! You work so hard now. Back and forth from the radio station to Philadelphia... And those poker games you love so much.. don't forget you have to have time to give your money to those cheating card sharks..

ERNIE KOVACS

Oh, there's always time for poker. No, this is different. It's my own real TV show. A whole hour and a half of anything I want to do.

MARY

An hour and a half? What time will it come on...?

ERNIE KOVACS

*(mumbling inaudibly)*...uh, 7:30am in the morning....

MARY

What? I can't hear you...

ERNIE KOVACS

7:30 am in the morning.

MARY

What?! Phhttt! Oh, my little cherké, you'll never make it! What will they do without their host until you get there?

ERNIE KOVACS

Now, don't jinx me, Ma! I'll make it! Somehow, I'll have to make it.

MARY

You'll never make it. 7:30 in the morning. Who watches TV that early? What are they thinking? There's no TV on at 7:30!

ERNIE KOVACS

Well, there is now. We're the first ones ever. It's called Three To Get Ready. Three stands for channel 3, y'see? Philadelphia's gonna be waking up to my mug every morning.

MARY

Television should only be for after sundown, like alcohol or sex. Next thing you know they'll be putting on shows while people are eating their dinner.

ERNIE KOVACS

Well, it's just local. The brass talked to NBC but they just want to see how it goes. But, don't you see, Ma? It's me! All me! Wheeeee! Aren't you proud.

MARY

*(takes his face in her hands)* Yes, I'm very proud of you, my little love. If Philadelphia wants to wake up to a mug, it should be my little boys. If you can get your keetchie ass outta bed and get there by 7:30. Now, go get some rest.

ERNIE KOVACS

Can't Ma. I gotta go kiss my angels and write down some ideas for the show. Maybe I'll tell my girls a story. *3 To Get Ready!* Whooo-hooo.

He exits. Same time, ACTOR 2 enters as CRAIG ALPAUGH.

MARY

*(to audience)* I know what you're thinking. Television. The bane of the thinking modern man. The boob tube. Hmmph. Snobs. Forget everything you know about television for now...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Some theatrical suspension of disbelief...

MARY

Who are you?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

*(looking around)* Oh, I'm Craig Alpaugh. One of the writers of this play.

MARY

Well, get out of my kitchen Craig Alpaugh. And take your audience with you.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Please continue...

MARY

This little box with a screen. We never had this. No one's ever seen anything like this. Imagine a box in your home with live moving pictures that talked and sang to you.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Yea, like a miracle of technology and communication...

MARY

Who said miracle? I said it's neat. And here in 1950, it's no older than those two beautiful little girls upstairs. But it's a waste. They're doing radio shows on the TV. I don't have to look at that.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

But Ernie's different.. he'll use it as an exciting new communications tool.

MARY

Ernie's a comedian. He has funny ideas. What should he care about communicate? He wants to put what he sees in his mind's eye on a little screen.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Really?..

MARY

Well, someone has to shape the damn thing into something...  
*(she puts her hand on his face)* You're a nice man, Mr.  
 Alpo... now get the hell out of my kitchen... *(she leaves)*

CRAIG ALPAUGH

*(becoming announcer)* All right folks, now remember, this is a  
 live broadcast. So let's have a big hand for Philadelphia's  
 own wake-up show... Three To Get Ready!

He exits. All lights down as the TVs  
 come to life with music and "3 To Get  
 Ready" superimposed over a hand dancing  
 on a piano keyboard. Then cut to an  
 empty chair...

VO

But wheres the host?

Cut to various shots ie: painting,  
 magazine pictures, a dog... Then Actor  
 2 runs back onstage as Stage Manager  
 and yells to booth...

STAGE MANAGER

He's here! He's just coming in. Get a camera out there!

TV scene cuts to exterior of theatre  
 and ERNIE KOVACS running up through  
 doors.

ERNIE KOVACS

I'm here! I'm here!

He runs and then passes a coffee  
 machine. He comes back for coffee and  
 then notices the time and keeps  
 running. He stops to pick up a dog and  
 in slow-mo twirls him around and  
 smiles, looks at watch and throws dog  
 down and runs.. etc. SOUND: RIDE OF THE  
 VALKYRIES.

The TVs go off and ERNIE KOVACS appears on stage dressed as AUNTIE GREUSOME - wearing a bizarre white wig and thick glasses and sharp little teeth sticking out of his mouth.

AUNTIE GREUSOME

Oh, hello there kids! It's your ol' Auntie Greusome here with another horrible old story to delight and scare the pants off you. I'll tell you what's greusome, kids, is the traffic into Philly, that's what's greusome. Where is everyone goin' this early in the morning? And there's a pothole on 4th that'll knock your socks off, if you like that kind of thing. Oh well, this is the story of Rapunzel. The girl who was locked up in the tower? Well, it seems Rapunzel had been hanging out in too many "special" joints and her father said, 'I'm gonna lock you up in the tower, Rapunzel!' Rapunzel wasn't her real name, her real name was Bessie Lou Cosnowski, but she wanted to be in motion pictures and she thought Rapunzel Leiderfranz was kinda more romantic... Well, now she's locked up in this tower and all of a sudden along comes this Frits, see, he's riding on this big horse. Fritz works in a hardware store in the daytime, he's a prince by night - wonderful fella, and he says, 'Hello there, Rap, whacha doin'?' and she says "Well, the old man has locked me up in this tower, she says, Gee, I'm dyin' to get outta here, Gee why don't you slip off and get a couple of pizzas and come on up and we'll have a little party..." and he says 'Well, swell' so he races off on the horse that he borrowed from the guy who owns the hardware store and in about five (looks at hand) four minutes, he comes back, see, with the pizza. She says 'Well, come on up, come on up!' And he says 'Gee, well I can't get get up there in that big tower,' he says 'Look here, bushy tails, why don't you let down your hair and I'll climb up there.' And she says 'swell idea'. Well, it just happens that she's got kinda loose hair and in about a half an hour he looks like a mohair sofa, y'know it's all over him, and she's got dandruff, he thinks it's snowin', starts to catch cold. He finally gets over there and he cuts this big pole off a tree and he goes 'Dingo!' and he kinda pole vaults to the tower but his hands are slippery from the pizzas and the hair and he goes sailing... (to offstage) What's that? Time's up already? Gee, I never get to finish these things... Where did the time go...?

SOUND UP: RIDE OF THE VALKRIES. STAGE MANAGER comes running up to ERNIE as he gets out of his Auntie Greusome costume.

STAGE MANAGER

And we're at commercial. Man, Ernie, that was weird. Very funny... Look, I hate to tell you this, but the brass is here...

ERNIE KOVACS

What? I don't want the brass on my set. I told them that..!

VOICE FROM SPEAKERS

Hello, Mr. Kovacs.

ERNIE KOVACS

Oh my God! It's the station management!

Ominous music plays and the two hug each other, scared.

VOICE FROM SPEAKERS

That last piece was very.... interesting. I didn't really get it.

ERNIE KOVACS

Well, you're not supposed to get it.

VOICE FROM SPEAKERS

Well, I didn't.

ERNIE KOVACS

Well, you're not supposed to. And what are you doing here? I said no management in my studio. That was the deal.

VOICE FROM SPEAKERS

I'm from your station's parent company - NBC! (Ominous NBC Dong dong dong...) And we think you need a girl singer on the show!

ERNIE KOVACS

Girl singer? Why?

VOICE FROM SPEAKERS

'Cause everyone has one! Don't talk back! We decree it! (*dong dong dong*) Ha, ha, ha, ha... (*fades away*).

STAGE MANAGER

Don't sweat it, Ernie. I got a girl all lined up for an audition.

ERNIE KOVACS

But I don't want a girl singer! I don't want a ...

ACTRESS enters as EDIE ADAMS, a nervous, fresh-faced blond.

ERNIE KOVACS (*cont'd*)

...Mama!

EDIE ADAMS

Hello, Mr. Coatrack...Mmm..Mr. Kovat...

ERNIE KOVACS

Kovacs...

EDIE ADAMS

Of course, Mr Kovacs. It's really great to meet you..

ERNIE KOVACS

You've seen the show?

EDIE ADAMS

No, I'm sorry - we don't have one. A TV that is. But I'd love to sing on it... Yours, I mean...

ERNIE KOVACS

Okay, I guess you have a large repertoire?

EDIE ADAMS

I beg you're pardon? Oh that.. Yes, it's large... (*she fumbles through her three pieces of sheet music and hands ERNIE a song*)

ERNIE KOVACS

(*He hands it off to STAGE MANAGER*) Here, take this to Hatrak...

STAGE MANAGER

*(aside, to Edie)* Don't be nervous, kid. You're doing great...

EDIE ADAMS

I've never seen anything like him. He's so big and dark.. he looks like a B movie gangster.

STAGE MANAGER

He's a big softie...

EDIE ADAMS

I want him.

STAGE MANAGER leaves with music.

ERNIE KOVACS

*(calling offstage)* Eddie I want you to play this girl's song. And use all the keys this time. *(EDIE laughs nervously)*

EDIE sings a dull version of Patti Page's "Would I Love You". Soon after she starts, Ernie stops the music.

ERNIE KOVACS *(cont'd)*

Great! I love it. Your hired, kid. *(He starts to leave...)*

EDIE ADAMS

But, there's more...

ERNIE KOVACS

I know. I know.. there'll be a lot more. We got an hour and half to fill every day. Hey, you don't mind taking a pie in the face, do you? I mean do you think you could do that?

EDIE ADAMS

Umm, sure.. I guess...But...

**"I Feel Hungary"**

**by Sean Sanczel©2003**

Look at his face, he's so unusual  
 Look at the way he looks at me  
 Look at this place! It's so unusual  
 Don't know what it is but I think I like it  
 Know what I like but I..I...

(MORE)

EDIE ADAMS (cont'd)

I was raised in Grove City, Pennsylvania  
Where everyone was just like me, but I'll just wait and see  
'Cause look at this place it's so unusual  
Don't know what I want but I feel Hungary! (Hey!)

I learned to sing at Juilliard  
Know how to sing the proper way (ah-ha-ha-ha)  
But still, he's just so darned peculiar  
Don't know what I want, I just don't know,  
I know what I like but I, I,  
I was born for the glowing lights of Broadway  
Up on the stage, they'll know my name,  
But still and just the same,  
Tell the waiter that I'm ready to order  
I know what I want and I feel Hungary!

At the end of the song, STAGE MANAGER  
comes back out and hits Edie in the  
face with a pie. ERNIE laughs big.

ERNIE KOVACS

Ha, ha! Yes! That's perfect!

EDIE leaves, trying to be a good sport.

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

And now ladies and gentlemen, it is not only because the television industry is determined to bring important and enlightening events to the public, but because the guest who's about to appear has a story to tell which I think will be of interest to all of you watching. Normally, we don't do straight interviews on this program, but I felt you'd be interested in hearing this fascinating and exciting story that Mr. Albert Gridley has to tell. Mr. Gridley's story is one he'll never forget.

ALBERT GRIDLEY enters and shakes hands  
with ERNIE.

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, it is etched into my mind forever. It is as if it happened yesterday.

ERNIE KOVACS

Tell us your story, Mr. Gridley.

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Well, I was one of.... (pause)

ERNIE KOVACS

..one of five children...

ALBERT GRIDLEY

.. yes, one of five children, who came out...

ERNIE KOVACS

..west, with your father and mother..

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, with my father and mother. We were in the middle of the desert. I'll never forget what happened that day. It was on the....

ERNIE KOVACS

...fifth day...

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, fifth day after we left.....

ERNIE KOVACS

(pause) ...and wasn't the sun beating down?

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, the sun was beating down. And it was hot!...

ERNIE KOVACS

..and uh, did your 1918 Stutz Bearcat have motor trouble?

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, our 1918 Stutz Bearcat had motor trouble. It was.....

ERNIE KOVACS

.. terrible...

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, terrible. I'll never forget what dad said. Dad said...

ERNIE KOVACS

... Did your father tell you to go to the nearest town and get a fan belt?

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, father said to go to the nearest town and get a fan belt. My four sisters...

ERNIE KOVACS

They were Alice, Mabel, Myrtle and Bessie...

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, Alice, Mabel, Myrtle and Bossie...

ERNIE KOVACS

Bessie...

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, Bessie.

ERNIE KOVACS

What did your sisters do?

ALBERT GRIDLEY

They...

ERNIE KOVACS

Did they stay behind in the car while you went in town for the fan belt?

ALBERT GRIDLEY

They stayed behind in the car while I went in town for the fan belt.

ERNIE KOVACS

And what happened while you were in town getting the fan belt? (pause) What happened to Myrtle?

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Myrtle?

ERNIE KOVACS

Your sister!

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, my sister. I'll never forget it... A wolf..

ERNIE KOVACS

Did a rattlesnake bite your sister Myrtle?

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, a rattlesnake bit my sister Myrtle. On the arm?

ERNIE KOVACS

Leg.

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, on the leg. I'll never forget it. It was terrible.

ERNIE KOVACS

*(pause)* And then your father killed the snake, and you came back from town with the fan belt and you fixed the car and drove off to southern California and then everything went well after that.

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, like you said.

ERNIE KOVACS

Well, thank you for coming on our program, Mr. Gridley. You had a wonderful and exciting story to tell, one that has lived with you every moment.

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, I'll never forget it. It is etched into my memory.

ERNIE KOVACS

Well, thanks again and goodbye.. Now folks, we have here on our program...

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Wait, there's more...

ERNIE KOVACS

What's that?

ALBERT GRIDLEY

I have more story to tell.

ERNIE KOVACS

Ummmm, no you don't. What are you doing?

ALBERT GRIDLEY

There are these two....

ERNIE KOVACS

Joe, what are you doing?

ALBERT GRIDLEY

two... um, little people...

ERNIE KOVACS

Two little boys? Two little girls...

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, two little girls. Beautiful little girls. And it's such a shame. Terrible shame. They got....

ERNIE KOVACS

What? They got what? Hurt..? What little girls...?

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Not hurt...

ERNIE KOVACS

What then? Who are these little girls? What are you talking about?

ALBERT GRIDLEY

They were..

ERNIE KOVACS

Kippie?

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, Kippie and Elisabeth....

ERNIE KOVACS

Kovacs?

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, Kovacs. It's terrible. I'll never forget it...

ERNIE KOVACS

(grabs him by the collar) Joe, what the hell are you talking about? What happened? Were they hurt? In a car crash? Are they sick? Kidnapped?

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, kidnapped. I'll never..

ERNIE KOVACS

Oh, knock it off before I belt ya! Where are they?

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Nobody knows Ernie. They're gone...

ERNIE KOVACS

Who took them? Who took my little girls?

ALBERT GRIDLEY

It was their mother. It's very unusual in this day and age that you ever got...

ERNIE KOVACS

..custody...

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, custody. And now they're...

ERNIE KOVACS

Gone.

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, gone forever. It's terrible.

ERNIE KOVACS

Well, they're not gone forever! I'll get my angels back if it's the last thing I do! I've got to get them back with me!

He runs off.

ALBERT GRIDLEY

Yes, it's terrible. I'll never forget it.

LIGHTS OUT. End of Act 1

ACT 2

Lights up on the NAIROBI TRIO. They are three monkeys in long dress coats and derbys.

Monkey on stage right (ACTOR 2) has two mallets. Monkey in the middle (ACTOR 1) has a banana. Monkey on stage left (ACTRESS) is seated at a piano. They are frozen still but when the music ("Solfeggio") starts they start to move to the music, the monkey in the middle conducting. Every time the song gets to a drum fill break, the monkey on stage left whacks the conductor with the mallets. At the end, the conductor monkey gets up and hits stage right monkey with a vase. Lights out, then back up...

ACTOR 2 exits. ERNIE and EDIE take off masks and costumes.

EDIE ADAMS

That was fun. I'm not really sure what it means, but you're the kookiest. I can't wait to see what we're doing tomorrow...

ERNIE KOVACS

What should it mean? You were great in it. Bring in a trench coat tomorrow 'cause we're doin' a spy thing...

EDIE ADAMS

Trenchcoat. Got it. We going out for coffee?

ERNIE KOVACS

Look, Edie, I'm sorry. I have to go, beautiful. My dad's coming down to see me. Can we do it tomorrow?

EDIE ADAMS

Sure, and bring your monkey costume, big boy....

ERNIE KOVACS

Ooohh, stop! I gotta change, if you see my dad tell him to wait for me, okay?

He kisses her and exits. She stands there with her eyes closed from the kiss. Meanwhile ANDREW KOVACS enters.

EDIE ADAMS

*(unaware she's not alone)* Oh, Mr. Kovacs. You big burly teddy bear... What am I gonna do with you?

ANDREW KOVACS

*(hungarian accent)* Well, we could go dancing, I suppose...

EDIE ADAMS

Ohmigosh! I'm so sorry, Mr. Kovacs. I was talking to your son...

ANDREW KOVACS

Is he here?

EDIE ADAMS

He's getting changed. He'll be right out.

ANDREW KOVACS

You think he's a burly bear doll, huh?

EDIE ADAMS

*(pause)* I like him very much.

ANDREW KOVACS

Well, he likes you, too. He told me about you. You're the singer girl. Said you had the voice of an angel and looked like one, too.

EDIE ADAMS

Oh... I don't know about that...

ANDREW KOVACS

Well, I could be wrong. I thought that's what he said... You like him, huh?

EDIE ADAMS

Oh, everyone who works with him adores Ernie. The crew loves him...

ANDREW KOVACS

No... you like him..?

EDIE ADAMS

Oh, Mr. Kovacs. I've never met anyone like him. He's so... free. He does what he likes to do.. and always has fun doing it. I'm in a whirlwind.

ANDREW KOVACS

Whirlwind, huh?

EDIE ADAMS

Do you know once we had a date and he came to pick me up in a brand new Jaguar? I said, "How could you afford this?" Which, between you and me, I don't think he could... and he says "Who cares, I'm tired of taking taxis.."

ANDREW KOVACS

Trying to impress you. He takes after me, though. We like to spend it if we got it. Otherwise, what's the sense of having it?

EDIE ADAMS

Well, it's not just that. He's just really... alive. *(suddenly shy)* And when he's around.. I don't know.. I feel so much more ...alive, too..

ANDREW KOVACS

*(likes Edie)* You know what else he told me, little girl? *(goes to her)* He told me once, he'll do a TV show in front of millions of people, but he'll go home and put on a better suit because he knows he might be seeing you that night...

Edie puts her hand to her mouth,  
visibly moved.

EDIE ADAMS

It was nice to meet you, I have to go...

She runs off.

ANDREW KOVACS

I never say the right thing....

ERNIE enters.

ERNIE KOVACS

Pops! *(they hug)* You saw the show? Did you like it?

ANDREW KOVACS

You like dressing up like a monkey, you like dressing up like a monkey. What do I know from television...

ERNIE KOVACS

Did you hear anything from LaTooth? What's the word?

ANDREW KOVACS

No son. He's not found nothing yet. What kind of detective is this you got? Pierre LaTooth - sounds like one of your characters you made up...

ERNIE KOVACS

And he's costing me a fortune, too. Nothing, huh? I can't believe it. Eight months of this. I want us to go back down to Florida and look again...

ANDREW KOVACS

What - again? Ernie, let the detective do his work. We've been everywhere down there. We don't even know if they're there or not.

ERNIE KOVACS

I can't take it, Pops. I miss them so much. I want my little girls with me. I want them home by Christmas. Do you know, I would come home from the radio station and she'd have them tied to a tree with rope so they wouldn't run off? No, I need my girls with me. ...I wanted to tell you, Pops - I think I'm gonna quit my shows and look for them full time. I need to look for them full time...

ANDREW KOVACS

What? Son, wait a minute.. Quit your shows? How much have you spent on detectives so far?

ERNIE KOVACS

\$20,000.

ANDREW KOVACS

And how will you pay for detectives if you're not working? How will you pay your bills?

(MORE)

ANDREW KOVACS (cont'd)

How far can you search then, hmm? Son.... poor people don't have so much luck getting their children back.

ERNIE KOVACS

...Sometimes, I just cry for hours. I hate to admit that to ya, Pops. I just miss them so much...

ANDREW KOVACS

I know you do, cherké... We're all with you. Even your mother is sending out postcards all over the south...

ERNIE KOVACS

She told me. Two cent postcards with their descriptions. Oh well, every little bit helps, I guess.

ANDREW KOVACS

Sure, every little bit helps. You must have a little faith my boy. And work, work, work... And look, son, CBS brought you to New York now. My son's getting bigger and bigger on the television set machine. "Kovacs Unlimited" I love the title. You need to work...

ERNIE KOVACS

Yea. Hey, I gotta great idea for a bit. Remember ol' man Hepplewhite on our block? Well, get this - a magician: his name is Motzah Hepplewhite...!

ANDREW KOVACS

Are you in a monkey suit?

ERNIE KOVACS

No, no monkey suit. Come on I'll show it to ya...

They start to exit. ACTRESS enters as a CBS executive - MS. CBS. She is very sweet and kind but during this scene, slowly turns horribly monstrous.

MS. CBS

Mr. Kovacs? Oh there you are. Oh, it's so good to see you! I have to talk to you.

ERNIE KOVACS

Well, I was just goin' out with my father.. You are...?

MS. CBS

I'm from CBS. We have great news for you! We really need to talk. We here at CBS are just thrilled silly that you're with our network. You're numbers are just going through the roof just like you had at NBC.

ANDREW KOVACS

You people are lucky to have my boy. He's a genius...

ERNIE KOVACS

Dad, please. They already know that...

MS. CBS

Yes, we do. It's terrible what they did to you in Philadelphia. Why, the whole Today show concept was based on your Three To Get Ready.

ERNIE KOVACS

Dave Garroway! Pleeease..! Aren't those those seeds you get on a bun?

MS. CBS

*(fake laugh)* Ha ha ha! Goodbye, Mr. Kovacs.

ERNIE KOVACS

It's all right, Pops. We'll get together tomorrow night, okay?

ANDREW KOVACS

Yea, sure, Ernie. *(he starts to exit)* Garroway seeds, get it? You can use that, son.

ERNIE KOVACS

Thanks Pops!

MS. CBS

Well, like I was saying.... pleased silly. And we'd like to make you an offer, Ernie.

ERNIE KOVACS

Yea, what kind of offer?

MS. CBS

How would you like a prime time national show?

ERNIE KOVACS

I want it! I want it! I want it! Are you kidding? Me? Of course, I'd like it...!

MS. CBS

We'd thought you'd feel that way. CBS couldn't be happier. Just think. Your first prime time national show will air in eight days. Mwuha-ha-ha-ha. I mean, heh, heh...

ERNIE KOVACS

Wait a minute! Eight days from now? That's not much time to put a show together. But, yes,..yes. I can do it. I'm not afraid of a challenge. Of course it is the Christmas season and most people are on vacation.. but.. why didn't you tell me sooner?

MS. CBS

You know, that's funny. I don't know. Mwuha-ha-ha.. But don't worry, you'll be great. And here's another thing - (*devilish laugh*) your show will be on... (*snicker*) will be on...

ERNIE KOVACS

(*getting worried*) Yes? Yes? When will my show be on?

MS. CBS

(*she is turning very ugly*) ..will be on - Tuesday nights!  
(*big witch laugh*)

ERNIE KOVACS

(*scared*) Oooohhh! No! I mean, I don't know.. Tuesday night is a rough night, y'know... and...

MS. CBS

(*she now has fake fangs in her mouth and her hair is wild*)  
...at eight O'clock!

ERNIE KOVACS

Noooooo! Not eight o'clock! Black Tuesday! Whyyyyyyyy! In eight days, too!

MS. CBS

(*completely fiendish*) That's right, Mr Kovacs, you're show will be opposite... Milton Berle! (*maniacal laughter*)

ERNIE KOVACS

Mr. Television himself!

Fiendish music up. TV sets show Milton Berle laughing with lots of echo.

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

The Texaco Star Theatre! Uncle Milty! The man credited for selling more TV sets than the manufacturer's ad campaigns.

MS. CBS

*(back to normal)* Of course, we'll want you to keep your daytime Kovacs Unlimited going, too. Only we're putting you against the Today show starting tomorrow. Goodbye.

She exits.

ERNIE KOVACS

Fine. Okay, eight days to prepare. I can do this. Prime time? Maybe I just have to rehearse a little and adlib less... Maybe do a show that's a little more conventional.... Nahh!

He exits. The TVs come to life again with the opening of Ernie's late night show "The Ernie Kovacs Show". Orchestra playing. Announcer.

The 1812 Overture begins playing. ACTOR 2 comes out in a tutu dancing in a ballet step to the music. As the music gets slower he gets closer to the audience running out of breath until he's completely exhausted. Lights out.

When the lights come back up we hear birds chirping. ERNIE KOVACS steps out and shoots the bird. Sound FX of an airplane going down. He finds a chain on the desk.

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

Must've been left here by a chain smoker. Hi. I'm Ernie Kovacs.

(MORE)

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

Now, whenever a new show goes on the air, CBS usually advertises it in the trade papers weeks in advance - except for this one, of course - as a matter of fact they were going to have the president of CBS on I've Got A Secret and his secret was this show coming out. But usually there's enough time and you get all kinds of letters from agents and managers who would like to book their talent on the show. And we got so many, it's hard to choose.. there was Mimo the elephant who did impressions, Bing Crosby, Fred Astaire, we had to throw them all out... - would've worked for peanuts - then there were these guys with the most amazing trampoline act I've ever seen.. four guys bounced up - just up. They never came down, in fact we still got the trampoline around here. Everyone's always tripping over it. Then there was the guy who...

A knife hits the wall behind ERNIE.

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

Oh, this guy. This guy never gives up, no matter what we tell him.. (*ERNIE ducks as another knife hits the wall*) He just keeps auditioning. (*another knife*).. the problem with this guy is.. (*another knife where Ernie's head was*) ..he's not the most accurate guy in the world, y'know? But we finally got to some good ones and here we go, right here on our show, Miss Marilyn Monroe! Let's have a big hand for her...

ACTRESS 2 comes in from the audience dressed as Marilyn Monroe (Edie Adams impersonation) Music...

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

Marilyn, hello you gorgeous thing, you. Welcome to the show.

MARILYN

Hello, how are you?

ERNIE KOVACS

Fine. Gettin' better all the time. Should I whisper, too?

MARILYN

Certainly not, Dave.

ERNIE KOVACS

Well, this is always such a rare pleasure when you come by on these little visits.

(MORE)

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

I know you don't usually like to perform unless it's a big movie or something like that but I thought maybe you'd like to sing a little something or recite or anything like that...

MARILYN

Oh, I'd love to sing something for you...

ERNIE KOVACS

Oh you would? Terrific. Let's have a little music for Marilyn Monroe!

Music starts. Edie does her Marilyn Monroe impersonation singing "Davy Crockett".

MARILYN

Born on a mountaintop in Tennessee  
Greenest state in the land of the free  
Raised in the woods, so he knew every tree  
Killed him a bear when he was only three  
Davy, Davy Crockett  
King of the wild frontier... *(pause)*

*(mostly to herself)* Oh, my God.. what am I gonna do? Ernie wants me to marry him. He's asked me about a hundred times.. and suddenly.. I just don't know. I mean, he's like from another planet. Where I come from people just don't act like that. It's like a sin to spend money the way he does. He'd throw me a grocery bag filled with air, but you could hear something rattling around in it, and it would be a string of real pearls. He just always figures more will come.. and it always does somehow...

*(back to Marilyn, play to the men in the audience)*  
In 1813 the creeks uprose  
Add redskins arrows to the country's woes..

It's just that I come from a family that had conferences about whether to cross the street, Ernie plans nothing in advance. He always seems to be on this effervescent high: "This is the greatest orange juice" or "the most *fantastic* coffee".. y'know.. manic.

*(back to Marilyn)*  
Injun fightin', something he knows  
So he shoulders up his rifle and away he goes...

(MORE)

MARILYN (cont'd)

I told Ernie I wasn't sure about marriage - and for a punchline I told him I was sailing to Europe. And he reacted with a dose of Hungarian high drama...

ERNIE KOVACS

*(from offstage)* Go ahead Edie! Go to Europe! Go to Afghanistan or Hightstown or New Jersey, who cares?

MARILYN

Who cares? When I was about to sail he showed up at the ship piled up with flowers and candy and perfume. I went on with my plans anyway. It was supposed to be our Big Test. I was determined to stay away for six weeks. Some test. We called each other every day. Once he even called me from the show. I felt so alone without him. All the things I was seeing were no good seeing them without him. I couldn't bare it any longer and after four days I flew back to the states. Back to Ernie.

Davy, Davy Crockett...

He swooped me down to Mexico and we were married in a ceremony performed in spanish, which neither of us understood. We just got nudged when we were supposed to say sí. Life with Ernie Kovacs is unpredictable, and it's just what I needed.

King of the wild frontier!

She exits to flourish. ACTOR 2 comes out as announcer.

ANNOUNCER

That was the beautiful Edie Adams as Marilyn Monroe. And now once again, it's time for our resident bard, and what a bard he is..

ERNIE KOVACS

*(from offstage)* Watch your mouth, there's kids watching!..

ANNOUNCER

Did I make a booboo? "Bard"? Oh well, here's our resident poet laureate, Percy Dovetonsils!

Harp music plays. ANNOUNCER takes place as cameraman. ERNIE comes out as PERCY DOVETONSILS with a tiger-skinned jacket and spit curls and goofy glasses. He sips a martini glass and lisps continually.

PERCY DOVETONSILS

Greeting over your orthicon tube. Oh, knock it off on the harp already. Ever since we gave that boy a solo last week there's no stopping him. I'm looking at my cameraman. He has the most gorgeous legs. So muscley and sinewy. It's a toss up whethere they're more muscley or more sinewy. Well, hasn't the weather taken a change? If you'll pardon the expression, *(covers the martini glass)* there's a real nip in the air. Actually, we have the most amazing stage manager. Whenever she makes one of these for me, she dips her little finger in it. *(takes a sip behind his book - spits)* I just wish she'd trim her fingernails. It's so nice to blink pinky via the orthicon tube, as the expression goes. I was reminiscing only this morning over my childhood. And I was thinking of a dear friend of mine who lived next door whose name was Stanley. And for no reason at all I was thinking about Stanley all day. Did you ever have one of those days, where you'd think of Stanley? Perhaps you didn't know Stanley. Well, then you would have difficulty remmebering him. However, the wonderful thing about Stanley is, Stanley had a wonderful little pussy cat when he lived next door, and I was thinking about Stanley and his pussycat and so I wrote a poem, Ode to Stanley's Pussycat. *(music comes up)*

### **Ode to Stanley's Pussycat**

I was a strong child and considered quite manly  
 I lived in the suburbs next door to Stanley  
 I planned to be a fireman and he planned to be a doctor  
 His mother taught psychiatry, honest I could've socked her...

She taught her son to exert his mind on animal and friend  
 And what he did to that pussycat was the just about the end  
 Stanley's pussycat at first was just as nice as silk  
 He purred like other pussycats and always drank his milk

And then that awful Stanley put the pussycat on the couch  
 And psychoanalyzed that poor pussycat and made him such a  
 grouch

(MORE)

PERCY DOVETONSILS (cont'd)

That pussycat's personality slowly began to change  
His friendly purr became a snarl with an emo sumac range

He'd sneak into the living room with steps as soft as satin,  
Climb up on the cocktail bar and mix a strong Manahattan  
He'd gulp it down and drop all shame and lose all sense of  
fear,  
And then he'd drink a second one and spit the cherry at the  
mirror

He'd drink till dawn then down the street he'd stagger round  
and fat,  
Soon everyone was gossiping about Stanley's pussycat  
His drinking went from bad to worse, 'twas really most  
disturbin'  
He'd catch the mice in any bar in trade for a shot of  
bourbon...

Percy gets interrupted by the TVs  
sputtering to life. SEAN is on the TV  
screen. His face almost fills the  
screen.

SEAN

(from TV) Wow. Cool. Everybody looks so weird. Craig! Craig!  
Come're and see this...

CRAIG enters TV screen. He has to push  
his face in because they are very  
cramped. Their two faces are smushed  
together.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Sean! What are you doin' in here? Man, move over.

SEAN

Quit pushin'... Did you shave today?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

What are you doin' in here? We're not supposed to be in the  
TV set.

SEAN

I just wanted to see what all the hubbub was about. Look out  
there, isn't that neat?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Yea, real neat. Everyone looks ten pounds thinner. Come on we need to write. .. is that your hand?

SEAN

Umm, I don't know. Could be. Wait, so I guess this is how they did television in the fifties.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

What are you talking about?

SEAN

They had to actually squeeze into the sets, huh? You know, 'cause the technology wasn't there, right?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

(pause) Are you insane? Of course not! You think they actually squeezed into the sets? They didn't have any special effects but they had cameras and studios..

SEAN

No, yea, I know... right. It's just that.. Well. Then why are we squeezed into the set?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

'Cause you're an idiot.

SEAN turns his face towards CRAIG ,  
smushing his nose into CRAIGS cheek.

SEAN

Who you calling an idiot?

CRAIG turns to look at SEAN, but this  
causes SEAN's face to turn towards the  
back.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

All right, I'm sorry, you're not an idiot. And I guess you're kind of right, in a way..

He turns his head back out front,  
causing Sean's face to turn back  
towards CRAIG.

CRAIG ALPAUGH (cont'd)

I mean Kovacs and his crew came up with a lot of special effects, stuff you could do today with the push of a button. But they used tomato cans and juice cans with mirrors glued inside so they make the picture appear upside down.

SEAN

Yea, but why did they want to?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Well, so they could stuff like this!...

The picture turns on it's side, putting CRAIG's head on top of SEAN's.

SEAN

Ohh, owww.. get off me! Or so they could do things like this!

The picture rotates the other way so SEAN is on top of CRAIG.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Oof! Oww.. okay, okay...

The picture rights itself.

SEAN

Or things like this!

CRAIG's face turns into SEAN's face (so there are two SEANs) The SEAN on the right is still CRAIG.

CRAIG ALPAUGH (LOOKING LIKE SEAN)

Ahhh! Sean, what'd you do?

His face turns back to CRAIG. They both pause for a minute.

CRAIG ALPAUGH (cont'd)

Or things like this!

CRAIG hits SEAN and sends him flying backwards - hitting the wall behind him upside0down and sticking to the wall. SEAN falls from the wall and re emerges face to face with CRAIG.

SEAN

And everybody borrowed from him. Not only was Three To Get Ready the first early morning wake up show in the country, but he had an on-screen commuter clock and news and comedy and the whole format was used for the Today show. And the Today show is what booted Ernie out of his slot. Get that. Oh, and speaking of borrowing... Here's that ten dollars I borrowed from you..

He reaches down into his pocket with much discomfort. He squeezes his hand into the scene and tries to give it to CRAIG.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Oh, great, Sean, you just got that out of my pocket.

SEAN

Oh, well... see we always borrow from the great ones...

At this point, ACTRESS crams her head into the screen. SEAN and CRAIG whimper with pain.

ACTRESS

Hey guys, what are you doin' in here? Aren't we supposed to be workin on the play?

SEAN

We'll be out in a minute, don't you ever knock?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Actually we were just discussing how Ernie used weird camera tricks on his shows..

SEAN

Weird? More like surreal..

ACTRESS

Like what, what do you mean?

SEAN

Oh, I'll show you.. for instance like this!..

ACTRESS AND CRAIG ALPAUGH

No! Ouch! Oooh! Owww!

As the scene changes to a quick montage of some of Ernie Kovacs special TV effects... (i.e. Hot water faucet with flames shooting out. Kaleidoscope stuff. Telephone dialing itself... - The last thing on the screen is a splash card reading "Motzah Heplewhite, Curse Caster - Has Spells, Will Travel) Light comes up SL on MOTZAH HEPPLEWHITE (ERNIE) He is dressed as a magician. Robe with criss-crosses, a turban, huge mustache and big nose, and carries a big gong stick. Whenever he waves it in the air you hear a big gong sound. This section has an applause sound effects track.

He stands by a lamp waving his hand over it. Then he turns on the lamp and gets applause. Then he waves the gong stick and we hear a gong sound. Drums play and his beautiful assistant (ACTRESS) struts out in a sexy assistant costume.

MOTZAH HEPPLEWHITE

Some people forget who's show they're on.

He claps his hands together and she pours him a drink. When he takes the shot we hear a cranking sound. Then "GONG"

MOTZAH HEPPLEWHITE (cont'd)

Would some young man from the audience like to come up here to assist me?

ACTOR 2 comes up from the audience. He walks towards the girl but MOTZAH pulls him over to the other side.

MOTZAH HEPPLWHITE (cont'd)

And now the great Motzah will perform another great feat of magic, but first.. *(He claps his hands together and the assistant gives him another drink)* Better order another case of that. The Great Motzah's running a little low. *(then to ACTOR 2)* Thank you for your assistance young man. *(He doesn't leave)* Look, no personal problems, okay? I'm sorry, we just do magic tricks. *(The ASISTANT whispers in Motzah's ear...)*

ACTOR 2

But.. but you haven't done the trick...

MOTZAH HEPPLWHITE

I know, I know! I haven't done the trick yet. She just told me. I don't need everyone telling me. *(to audience)* Now, are there any questions about the next trick? All right you'll notice by quick gesture *(he sticks his hand out and Assistant gives him cards)* I have a pack of cards in my hand.

ACTOR 2

That's right. That's very good.

MOTZAH HEPPLWHITE

Thank you. You sir, I want you to think of a card. Any card at all. *(pause)* How you coming?

ACTOR 2

I got it narrowed down to two of them, but I can't decide which one..... got it.

MOTZAH HEPPLWHITE

Good. *(He slaps his hands together and ASSISTANT offers him a drink)* No, I didn't mean that. Well, perhaps just a short one. *(He drinks)* And now young man, here is the card you were thinking of!

ACTOR 2

Well, which card did you pull out?

MOTZAH HEPPLWHITE

Well, what card were you thinking of?

ACTOR 2

The eight of clubs.

MOTZAH HEPPLEWHITE

(He looks at card and thinks, then throws the pack onto the table) I guess many of you people would like to know how I did that trick. Sorry! (Gong) These secrets were handed down by an ancient Kaputchen monk who would betray his secret world and bring disgrace to Kaputchen monks everywhere. Thank you for coming up from the audience, how 'bout a little hand for the guy?

ACTOR 2 exits. MOTZAH swings his gong stick and "Gong". Assistant offers him another drink.

MOTZAH HEPPLEWHITE (cont'd)

Not while I'm working, please.

ASSISTANT

I insist.

MOTZAH HEPPLEWHITE

Oh, all right if you insist. *(He drinks, bigger sound FX - ASSISTANT then hands him three tubes and then the bottle by mistake)* Oh, all right. *(He drinks again)* Now, inspect this tube. Is it hollow?

ASSISTANT

Oh, yes. It is hollow, oh Great Motzah.

MOTZAH HEPPLEWHITE

Is number two tube hollow?

ASSISTANT

Oh yes, it is hollow, oh Great Motzah.

MOTZAH HEPPLEWHITE

And number three tube, is *it* hollow?

ASSISTANT

Oh, yes, the tube is hollow, oh Great Motzah.

MOTZAH HEPPLEWHITE

(SFX applause) All three tubes are hollow, thank you! (Gong)  
And now, the Great Motzah will perform the mother of all  
magic tricks. (*ominous music*) Watch now as I take this  
ordinary ten cent postcard. Please inspect this postcard,  
assistant. Is it a normal, run-of-the-mill postcard?

ASSISTANT

Oh, yes, it is a normal run-of-the-mill postcard, oh Great  
Motzah.

Lights dim down to just a spotlight on  
Motzah.

MOTZAH HEPPLEWHITE

And now, I will take this postcard and make two little girls  
appear, two girls whose descriptions are on this postcard,  
Kippie and Elisabeth Kovacs!

Lightning flashes and the girls faces  
appear on the screens. Over the house  
speakers we hear girls giggling...

ELISABETH (OVER SPEAKER)

Kippie, let's get a popsicle and go outside... Come on..

KIPPIE (OVER SPEAKER)

No why?

ELISABETH

Come on.. Daddy's come for us!

KIPPIE

No, Mommy told me he's a witch and he'll kill us!

ELISABETH

Do you really believe that?

KIPPIE

No.

ELISABETH

He loves us and he's come for us.. Come on!

KIPPIE AND ELISABETH

Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!

ERNIE KOVACS

Kippie, my baby, I see you're still sucking your thumb.

KIPPIE

I see you're still smoking those big cigars...

Sounds of girls giggling. SEAN and CRAIG are now seated at a table as in previous restaurant scene.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

So, that's it, huh, Sean? He spent over 50,000 dollars in detectives and a two cent postcard got his kids back.

SEAN

Yep. Looks like mother Kovacs was sending out postcards all over the south and that's what eventually led to finding them.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Well, that's got to be the important thing about Kovacs... get writing...

SEAN

Well, I don't know, Craig. I mean, they were with their mother...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Yea, living in squalor in the back of some shack diner in Florida. Kippie Kovacs said later it was a nightmare. She beat them with a hairbrush.

SEAN

I guess so... I just don't think it defined the guy's life...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Look, Sean, I don't know what I'd do without my two sons. This guy had to go up and do comedy bits not knowing where the hell his kids were. I can't think of anything harder... Two years he looked for them. Two years... *(to offstage)* Hey waitress, bring some cheesy stuff, would ya? *(to Sean)* And I don't know what my kids would do without me, either...

SEAN

He said as he orders more heart clogging cheesy stuff.. Well, maybe you're right. And his kids really loved him. Suddenly, they were living in the lap of luxury.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

So where were we? You gotta get back to writing.

SEAN

Yea, why am I doin' all the writing anyway?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

I'm just feelin' a little tired. So what? Come on, where were we?

SEAN

Well, his big shot against Milton Berle didn't work out. They didn't give him any promotion and it was just doomed from the start. His morning show was kickin' butt, though. But he eventually went to Dumont and then back to NBC, he even hosted the Tonight Show for awhile, believe it or not.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Yea, trading off with Steve Allen, right?

SEAN

But, when he got his kids back. he was a man without a network again. Until.. and this is the good part... It all turned around for him in 1956. 6 years after starting in Television. You remember Martin & Lewis, right?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis?

SEAN

No, Martin and Lewis the dry cleaners.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

All right, all right. Of course I remember them. They were the biggest comedy team ever. They started off doing nightclubs in 1948 and became huge.

SEAN

Nice exposition. Yea, but they broke up in 1956, right when they were the most popular.

(MORE)

SEAN (cont'd)

NBC offered each guy his own solo TV special. Jerry Lewis was gonna go first. Everybody in the country was waiting for this show, so they could see if Lewis could make it without Martin...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

And vice versa...

SEAN

And vice versa... And that's where Ernie comes in.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Wait, don't just tell me, do it...

SEAN

Do it? Let me just tell you.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

No, no act it out...

SEAN

Okay. No, what are you gonna do to help?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

This is how I help.. go ahead. Anyway, you've got to now.

SEAN

Why?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Because look behind you...

ACTRESS is now standing behind SEAN as MS. CBS, only now, she's MISS NBC. SEAN immediately becomes ERNIE.

MISS NBC

Hello, Mr. Kovacs!

ERNIE KOVACS

Ahhh! (*jumps*) Oh no, it's you, Miss CBS! Not you again! look, I don't want any deals! Go Away!

MISS NBC

No, actually I'm Miss NBC. Welcome home Ernie! We have a great opportunity for you!

ERNIE KOVACS

No, no, no! I fell for this routine before. You're nuts! Go away!

ERNIE bumps into ACTOR 2 who has reentered as another NBC EXECUTIVE.

NBC EXECUTIVE

Oh, you'll like this one, Mr. Kovacs.

ERNIE KOVACS

Ahhh! Two of you! I'm surrounded!

NBC EXECUTIVE

Please just listen to what we have to say.

MISS NBC

We need you, Mr. Kovacs.

NBC EXECUTIVE

Jerry Lewis is scheduled to do an hour and half television "spectacular" for his big solo debut.

ERNIE KOVACS

So, what's the problem? Everyone's waiting for that. You'll have a big hit.

MISS NBC

Yes, but unfortunatley, Mr. Lewis says he'll only do an hour.

NBC EXECUTIVE

And he won't follow anybody.

MISS NBC

And...

NBC EXECUTIVE

And...

MISS NBC

And we already sold the full hour and a half to sponsors. We need someone to take that last half hour.

ERNIE KOVACS

Ah-haaaa... So you need some monkey-boy to follow the most heralded TV solo special in history, huh?

MISS NBC

I knew he'd understand.

ERNIE KOVACS

All right, well, here's the deal. You want me? Well, I want plenty of rehearsal time, and I want to do what I want to do script-wise and the most important thing, no interference from network executives!

NBC EXECUTIVE

But, but, but...

MISS NBC

Oh, Mr. Kovacs...

ERNIE KOVACS

You heard me. None.

NBC EXECUTIVE

Yes, you can do a game show or one of your crazy characters, I guess..

ERNIE KOVACS

No. I have a new idea. You're gonna love this. "The Silent Show"!

MISS NBC

"The Silent Show"?

ERNIE KOVACS

That's right. Absolutely no talking at all. Just sounds and sights. If people want talking, they can turn on the radio, it's filled with it. It'll star a character named Eugene, see? And everything in this guy's world is amplified somehow. He blinks his eyes and you hear clanging, every bodily function is uncontrollably loud and noisy...

MISS NBC

That's disgusting.

NBC EXECUTIVE

Now, see here, Kovacs, that'll never work. First of all, it's not funny...

The two EXECUTIVES start surrounding ERNIE with flats covered in white paper.

NBC EXECUTIVE (cont'd)

Y'see, I've heard of your "mad scientist" approach to tv making. But you have to learn to work inside the confines of the established television format.

MISS NBC

It's what we like to call "the confines of the established television format". We're here to sell toaster ovens, not do art. And that's the brave new era of the medium.

NBC EXECUTIVE

You know television's called a medium, don't you?

ERNIE KOVACS

Yea, 'cause it's not rare and it's not well done.

NBC EXECUTIVE

And that's what we're talking about here. So what'll it be Ernie?

ERNIE KOVACS

Do you mind if I use the phone? (*picks up phone*) Hello film department? Yea, you better get an old western movie to run after the Jerry Lewis special. They got nobody...

NBC EXECUTIVE

Now wait a minute, Mr. Kovacs, don't say that...!

MISS NBC

Mr. Kovacs, please...

ERNIE hangs up the phone and puts his fingers to his lips..

ERNIE KOVACS

Shhhhhh!

The lights go out. KOVACS lights a match and a small spotlight comes up on the scene. He goes to one of the white walls and draws a lamp. It doesn't turn on so he draws an electric outlet and a plug. The light turns on.

The two network executives turn into library patrons - sitting and reading. ERNIE is now EUGENE. EUGENE's feet make loud squishing noises wherever he walks. He draws a radio on the wall and turns it on. Music fuzzes out so he cuts out the radio and on the other side are actual radio innards. He adjusts them.

He goes to the bookshelf and takes out a book called "Camille". He opens it and we hear a woman coughing. With every turn of the page, more coughing. Then a book labeled "War And Peace". When he opens it, we hear war planes and bombs. He opens it up to the back and a dove flies out of the book. He then picks up a book called "Edison". When he open it up, bright light floods out of it and blinds him. Another book, "Man Of The Sea". Water pours out of the bookshelf from where the book was.

He then sits next to ACTOR 2, who is reading. He pulls on his fingers and we hear loud explosions as he pops his knuckles. EUGENE's stomach starts to make loud noises. ACTOR 2 is annoyed. EUGENE takes out a little hourglass and puts it on the table. It starts to "bong" like Big Ben. He then pulls out a lunchbox. He eats celery and it makes loud crunching noises. ACTOR 2 can't take anymore and jumps ups.

ACTOR 2

Stop it!

EUGENE jumps out of his seat and runs to the white wall. He draws a doorway. After that, he rips a whole in the wall and leaves. ACTRESS walks out as ACTOR takes place behind desk as NBC EXECUTIVE.

MISS NBC

Well, Mr. Programming genius, did you see these reviews?

NBC EXECUTIVE

Yes, I saw them. And the switchboard lit up like a Christmas tree last night. People loved the silent show, even the critics.

MISS NBC

Even the critics?

NBC EXECUTIVE

Yes, even the critics.

MISS NBC

And did you know that soon Ernie's Silent Show will become the only television show presented by the United States at the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels?

NBC EXECUTIVE

Well, how the hell do you know that?

MISS NBC

I read ahead in the script a little...

NBC EXECUTIVE

Did you now...

MISS NBC

Well, what are you gonna do with him?

NBC EXECUTIVE

Y'know... I just don't know.

MISS NBC

He makes inspired television...

NBC EXECUTIVE

But he doesn't put ratings above all. No. I think we'll just keep him under wraps for awhile...

EXECUTIVES exit. ERNIE walks out and pulls up a wooden cutout of a car off the stage. It stand up and it looks like he's in the car.

ERNIE KOVACS

Keep me under wraps, huh? No thanks. After the Silent Show, somebody else was callin' too. Hollywood. And, durn me.. I just couldn't say no. Operation Mad Ball is the name of the picture. And now I'd like to show you a few scenes from the movie. *(He pulls out 8x10 pictures and whizzes through them)* How 'bout this one? Take a look at this.. Is that Moxie or what? Here's me and Jack Lemmon. Jack Lemmon - what a great guy. We became the best of friends.

ACTOR 2 enters.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Everyone loved him in Hollywood. His charm, wit...

ERNIE KOVACS

Hey get the hell out of the road, would you, I almost hit you!

CRAIG ALPAUGH

But the movies Ernie was in played upon his unique personality instead of his innovative and imaginative mind.

ERNIE KOVACS

Well, that's okay for awhile. The pay is out of this world. I think I've been working too hard all my life. Besides, maybe now I can get a few of my projects done.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

He wrote a book called Zoomar. About a TV executive who keeps running into walls while trying to keep TV fresh and new.

ERNIE KOVACS

Yea, and I get to play poker with Dean Martin, Milton Berle, Frank Sinatra, Tony Curtis, Billy Wilder...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

And they all take his money. The worst poker player in history.

ERNIE KOVACS

Heeey!...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

And they all love him.

ERNIE KOVACS

Look, I'd like to go down memory lane with you all night, but could you get out of my way? I'm on my way to my death scene.

ACTRESS runs out as EDIE ADAMS

EDIE ADAMS

What?! Ernie! Did you say death scene? You're only forty-two!

ERNIE KOVACS

Yea, it's a damn shame, aint it?

EDIE ADAMS

Ernie, please. You're just kidding, aren't you? We just had a baby of our own. Your little Mia!

ERNIE KOVACS

I'm leaving a party at Milton Berle's house. I worked all day and Edie and I are in seperate cars. I told her to take the Rolls and I would take the Corvair station wagon...

ACTOR 2

Ahh, yes, the car Ralph Nader later dubbed "unsafe at any speed".

ERNIE KOVACS

Yea, well, whatever. It was raining that night and the roads were slippery.

EDIE ADAMS

And you were driving top speed again, as usual.

ERNIE KOVACS

Look, can I tell this story? Ooohh, well, that's that. I guess I better get goin'.

He goes to Edie.

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

I forgot to tell you, Did you know you're the only F.W. I'll ever have? It's been real, kid.

He kisses her with passion and then becomes SEAN as he sits at the desk. ACTOR 2 joins him as CRAIG. EDIE walks over to the telephone. Spotlight on just her.

EDIE ADAMS

Hello, Police dept.?

CRAIG (POLICMAN ON LINE)

Yes, how can I help you?

EDIE ADAMS

A reporter just told me I should call. This is Edith Adams. I'm home and Ernie's not. And no matter what car we take he always beats me home. Was there an accident? Tell me if I should be worried!

CRAIG ALPAUGH (POLICEMAN)

Um, yea... Could you hold on a minute, Mrs. Kovacs?... It's Mrs. Kovacs... What'll I tell her? Jesus God, he's already on his way to the morgue...

She hangs up phone and starts to cry.

EDIE ADAMS

That's how I found out. I didn't even believe it until Jack Lemmon called me from the coroner's office. My sweet Hungarian man was gone. *(she cries for a pause)* I could never imagine what my life would have been like if I had never met Ernie Kovacs. Thanks for the ride of my life, darling. On his grave plaque. we put "Nothing In Moderation - We All Loved Him."

She exits. Lights up on SEAN and CRAIG sitting at table (back at restaurant)

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Man, Sean - what a way to find out something like that. What a shame.

SEAN

Yea, and when they found him, he was halfway out of the car - reaching for a cigar.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Get out of here.

SEAN

Yea. Kinda funny for him, huh? Well, right before he died he was doing some of the best work of his career...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

For Dutch Masters, right?

SEAN

Right. Once-a-month TV specials. And he finally had the budget and the time to do some of the weird, imaginative stuff he saw in his head. Very surreal stuff, some of it. He left a hell of a legacy...

CRAIG ALPAUGH

And you can still see his influence: Saturday Night Live, Laugh-In, Letterman, Monty Python's Flying Circus... Ernie was the guy.

SEAN

Yea they all borrowed from him, but much more tame. D'you know Craig, some reviewer said bring back an Ernie Kovacs show today would be like bringing back those kid's toys with the sharp metal edges.

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Ha ha, that's funny. I use to love those toys. Well, look, I gotta go...

SEAN

What? Whaddya mean "go"? We're working here!

CRAIG ALPAUGH

Sorry Sean, I really gotta go. You're doing great. I'll check in on ya...

SEAN

Wait a minute! Check in on me? Where you going? Aww, Craig, don't leave me sitting here alone in a restaurant. I'll look like a hobo... Hey! What about the check?

CRAIG ALPAUGH

I'll get it next time. Just work. See ya later, my friend.

He winks and exits. Lights dim.  
Spotlight on SEAN alone.

SEAN

He'll get it next time he says. So what was important about Ernie Kovacs? What's important about anybody? I could never imagine what my life would have been like without him... Isn't that what Edie Adams said? Good thing she didn't have to find out. Sometimes people just come along.. and you don't know what the hell they're supposed to be for. You're just glad they came along. People who are glad to see ya. People who inspire you. People with a lot of heart. You probably know someone like that. Good thing they came along...

SEAN beomes KOVACS again and walks backstage to a large tree. He jumps up on the limb. There is a saw in the limb. KOVACS sits on the dangerous end of the limb and begins sawing.

ERNIE KOVACS

Well, here we are at the end of the show. (saw, saw) I really like this part. The show's over and everyone is relaxed and talking about what they're gonna do after the show. (saw, saw) Maybe go get coffee. Everyone is congratulating everyone else on the good job..(saw, saw) That's what I like about the end of a show... It's that comfortable feeling...

He finally cuts throught the limb and the tree itself falls over while the limb stays suspended in air with KOVACS still sitting on it.

ERNIE KOVACS (cont'd)

Good night. Thanks for watching. It's been.... real.

TV's sputter on with video of ERNIE in tank of water smoking a cigar. He spits out milk so it looks like smoke and holds up a "Goodbye!" sign.

Light Out.

THE END