

# **RADIO RIOT!**

## **By Jacqueline T. Lynch**

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# RADIO RIOT!

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**SYNOPSIS:** The time is December 1942, the setting is a radio station where "Cowboy Chuck and the Happy Rangers," a children's adventure program featuring hero Cowboy Chuck, his best gal, his sidekick, the villain, and the announcer all wrapping up an episode. When the station manager informs them this locally-produced show is about to make its nationwide debut and Life magazine photographers are coming to do a story on them, they are thrilled, but not about having to wear the outrageous western costumes chosen for them. Behind the scenes, however, trouble is brewing, as the actor playing the show's villain, who is actually an undercover FBI agent, discovers that the station owner is a Nazi sympathizer and the new script they are to perform coast-to-coast contains coded secrets on national security about to be broadcast to the enemy. The confused cast, the bumbling sound effects man, the prim organist, the show's bickering husband-and-wife team of writers all work together in true bumbling, patriotic *Cowboy Chuck and the Happy Rangers* can-do fashion to foil the bad guys.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

(7 male, 7 female, 1 either)

DIRK MCCOY (m) ..... Plays COWBOY CHUCK the star of *Cowboy Chuck and the Happy Rangers*. The star of a children's radio show. His rugged, two-fisted radio persona is a contrast to his real-life childlike dimwittedness. (60 lines)

FRIEDA FREDETTE (f) ..... Plays COWBOY CHUCK's girlfriend YODLIN' SAL. As sassy as her character, yet she is more poignant, and troubled. (121 lines)

HAMILTON

- BAXTER-JOHNSTON IV (m).....Plays COWBOY CHUCK'S sidekick, GERONIMO JR. An elderly Shakespearean actor now reduced to playing a stereotyped sidekick, which he does with great dignity. (76 lines)
- CLINTON EVERETT (m).....The smooth, self-important announcer with a fragile ego. (72 lines)
- BIFF SLIGO (m).....Plays the villain, NASTY ROBERT, in *Cowboy Chuck and the Happy Rangers*. A sneering villain on and off the air, but secretly a good guy and secretly in love with FRIEDA. (127 lines)
- MARTY KOLCHAK (m).....Husband of the, husband and wife writing team, who are always bickering. (38 lines)
- EDNA KOLCHAK (f).....Wife of the, husband and wife writing team, who are always bickering. (27 lines)
- THE BERTUCCI SISTERS (f).....Three (3) studio singers. They perform the show's commercials and do background voices for the show, other than that they don't speak and always look bored.

- JIMMY (m).....The young gopher and sound effects man, who sometimes gets carried away by his work. *(56 lines)*
- MRS. RAPPELLE (f) .....A rich society woman, the station's owner. She is revealed to be a villainous Nazi sympathizer. *(14 lines)*
- MR. PRENTISS (m) .....The station manager who bullies his staff, and fawns over MRS. RAPPELLE. *(77 lines)*
- MISS KOWALSKI (f).....The silent organist, who though very easily flustered, shows a lot of Moxie when she has to. Has only one line at the end of the play. *(1 lines)*
- NEWS ANNOUNCER (m/f).....This is an off stage voice. *(4 lines)*

## PROPS

Sound effects props such as a small hinged board to represent a closing door, a pair of shoes on a box of gravel, bells, horns and whistles (Note, these do not necessarily have to be used to create the sounds in the play, as those can be obtained on sound effects recordings. They need only be seen.) A handgun, a coil of rope, and two sheriff/FBI badges.

## COSTUMES

All the men and women should be dressed in 1940's style dresses/skirts, suits or pants and shirts for the men. In the second act, a rather cartoonish cowboy outfit, a cowgirl's outfit, a black hat and pair of boots for the villain, an Indian's headband, feather and loin cloth, and a cactus costume.

## SETS

The single set is a radio studio. It is a bare stage with only a table for the sound effects props, a table with a coffee percolator with coffee and cups, a coat rack, two standing mics, an organ, a clock on the wall, and a red light to indicate broadcasting is in progress.

## DEDICATION

*This is for my twin brother, John.*

Do Not Copy

**ACT ONE, SCENE 1**

**TIME:** December 1942.

**SETTING:** The studio of radio station WCFS, live from Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts. The stage is fairly open without much furniture. The walls suggest a sound-proof studio. Up Right there is a long table with sound effects props: creating door slams, shoes walking on gravel, horns and bells, etc. NOTE: A working mic can be used to amplify the sounds. Downstage Right there is a small table against the wall with a coffee percolator, cups and saucers. There is a clock on the wall Stage Right, and red light which goes on during a live performance, and is turned off when not. Up Right Center there is a sofa, perhaps an easy chair and a couple of stools for actors waiting for their cues. There is a door Upstage Left, a coat rack Downstage Left. Down Center and Left there are two standing microphones. The Center one is for the CAST, and the one far Left is for the ANNOUNCER. There is a mic on a boom set at the sound effects table. This need be the only mic that works: See above. Short news items are read over a speaker from other studio. These may be read by an offstage actor or recorded on tape and played.

**AT RISE:** *An episode of "Cowboy Chuck and the Happy Rangers" is being concluded. FRIEDA, BIFF, DIRK, and HAMILTON stand around the Center mic. CLINTON EVERETT stands at the mic far Left. THEY all carry pages, which THEY drop on the floor after they are read. JIMMY is behind the sound effects table. The BERTUCCI SISTERS alternately shift from the couch to the Center mic when THEY are required.*

**BERTUCCI SISTERS:** *(They constantly chew gum, which they take out of their mouths only to sing. In a very bored manner, they sing to the tune of "Blow the Man Down.")*

BLOW THE STEAM OFF, BULLIES  
 BLOW THE STEAM OFF.  
 CAP'N HANK'S CHADDA IS HOT.  
 IT'S FULL OF POTATOES  
 AND MAYBE SOME CLAMS  
 CAP'N HANK'S CHADDA'S THE BEST IS THE LAND!

**CLINTON EVERETT:** *(Breaks in with gusto.)* Yes! That's right, rangers! Cap'n Hank's Chadda is the best in the land, and even our hero, Cowboy Chuck, thinks so, too! Isn't that right, Cowboy Chuck?

*JIMMY makes slurping and smacking noises. The others laconically look at him.*

**DIRK:** *(As COWBOY CHUCK.)* Mm-mmmm, yessir, pardners, this here chowder is mighty swell!

**CLINTON EVERETT:** *(Covering)* Only, we're in New England, right kids? So of course he means *chadda*, not *chowder*. Isn't that right, Cowboy Chuck?

**DIRK:** *(As COWBOY CHUCK. Flustered)* Huh? Oh, yeah. Sure. Uh . . . how can we be at the ranch in the old west if we're still in New England?

*The others groan. MISS KOWALSKI plays background organ to the following.*

**CLINTON EVERETT:** *(Interrupts.)* And now . . . back to our story. When we left Cowboy Chuck, his Indian friend Geronimo Jr., and his best girl, Yodlin' Sal, the Sweetheart of Dry Gulch, things were looking mighty bad . . .

**BIFF:** *(As NASTY ROBERT.)* Take that . . .

**CLINTON EVERETT:** *(Not finished.)* . . . yessir, mighty bad . . . They found the secret hideout of the meanest hombre in the west, Nasty Robert and his gang . . . when suddenly . . .

**BIFF:** *(Angrily.)* You want to let us act some of it out before the show's over?

**CLINTON EVERETT:** When suddenly . . .

*He signals to JIMMY, who, startled, fires off unrealistic popgun sounds.*

**BIFF:** *(As NASTY ROBERT. Fed up, reads.)* Take that, and that you rats!

**FRIEDA:** *(As YODLIN' SAL.)* Cowboy Chuck, he's getting away! And he's tying me up . . . and taking me with him!

**BIFF:** *(As NASTY ROBERT.)* Ah-HAAA! My lovely wench! Now I've got you, Sweetheart of Dry Gulch! How would you like to be Mrs. Nasty Robert?

**FRIEDA:** *(As YODLIN' SAL.)* No! A fate worse than death! Help, Cowboy Chuck, help!

**DIRK:** *(As COWBOY CHUCK.)* Don't be afraid, Yodlin' Sal, I'll help . . . *(turns page)* . . . you.

**HAMILTON:** *(As GERONIMO, JR.)* *Speaks with Shakespearean flare and proper diction.* Me stop bad man, Cowboy Chuck!

**BIFF:** *(As NASTY ROBERT.)* Oh, sending your Indian sidekick to do a man's job, eh? Take this, Indian, and that!

*JIMMY makes punching and slapping sounds. HAMILTON groans dramatically after each hit.*

**BIFF:** *(As NASTY ROBERT.)* And this! And that! Now for the big finish!

*JIMMY lifts a box and slams it on the table repeatedly.*

**FRIEDA:** *(As YODLIN' SAL.)* Cowboy Chuck, help! He's beating Geronimo, Jr. on the head with a box of dynamite!

**DIRK:** *(As COWBOY CHUCK.)* Why, that means this whole shack could go sky-high any minute! If only I weren't tied to this chair, I . . . I'll . . .

*Clears his throat loudly and glares at JIMMY. JIMMY stops banging box.*

I sure wish I had my Cowboy Chuck and the Happy Rangers pocket knife that came absolutely free with 10 box tops from Sugar Coated Stuff Cereal, the treat that moms love to buy . . . I guess I'll have to bite through the rope with my teeth instead.

*JIMMY makes a sawing sound on wood. They all look at him. He shrugs.*

Um . . . there, I'm free. I guess. Now for a little cowboy justice!

**BIFF:** *(As NASTY ROBERT.)* Come here and say that to my face, Cowboy!

**DIRK:** *(As COWBOY CHUCK.)* All right . . . *(turns page)* I will!

*JIMMY makes sound of boots walking across wooden floor, which lasts much longer than it should, until they all glare at him. He looks up, embarrassed, stops.*

**DIRK:** *(As COWBOY CHUCK.)* Um . . . this sure is a mighty long shack.

**BIFF:** *(As NASTY ROBERT.)* Any talking you want to do with me, Cowboy Chuck, you can say it to my six shooter! It does all my talking for me. Oh, no! I'm out of bullets!

*JIMMY fires off a shot. They all look at him. Then at the mics.*

Uh . . . except that one. That was probably the last one, though.

**HAMILTON:** *(As GERONIMO, JR. Covering.)* Ugh! He-um got-um me in the leg, Cowboy Chuck.

**FRIEDA:** *(As YODLIN' SAL.)* Poor Geronimo, Jr.! Cowboy Chuck, do something! *(Points to the script.)* Put your lasso of truth around him!

**DIRK:** *(As COWBOY CHUCK.)* Will that stop the bleeding?

**FRIEDA:** *(As YODLIN' SAL. Fed up.)* Put it around Nasty Robert, you . . . cowboy, you, to get Nasty Robert to confess about the train robbery and the mine shaft disaster and the counterfeit money, and the, well you know, everything we've been talking about for the last six weeks.

**BIFF:** *(As NASTY ROBERT.)* Oh no! Not the Lasso of Truth!

**FRIEDA/YODLIN' SAL, GERONIMO, JR. & BERTUCCI SISTERS:**  
Yes! The lasso of truth!

*MISS KOWALSKI fires off an ominous chord. After a long pause of shuffling pages; the others wait, anticipating.*

**DIRK:** Did we skip a page?

**FRIEDA:** *(As YODLIN' SAL. Grits teeth.)* Here. I'll put the lasso on him. You just stand there and . . . be heroic.

**BIFF:** *(As NASTY ROBERT. As if straining.)* The lasso of truth . . . Ye . . . sss . . . it . . . was . . . me . . .

**CLINTON EVERETT:** *(Breaks in.)* That's right, boys and girls! And now a word from our . . .

**BIFF:** *(As NASTY ROBERT. Not finished.)* . . . all . . . the . . . time . . . it . . . was . . . me . . .

*MISS KOWALSKI blasts the organ. They all jump.*

**CLINTON EVERETT:** Sweet Jehoshophat, woman! Oh, excuse me. And so ends another action-packed half-hour of thrills and cowboy suspense with Cowboy Chuck and the Happy Rangers! Brought to you Monday through Friday by Magnifique Cigarettes.

**BERTUCCI SISTERS:** *(Singing to the tune of “Mademoiselle from Armentieres”)*

MAGNIFIQUE CIGARETTES

IS THE BRAND

MAGNIFIQUE CIGARETTES

THEY'RE SO GRAND.

JUST TRY A PUFF AND THEN YOU'LL SEE

YOU'LL BE AS POPULAR AS ME,

MAGNIFIQUE BRAND CIGARETTES!

**CLINTON EVERETT:** That's right! The really popular brand of cigarettes for popular people! And don't forget, 9 out of 10 doctors report that smoking Magnifique Cigarettes is better for you than eating carrots! So, take a tip from Cowboy Chuck . . . and try . . . Magnifique Cigarettes!

*JIMMY makes sounds of drawing on cigarette and blowing smoke.*

**DIRK:** *(As COWBOY CHUCK.)* It makes me feel . . . magnifique!

**CLINTON EVERETT:** And tune in next time for the start of a brand-new Cowboy Chuck adventure with thrills galore . . . So long from Cowboy Chuck and the Happy Rangers, starring Dirk McCoy as Cowboy Chuck, Frieda Fredette as Yodlin' Sal the Sweetheart of Dry Gulch, Biff Sligo as Nasty Robert, Hamilton Baxter-Johnston IV as Geronimo, Jr., and I'm your announcer, Clinton Everett.

**BERTUCCI SISTERS:** *(Singing theme song to the tune of “Home on the Range”)*

WHEN YOU'RE OUT OF LUCK,

AND THE POSSE IS STUCK,

AND DANGER IS COMING YOUR WAY,

JUST CALL COWBOY CHUCK

AND THE BAD GUYS WILL DUCK

AND VIRTUE WILL TRIUMPH ALL DAY.

**CLINTON EVERETT:** This is WCFS, the Voice of Chicopee Falls and greater Chicopee Falls including Willimansett, Aldenville, Fairview, Cabotville, Sandy Hill, and Johnnycake Hollow . . . stay tuned for the news from studio B.

**MR. PRENTISS:** *(Off Stage Voice.)* We're clear.

*They all relax. The red light goes off. MR. PRENTISS enters.*

**MR. PRENTISS:** Okay, people okay. Good show. Good show. Stay here everyone for a brief production meeting.

*They groan.*

Hey, hey. I've got some very important things to tell you about, but only if you're still working here. Got it? Good. I'll be right back. Nobody leaves this studio. Um, except Jimmy. You come with me, kid.

**JIMMY:** *(Excited to be singled out.)* Yes Sir!

**MR. PRENTISS:** I have some heavy boxes I want you to carry.

**JIMMY:** *(Disappointed.)* Oh.

**MR. PRENTISS:** On second thought, you stay here. I'll take the singing Bertucci sisters instead. Every one of them is stronger than you. C'mon girls. Oh, and Miss Kowalski.

**MISS KOWALSKI shrieks.**

Sorry, didn't mean to startle you. You heft a pretty mean box, too, don't you Miss Kowalski?

*She nods obediently.*

That's fine, come with me, please. Jimmy?

**JIMMY:** *(Once again excited to be noticed.)* Sir!

**MR. PRENTISS:** Turn up the news from Studio B.

*Exits with MISS KOWALSKI, BERTUCCI SISTERS.*

**JIMMY:** Yes, boss. *(Turns on receiver.)*

*They all gradually turn to the source of the sound and listen.*

**NEWS ANNOUNCER:** *(From off stage.)* There's fighting tonight on land and in the air at Gaudalcanal as four more raids continue against the enemy. Meanwhile, the 8<sup>th</sup> US Army, along with British forces, are again at grips with the enemy forces under Rommel in North Africa. American losses since Pearl Harbor, one year ago, are estimated to be at about 50,000 . . .

*Fade to BLACKOUT.*

## ACT ONE, SCENE 2

**AT RISE:** *Moments later. JIMMY stands near sound effects table. HAMILTON and FRIEDA are standing at Center mic. BIFF pours himself coffee. DIRK strolls to area near Left mic. CLINTON EVERETT sits on one of the stools. The news continues.*

**NEWS ANNOUNCER:** Local citizens are asked to obey the signals for tonight's scheduled blackout. The first horn signal is for mobilization of air wardens and support staff to go to their posts. At the second siren the street lights will go out, and after the third warning, all lights in the city must be out, traffic must be stopped.

**FRIEDA:** Could you please turn that off!

*BIFF, who is nearest the monitor, considers FRIEDA a moment, and turns off the news.*

**DIRK:** Everyone? How was I?

**HAMILTON, FRIEDA, JIMMY, CLINTON EVERETT:** Wonderful.  
Great. Really good. Fine.

**FRIEDA:** The same as always.

**BIFF:** You stink.

**FRIEDA:** Stop it, Biff. Why do you always have to start trouble?

**BIFF:** Because I'm the villain. That's what I do.

**HAMILTON:** That's only supposed to be on the air, Biff. We're only play-acting.

**BIFF:** (*Gestures to DIRK.*) Tell that to him. He thinks it's real.

*JIMMY lies down on the couch. BIFF strolls to the area around the Center mic with his coffee. DIRK goes to the coat rack during the following conversation, gets a package of gum from his coat pocket, silently offers it around to shaking heads, except JIMMY, who accepts a piece, and then DIRK slumps into one of the chairs, looking at his script.*

**FRIEDA:** Hamilton, can I talk to you for a minute?

**HAMILTON:** Certainly, my dear.

**FRIEDA:** (*Who notices BIFF is eavesdropping.*) Take a hike, Biff. When I want a creep's opinion, I'll call you.

**BIFF:** Harsh words from the Sweetheart of Dry Gulch. Tsk, tsk.

*He goes to couch, slaps JIMMY's feet off, and sits down.*

**HAMILTON:** Never mind him. What is it, Frieda?

**FRIEDA:** I want your opinion on something. You've been around.

**HAMILTON:** That's putting it mildly. I just haven't been anywhere important, that's all.

**FRIEDA:** My gosh, Hamilton, you've traveled this whole country.

**HAMILTON:** That was in the old days, my dear, when St. Louis was the end of civilization and Los Angeles was a whistle stop on the way to nowhere. I've played Shakespeare all over the United States, mostly to people who don't know if it's good or bad, but they seemed to like the sword fighting. I suppose that's something.

**FRIEDA:** I guess this performing on this kid's show is a real come-down for you, isn't it?

**HAMILTON:** Not at all. After the Great Depression and my WPA acting jobs for food, this is a step up. A paycheck with my name on it is a wonderful thing, let me tell you. Though I admit, none of the Indians I encountered on my travels out west ever spoke like Geronimo, Jr.

**FRIEDA:** You played Shakespeare for Indian audiences?

**HAMILTON:** Yes, I certainly did. I'll never forget one summer evening our traveling troupe performed "Hamlet" under torchlight before an audience from the Hopi nation.

**FRIEDA:** Wow! Did they like it?

**HAMILTON:** They loved it. Well, the tribal elders thought Ophelia was hamming it up too much, and a couple of them said our costumes were tacky, but the show went over pretty well, I'd say.

**FRIEDA:** There's always a few critics.

**HAMILTON:** I suppose. Now I play Geronimo, Jr., no tribute at all to them I'm embarrassed to say, but it's a living. I get the crap kicked out of me every episode. Strangely, the kids seem to like it.

**FRIEDA:** There's a lot about this show that should be fixed.

**HAMILTON:** But listen to me go on, I'm sorry, my dear, you wanted to talk about something?

**FRIEDA:** Well I . . . I broke up with my boyfriend, Walter, today.

**HAMILTON:** Oh, well, that's too bad. Still, I'm sure it's all for the . . . wait a minute, wasn't Walter supposed to leave for the Army today?

**FRIEDA:** Yeah, I broke up with him on the train platform. Just as the conductor yelled "All aboard" and the train started to pull out.

**BIFF:** Ouch! You ought to be the villain, you're better at it than me.

**FRIEDA:** I'm not talking to you, Biff! Just butt out!

**HAMILTON:** Are you sure that was the right thing to do? I mean, the train platform and all . . .

**BIFF:** Lovers kissing their last goodbyes.

**JIMMY:** People crying and waving handkerchiefs.

**CLINTON EVERETT:** Listening to track arrivals on the loudspeaker.

**DIRK:** Buying gum.

*They all look at him.*

**FRIEDA:** I'm sorry I brought it up! I didn't know my personal business was going to be a topic for open debate.

**CLINTON EVERETT:** It's a sound proof room, Frieda. The acoustics are perfect. We can hear everything. Every time Jimmy burps at his prop table, I can hear it clear across the room to where I'm standing over there.

**JIMMY:** (*Nervous.*) You can? What else have you heard?

**FRIEDA:** I mean it, fellas, butt out. (*Growing confidential again with HAMILTON.*) I know it seems terrible. But I just couldn't have Walter leave thinking everything was solid between us. He's a nice fella, but I don't want to marry him or anything. I just think it would be even more cruel for him to be sent away and expect someone to be waiting for him. I hope someday someone is, but it's not going to be me.

**BIFF:** You could have given him one last night to remember.

**HAMILTON:** Watch it there, young man.

**FRIEDA:** Oh, dry up. (*Back to HAMILTON.*) I just don't like being phony. I know that's not what I'm supposed to do *these* days. Thousands of girls right now are getting engaged to guys they think they really know, just because there's a war on. One last night to remember, my Aunt Fanny.

**BIFF:** (*Teasing.*) It's patriotic.

**FRIEDA:** Yeah, well, maybe. Maybe not. So's saluting the flag, but I don't see you in uniform.

*BIFF is rebuffed, returns to the couch.*

(*Sorry for what she has said. To HAMILTON.*) I guess that was not very nice of me.

**HAMILTON:** I dare say he had it coming.

**FRIEDA:** Well, I don't think that, not really. It's none of my business. I don't think every man has to be in the service. I don't like pointing fingers.

**HAMILTON:** I know, my dear. I only meant that Biff takes plenty of shots at you, I've noticed.

**FRIEDA:** I know, why doesn't he just leave? This isn't such a great job to hang onto, with his looks he could be in the movies. The handsome creep.

**HAMILTON:** Maybe he's just not ambitious like you. He's certainly not washed up like me. I don't know why he's here. But about Walter, I suppose in the end you'll find you've done the right thing.

**FRIEDA:** In the meantime, I broke a GI's heart and stepped all over mom and apple pie. I guess I just don't like herd mentality, you know. I don't like doing what everyone else does, or being told what to do or what to think. And to tell you the truth, I don't feel comfortable doing that to other people, either.

**HAMILTON:** I've never seen you tell others what to do, Frieda.

**FRIEDA:** That's where you're wrong. I do it every day. So do you, and all of us. Doing those stupid commercials for Zephyr Mouthwash and Magnifique Cigarettes. On a kid's show, yet. Frankly, I don't think smoking Magnifique Cigarettes is better for you than eating carrots at all. In fact, I'm pretty suspicious about cigarettes in general. Someday, I think we're all going to be sorry.

**HAMILTON:** You have a lot of sense, and a lot of integrity. Someday they'll sell integrity, too, if they can only figure out a way to package it. In the meantime, I'm glad I can be here while you dole it out for free.

**FRIEDA:** You're sweet, Hamilton.

**MR. PRENTISS:** (*Enters.*) Okay, okay, let's get the show on the road. Jimmy?

**JIMMY:** (*Jumps up.*) Yes, sir!

**MR. PRENTISS:** Go get Marty and Edna. They're in their office throwing things at each other.

**JIMMY:** (*Dejected.*) Oh. Do I have to?

**MR. PRENTISS:** Can't have a production meeting without our writers.

**JIMMY:** (*Exiting.*) I hate getting Marty and Edna.

**MR. PRENTISS:** They're a little disagreeable to be around, I know kid. That's because they're writers. The only people who stink more are actors. Now, I have a big surprise for you all.

*The BERTUCCI SISTERS and MISS KOWALSKI enter, each struggling with a large cardboard box.*

**BIFF:** What's all this?

**MR. PRENTISS:** That's fine, girls, just fine. Miss Kowalski, I'm very impressed by how you handled those three flights of stairs. All right, ladies, just put them down anywhere.

*The BERTUCCI SISTERS collapse on the couch, one on top of CLINTON EVERETT. MISS KOWALSKI returns, fatigued, to her organ. CLINTON EVERETT struggles under the BERTUCCI SISTER, who does not notice him. He pinches her and she jumps up. He gets up indignantly, glaring at her as he allows her to sit back down on the couch. All three BERTUCCI SISTERS glare at him momentarily, then pick up magazines and, as usual, remain utterly bored until there is a commercial for them to do.*

Are you through playing musical couch? I'll tell you in a minute what's all this, Mr. Nosey, but first I need my coffee . . . JIMMY!

*JIMMY is thrown into the room, followed quickly by MARTY & EDNA KOLCHAK.*

**JIMMY:** *(Pulling himself up off the floor.)* You called, Boss?

**MR. PRENTISS:** Coffee. Marty and Edna Kolchack, our wonderful writers!

**EDNA:** We want more money.

**MR. PRENTISS:** Edna . . .

**MARTY:** We want our own offices. We can't stand to be near each other.

**MR. PRENTISS:** But you've been married for twenty years.

**MARTY:** Hey, just because I'm married to her, doesn't mean I have to listen to her jabber all day.

**EDNA:** You've been riding the coattails of my talent for too long, buddy! If it weren't for my brains, you'd be selling typewriter ribbons door to door.

**MARTY:** Oh yeah?! Maybe you want to take it outside!

**EDNA:** Yeah?! You and what army?!

**MR. PRENTISS:** Kids, kids! What a couple of wiseacres. Huh, am I right? You two crack me up. Now sit down and shut up.

**JIMMY:** *(Brings coffee to MR. PRENTISS.)* Coffee, sir.

**MR. PRENTISS:** What? Oh yes, good lad. Have you finished my ironing?

**JIMMY:** Tonight.

**MR. PRENTISS:** All right, but I expect it by morning.

**BIFF:** Any time now, Prentiss.

**MR. PRENTISS:** Save your nasty attitude for the airwaves, Biff. Just because there's a shortage of men with the war on, doesn't mean I can't find another actor to tie up the Sweetheart of Dry Gulch. *(Strolls to the sound effects table, puts his coffee down. Notices something on the table.)* Huh, I don't think I've seen this before. What sort of noise does this make?

**JIMMY:** That's my retainer.

**MR. PRENTISS:** *(Tosses it away.)* Yaggggh!

**FRIEDA:** Mr. Prentiss, we're all here, can we begin now?

**MR. PRENTISS:** Well, we're going to be joined a little later by our illustrious employer, Mrs. Rappelle.

**ALL:** *(Awed.)* Mrs. Rappelle? I've never seen her. I saw her once. She drove her limo over my foot. Mrs. Rappelle? Why does she want to speak with us? Are we fired?

**MR. PRENTISS:** Settle down, settle down. Put your minds at ease, kids. There's nothing wrong. In fact, everything is wonderful. It couldn't be better. Well, I told you there would be a big surprise, and here it is. Are you ready? Cowboy Chuck and the Happy Rangers is going NATIONAL!

**ALL:** National? Our show is going national? I don't believe it. Everyone in the country will hear us? Do we still get to keep our jobs?

**MR. PRENTISS:** That's right. There's been a lot of interest among the network boys in our little show, and they've given us a prime slot, 6 p.m. Eastern War Time, 3 p.m. Pacific War time, and all points in between, some time or other. We've got a very important and influential new sponsor, too . . . *(Pulls papers out of his inner breast pocket.)* Let's see here . . . it's . . . it's a product called Par Excellence!

*The CAST all look at each other.*

**DIRK:** What's that?

**MR. PRENTISS:** Dirk, you silly guy . . . it's . . . it's obviously . . . some sort of . . . well, I don't know.

**BIFF:** You don't know what we're selling?

**MR. PRENTISS:** Soap flakes, razor blades, gravy mix, who cares? It's all the same. They only mailed me the contract, I'm still waiting for the advertising copy. They'll probably send some free samples, too. We'll find out what Par Excellence is sooner or later. But there's more news!

**DIRK:** Maybe it's gum.

**MR. PRENTISS:** Dirk?

**DIRK:** Yes, Mr. Prentiss?

**MR. PRENTISS:** We've moved on. Edna and Marty, sharpen your pencils, because we're scrapping the new episodes you've written, and you're going to write a completely new adventure for Cowboy Chuck.

**MARTY:** WHAT?!!

**EDNA:** Scrap all our work! You've got to be kidding? Why that new stuff we came up with was brilliant! Nasty Robert ties Yodlin' Sal, The Sweetheart of Dry Gulch to a railroad track!

**MARTY:** I thought there was a stage coach robbery in there somewhere.

**EDNA:** Whatever. I forget. It was getting late.

**MR. PRENTISS:** Well now you're going to come up with some new material, instead of that lame old crap you've been pulling out of your typewriter carriage for the last I don't know how many years. Ready . . . here's your new assignment . . .

**MARTY:** The nerve! Who do you think you're talking to?!

**EDNA:** You can't bully us!

**MR. PRENTISS:** In fact, we're changing the whole title of the show!

**ALL:** Changing the title? Will it be the same show? Do we keep our same characters? Are we fired?

**MR. PRENTISS:** The new show will be called . . .

*MISS KOWALSKI lets a chord rip. The others jump.*

Miss Kowalski, would you mind please saving that racket for the show? Thank you. Our new show, going national coast-to-coast will be called "Cowboy Chuck and the Happy Rangers . . . And the Nazis!"

*There is stunned silence.*

**FRIEDA:** . . . and the . . .

**MR. PRENTISS:** Nazis. That's right.

**HAMILTON:** And the Nazis.

**CLINTON EVERETT:** Nazis?

**DIRK:** Real Nazis?

**MR. PRENTISS:** (*Trying to be patient.*) No, Dirk, my boy, not real Nazis. It's all pretend, remember? The Nazis are going to be characters in the show, our new villains. Sorry, Biff, but Nasty Robert has had his day. All his schemes are tired out. How many times can you tie a girl to the railroad tracks and have it be fresh, hmm?

**BIFF:** So . . . I'm fired?

**MR. PRENTISS:** Nope. You're a Nazi. Isn't that wonderful?

**FRIEDA:** Talk about typecasting.

**EDNA:** But we start the new season on Monday. How are Marty and I going to come up with a bunch of new episodes in time?

**MR. PRENTISS:** You'll work all weekend. Take some vitamins.

**FRIEDA:** Mr. Prentiss . . . this is a kid's show about cowboys. What are Nazis doing in Dry Gulch? That doesn't make sense. How do we explain that?

**MR. PRENTISS:** Explain? Who's asking for explanations? We're not going to explain anything. We're just going to keep on plugging those products and entertaining those wonderful . . .

**CLINTON EVERETT:** Kids.

**MR. PRENTISS:** Yeah. Whatever. Look, we've got to strike while the iron is hot. That's what marketing is all about. Nazis are a very big topic right now. This war has pushed them right to the front page. We need to be up-market about this.

**FRIEDA:** It's a kid's show.

**MR. PRENTISS:** Oh, so what. You mean to tell me you don't think the other kids shows and the movies and cartoons aren't all climbing onto the bandwagon? They've all joined the war effort. Please. Why, on the other channel, I'll bet Little Orphan Annie is beating the crap out of some Nazi right now.

**CLINTON EVERETT:** Well, it is all you hear about.

**MR. PRENTISS:** Sure it is. *(To BIFF.)* Can you do an accent?

**BIFF:** No.

**MR. PRENTISS:** Any accent? Look, I don't care if you sound Southern, or Hawaiian, you just can't sound like Nasty Robert.

**EDNA:** Never mind his accent, how do we write for Nazis? We have to get into the character, explore the psyche . . .

**MARTY:** Delve into their emotions . . .

**MR. PRENTISS:** Look, just get one of your old scripts. Everywhere it says "stage coach" or "abandoned silver mine" just scratch it out and write "Nazi" over it instead. Do I have to think of everything?

**BIFF:** You still haven't told us what are in those boxes, Prentiss.

**MR. PRENTISS:** You're very suspicious, Biff. I like that in a Nazi. These . . . *(Goes to a box, opens it, pulls out a couple of very colorful costumes, cowboy hats, etc.)* . . . are your new costumes!

*Brightly colored cowboy hats, chaps, holsters are passed around. A gray officer's cap is thrust onto BIFF's head. They all look at each other in bewilderment. DIRK holds up a fringed cowgirl skirt.*

**DIRK:** So . . . Biff is a Nazi now . . . and I'm a girl?

**MR. PRENTISS:** *(Trying to keep his temper.)* No, Dirk, that costume is for Frieda. I think your cowboy shirt and pants are in the bottom of that box over there, underneath the buffalo costume.

**CLINTON EVERETT:** Buffalo costume?

**MR. PRENTISS:** Yes, what size are you, Miss Kowalski? I had to guess.

**CLINTON EVERETT:** Um, Mr. Prentiss, Miss Kowalski is not an actor, neither, I might add, are Jimmy or myself, or the Bertucci Sisters.

**MR. PRENTISS:** I know, which is why your costumes have to do with the background. Jimmy's prairie dog costume is on back order, and you're a cactus.

**JIMMY:** Prairie dog? I don't wanna be a prairie dog.

**EDNA:** It was probably the closest thing he could find to a weasel.

**CLINTON EVERETT:** Mr. Prentiss, I am an announcer. I attended broadcasting school. I have blue ribbons for diction. I am not going to stand behind that microphone with my trained voice going out to everyone in the country dressed as a cactus!

**JIMMY:** How come Marty and Edna aren't going to be in costume?

**MR. PRENTISS:** Because they're writers, my boy. Writers should never be seen. It's too upsetting.

**EDNA:** Hey!

**FRIEDA:** Mr. Prentiss . . .

**MR. PRENTISS:** Now, none of your complaints, little lady.

**FRIEDA:** I . . . I don't mean to complain, sir. But we're doing a radio show. Nobody sees us. Why do we have to be in costume when nobody ever sees us?

**HAMILTON:** At least he's giving you a skirt, Frieda. I'm pretty sure all I'm getting is a loin cloth and a headband with a feather in it.

**MR. PRENTISS:** Which is why you're going to have to start going to the gym, Hamilton.

**BIFF:** *(Takes off the officer's cap, turns it over in his hands, thoughtfully.)* So . . . I'm this jackbooted Hawaiian who comes into Dry Gulch and . . . what? I'm after the silver mine? I'm after Yodlin' Sal? Or is it world conquest I'm supposed to be after?

**MR. PRENTISS:** World conquest. Hmm, yes, I like the sound of that. Marty and Edna, world conquest that gives us much larger parameters. Work with that.

**MARTY:** If he gets his hands on the silver mine, he can rule the world, sort of thing?

**MR. PRENTISS:** Pretty much.

**BIFF:** And Cowboy Chuck, he's supposed to stop me, right? The good guy is still going to win, right?

**MR. PRENTISS:** Eventually, of course, but we could drag it out more.

**EDNA:** Make Dry Gulch suffer a little bit first, I see what you mean. It has possibilities.

**BIFF:** (*Grim.*) And the war isn't going to end anytime soon, so you could drag this plot out for years.

**MR. PRENTISS:** As long as it takes.

**BIFF:** (*Accusingly.*) As long as it takes for what?

**MR. PRENTISS:** (*Jovially.*) To sell that warehouse of decoder rings for a start. Boy, I think I got taken for a ride on that deal. All right people, so, here's what we're . . . Oh, Mrs. Rappelle! Here's our dear Mrs. Rappelle!

*MRS. RAPPELLE enters, dressed in fur, regal, snobbish. She glares at MISS KOWALSKI, who gasps, and quickly does a couple bars of "Land of Hope and Glory" on the organ. MRS. RAPPELLE cuts her finger across her neck to silence MISS KOWALSKI after the appropriate interval.*

**MRS. RAPPELLE:** Good evening, staff.

**ALL:** (*Robot-like unison.*) Good evening, Mrs. Rappelle.

*She extends her hand, MR. PRENTISS grovels to her and kisses it, leading her Down Center.*

**MR. PRENTISS:** Dear, dear Mrs. Rappelle, how wonderful of you to visit us.

**MRS. RAPPELLE:** Yes, it is.

**MR. PRENTISS:** And how lovely you look.

**MRS. RAPPELLE:** Yes, I do.

**MR. PRENTISS:** Doesn't Mrs. Rappelle look lovely, people?

**ALL:** Huh? What? Yeah, sure. Lovely. I guess. For somebody who drives over your foot. Are we going to get fired?

**BIFF:** (*As part of the crowd.*) You stink.

**MRS. RAPPELLE:** What?!

**MR. PRENTISS:** The sink! The sink is clogged up in the green room. Jimmy will take care of that right away.

**JIMMY:** Before I do your ironing?

**MR. PRENTISS:** Shut up! Now, then everyone, we have one more surprise for you, and it's in connection with those wonderful costumes. Ready? LIFE Magazine is going to be doing a spread on us!

**ALL:** LIFE Magazine! Gosh! We'll be famous! My mother will be so proud! I'm buying fifty copies! We're in the big time now!

**MR. PRENTISS:** And you will, of course, be wearing your costumes for the photo shoot.

**ALL:** Oh no. We'll look like idiots. We can't wear those getups. My mother will be ashamed. I'll burn every copy I can get my hands on. Why doesn't he just fire us?

**MR. PRENTISS:** Publicity, people! Publicity! The life's blood of America! Now, stand at attention! Mrs. Rappelle, you have something to say to the staff?

**MRS. RAPPELLE:** Yes. Staff, as you know, Christmas is coming, our second wartime Christmas. It is your job to make light the hearts of our young audience, to cheer them in these troubled times.

*MISS KOWALSKI plays hearts and flowers music on organ.*

*(Looks around.)* Where in name of sweet jumpin' Jehosaphat did that come from?

**JIMMY:** It wasn't me.

**MR. PRENTISS:** Thank you, thank you, that's enough Miss Kowalski. *(To MRS. RAPPELLE.)* I'm sorry, she can't seem to help it. It's some sort of nervous spasm she has. Please continue, Mrs. Rappelle.

**MRS. RAPPELLE:** Thank you. We must all be of good cheer this holiday season. Better days are coming. There will be no Christmas bonuses this year. Have a good evening.

**ALL:** *(Downtrodden.)* Thank you, Mrs. Rappelle.

*MRS. RAPPELLE exits as MISS KOWALSKI plays a bar of "Land of Hope and Glory" before launching into creepy villain music.*

**MR. PRENTISS:** That will do, Miss Kowalski.

**CLINTON EVERETT:** I am not going to be wearing a cactus costume in LIFE Magazine, Mr. Prentiss. I'm drawing the line.

**ALL:** Yeah! We'll look silly. Radio actors don't wear costumes anyway. If he's not going to wear his costume, then I'm not going to wear mine. Me neither.

**MR. PRENTISS:** People, people. You go ahead and draw the line, Clinton Everett, mister blue-ribbon winner for diction. How long have you been in broadcasting? Twenty, twenty-five years? What announcing jobs did you have before this show?

**CLINTON EVERETT:** Well . . . I . . . well . . .

**MR. PRENTISS:** Farm reports?! You read the 5 a.m. farm report in Willimansett for twenty years, Mister Clinton Everett, professional radio announcer, before I pulled you out of the pig trough and into a real studio. And where will your career take you after this show? Back to the hog pen, that's where. So don't get smart with me. And the rest of you? Dirk? You trade-school dropout. You can't find your way to the men's room. Hamilton? A washed-up Shakespearean spear-carrier and Greek Chorus-boy, who used to act in "King Lear" in the finest theatres in East Cupcake and got paid in deli meat. Frieda? Star of your secretarial school spring pageant, where you played the ampersand?! And Biff? I don't know what you're doing here. All you've ever been able to do is look good. All Hollywood bound, are you? Don't kid yourselves. You'd be there already if you actually had any talent. This, people, this is your big break. You're going to be acting on the radio coast to coast for millions of people. You're going to have your pictures and your story published in the most popular magazine in America! And this is the thanks I get.

**CLINTON EVERETT:** (*Chastised, clears his throat.*) I'm . . . sorry, Mr. Prentiss.

**ALL:** Yes, Mr. Prentiss. Sorry, sir. Thanks for the opportunity, sir. Thank you for the lovely costumes. I always wanted to be a prairie dog. We'll try to do a good job for you, sir.

**MR. PRENTISS:** All right, enough of this. Monday morning, you all report back here for your scripts. Which Edna and Marty will have finished by then and will, of course be brilliant.

**EDNA:** Yes, Mr. Prentiss.

**MARTY:** We get you.

**MR. PRENTISS:** Fine. We'll do a rehearsal, break for lunch, then you'll get into your costumes and the LIFE Magazine photographer and reporter will take about an hour to interview us all and take photographs. At 6 p.m., we go live with "Cowboy Chuck and the Happy Rangers and the Nazis." Got it?

**FRIEDA:** Mr. Prentiss, do we keep our costumes on during the actual performance? Or can we take them off when the magazine people leave?

**MR. PRENTISS:** That depends on what kind of mood I'm in. Miss Kowalski!

*MISS KOWALSKI shrieks.*

I'm leaving now, and if I hear any mood music from you, I'll cut off your fingers and sell them for the war effort. Got me?

*MISS KOWALSKI nods vigorously. MR. PRENTISS finishes everybody off with one last glare, and exits. The cast exhales with relief.*

**MARTY:** Well, Edna, I guess we'd better go home and write ourselves into a coma.

**EDNA:** "Cowboy Chuck and the Happy Rangers and the Nazis." This is going to take more than one pot of coffee.

**HAMILTON:** Be careful. Rationing.

**EDNA:** Yeah. I've been saving my points for this kind of emergency.

*MARTY and EDNA exit.*

**HAMILTON:** (*Goes to coat rack, retrieves his coat and hat.*) Well, good night, Frieda. Try to have a good weekend. (*He kisses her on the cheek.*)

**FRIEDA:** (*Buttoning his coat for him.*) You, too, Hamilton. Are you going to go to the gym, like Mr. Prentiss said?

**HAMILTON:** On the contrary. I am going to eat like a pig all weekend. Just for spite.

**FRIEDA:** Be careful. Rationing.

**HAMILTON:** Touché. Ladies, after you. (*Exits*)

*The BERTUCCI SISTERS and MISS KOWALSKI exit with HAMILTON.*

**DIRK:** *(Goes to coat rack, puts on hat and coat.)* What they said before about the blackout tonight . . . does that happen before or after the lights go off?

**JIMMY:** *(Goes to coat rack for his coat and hat.)* Mr. McCoy, how about I take you home in my car?

**DIRK:** Oh, that'd be swell, Jimmy. Thanks. You know how confused I get in the dark.

**JIMMY:** Mr. Everett? You okay?

**CLINTON EVERETT:** *(He has been standing grimly at his microphone Stage Right.)* Hmm?

**JIMMY:** *(Concerned, delicately.)* Can I give you a lift, Mr. Everett?

**CLINTON EVERETT:** No, thanks, Jimmy. I think I'd rather walk. *(Rouses himself, goes to coat rack for his things.)*

**BIFF:** *(Clearing his throat.)* Look, what Prentiss said about everybody not being very good actors. Not having any talent . . . well I think he's wrong. I mean, I think you all are very good. I've learned a lot from you.

**CLINTON EVERETT:** *(Self depreciating.)* Well, kind words of pity from the villain. Either it's Christmas or I must really be washed up.

**BIFF:** Yeah well, they may be the last kind words you hear, so make it last. Rationing.

*CLINTON EVERETT leaves, followed by DIRK. JIMMY casts a glance back at BIFF and FRIEDA.*

**JIMMY:** Anybody else?

**FRIEDA:** No thank you, Jimmy.

**JIMMY:** Sure?

**FRIEDA:** Of course, I'm sure. Good night. Have a good weekend.

**JIMMY:** Thanks, you too. *(Exits.)*

**FRIEDA:** I have to say, that was nice of you, Biff. *(Goes to the coat rack for her hat, coat, purse. She puts them on and takes gloves out of her purse and puts them on.)*

**BIFF:** I think young Jimmy was attempting to defend your honor. He obviously didn't want to leave you alone with the villain of the piece.  
(*Goes to the speaker.*)

**FRIEDA:** Well, he should know I can handle myself.

**BIFF:** 'Course you can. Any dame that can dump her boyfriend, while the train is pulling out, has my vote for Tough Gal of the Year.

**FRIEDA:** (*Angry.*) I give up on you. Why do you always have to be such a viscous, despicable . . .

**BIFF:** (*At the speaker, turns on the news from Studio B.*) I'll tell you why, tough gal. Because nice guys finish last.

**NEWS ANNOUNCER:** . . . saboteurs are suspected in several of the fires throughout the region, thought possibly to have connections to the six spies recently convicted for their plot to destroy certain industries along the eastern seaboard of the United States . . .

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