

TENNESSEE TV - TAKE TWO

By Jerry Rabushka

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CHARACTERS

ANNIE PARKER—a lovestruck TV addict who lives her life by watching and appearing on Tennessee TV.

CHARLIE PARKER—her husband now and then, who has a better grasp on reality than his wife...maybe.

REEVA SQUIRES — host of “Tennessee Talk,” masquerading as one who wants to help people fix their lives, but does she?

DIRKE BARKMAN—host of “Tennessee Tonight,” a “hard news talk show” who only wishes he was as popular as Reeva.

TORRY DON—“rugged handsome country singin’ star” who’s made a career on being lonely and miserable, and therefore is loved by all.

ANNOUNCER—host of “Tennessee on Trial,” typical host for a court TV show.

JUDGE—at “Tennessee on Trial,” a bit smart alecky.

DIRECTOR’S NOTES

As Tennessee TV Take Two shifts rapidly from scene to scene, a simple setup will work for them all. By moving chairs and a few accessories we can change location relatively quickly. Some of the scenes, for instance Torry’s interview or Dirke’s scene with Annie and Charlie, can just be done on a small part of the stage without using a full set. For the short scene changes, usually some type of country song would work well as background music, or some signature tunes to introduce the programs.

From a character standpoint, keep the audience guessing. Are these people telling the truth, or just making things up for the benefit of their TV audience?

Since all of the action is either on TV or for TV, characterization can take place on a couple different levels:

1. What do the characters want their TV audience to think of them?
2. Despite what they say on TV, what can we find out about them in real life?

Much of the humor of the play is based on perception vs. reality, and the fact that these people will say just about anything to get themselves out of a jam or to impress their TV audience.

Anything that can reinforce the image of a tacky TV station should add to the humor.

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SCENE 1

(Lights up on TORRY DON, who is doing a promo for Tennessee TV. This would best be accomplished by having him in a front corner of the stage, then having lights come up on the set for Tennessee Talk.)

TORRY: This is Torry Don, and you know, when I ain't singin' country music, I just like to kick back and watch it all on Tennessee TV. 'Cause the way I see it, if it ain't happenin' on Tennessee TV, it ain't happenin'

(Lights come up on Tennessee Talk, as REEVA, CHARLIE, and ANNIE are seated and ready to begin the current episode. ANNIE and CHARLIE should be near each other, with ANNIE center stage between the other two. They are somewhat at odds with each other. REEVA should have her own chair and be separated from them somewhat. SHE can walk around the stage as the scene goes on.)

REEVA: This is Reeva Squires and you're watching Tennessee Talk. Do you ever wonder what happens to our guests after they're on our show?

ANNIE: I do.

REEVA: **(not wanting to be interrupted)** And so does the rest of America. Today on our show are Annie and Charlie Parker, who appeared on Tennessee Talk some time ago, and claim their marriage broke up-

CHARLIE: **(interrupting)** Because she watched too much Tennessee TV.

REEVA: Yes, and particularly because-

CHARLIE: She was infatuated with **(mocking)** country singin' star Torry Don.

REEVA: **(gives him a look that indicates SHE'LL finish her own sentences)** Exactly.

ANNIE: He's still doing it, Reeva. He never lets anyone get a word in.

CHARLIE: At least when I talk it makes sense.

REEVA: **(almost motherly, but sarcastic at the same time)** Annie and Charlie are back on our show because they want to get back together and put their past behind them. Isn't that right, Annie?

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ANNIE: (**like a reformed alcoholic**) I realize now that I went overboard and I was confusing love with fantasy. I thought I could have a relationship with country stars on the TV, but then I realized something else. They aren't stars at all. They're manufactured no talent hunks singing mass-produced factory songs that mean nothing to me personally.

REEVA: Annie, you are undermining the entire country music industry.

CHARLIE: So? It undermined (**deliberate mispronunciation**) our marriage. She got to where she couldn't tell the difference between real life and TV.

REEVA: Is that true, Annie? Were you really that delusional or did your marriage to Charlie drive you to it?

ANNIE: Actually, Reeva, TV was wonderful. It was beautiful men, beautiful music, and beautiful, beautiful love. (**changed attitude**) Real life stunk.

REEVA: Yet it's real life you want to return to.

ANNIE: I would like to give it a try. See, I learned something.

CHARLIE: Not since the third grade, you haven't.

REEVA: Charlie! Your wife wants you to take her back and-

CHARLIE: Then let her prove it. Let her throw out all her country music albums.

ANNIE: (**aghast**) No! Never!

REEVA: Charlie, are you willing to take her back?

ANNIE: Charlie, I never stopped loving you.

CHARLIE: Just like you never stopped loving Torry Don or Travis Tritt.
Or...

ANNIE: Charlie, listen to me! Not that you ever did.

CHARLIE: I might have if you'd have said something I could stand to hear.

REEVA: Do you know what I'm hearing?

CHARLIE: If you're hearing angels I'm going on another show.

ANNIE: You're hearing a man who doesn't want to resolve conflict. A man who doesn't want to change!

CHARLIE: (**heating up**) I want to change wives is what I want to change!

REEVA: Well, you can't!

CHARLIE: (**amazed, after a pause**) I can't?

REEVA: No, you can't. You came on this show because you wanted to repair your marriage, and dern it, you're going to repair your marriage!
(**audience applause sound effect**)

ANNIE: And stop drinking!

CHARLIE: I don't drink!

ANNIE: Yes you do!

CHARLIE: You keep this up and I'll start again.

ANNIE: I told you he drank.

CHARLIE: See, Reeva? She just makes stuff up just like she made up the notion that Torry Don was in love with her. I didn't have a real wife. I had a TV addict who couldn't divorce the screen from the rest of the world. She'd rather divorce me.

ANNIE: Don't tempt me. Now I am on this show because I want you to come back to me.

REEVA: That's right, Charlie. Annie is willing to work through her problems. Are you willing to work through yours? Are you willing to stop drinking?

ANNIE: Not to mention chasing after my sister!

CHARLIE: I am not chasing after that ugly roach.

ANNIE: See? He never liked my sister. He never liked any of my family.

CHARLIE: I need a beer.

ANNIE: You don't need one. You just want one. There's a difference.

CHARLIE: Yeah, and either way it will help me forget I'm married to you.

REEVA: **(loud)** Charlie, do you want to be with her or don't you? And hurry, you need to decide before the commercial break.

CHARLIE: **(not thrilled)** Oh, all right. At least she cooks better than her sister.

ANNIE: He always says he loves her glazed tomatoes, Reeva.

REEVA: That's fine, Annie. Now is there something you want to say to Charlie?

ANNIE: Two timing brat.

CHARLIE: Delusional witch.

REEVA: Something else you want to say to Charlie? Would you like to try it again?

ANNIE: **(changes attitude)** I'm sorry I hurt you.

CHARLIE: And I'm sorry I wasn't more understanding.

REEVA: **(to audience)** So, if Annie can deal with his drinking and cheating and Charlie can deal with her obsessive and belittling behavior...

ANNIE: **(dreamy)** We'll have each other back again. **(poetic)** Because, Charlie, whatever I have gone through, and whatever I will go through, I never have – and never will – stop loving you.

REEVA: That's beautiful, Annie!

ANNIE: Of course it's beautiful. It's from Torry Don's latest album "I'll Never Stop Loving", and if it's true for him, then it's true for me.

CHARLIE: Well Annie, I love you too. And if you want to spend all day listening to that crap on TV and dreaming of men who don't know or care that you exist, that's okay by me. As long as I can go out, that is.

REEVA: Do we see a hug coming on?

(They get up to hug. REEVA looks at them lovingly, then motions off-stage while they can't see. TORRY comes out. As ANNIE

approaches CHARLIE, SHE sees TORRY who is coming on stage behind him, shrieks with excitement, and runs to him instead.)

ANNIE: Torry!

(SHE hugs him, leaving CHARLIE standing there humiliated.)

REEVA: ***(to audience)*** Tennessee TV. Is it just TV, or is it real life?
We'll be right back!

LIGHTS DOWN

SCENE 2

(Lights back on TORRY in his promo spot.)

TORRY: I've had a hard life. In love, in luck, in money, oh, and that year in a Turkish prison didn't help much either. So if it wasn't for the support of all you loyal fans out there in Tennesseeland, I would be nowhere today. Nowhere at all. Now you can watch TV in Alabama, or you can watch TV in Mississippi, but it just don't have the same ring to it as TV in Tennessee. And it don't have Torry Don. So you just remember, no matter how down in the mouth you get, no matter how lonely, miserable, and depressing life seems to be, always remember there's someone worse off than you. And chances are it's Torry Don. And you can see it all right here – on Tennessee TV. Pick up my new album, "I'll Never Stop Loving." Because you'll never stop loving that album.

(Lights up and it's Tennessee Tonight. DIRKE, the show's host, is introducing REEVA in her home. SHE should be oblivious to him while HE makes his speech.)

DIRKE: This is Dirke Barkman and you're watching Tennessee Tonight, the show that takes a behind the scenes look at the people who make up the vast network we know as Tennessee TV. What about talk show hosts? Are they really here to help, or are they just out to manipulate people's lives for the sake of the ratings? Out to satisfy the voyeurism of the audience? Tonight we feature Tennessee TV's most recognized talk show host, Reeva Squires, in a rare candid moment.

REEVA: **(at this point, SHE should be on a chair or couch alone, and DIRKE will approach her over the next couple of lines)** She deserved it!

DIRKE: What's she talking about? Listen a little longer.

REEVA: Annie Parker. She deserved it. I knew if I brought Torry Don on my show, she wouldn't be able to control herself. After she made a fool of me the last time—after she came on your show and admitted she made up her problems just for the publicity – I resolved to get revenge.

DIRKE: So you admit you toyed with her heart just to spice up your show?

REEVA: I used to think that people came on my show to work out their problems, but then I realized they wanted to be TV stars just like we are. They want to steal our spotlight. And that really grinds my pepper the wrong way! So I thought if they're willing to give up their private lives, then I'm willing to make their public lives just a little more exciting.

DIRKE: And how do you do that?

REEVA: Oh, we're always up to something. Remember Lisa the caffeine addict? We drove her back to the coffee house. Joanie the prostitute? Dropped her off at the docks. And Hector, the young man who cheated on his college exams and his girlfriend? Slipped him the wrong answers the night before his biology final. Then we brought them all back to the studio to see how they coped with reality.

DIRKE: So you're saying it *is* reality, not just TV.

REEVA: **(laughs a bit)** It's reality when it happens to you!

DIRKE: But do you think it was morally proper to bring Annie and Charlie Parker back on your show and then ruin their chances of reconciliation by bringing out the man who caused all the problems in the first place?

REEVA: **(proud, and dodging the question)** That was our highest rated show ever.

DIRKE: **(awed)** Good point. But what would you say to viewers who don't approve of your methods of doing business?

REEVA: I say I'll change my tactics when they change the station.

DIRKE: So you're saying it's really not TV or real life!

REEVA: It's a little of each. And it's not up to me to decide which is which.

(Lights down, but DIRKE moves over to another part of the stage to interview the PARKERS, who can be in a small corner, perhaps where TORRY did his promos, or on a couple of chairs.)

DIRKE: Now, let's hear from the other side of the fence.

ANNIE: (*crying*) I wanted to give it a chance. I wanted my Charlie back with me. And she up and put temptation right in front of me. She knew I couldn't resist a handsome, rugged, masculine country singin' star.

CHARLIE: My butt you couldn't. You ever heard the word no?

DIRKE: What do you think this means for your marriage?

CHARLIE: It means I married an idiot is what it means to me.

DIRKE: Hey, that's a line from Torry's new album! (*sings a bit*) "Can't be too giddy, since I married an idiot." (*CHARLIE is not amused, DIRKE becomes official again*) But do you still love her?

CHARLIE: Of course I love her. It means she married an idiot as well.

ANNIE: (*on a soapbox*) Reeva Squires is a dangerous woman. She's dangerous, and she's crazy! She plays with people's lives...people's personal private lives, and makes a mockery of us in front of the entire American public. I went on her show for help and now? (*really pathetic*) Who will help me now?

CHARLIE: You helped yourself to a piece of Torry Don. Right in front of me. Right in front of me. I had to spend all night out drinking with your sister!

DIRKE: So you believe Reeva Squires is responsible for destroying your marriage?

ANNIE: Yes, Dirke, I do.

DIRKE: Charlie?

CHARLIE: Yes I do. And I'll thank her for it the next time I see her.

ANNIE: Charlie! I can't believe you could say such awful things! After all we've been through. (*starts to cry again*)

DIRKE: (*to audience*) We'll be right back!

SCENE 3

DIRKE: (*over a dark stage*) Interview with Torry Don, take one! (*silence*) Torry Don! Where are you, Torry?

TORRY: (*off*) I'm coming.

(Enters, as light comes up on him. This can be done up front in a small area, or TORRY can sit on the edge of the stage while DIRKE stands off to one side.)

DIRKE: Good. Now sit down and don't mess this one up like you did the last time.

TORRY: What'd I do?

DIRKE: You told the truth. Now stick to the script.

TORRY: I thought we were supposed to talk about women.

DIRKE: Yeah, women. Talk about women.

TORRY: I like women.

DIRKE: Good.

TORRY: Just that they don't like me.

DIRKE: Why not?

TORRY: Probably because I don't know how to pay them any attention. I'm used to getting all the attention and being treated like a star. Sometimes I expect that when I'm off camera as well.

DIRKE: I'm sure there's plenty of women who would love to treat you like a star.

TORRY: Yep. I like it when they wait on me hand and foot and flatter me and they tell me I'm a handsome, rugged, masculine country singin' star. And then I kiss her and she's flying around the room like some sorta bug you have to swat but you can't get to her because she won't settle on anything... But it didn't teach me nothin' about love. Still no good at that.

DIRKE: Torry.

TORRY: Well, you made me into this. I'm just a regular guy who writes regular songs. And here I'm all built up into something so that someone I just meet can't see that I'm a regular guy. **(sad)** And then I don't know how to be that anymore.

DIRKE: Then why do you keep this up?

TORRY: It's a living. It's all I know how to do. **(more philosophical than DIRKE can stand)** Maybe to you it's just TV. To me...

DIRKE: Yeah, yeah, "It's real life to me." You are such a loser. We still can't run this.

TORRY: Yeah and I never asked to be any more than that! So stop making me do these danged interviews. Let me sing. It's the only thing I know how to do right.

DIRKE: We need to let the viewers know what you're like. They want to know more. They want to know everything.

TORRY: It don't matter who I am. And you won't let them find out. You make it all up. And if I can't get myself a girl, it's y'all's fault too. I just do this to keep my job.

DIRKE: **(disgusted)** I won't tell you what I do to keep mine.

(Exits, leaves TORRY stranded there. This would be a great time for him to sing, if indeed HE can, if not HE can leave slowly, or lights can go down on him.)

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