

# **TENNESSEE TV**

## **By Jerry Rabushka**

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## CHARACTERS

TORRY DON—a country music star

REEVA SQUIRES—host of Tennessee Talk

CHARLIE PARKER—a talk show junkie

ANNIE PARKER—a Torry Don junkie

DIRKE BARKMAN—host of Tennessee Tonight

ANNOUNCER—host of Tennessee on Trial

JUDGE—on Tennessee On Trial

## PROPS

SCENE 2: Tennessee Talk; Reeva can have a clipboard. Also they can each have a water glass to drink from.

SCENE 4: Tennessee Tonight; potato chips for Charlie and Annie. In the author's production, Annie wore a "big hair" wig when she was on TV, but for the home scenes she put it on a styrofoam head in the living room.

SCENE 5: Interview; Dirke can have a clipboard or a "clapper" when he says, "take fourteen".

SCENE 6: Tennessee on Trial; Reeva needs a videotape to hand to the judge, the Announcer needs a microphone, the Judge needs a gavel.

SCENE 7: The Parker's home; needs a TV, Charlie needs a bottle of liquid, Annie and Reeva both need telephones.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Tennessee TV continually jogs back and forth between television and real life until our main characters get confused themselves and start playing out their television persona in real life. The majority of the script lets us see the characters solely as public figures, on television, or preparing for TV shows.

This gives the actors a variety of levels to work with when playing the parts.

1. Public figures such as Dirke and Reeva want to appear one way to their TV audience, and another to the Parkers, and yet in another category, we need to see their private persona come through all this as well. For instance, when Reeva is humiliated by the Parkers deception, is that real or just an image she wants people to see?

2. The Parkers themselves want the audience to see them one way, and their hosts to see them another, although in their case, by the end, they're not quite sure where all this chaos is taking them.

This was written for film originally, but as a show should come off with the fast paced cuts of television.

Try to make the Parker's house as tacky as possible. The furniture can be rearranged for the Parker's living room, perhaps with a throw over some of the furniture to make it look a little different. Tackier, more "Elvis-like" their place can look, the better. For the courtroom scene, the chairs can be rearranged again with a podium or the desk for the judge, or very simply the furniture can be removed with nothing but a podium, and the characters can stand. Annie should wear a big, gaudy wig for her TV appearances, but when we see her at home, it just sort of sits on the table. For Charlie's line of "we completely updated our kitchen," he can hold up an overly ornate plate. Dirke remains on stage during Torry's 'interview', getting more and more annoyed as Torry deviates from what is more or less supposed to be a prepared script.

Cast members can be placed in the audience for the talk show section. One can hold up a sign that says "applause", and another a sign that says "Ooooooh", in a few pre-planned places, getting the crowd involved as soon as the play begins.

Costume-wise: Annie and Charlie should look like folks who think they have taste but don't really know how to put things together. The scenes come quickly, but tossing one or two things on and off can make it look like a different day.

## SYNOPSIS

Tennessee TV: A mythical network of tabloid television. S has its own set of stars, and its own set of values. And it's sweeping the nation. "If it ain't happenin' on Tennessee TV – it ain't happenin'!" When Charlie and Annie Parker appear as guests on Tennessee Talk, Charlie makes the accusation that his wife's addiction to country heart-throb Torry Don is ruining their marriage. He can never measure up to those perfect, romantic, manufactured images on the screen; or at least that's what he tells Reeva Squires, the show's oh-so-sympathetic host. As Reeva tries to mediate, Annie counters with some smarmy instances of her husband's jealousy, philandering, and neglect. Torry Don, on the other hand, has more pressing problems than Annie's distant admiration.

"I hate country music, really! I just hate it!"

Some startling revelations are in store, as Annie and Charlie reveal the shocking truth about their talk show appearances on Tennessee Tonight. Were their antics all a put on? And what about Reeva? Does she really only care "all the way to the bank?"

As Reeva verbally attacks the Parkers for defrauding the American public, Annie and Charlie fall further into the grip of Tennessee TV, until the difference between television and reality becomes harder and harder to tell apart.

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### SCENE 1

**AT RISE:** *TORRY's promo scenes can be done in a small corner of the stage, away from the rest of the action. HE can have a small chair, couch, or bed, and a TV as well. TORRY is sprawled out on a bed or a couch with a canned drink and chips and a hat pulled over his face.*

TORRY: This here's Torry Don...y'know, when I ain't busy singin' country music, I just like to kick back and watch it all on Tennessee TV. The way I figure it, if it ain't happenin' on Tennessee TV...it ain't happenin'.

**END OF SCENE 1**

### SCENE 2

**AT RISE:** *The studio for REEVA SQUIRE's show, Tennessee Talk, should resemble a talk show set. REEVA needs a chair, and CHARLIE and ANNIE need either a couch or their own chairs. There should be a small table in front containing some water glasses. The scene should look like a modern cheesy talk show. The stage will later have to serve as the PARKER's home as well as a courtroom, so simple might be best. And tacky. The tackier the better. ANNIE should be dressed in something slightly risqué and too tight, CHARLIE in something mismatched and backwater, and REEVA more upscale. SHE can walk in from the back of the audience with a microphone in hand, and eventually wind up on stage. People can be planted in the audience to respond to the action, a la talk show manner.*

REEVA: I'm Reeva Squires and this is "Tennessee Talk". Today on our show are Charlie and Annie Parker. He claims his wife's addiction to country music is ruining their marriage...isn't that true, Charlie?

CHARLIE: She watches it all day long. We never spend any time together. She thinks those people really care about her.

ANNIE: I do not. I just like to be entertained by a good-looking country man every now and then.

CHARLIE: She's always comparing me to those images on TV. They ain't real! She's got to where she can't tell the difference!

ANNIE: At least they don't drink like you do!

REEVA: So it's your drinking that drove Annie to become addicted to TV?

ANNIE: I'm not addicted!

CHARLIE: I don't drink!

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ANNIE: You do too! You're never around when I need you. No wonder I have to spend my evenings watching Torry Don!

CHARLIE: Torry Don? Do you think Torry Don's interested in your sorry lookin' backside?

ANNIE: He knows who I am. I've written him six letters and I have an autographed picture!

REEVA: Every woman has an autographed picture of him.

CHARLIE: You don't think he sends 'em?! He hires out a secretary.

ANNIE: Not for my letters! My letters are special.

CHARLIE: And she wonders why I drink.

REEVA: You just said you didn't drink.

CHARLIE: Well, I didn't drink until she got addicted to Tennessee TV! And that Travis Tritt and all them folks. I don't have a wife anymore.

ANNIE: Did he tell you he was flirtin' with my sister? Did he tell you that, Reeva?

REEVA: (*delighted with the information*) Is that true, Charlie?

CHARLIE: Is that true? Would you want another one (*points to his wife*) of those?

ANNIE: (*stands up*) Travis Tritt would know how to treat a woman! So would Torry Don. That's why they're stars. That's why they're what they are. And why you're what you are. And why you'll stay that way. (*applause*)

CHARLIE: She won't like me unless I'm a TV star, Reeva. I can't sing. I can't act. I can't even adjust the fine-tuning!

ANNIE: You adjusted my sister's fine-tuning.

REEVA: Charlie, your wife is accusing you of flirting with another woman. How do you answer that charge?

CHARLIE: Oh shut up, this ain't your business no how!

REEVA: This is what you came on the show for, isn't it?

ANNIE: (*pouting*) He doesn't want to talk about our problems at home. I just hoped-

CHARLIE: (*flash up a sign that says CHARLIE...thinks country music is ruining his marriage*) She won't turn off the TV. Not ever! She's living some kind of wild fantasy that those men are real! That they're really like that! She touched Torry's hand once at a concert and she thinks he knows who she is. She thinks she's the only woman in the lives of fourteen different men who never even laid eyes on her. I know I don't have the body and I don't have the looks, but I put a roof over her head, I provide her a decent home, and I send her flowers every couple years!

REEVA: Every couple years? You're going to have to do better than that!

CHARLIE: It's more than most men do! And it's more than any woman's ever done for me. I treat her good...She don't even give me half a chance.

ANNIE: (*dreamy*) "Half a Chance." That's that song by-

CHARLIE: Will you stop it already! It's all I hear, all day long!

REEVA: It sounds like you have some deep-seated problems that you haven't been able to work out. Well **(to audience)** let's see if by the end of this program we can have them talking to each other like...reasonable adults. **(applause from audience)** Now Annie, I want you to watch something...a clip of a Torry Don interview that was cut from his interview show. I snagged it for Tennessee Talk. See if this will change your impression of him.

ANNIE: Oh, just to look at him makes me tremble.

CHARLIE: It's like living with a danged earthquake.

**(Lights up on TORRY, as if HE's being interviewed)**

TORRY: Yeah, I love my fans, y'know, but there's so many of 'em out there, no way I can answer a thousand letters a day. I get phone numbers, marriage proposals, even guys writin' looking for romance...I never been able to keep a woman around me for long though. People think I have it made, but that just ain't the case. The life of Torry Don is a lonely one.

**(Lights out on him, REEVA looks to the audience and tries to get them to applaud.)**

REEVA: Annie, what's your reaction to that?

ANNIE: **(kind of like a cult member who's brainwashed)** I already told you, my experience is different. My relations with my country stars is from the heart. And nobody's gonna convince me otherwise. Especially my jealous, drunken, philandering husband!

**(Folks in the audience can shout "You tell 'em!" or something like that at this point)**

REEVA: We'll be right back. **(Lights out)**

**END OF SCENE 2**

**SCENE 3**

TORRY: Y'know what I like about Tennessee TV? It's real life, real people, and a real good time! An' all you people out there watchin'... every one of you's just as important to me as every other one of you. I got a new video comin' out. It's called "No Luck At Home." Watch it...exclusively on Tennessee TV!

**END OF SCENE 3**

**SCENE 4**

***(Spotlight on DIRKE, or HE can walk in through the audience.)***

DIRKE: This is Dirke Barkman, and you're watching Tennessee Tonight, the program that takes an in-depth look at the people who make up this vast network of life we know as Tennessee TV...What about talk shows? People baring their most intimate details in front of a live audience and hundreds of thousands of viewers...what are these people like in real life? ***(lights should come up on the Parker's home; once again, simple but tacky)*** Tennessee Tonight dropped in on Charlie and Annie Parker, recent guests with Reeva Squires on Tennessee Talk. What are they like at home, away from the eyes of the camera and the public? Do they really fight about country music? Is he really a jealous, drunken, philandering husband? Here's our surprising - and exclusive - report.

***(ANNIE and CHARLIE are looking happy and placid, counting money.)***

ANNIE: Gosh, this is really amazing!

CHARLIE: It's really something. I never thought it could happen to us.

DIRKE: ***(to audience)*** You might think they just won a sweepstakes, but listen a little longer.

ANNIE: Oh, no, we got this all off of talk shows.

CHARLIE: See, we just wanted to get some extra cash...

ANNIE: I hate country music, really. I just hate it!

DIRKE: So you just made this up then, to get on TV.

ANNIE: Oh yes. We've been on all the shows. Remember this one? ***(strikes a character)*** My husband and my mother were having an affair, and I was the last to know ***(starts to cry)*** the last to know! Everyone on the block knew before I did.

CHARLIE: ***(in character)*** She could have taught you a thing or two about lovin', that's for sure!

ANNIE: Or this one- ***(in character)*** When I take my clothes off in a public place, I feel like a real woman. For the first time in my life, I know what it's like to be free.

CHARLIE: I love watching her strip in public. She won't do it for me at home, so it's the only choice I have.

ANNIE: They treat me like a woman in those places. You treat me like a tramp!

CHARLIE: ***(reverting back to himself)*** Yeah, we've done all the shows. We grew up with it, you know, in the backwoods of Tennessee. There'd always be something smarmy goin' on. So we just sit around here playing dysfunctional-like, you see, and we come up with all sorts of ideas. I got Annie here a new car and we've completely updated our kitchen.

ANNIE: And we get to be on TV all the time. We just dress up as different people...

DIRKE: But don't you feel you're defrauding the American public? Do you think they deserve this?

CHARLIE: It's what they want to see! We ain't doin' nothin' but giving them what they want. I can't help it if they fall for that stupid stuff.

DIRKE: But what about the talk show hosts who feel they're helping you solve your problems. These television samaritans really care about you. Take Reeva Squires-

ANNIE: Reeva? You don't think she fell for it, do you?

CHARLIE: Yeah. She cares all right. She cares all the way to the bank.

ANNIE: I don't even listen to Torry Don. He thinks he's got every woman twisted around his finger, but I'm happy with my Charlie.

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