

P E T E Y ' S P A R A D E

by

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CHARACTERS

PETEY LEE, mid-30s in Act One, early 50s in Act Two. An arrogant radio comedian known all over Europe, later a radio performer in America, he sees himself as a great actor and speaks in a stylized, rarified tone when he's "on," which is most times.

BERT, Petey's head writer and long-time acting partner, able to produce many different vocal characters and accents. Hot-headed and willing to stand up to Petey.

FRANKIE, Petey's brother, a writer and actor. Always the "other brother."

DON, Petey's long time announcer and associate. Sees where the world is headed and follows along, no matter where it leads him.

ELISABETH, an actress on Petey's shows, BERT's wife.

SETTINGS

Petey's office at a radio station, and the radio studio.

TIME

Act One--Berlin, 1932

Act Two--New York, 1947, fifteen years later

SYNOPSIS

An arrogant but hugely talented radio star deals with changing political and social climates, and his rise and fall in popularity, in pre-World War Two Berlin and later in 1940s New York. Petey Lee yearns for greater success in Europe, but the political activism of his friend and head writer land him and the rest of his show's team in trouble, and they flee to New York, where we find all but Petey have thrived. He is forced to come to grips with his actions from 15 years before, and has a chance to redeem himself.

A note on the historical elements of the play follows.

The author is represented by the Susan F. Schulman Literary Agency, New York, and is a member of the Dramatists Guild. This script is also available for download at the New Play Exchange of the National New Play Network, <https://newplayexchange.org>.

A C T O N E

(Spotlight up on an old style "ring-mount" radio microphone on a floor stand, dead downstage center, alone on a bare stage.

(Fade up on radio crackle and tuning whine, followed by 1920-30s instrumental jazz.

(We then hear DON, an off-stage announcer touting the next program, speaking over the music and audience applause from the previous program.)

DON

(off-stage)

If there's one thing radio lovers from London to Berlin agree on, it's that Petey's Parade, starring your top funny man, Petey Lee, is 1932's smash continental comedy of all Europe! Join us tonight as we all march in Petey's Parade!

Dies ist der internationale Dienst von Radio Berlin, die Stimme von Deutschland.

This is the International Service of Radio Berlin, the Voice of Germany.

(Lights fade out on the microphone, and up as PETEY LEE enters his very downscale office and sits behind his battered desk, followed by BERT and FRANKIE.

(PETEY is dressed in a heavy woolen suit of the time - casual wear of the 1920s and '30s - but immaculate, "clean shaven as an actor" as he might say, every hair in place. This is how he would want to be seen on the street and in public.

(BERT and FRANKIE are dressed in business suits, but disheveled as they

prepare for a broadcast - much less formally than PETEY - open collar, loosened tie. They've been working on final touches to the script, while PETEY's just walked in.)

PETEY

And if there's one thing radio lovers agree on, it's that you two are the shittiest writers still working today!

(HE stops to collect himself, and adopts the cool, even tone he'll use for most of the rest of Act One.)

I'm sorry for the outburst.

BERT

But Pete...

PETEY

All right. You want to defend yourselves? Just listen to this - "Why did the pigeon cross the road? He was a test pilot for the chicken."

Or this. Which one of you Nobel prize aspirants wrote this? "Why did the Kaiser abdicate? He was looking for a bigger role."

BERT

Kaiser. Roll. Kaiser roll. It's funny.

PETEY

How long have you been with me, Bert? How long have you been my head writer, my acting partner, my confidant, my right-hand man? Ten years? Ten years in the variety halls. Ten years conking me on the head with a rubber mallet. Ten years of seltzer in my face. We're not in the variety halls anymore, are we? But from this material we might as well be.

(to FRANKIE)

And you? My brother. A comic sensibility forged in the same womb. You, Frankie. Except I seem to have absorbed all the talent, leaving you with the bitter dregs of our shared amniotic fluid. But you are the burden I must bear. I swore

to our sainted mother, may she rest in peace alongside the angels and cherubim, that I would protect and shelter you, give you alms and employment, even if you continue to produce jokes like "Why did Luigi the Italian take bicarbonate after dinner? So he wouldn't have to relive his past-a."

(Everyone flips through pages of the script.)

You both have work to do before we go live. Get to it!

(DON enters.)

DON

Good afternoon, everybody. Good to see you all. Great day for a show! Hiya, Pete, Bert. Boy, it's cold out there. I don't remember winters like this when I was a boy.

(Everyone acknowledges DON's entrance with a distracted grunt, but don't take much notice.)

Anyone want something to eat?

BERT

Lilli's bringing sandwiches and coffee.

DON

Great.

(Awkward pause, as everyone has something to do except DON. HE's the definition of a third wheel.)

Say, Frankie, how's that novel of yours coming?

BERT

You're writing a novel?

PETEY

It's always the quiet ones.

FRANKIE

Slowly. I'm taking my time with it.

PETEY

What color crayons are you using? Say - that's a good one. Write that down, Frankie. I would phone our mother to congratulate her on having me. Were she still with us, of course.

BERT

Is that how brothers talk these days?

PETEY

Excuse me?

BERT

I wouldn't put up with it.

PETEY

(wearily)

Then why are you here, Bert?

BERT

My options are limited.

PETEY

Not as limited as his talents.

BERT

How would you treat him if he wasn't your brother?

FRANKIE

Bert, it doesn't bother me.

PETEY

See? It's the way I show love. So brother, I hope this novel doesn't offer merely a veiled portrayal of me. Either write me as I am or leave me out of it.

BERT

What if it's not about you?

PETEY

Please.

BERT

What's it about, Frankie?

FRANKIE

A soldier returns home from the war. He can't find his place in his old hometown, and he's changed so much his family rejects him. So he sets off for America.

PETEY

America. What do you know about America?

FRANKIE

Enough to know we might all be headed there very soon.

DON

You're going to America, Frankie? Why would you be doing that? Everything's going well here. We're finally getting on the right track in this country.

BERT

For some.

PETEY

Bah. No political talk please.

BERT

I'd think you two might be thinking about America more than anyone else.

PETEY

And why is that?

BERT

Being Jewish.

PETEY

You're one to talk. And I'm not Jewish.

FRANKIE

Of course you are. I am. Whenever I see those idiots out in the street, I go back home and look over my street map of New York. So I'm familiar with it if I need to go quickly. Ask me when the next train to Paris leaves. Then ask me how to get to the Grand Concourse in the Bronx from Times Square. I've practiced the subway ride in my head a few times.

PETEY

For the last time, I'm hardly Jewish. Well, maybe ten percent. On my agent's side.

FRANKIE

All I know is that if it gets too hot here, I'm ready to pack my bags and go. I've been sending some money over there to our cousin in Chicago, just in case.

PETEY

We have a cousin in Chicago?

FRANKIE

Sure. Uncle Nathan's boy Leo.

(HE writes in the air as if writing out an envelope.)

1100 East Hyde Park Boulevard, Chicago 15 U-S-A.

PETEY

We'll have to visit him to reclaim your stake when I conquer America's radio waves.

DON

Frankie, it's not your type they're after.

PETEY

Ah, Don. When I conceived this show, I wanted to be the still center around which everyone revolved, so I hired the most talented people I could. In your case, I made an exception.

(ELISABETH enters in a long woolen coat, with a paper bag.)

ELISABETH

Hi, boys. Have at it.

(SHE puts the bag down and kisses BERT. But on her way to him she gives an odd look to PETEY. SHE gives a sandwich to BERT and he hands her a script. FRANKIE gets his himself.)

PETEY

Personally, I don't believe in eating before a show. Weighs you down. But I suspect it won't affect your performances, supporting as they are.

(takes his script and slaps it)

Look at page six!

(then HE calms down)

Bert, how could you. That's as bad as our old act.

ELISABETH

Old act?

BERT

Before we met.

ELISABETH

(laughing)

You and Pete? I knew you went back. But you had an act?

PETEY

Yes. He and I.

BERT

We were two soldiers. Otto and the Frog. I was Otto the soldier, and he was the French guy. The things I did to him!

PETEY

Yes, and I abhorred every minute of it.

BERT

Really? We had some great times together. We packed the halls.

PETEY

I was a bad magician, and you were a worse singer. But together, seem to have clicked.

BERT

We made people laugh.

PETEY

But at my expense, Bertie, at my expense.

BERT

That was what worked then.

ELISABETH

Do you remember any of it?

(Pause, as PETEY looks at BERT.)

PETEY

Not on your life.

ELISABETH

Oh please! For me.

BERT

It would loosen you up a bit, Pete. You're looking a little tight.

FRANKIE

He'll be even tighter after the show!

ELISABETH

For me.

PETEY

Oh, if you insist. But only because you asked, Lilli.

(BERT and PETEY walk dead center stage,
and stand next to each other.)

BERT

(as Otto, the German soldier)

Hey, Frenchie!

PETEY

(as the Frenchman, but clearly not
enjoying it)

Yes, Otto?

BERT

Frenchie, do you like cheese?

PETEY

Yes, Otto. All Frenchmen like cheese. Do you like cheese?

BERT
We Germans like a neutral cheese.

PETEY
A neutral cheese?

BERT
Swiss cheese! Neutral! Swiss!

(HE elbows PETEY, perhaps a bit too hard.)

Hey Frenchie!

PETEY
Yes, Otto?

BERT
Why didn't the Spanish army invade France?

PETEY
Why?

BERT
The Germans had already gotten there!

PETEY
(out of character, but coolly and quietly)
Hit me again and I'll kick your ass from here to London.

(Pause.)

(BERT walks away, and goes back to his script. PETEY holds his arms spread out, and waits.)

Well? We have a show to do in an hour, gentlemen.

(FRANKIE gets up and begins to undress PETEY, taking off his coat first, and eventually everything down to his underwear. After that, he will dress

him into his tuxedo - his broadcasting attire.)

Bert, my Chesterfields and my usual, please.

(BERT gets PETEY's cigarettes and puts one in his mouth as FRANKIE undresses him. BERT lights the cigarette and PETEY takes a long drag, his arms still outstretched.)

(Through clenched teeth as HE tries to keep the cigarette in his mouth:)

It's a burden, carrying all of you, I grant you, but a labor of love. You know, this isn't easy to do, talk with a cigarette in your mouth. Sort of like ventriloquism without a dummy. Edgar Bergen without Charlie McCarthy.

ELISABETH

I always wanted to ask you - why do you dress in a tuxedo to go on the radio?

PETEY

I don't dress in a tuxedo. My character does. He's a well-dressed sarcastic know-it-all. Nothing like me in the least.

DON

Costumes for the radio! If that don't beat all.

PETEY

If someone on my show were playing a cowboy for more than a few lines, I want them to wear western chaps and a 10-gallon hat, yee-haw. If they were playing a clown, they'd have a greasepaint smile and woolly bright red hair. It's about the character you're playing, not the lowly thespian underneath.

And say, who's the guest tonight? Those singing boys, the Comedian Harmonists?

DON

Umm, I was just told they couldn't make it.

PETEY

Couldn't make it?

BERT

Couldn't...or were they told not to? Pete, you're losing control of your own show here.

DON

Actually, we got Marika Rökk.

FRANKIE

Her? She's gorgeous, but this is radio. She can barely sing a note.

PETEY

Don, I'm finally impressed with you, using your modicum of pull.

DON

It's not like that.

BERT

Pete, she's...one of them.

PETEY

One of who?

DON

Well, the producers just thought she was more in line with the current situation.

PETEY

Which producers, and what situation?

DON

Don't be blind, Petey.

PETEY

This is a fucking comedy show and she's a singer with big tits. That's all I know, and all I want to know. Let's just get this done.

BERT

Pete, the Comedian Harmonists are four young boys. Four young *Jewish* boys. You see what I mean.

PETEY

I don't want to hear it. I told you, I don't get political. We do simple, gentle humor making fun of everyone. Berlin is a cosmopolitan city, and we make fun of every ethnic variation from all over the world. We're just reflecting our society, and my vision of equality for all, where all men are my brothers in laughter. Plus, I can do Jew jokes.

BERT

(turns to DON)

I'm surprised at you. You give in to these people?

DON

I won't be judged, and not the least by someone like you.

PETEY

Boys, boys. Please. We have a script to rehearse.

FRANKIE

It was mostly Bert's work. Nice job there, by the way.

PETEY

Please, no praise. Swelled heads won't pass through these doors. Bertie?

BERT

Yes?

(PETEY mumbles to him with the cigarette in his mouth - his cue for BERT to take the cigarette out of PETEY's mouth and give him a drink of whiskey. BERT pours a bit of whiskey down PETEY's throat, but PETEY's reacts violently to it.)

PETEY

That's not my regular! Are you trying to poison me?

DON

You can't get the good Irish stuff anymore. Or at least they won't let it into the country. It's domestic. German whiskey.

PETEY

German whiskey? What a novel idea. Like American humility.

DON

Wartime restrictions, they say.

PETEY

We're not at war.

BERT

Not yet at least.

FRANKIE

You think so?

PETEY

As an artist, I don't mess about in politics, but...

BERT

We heard already. And no one asked you.

(Pause.)

(FRANKIE, who has been dressing PETEY, backs off, and PETEY, still not fully dressed, approaches BERT.)

PETEY

(evenly)

Whose name is on the door here? Whose name is on the show?

BERT

Yours.

PETEY

Who's the radio king of all Europe? The funniest man in the land?

BERT

You.

PETEY

Who is the greatest actor in Germany today?

BERT

(after a confrontational pause)

Peter fucking Lorre.

(They lock eyes and pause, after which
PETEY laughs loudly.)

PETEY

Very good, Bert. Very good. You've always been able to stand up to me. That's why you're a "stand-up" guy. Elisabeth, your husband is all right by me. A good actor, a great writer, always on time. If there's one thing I insist on, it's punctuality. Now give us another drink of this German pretender to the Rhône. Frankie, you may resume your ministrations.

(FRANKIE resumes dressing PETEY into his tuxedo.)

ELISABETH

(with a bit of nervousness)

We should rehearse. Get it off the page.

DON

Great idea. I'd love to hear it!

(ALL get their scripts and flip midway through.)

(PETEY uses his radio manner - a languid, very natural style, almost apologetic to the audience. ELISABETH's character is not exactly a dumb blonde, but is sassy and can give as much to PETEY as he gives to her. THEY have an obvious chemistry.)

PETEY

(out of character)

Page ten, fellows. And Elisabeth.

(back into character)

Well, ladies and gentlemen, it's come to that part of our show again.

ELISABETH

What part is that, Petey? The one in your hair?

PETEY

No, Elisabeth, the part where we discuss the important news events of the day.

ELISABETH

Like those awful men with the brown shirts in the streets?

PETEY

Brown. Dreadful color. If they were the light-blue-checked-shirts-with-a-hint-of-pale-yellow I might have some sympathy. But whoever chose brown should have his sartorial taste questioned immediately.

Elisabeth, according to the newspapers - do you read the newspapers, Elisabeth?

ELISABETH

Only when I have fish for dinner.

PETEY

You only read newspapers when you have fish for dinner?

ELISABETH

Well, in the morning I go to the fish store and ask for a trout. Without the head, because you know what the Italians say.

PETEY

What do the Italians say?

ELISABETH

They say the fish smells from the head, so if I get a fish without a head I can keep it as long as I want -

PETEY and ELISABETH

(together, with a hint of exasperation from PETEY)

And it won't smell!

PETEY

Yes, so you were saying about newspapers.

ELISABETH

Oh yes. So I buy the trout, without the head. Say, I wonder what they do with all the fish heads?

PETEY

Probably send them to France. They'll eat anything there.

ELISABETH

So I buy the fish, and the man in the store wraps it up in a newspaper, and on the tram home I can read it!

PETEY

Is it always the same section of the paper?

ELISABETH

Did you know there's an apartment downtown that's been open for two months? I was thinking of renting it but who rents an apartment that's been recommended by a fish?

PETEY

(exasperated again)

So the newspapers. Over in the United States, the boys at the Agriculture Department, specifically the National Egg Board - you'd think if you threw an egg at a board, it would crack! - but the boys at the Egg Board said this week that people should be eating at least one egg a day. "An egg a day makes everybody okay!" they claim, with typical American enthusiasm. So our question down the Parkway tonight is, "Does an egg a day really make everyone OK?"

Shall we commence our perambulations, Elisabeth?

ELISABETH

Huh?

PETEY

Wanna take a walk?

ELISABETH

Sure!

PETEY

Well then, as the pair of pants said to the zipper, Let's fly!

Why don't I just knock on this door and see who's in?

(PETEY mimes knocking on a door as FRANKIE, who doubles as the sound effects man, raps on a table making the sound.)

ELISABETH

(in character, in an exaggerated Yiddish accent)

Whom is knocking at mine door?

PETEY

Mrs. Goldbloom!

ELISABETH

You was expecting mebbe Franklin Delano Shmoesenvelt?

PETEY

(in character, but seemingly off-the-cuff, ad libbing)

"Shmoesenvelt." I like that. How are you today, Mrs. Goldbloom?

ELISABETH

How am I, he asks. How should I be? Mine boy Hoiman gets into a fight in school.

PETEY

Herman got into a fight? Over what?

ELISABETH

What do boys get into fights over? A goil.

PETEY

"A goil"? Oh, a girl. What was this fight about?

ELISABETH

He wanted to, but she didn't.

PETEY

He wanted to, but she didn't?

ELISABETH

Dat's exactly what I'm saying.

PETEY

She, uh, she didn't want to do what?

ELISABETH

Vat do you tink? Study with him for a history exam! Oy, such a nice man with such a feelthy mind!

PETEY

It's been said of me before... So, Mrs. Goldberg...

ELISABETH

Goldbloom. *Bloom*, not berg. A bloom never sank no Titanic. But a *berg*... You get my meaning.

PETEY

I certainly do. So, Mrs. Goldbloom, how do you feel about eggs?

ELISABETH

What should I feel about eggs? I feel about eggs the way I feel about the Russians, with their Mazeltov cocktails. If the chicken don't want 'em, I'll take 'em. Eggs, he asks me.

PETEY

The American government says you should have an egg every day to stay healthy and stay out of the doctor's office. What do you think of that?

ELISABETH

Eggs *shmeggs*. You know what keeps me out of my doctor's office?

PETEY

What would that be?

ELISABETH

I ain't got no health insurance! So goodbye, Mister, and be in good health!

PETEY

Thank you, Mrs. Goldbloom.

(FRANKIE drops a nearby heavy object, such as a book, onto the desk to make

the sound of Mrs. Goldbloom's door
shutting.)

Somehow I get the feeling she'll outlive us all.

ELISABETH

(as herself again)

Who's next, Petey?

PETEY

Well, let's just knock on this door and see.

(FRANKIE raps on the table again.)

BERT

(in character, with a broad Irish
accent)

Ah sure someone's at me door. Mister Lee, how are you this
fine day, sure it is. Paddy McPaddy's my name, and a fine
son of Ireland I am.

PETEY

"Paddy McPaddy," is it? Really?

BERT

That's what the script here says, me bucko!

PETEY

(slight chuckle, in character)

Does it? Well, glad to see you here. I hope I'm not
interrupting anything.

BERT

Sure and you're not. A little nippy out here, isn't it?

PETEY

Yes, a bit.

BERT

Well, here, join me and have a nip yourself.

PETEY

Oh, I usually don't drink when I'm working.

BERT

Me neither. Luckily, I'm not working.

PETEY

Oh, what did you used to do?

BERT

Sure and I'll tell you. I sold shoelaces in a shoe store, and you know those little pieces of plastic at the tips of the laces? I would put them on.

PETEY

Aglets.

BERT

It's true!

PETEY

I think they're called "aglets."

BERT

I wouldn't know - I just put them on and sold them. Very tedious work. I'm well shot of it.

PETEY

I'm sure you are. Now Paddy, we're asking everyone in the neighborhood whether they think eggs are a healthy food. What about you? The Americans say an egg a day keeps the doctor away.

BERT

Why sure and if eggs aren't a part of my balanced diet. But you see now, I'm not exactly balanced in the mornings, if you know what I mean. I might have a few eggs once I come home at night.

PETEY

Scrambled?

BERT

Well, not every night I'm not. But when me and the boys get going, we do get a little poached! See you around, sonny!

(FRANKIE makes the sound of Paddy's door shutting.)

PETEY

Well now, he was certainly sunny side up. Let's see who's behind this door.

(FRANKIE raps on the table again.)

FRANKIE

(in character, with a broad Texas accent)

How, I say, how can I help you, son?

PETEY

And who do I have the pleasure of speaking to?

FRANKIE

Tex! Tex is the name, Tex Houston! I was born in Tuscaloosa with a banjo on my knee, and that's the last time I was outside the great state of Texas. Do keep up, boy.

PETEY

Well, I'll certainly try. What brings you all the way from America, Tex?

FRANKIE

What brings me here? Why, I sailed from New York on the biggest ocean liner there is, the SS *Jefferson Davis*.

PETEY

The *Jefferson Davis*? Don't you mean the SS *Abraham Lincoln*?

FRANKIE

You've got your history books, son, and I've got mine.

PETEY

That's probably the case. But what business do you have here in Europe?

FRANKIE

I came, I say, I came to Europe to see all the fantastic art works.

PETEY

There certainly are a lot of them here. What's been your favorite?

FRANKIE

I do like your Moanin' Lisa. Right pretty woman, though I can't figure out what she was a-moanin' about.

PETEY

Tex, what do you think of eggs?

FRANKIE

Eggs? You trying to give me intellectual whiplash here, son?

PETEY

Why no, but the question we're asking everyone today is if you agree with the Agriculture Department that an egg a day keeps everyone okay?

FRANKIE

An egg a day? I can tell you who'd be happy with that - the chickens! Why, you couldn't hold a candle to it! Egg - candle! That's a joke, son! I keep lobbin' 'em up to you and you keep droppin' 'em. Laugh it up a little, boy, you're on the radio.

PETEY

Did you raise chickens in Texas?

FRANKIE

Raise chickens? Why, I had the biggest chickens in Texas!

PETEY

The biggest chickens in Texas? Where do you raise them?

FRANKIE

Raise 'em? I raise 'em so high - I fed 'em helium and they floated in the sky like balloons! Raised! Chickens! So long, son! So long, that is!

PETEY

(back out of character)

Now that's how you do a show! Well done everyone, well done! We should take this on tour. You all remember how we used to tour, do the show from different cities? We should do that again, like we did in Cologne.

BERT

Frankie, great Texas accent. Maybe you should move to Houston and not New York.

FRANKIE

I'll tell you when I get there.

BERT

And Lilli, a little less dumb blonde. Take it down a drop and you'll be fine.

ELISABETH

Thanks.

PETEY

Hamburg would be good. Get out of town for a spell. Or even the south of France. *Le tour internationale*. Meet some of my French admirers.

BERT

And if I do ever ask you to play the dumb blonde, remember, you'll always be my dumb blonde.

PETEY

OK, boys, good job. See you all out there in 20 minutes.

(Everyone gets up to leave except
ELISABETH and DON.)

ELISABETH

Pete, I need to talk to you.

DON

I do too. About the show.

PETEY

(to ELISABETH)

Well? What is it?

ELISABETH

In private.

(Pause, as PETEY has a slight inkling
of what this is about.)

Oh. Don, could you give us a minute?

DON

Sure.

BERT

(before he leaves)

Petey, I was wondering...

PETEY

Doesn't anyone know what "leave" means?

BERT

Pete, I hope you could sign this.

(BERT shows PETEY a large paper. PETEY is occupied with his script, his clothing, his drink and his cigarette.)

PETEY

What is it?

BERT

A petition. A statement against what's going on in the streets. Against harassment. For artistic freedom.

PETEY

I don't get political, Bert. Not my style.

BERT

Everyone's signing it. Brecht, Max Reinhardt, Lang...

PETEY

Not his wife Thea. She likes them I heard.

BERT

Peter Lorre.

PETEY

(suddenly interested)

Lorre's signed it?

DON

I'd stay away from that kind of thing, Pete. You never know which way the wind will blow.

BERT

But a man has to take a stand! If he doesn't, what kind of man is he?

DON

A man with a job, with a solid reputation.

BERT

A reputation as a turncoat, as a rat!

DON

These guys aren't playing games! Artistic freedom. Do you think they care about your "artistic freedom" to tell jokes on the radio?

PETEY

Boys, boys. Let's calm down. If it's all right by Peter Lorre, it's all right by me. I mean, they can't get rid of all of us, now can they.

(HE signs the petition.)

Here, Frankie, you sign it too. It will be good for your career. You might find a publisher. And you Lilli. Might as well get full representation. Don?

(FRANKIE and ELISABETH sign. DON pointedly does not.)

I hope you're publishing it in the newspaper, too. I'd love to see their faces when they go down that list of names and see mine.

ELISABETH

Pete?

PETEY

Of course. Okay everybody, see you out there.

(BERT and FRANKIE exit.)

DON

That was not a smart thing to do, Pete. Very very stupid. Management won't be happy. Freddie said they have to be very careful these days. So do you.

PETEY

I don't really care what that station manager and those other weasels and pinheads think. I have the most listened-to radio program in the country, and in all Europe. They know what their place is - leave me alone and I bring in the audience. And I won't have any more talk about it. Understand?

DON

We need to talk about the show. Freddie wanted a few script changes. I should have told you before.

PETEY

With 20 minutes to go before air? Are they crazy? Are you?

DON

I'll get the new pages to everyone.

(DON exits.)

ELISABETH

Pete?

PETEY

Yes, Lilli?

ELISABETH

Pete. I'm pregnant.

PETEY

Why...that's wonderful! That's why Bert's been especially chipper. Will you be leaving the show?

ELISABETH

No. No Pete. Bert doesn't know. Because it's yours.

PETEY

Mine? That's impossible.

ELISABETH

When we did the show from Cologne in September.

PETEY

Oh. Oh. There was always something I didn't like about Cologne. But you and Bert...

ELISABETH

Bert and I...we have separate lives.

PETEY

I thought you two were getting along.

ELISABETH

We get along. But you know Bert. He has his life, and I have mine. I mean, you've known each other for a long time. You must have suspected. You must have known.

PETEY

I was surprised when you two got married, I'll admit. But I thought, I don't know, people can change. I didn't pay it much attention. I didn't know why you agreed, though.

ELISABETH

He thought he needed to get married to stay in the business.

PETEY

But why would you marry him? You're an attractive woman. You could marry anyone. Aren't I right?

ELISABETH

Men will say they want a successful intelligent woman, but what they really want is someone to make the coffee in the morning and fetch the newspaper at night. Even today.

PETEY

That's not true, is it? I don't have a housefrau waiting for me, with schnapps and slippers at the ready. I used to, but she was horrible at dusting. Mind you, she was stealing the silverware too so I gave her a week's notice.

ELISABETH

I love Bert. And I mean that. I love him. I didn't think I really could change him, but he asked me so it would seem as if he had a normal life. And men don't exactly break down a woman's door if she's got a career, especially what I do. I know it was stupid and fanciful, but I hoped it would work out, and that it would work out for me. He

doesn't have it easy, you know. They're not too accepting of things like that anymore.

PETE

Well, can you blame them? It goes against the natural order of things. It doesn't really concern me though. As long as he keeps giving me golden scripts like this, he could be fucking a moo-cow in Bavaria for all I care. But please tell him to stop hanging around the El Dorado. It reflects badly on all of us.

ELISABETH

But now me.

PETE

Yes. But now you. How could you let this happen?

ELISABETH

How could *I* let this happen?

PETE

Look - I know people. People who could help you.

ELISABETH

Us. People who could help us.

PETE

Yes. Us. I'll pay for it.

ELISABETH

I don't know if I can do that.

PETEY

It's the only thing you can do that saves my career. And if I don't have this radio show, what will you and Bert do? The pregnant actress wife of a literary degenerate - their words, I remind you, not mine. But really, you were never meant to be with him.

ELISABETH

How can you say that?

PETEY

That kind of life is fine in your twenties. But lying about the central reality of your life gets much harder with the

years. Even for a born, confirmed and practiced liar like me.

ELISABETH

You too?

PETEY

No, of course not, if that's what you're thinking. We all lie about something, Lilli. The more successful you are, the more you have to lie about. The only consistent facts in my life are that Frankie is my brother, Bert is my writing and performing partner...and your eyes well up so beautifully when you cry.

(Pause, as SHE looks at him.)

You wanted me to tell the truth? There's my truth-telling for today. Out there on the radio, and when we're together, there's something there. Something that's not there with anyone else. You know it too. We're meant to be together.

ELISABETH

I can't just leave him. Not for you.

PETEY

Why not?

ELISABETH

He'll be exposed. I know you don't care about what he is, but others do. He'll never work again.

PETEY

He'd find work. If Frankie can write a novel, certainly Bert can! He'll be a respected author, and maybe Lang will make a movie from it. He'll be like me...untouchable.

ELISABETH

You make it sound so easy.

PETEY

That's because it is. But you'll have to get rid of that first.

ELISABETH

I can't. He needs me, and I need him, especially now. He'll understand. In fact, it's the perfect cover for us. I'm sorry, Pete. I can't. I just can't.

(A knock at the door.)

PETEY

(annoyed)

Yes?

DON

(from behind door)

Pete? Ten minutes. And we really need to talk.

PETEY

(exasperated)

All right!

(to ELISABETH)

Do you think you can do the show?

ELISABETH

I...I don't know.

PETEY

Of course you can. You're a trouper. You've never let me down before, and you're not starting now. Now go out there, get dressed, have a stiff drink - it will do you good. See you in 10.

(DON opens the door as PETEY is about to give ELISABETH a long kiss.)

(THEY see DON at the door, and PETEY quickly pulls back and gives her a peck on the cheek.)

DON

Oh, Lilli, here's the new script for tonight. A few changes. You can read it cold - you'll be great.

(SHE takes the script and exits, as DON enters.)

Here. Take your script and read it.

(PETEY thumbs through it.)

PETEY

Who are you to give me a script?

DON

There are new realities.

(PETEY flips through the new script,
and is shocked.)

PETEY

I can't do this.

DON

You have to. You're on in ten minutes.

PETEY

That's not what I mean.

DON

There are changes. Freddie insisted on changes.

PETEY

Not like this. These aren't just changes. This is disgusting. When we do Jewish jokes about Mrs Goldbloom, or Irish Paddy jokes, they're gentle, we're laughing *with* them, or at least in their general direction. But this is hateful. And more than that - it's not funny. I can sell just about anything if it's funny. But this... Why?

DON

You see what's going on. In the streets. In the government.

PETEY

Jesus Christ, Don, it's a dumb comedy show! We do jokes about fish renting apartments!

I am one shot away, Don, one fucking shot away. France has Chevalier. England has Chaplin. Continental, hell, worldwide entertainers. We have no one - but it could be me. If you ruin this for me, Don, so help me, I won't be responsible for what happens.

DON

It's not about the show. It's about you. You're a prominent person. "The radio king of all Europe."

PETEY

Me?

DON

If they can turn you, they can turn the country.

PETEY

I won't do it.

DON

Yes you will. If you don't do this script tonight, I can't guarantee you'll have a show next week.

PETEY

Who do you think you are?

DON

From tonight on, I'm the executive producer.

PETEY

Get out of here.

DON

I can't without you telling me you'll do the new script. As written.

PETEY

It will be the end of my career!

DON

Maybe. But it definitely will be if you don't.

PETEY

So, you're one of them now, are you?

DON

Not at all. I'm one of *me*. I'm looking out for myself from now on. We all have to. That's the new reality.

PETEY

It's not my reality. Here. You do it.

DON

What do you mean?

PETEY

You do the script. You do my part.

DON

I can't.

PETEY

That's right. You can't. You need me. *They* need me. So you and your thug friends can go to hell. After all these years, Don, I can't believe it.

DON

Do you think I wanted to do this? We've worked together for seven years. I like doing the show. I have a strong deep voice and I can deliver a straight line. What else is that going to get me? I need to keep my career, Pete. There's nothing else I can do. So tell me you'll do the new script. Please.

(Pause.)

(PETEY puts arm around DON, and leads him out the door.)

PETEY

Now Don, if you need me to do this for you so much, then I'll do it. We're friends, right?

DON

I hope so.

PETEY

And friends protect each other, right?

DON

Of course.

PETEY

Well then, I'll protect you. And you'll protect me - is that OK?

DON

Well, sure.

PETEY

That's all I ask. We go back a long way, don't we Don? Remember when I discovered you. You were a tour guide at an art museum in Frankfurt.

DON

It was all I could get with an art history degree. Jobs weren't easy to come by before.

PETEY

But that clean, clear voice! That projection! I knew you had what it takes.

DON

And I've always been grateful.

PETEY

Yes you have. In the future I may need your help. And I'm sure I can rely on it.

DON

Of course. Well, I feel better now.

PETEY

What do you mean?

DON

I was afraid you wouldn't see things our way, and I'd have to fire you.

PETEY

Our way. Interesting.

DON

I'll go get everyone ready and warm up the audience.

PETEY

Good, good.

DON

Good luck, Pete. And thanks.

PETEY

Why, you're welcome, Don.

(DON exits. Pause. PETEY races to the door and opens it.)

Frank! Bert! Lilli!

(FRANKIE and BERT come in, angry, with their scripts.)

I know.

BERT

I can't do this!

FRANKIE

Me neither. I won't. It's just plain wrong.

BERT

Who put you up to this? Was it Don with his new "friends"?

ELISABETH

I can't believe you'd let him get away with this. It's disgusting.

PETEY

And what's worse, it's not even funny.

BERT

I have an idea. Just follow my lead, and we'll be okay. Just follow me. You're all actors. Listen, and react. I don't know what we'll do next week, but we'll give them a show this week!

(DON enters.)

DON

Show time, people.

PETEY

Yes. Show time! Time to make magic again!

(Light change, and we soon see DON at one studio mike, and PETEY, ELISABETH, BERT and FRANKIE all gathered around each other. They approach it and go back depending on who's speaking. All have their scripts in hand, and they're unfamiliar and uncomfortable with the new script changes ordered by DON, and their implications.)

ELISABETH

(back in character)

So are we ready to visit all the characters on Petey's Parkway?

PETEY

Well, as the stocking said to the nail, let's run! Let's see who's behind our first door today.

ELISABETH

(as Mrs. Goldbloom, reading script but nervously)

To *JEW* am I speaking?

PETEY

Ah, Mrs. Goldbloom.

ELISABETH

You was expecting mebbe Franklin Jewsinfelt?

PETEY

Why no, of course not. Um, Mrs. Goldbloom, have you had much schooling?

ELISABETH

School, he asks me.

PETEY

How much is two plus two?

ELISABETH

Retail or wholesale?

PETEY

Let's skip that. Mrs. Goldbloom, we're going around the Parkway asking people what it means to be a loyal citizen.

ELISABETH

Loyal? What means loyal?

PETEY

Well, as a Jew, you're a member of a rootless clan, and probably not a loyal citizen of any nation, let alone this one.

ELISABETH

Well, gee, mister, I never thought of it like dat.

PETEY

There's a new way of thinking in this country, Mrs. Goldbloom, and you and your type better get used to it. Good day, Mrs. Goldbloom.

(Sound of a door slamming. Pause, and an uncomfortable silence.)

PETEY

Well, let's see who's at this door.

FRANKIE

(in a falsetto British voice, but not very convincing)

Why, it is I, Lady Peel deTaterswell.

(ALL look at him with a mixture of discomfort, horror, and amusement.)

PETEY

Lady Peel deTaterswell?

FRANKIE

Yes, my husband, Lord Peel deTaterswell, and I have a country estate...at Dressing-on-the-Greens.

PETEY

Dressing-on-the-Greens? Well, you've certainly got the makings of a fine side salad.

FRANKIE

I won't countenance humor about my ancestral home!

PETEY

(off-script, commenting on the script
he's been given, and trying vainly to
make the best of it)

Well, there's obviously no chance of humor here. Lady Peel
deTaterswell - it is Lady, isn't it? I think I spy a bit of
five o'clock shadow on your chin.

FRANKIE

I'll have none of your impertanance!

PETEY

We're asking what it means to be a loyal citizen.

FRANKIE

My good man, I am loyal to my King, George V. And to the
Parisian hotel that bears his name.

PETEY

(back to script)

Really? Loyal to your King? What if there were no king?

FRANKIE

No king? Whatever do you mean?

PETEY

Soon you and your beloved London will find out what we have
in store for you and your kind! Can you imagine Buckingham
Palace in ruins, and Westminster in flames? Be prepared -
your time is coming to an end!

(HE slams the door.)

(wearily)

Let's see who's behind this door.

BERT

(off-script)

It is I, Otto the German soldier. Remember me, Petey? We
met in the music halls years ago.

PETEY

(catching on)

Oh...yes. Yes I do.

BERT

My name is Otto Raisink. "Herr Raisink."

PETEY

Well, you certainly are "Herr Raisink." In fact, you've set my follicles all aquiver.

BERT

(in a conspiratorial whisper)

You remembered!

(back to normal voice)

You may call me Otto.

PETEY

So I shall. Otto, the question we're asking today is "What makes someone a loyal citizen?"

BERT

I must ask, Herr Professor Lee, loyal to whom? To a nation, to a leader, to a cause, or to an idea?

PETEY

That's...that's an interesting question, Otto. Not a particularly funny one, but an interesting one none the less.

BERT

We, as loyal citizens, must stay vigilant. There are many dangers to our land, and we must always be on guard.

PETEY

And what might these dangers be? Foreigners wishing to do us harm?

BERT

Exactly the opposite, Herr Professor, exactly the opposite. We are doing this to ourselves. Our enemies are within our great nation.

(HE pushes PETEY out of the way and grabs the microphone.)

My fellow citizens, don't listen to the rabble rousers on the street and their venomous lies! All Germans are brothers! We have a beautiful country, and we must not allow them to destroy it! They are the enemy, no one else! They must be stopped! Listen to me! Listen to me! You must all listen to me before it's too late!

(DON rushes on and struggles with BERT. He eventually pushes BERT off mike.)

DON

(panting, gasping, out of breath)

Ladies and gentlemen, we bring you now, dear radio listeners, the music of Sid Kay's Fellows from Berlin's famous Fatherland Haus with "The Whole World is Sky Blue."

(HE grabs BERT by the arm and mutes the mike with his hand.)

Come with me.

(BERT looks back at the rest of them. ELISABETH looks very concerned, FRANKIE looks dumbfounded - but PETEY seems calm. They are now off the air.)

PETEY

Don...

(DON just glares at PETEY, and hustles BERT off stage.)

ELISABETH

Bert!

(SHE moves to run after him, but PETEY stops her.)

PETEY

Don't. Not now.

(ELISABETH collapses in his arms.)

Don't worry. We'll be fine. We'll be fine.

(FADE OUT to German jazz music of the period.)

(LATER THAT NIGHT.

(PETEY is at his desk in a darkened office. He lights a cigarette, which lights up the room. He pours himself a drink, and quietly ruminates.

(We also soon notice FRANKIE in the room. HE also has a drink.)

PETEY

Goddamnest thing I've ever been involved with.

FRANKIE

Yep.

PETEY

Goddamnest thing I've ever seen.

FRANKIE

Me too.

PETEY

I got carried away.

FRANKIE

You? You were the least of it. Poor Bert. What do you think will happen to him?

PETEY

Let's not go that far. I'm sure I can work this out with Don. *With Don*. I never thought I'd be saying that.

FRANKIE

Employment is the least of our worries.

PETEY

You worry too much. Don is frightened. I'll reassure him. He owes me. I'll take care of everyone. Trust me. I'll put this right.

(HE leans back in his chair.)

Ah, they don't make 'em like me anymore.

FRANKIE

Have you seen Bert? And what about Lilli?

PETEY

She ran after him. I told her not to. Oh, I'm sure they're consoling each other. Their marriage is in...a rough patch.

FRANKIE

I still don't see why she'd marry him. I can understand it for him, but what's in it for her?

PETEY

I don't know. I've been wondering that myself. She's quite the woman.

(Pause, as FRANKIE looks PETEY over with thinly veiled disgust.)

FRANKIE

Pete?

PETEY

Yes, Frankie?

FRANKIE

Have I ever thanked you for everything you've done for me?

PETEY

Why, no, actually. You haven't.

FRANKIE

Good.

(PETEY laughs.)

PETEY

Have I treated you that badly? Honestly. I'd like to know. You have a good job, a kind of celebrity...excitement. Wherever I've gone, you've been right there beside me. Perhaps a tiny bit behind, but close enough.

FRANKIE

See? Like that. The needles. The constant needles. Ever since we were kids. You're a real son of a bitch. You know that?

PETEY

Of course I know that. Show me one successful man who isn't.

FRANKIE

Bert.

PETEY

Bert? A Uranian¹ comedian with a pregnant wife and a price on his head?

FRANKIE

Lilli's pregnant?

PETEY

Yes. She told me before the show. That's...that's why she was so emotional.

FRANKIE

I didn't know. I hope it works out for them. Poor kids.

PETEY

I'm sure it will.

(Pause.)

Frankie, do you ever think about our father?

FRANKIE

Sometimes. Sometimes when I'm sleeping. I see him in a dream. Do you remember him?

PETEY

No. I was only five when he left. Just left one morning - a Saturday it was, I've been told - went out for the newspaper, and we never saw him again. Who does that? Was life so terrible with our mother, and with us, that he just left? No note, no letter six months later with a postmark from a strange land.

¹ An archaic word for homosexual - NOT a typo of "Ukrainian."

FRANKIE

Maybe he died, tumbled off a bridge, and no one's ever found the body. Maybe he was eaten by a school of fish in the river.

PETEY

Frankie, you always say just the right thing to make me feel better. I tried to contact him in a seance once.

(FRANKIE laughs.)

No - really! I hired a psychic to find him.

FRANKIE

You believe in that?

PETEY

A little. It was cheaper than a detective. She didn't find anything, though. She was incredibly tall. And she was so depressing.

FRANKIE

So the long and the short of it was she wasn't a happy medium?

PETEY

You know, comes the revolution, jokes like that will end you up in prison. Still, not bad. We can use it next week.

FRANKIE

If there is a next week.

PETEY

There will be. I'll ask Don to talk with Freddie to see what we can do. I'm sure we can fix this.

(DON rushes in.)

DON

Petey, I'm sorry. I'm very sorry. I never meant for this to happen.

PETEY

What do you mean?

DON

Bert. They took him.

FRANKIE

Who took him?

DON

I was just going to have a talk with him. I was told we had to stick to the new script or there would be consequences. I was going to take him to Freddie's office and apologize for him - really I swear I was! I would have even taken some of the blame.

PETEY

How commendable of you. You got in too far with these people, Don.

DON

But outside Freddie's office, this man I had never seen says hello, and takes Bert. He said he was the new station manager. And he took Bert down the stairs into a car.

PETEY

Where did they take him?

DON

I don't know. Everyone from Freddie's office was gone. Just this tall man with blond hair who took Bert away.

FRANKIE

How could you have let this happen? How could you get so cozy with them?

(DON breaks down.)

DON

I'm sorry...I'm sorry...

FRANKIE

You know they'll be after us next.

PETEY

After me? I've got the top show on the station!

FRANKIE

They don't care about that, Pete. You're a Jewish satiric comic. And you're not Petey Lee anymore. You're Peter Lefkowitz. Or in other words, an enemy of the state.

(For the first time, PETEY sees his predicament, and fear crosses his face.)

(ELISABETH enters.)

ELISABETH

Have you heard from him yet?

PETEY

No. Don thinks some of those thugs took him.

ELISABETH

I know. They took him back to our apartment and told me to give this to you. They said to call when you opened it.

(SHE hands PETEY a sealed envelope. HE opens it. There's a small piece of paper the size of a bank check, and a note.

(HE looks both over with amazement, and stuffs them in his pocket.

(HE runs to the coat rack and puts his overcoat on.)

PETEY

We have to get going.

ELISABETH

What?

PETEY

All of us. Now. Frankie, you've been practicing this. When's the next train to Paris?

FRANKIE

Thirty minutes.

PETEY

Get your coats, everyone. Let's go. NOW.

DON

Even me?

PETEY

Yes, God help me, even you.

ELISABETH

But Bert! They'd release him if you call!

PETEY

There's no time for that.

FRANKIE

I knew this would happen.

PETEY

The clothes on your back. That's all.

ELISABETH

But he's my husband! Your friend!

PETEY

He's strong. He'll...he'll understand.

(PETEY guides ELISABETH to the door.)

Frankie, run and get a taxi to the station. Take Don.

(FRANKIE and DON get their coats, and
EXIT. PETEY is alone with ELISABETH.)

There's nothing we can do, Lilli.

ELISABETH

We can go back to the apartment and get Bert.

PETEY

It's in the other direction. We have a train to catch.

ELISABETH

We can't just leave him here!

PETEY

He shouldn't have been so goddamn reckless!

ELISABETH

You can save him!

PETEY

We have no choice! Besides, he'd want us to do this. For our baby's future.

(Pause.)

We can name him Bert.

(Pause.)

Now come on. We have to make that train to Paris.

(SHE looks at him, and slaps him. HE doesn't react.)

(HE guides her gently out the door, and she goes quietly.)

END OF ACT ONE

A C T T W O

(Spotlight up on a newer style radio microphone on a stand, appropriate for the late 1940s.

(We hear DON, again the off-stage announcer, over jaunty Western swing music, touting the next program.)

DON

(off-stage)

Hey kids! It's almost time for the Purity Baking Hour, with your pal Petey Lee. Captain Don here, reminding you to stay tuned for your own funny friend, the clown with the crown and the funniest fella in town - after these words from our sponsor, the Purity Baking Company for the purest bread around. Ask mom to buy some!

(Fade to black.

(It is fifteen years later, 1947, in a downscale office in New York. The setup of the office is similar to Act One, but a little worse for wear.

(FRANKIE and DON are leaning back in office chairs. THEY have been there for some time. DON reads the newspaper while FRANKIE tosses cards into a hat. There are a few bottles of scotch and glasses around - both have been drinking, but not to excess.

(After a while:)

DON

He's late.

FRANKIE

He's always late. Give him time.

(Pause.)

Today of all days. I have a meeting with my publisher after this.

DON

He's too irresponsible.

FRANKIE

You've known that for twenty-five years.

DON

Your publisher?

FRANKIE

She has some ideas for my new book.

DON

Congratulations.

FRANKIE

Routine, really. They always want changes.

DON

But still. I liked your last one.

FRANKIE

Thank you.

DON

And the one before that.

FRANKIE

The first one's the hardest.

DON

Any bites from the movies?

FRANKIE

Occasionally. They bought the last one. Sent me a nice fat check.

DON

And you're still here?

FRANKIE

I'm still here.

DON

Why?

FRANKIE

Because I love you, Don. I love you, like I love our swanky offices. Like I love the bitter boiled coffee from the shop downstairs that gives me indigestion with every sip. Like I love the ingrown hair on my left thigh. I figure if I have to suffer for my art, at least I should get paid for it.

DON

How's Lilli?

FRANKIE

Oh, fine. She'll be here today.

DON

Here?

FRANKIE

I persuaded her to take the lion tamer role in the circus sketch. It took some doing.

DON

Really? No one else could do it?

FRANKIE

We've been writing around Janet being gone for so long - how long is it? A month? I wish her luck, but I hope that show closes quickly - and I needed to put a woman back on. To balance him. The best actress I knew was sleeping right next to me. And she works cheap.

DON

Janet was good.

FRANKIE

That she was. But, they graduate to Broadway, to the movies, and leave us...here.

DON

What show is Lilli in?

FRANKIE

She's got a featured role in *One Touch of Venus* at the Imperial. But she's understudying the lead, so one day she might go on. We're hoping someone at Sardi's gives Mary Martin *One Touch of Food Poisoning*.

DON

Bert would be proud.

FRANKIE

He only wanted the best for her.

DON

I saw in the paper that they hanged that Lord Haw Haw.

FRANKIE

I can't believe he broadcast that propaganda shit. And from our own studio. From where I stood, from where Pete stood!

DON

Did you know him? He seemed to come out of nowhere.

FRANKIE

We tried to bring laughter and joy to a troubled country - to a troubled world - and these idiots went and, well... At least we all got out at the right time.

(Pause.)

DON

Would you ever want to go back?

FRANKIE

What? *There?*

DON

They're all gone now.

FRANKIE

If you think that, you're mistaken. They're still there. In fact, some of them came here.

DON

I never met any. Not in Chicago, not in Philadelphia, not here.

FRANKIE

You think they're going to parade up and down Broadway announcing it? This ain't Berlin, thank God. Not yet.

DON

Don't be so cynical. This is a great country, and we're finally back on the right track.

FRANKIE

I'm a Jewish German emigré. I have every right to be cynical. It's in my blood.

DON

Really? You've got it pretty good. You're a published novelist, married to a beautiful woman.

FRANKIE

And you made it all the way to producer. I do wish we could have had a family of our own. Lilli always wanted that. A baby with her nose and my chin, she always said. But when she got so sick on the ship coming over, that ended that. That's my one regret. No - I tell a lie. My real regret is that my life is reduced to writing bad jokes for a drunken kiddie's radio comic.

DON

But that's because of your loyalty to him. And you still need a regular paycheck. As do I.

FRANKIE

He's my brother. What do you expect me to do? Abandon him?

DON

He would. Without a second thought.

FRANKIE

I can't believe that.

DON

You'll admit he's pretty egotistical.

FRANKIE

Pete? Egotistical? The last time I saw Pete, he was parked in Lover's Lane holding his own hand.

DON

We've been with him through three years in Chicago, five years in Philadelphia, and now here, for seven. We're too loyal.

FRANKIE

Yes, we're loyal to a fault. And that fault is late. As usual.

(PETEY enters, hurriedly and apologetically, scampering around, relatively - for him - sloppily dressed - tie askew, ruffled suit. HE carries a paper bag, and a battered suitcase with his costume and other items.

(The fifteen years since Act One have not been kind to him. HE is a bit heavier, but not fat, hair a little thinner, but not bald. But HE is a different man, having been out of the spotlight for much of the ensuing years, rebuilding his career in America. HE is not drunk, but feels the effects of a few drinks.)

PETEY

Hi guys. Sorry to be so late.

FRANKIE

Hi, Pete.

DON

Where have you been? We're live in forty minutes.

PETEY

Of course. But - I brought doughnuts! Doughnuts, Don! You can't resist doughnuts! And a nice sweet iced crueller for my brother. Heh - a crueller for my brother. Write that down for next week, Frank.

DON

Look, I've had just about enough of this, Pete. You were supposed to be here an hour ago. I know you have more important things to do, like drink yourself to death.

PETEY

(angry)

Like you don't every now and then.

DON

Not every day I don't, and not before a show.

PETEY

Don't you moralize to me. I saved your ass fifteen years ago and you've never ever thanked me for it. No appreciation in the least. If it wasn't for me, you'd be swinging from Her Majesty's gallows, birds pecking out your liver. And every night it would grow back, and they'd be at it again, a little liver but no onions on the side. And why? Because you offended the gods! You hear that! You offended the gods!

(PETEY sits down with satisfaction at his makeup table in a corner of the room. HE pours himself a drink, downs it quickly, and then another.

(DON returns to his chair and reads the script over.)

FRANKIE

Pete, why don't you get dressed. You'll feel better.

PETEY

I feel fine. It's him who doesn't. Feel. Fine. Yes.

FRANKIE

I'll get you your script.

PETEY

Thanks, brother. I could always count on you.

(PETEY begins to get undressed, in order to put on his costume - loudly checked and mismatched pants, suspenders, shirt and jacket, and too-large shoes. The effect is clown-like, but not as much as a circus performer.)

FRANKIE

Guess who's on the show today?

PETEY

(hopefully)

Jack Benny? Bob Hope?

FRANKIE

Lilli. You remember Lilli.

PETEY

(totally taken aback for a moment)

Lilli? Your wife?

(recovers himself)

Why, I haven't seen her in years. You've kept her away from me, Frankie.

FRANKIE

She's playing the lion tamer in the circus sketch. It'll be good to work with her again, won't it?

PETEY

Yes. Great to work with her again. I should get dressed.

FRANKIE

Good idea. You need any help?

PETEY

Help with my makeup? Frankie, I'm ashamed of you. If there's one thing an actor knows it's his way around a dressing room. You think just because I'm playing the clown I can't act? Is that it? Say it! You think I'm a fool, a goddamn fool. Well, you listen - you too, Don. What do you think I've been doing? Do you think I've been selling oranges in Shubert Alley? I was playing Shakespeare when you two were playing patty-cake!

(HE pours himself another drink and downs it.)

FRANKIE

Pete, do you really need that?

PETEY

After your insinuations and his lack of gratitude, yes. Yes I do. I don't need it - I deserve it. And give me that goddamn crueller.

(HE takes the crueller and takes a big bite. FRANKIE shakes his head.)

FRANKIE

Don, why don't we give him some time to compose himself.

PETEY

(with crueller in mouth)

I don't need to compose myself! I'm as composed as...a composer! More! I'm composed like Irving Berlin is a composer!

DON

We're on in thirty. Just get yourself ready.

(FRANKIE and DON exit. PETEY spits out the remnants of the crueller. HE is alone.

(By this time, PETEY has undressed down to an undershirt and shorts.

(HE stops, and looks straight out, as if to a mirror.

(HE does a short, jaunty dance, limbering up and trying out part of a routine.

(HE stops dead in the middle, and looks straight again.

(HE has a dour, serious expression on his face. Then, he wipes his hand over his face bottom to top, and comes out grinning. His hand wipes his face top to bottom, and the grin goes away, replaced by the dour, serious expression. HE does this a few more times, faster and faster.

(HE stops, glances around, and finds two or three relatively small but weighty objects lying around - perhaps tins of makeup, or shoe polish. HE begins to juggle them.)

(ELISABETH enters, behind PETEY - who is wrapped up in what he's doing, not expecting her, and juggling in his underwear. SHE stands there out of his vision for a bit, and finally speaks.)

ELISABETH

Hello, Pete.

(At which point HE drops the tins HE's been juggling, and they crash to the floor.)

PETEY

Oh. Hello. Didn't know you were there.

(HE picks up the tins and starts juggling again.)

Always have to keep up the skills, you know.

ELISABETH

You look well.

PETEY

(never taking his eyes off his juggling)

You too.

ELISABETH

I'm sorry. I interrupted your preparations. I remember how important that was to you.

PETEY

It still is. After all these years.

ELISABETH

After all these years.

PETEY

When did I see you last?

ELISABETH

Christmas?

PETEY

No. I was playing a date at the Fisher in Detroit last Christmas. Vaudeville still lives. It was before that. Several years.

ELISABETH

It must have been.

PETEY

Yes. I haven't seen you in several years. We all left Berlin 15 years ago, and I haven't seen you in, oh, probably... *twelve* of them. Why is that, Elisabeth? Why haven't we seen each other for twelve years? When you're married to my brother. *Why is that?*

(Pause.)

ELISABETH

I'll let you get dressed.

(SHE moves to exit.)

PETEY

Don't. Don't go. I need your help. Could you hand me my pants?

ELISABETH

I'll bet you say that to all the girls.

(SHE stays, and HE begins to get dressed.)

PETEY

Not anymore. Petey Lee is a one woman man. And that woman is my craft, the theater. Look on my empire, ye mighty, and despair!

Give us that shirt if you would.

(SHE hands him his shirt.)

Are you happy?

ELISABETH

Oh yes. Most days. Like anyone else. And you?

PETEY

Never better, never better. Back in the saddle again, as Gene Autry sings. I hear Frankie's in your sketch today. It'll be good to have the old gang back together one more time. Like the old days.

(SHE doesn't say anything.)

There was nothing I could do. You know that.

ELISABETH

You could have saved him. He could have been here right now, with all of us. Today!

PETEY

He didn't want to be saved. He told me so.

ELISABETH

What?

PETEY

The note he sent. Here.

(PETEY goes to his wallet and takes out a small folded piece of paper. HE hands it to her.)

He didn't want me to tell you. But after 15 years, he'd forgive me.

ELISABETH

You kept it?

PETEY

I take it wherever I go.

(SHE reads it and hands it back to him.)

ELISABETH

But why?

PETEY

Who knows. Maybe he felt you were better off without him, that he could sacrifice his future for yours, that if they had him they wouldn't look for us. And that check of his kept us alive for two years while I got back on my feet.

ELISABETH

That was his money?

PETEY

And what Frankie had sent to our cousin. We all needed it. You remember - you were in a stage show, Frankie was writing his novel, and I was a bad magician and juggler. I was such a bad magician the rabbit tried to make *me* disappear. I hope I've gotten better since.

ELISABETH

Goddamn you, Pete. What is with you? Half the time I want to kill you and the other half I want to kiss you.

PETEY

At least I've got your attention.

Look, we could have had something, but life gets in the way sometimes. Those two years in Chicago were something.

ELISABETH

Until you found...

PETEY

She never meant anything. I don't even remember her name.

ELISABETH

I do. *Eva*. How ironic for a German emigré.

PETEY

I always did have a sense of the absurd.

ELISABETH

You were a real shit. I don't know that you've changed. And I don't want to know, I don't want to find out. I'll do my lines, and I'll go home with Frank, then I'll go to the theater tonight and hope Mary Martin gets hit by the crosstown bus. I don't want to see you again. Ever. For my sake and yours.

(SHE sees him dressed fully in his costume, except his shoes, and starts laughing, but not meanly, almost lovingly.)

Talk about absurd. You ridiculous son of a bitch.

PETEY

Anything for a laugh these days in this, the best of all possible worlds.

ELISABETH

Put your shoes on.

(HE sits down and SHE hands him his oversized shoes. HE looks at her, and SHE looks at him.

(Pause.)

PETEY

I have a touch of arthritis. I can't bend.

(Another pause, as she sizes him up. SHE then bends down to help him put on and tie his shoes. SHE looks up at him.

(At which point, DON and FRANKIE enter, and ELISABETH quickly gets up.)

FRANKIE

There you are.

(HE kisses her on the cheek, and hands ELISABETH and PETEY their scripts.)

A few minor changes.

ELISABETH

Hello, Don. It's been ages!

(THEY hug.)

DON

Too long. I'm so glad you could do the show. We've been short an actress ever since Janet left for *Brigadoon*.

PETEY

(almost butting in on everyone)

Yes. I hear she only goes on once every hundred years.

(ALL look at him, confused.)

Brigadoon. A mysterious Scottish village which only appears every hundred years.

(Pause.)

It's a joke!

(But THEY ignore him.)

DON

Frankie says you're all moving.

ELISABETH

Well, if everything goes through, we might move to a bigger place in Dutchess County.

FRANKIE

We're trying to adopt. It's a long process, but we've made a start.

DON

Really! I had no idea. That's wonderful. You two deserve it.

ELISABETH

It would be an easy drive down here for my shows on the Taconic. It's totally empty.

DON

Sounds like everything's coming together for you.

(And PETEY barges in.)

PETEY

Yes it is, Don, it most surely is. Look at this - the old gang all back together! All of us good-looking, rich and successful.

(HE joins arms with as many of them as HE can - but the effect is striking. FRANKIE and DON are in suits, ELISABETH is smartly dressed - and PETEY is in baggy pants and clown-like shoes.)

FRANKIE

Lilli, say, do you want to run the opening with me? We can do the circus sketch cold.

ELISABETH

Sure. Well, I'll leave you two together. See you in a few.

(THEY exit.)

(PETEY looks dejected, and slowly goes to his makeup table to apply a little clown face powder and greasepaint eyebrows. HE pours himself a drink and downs it quickly.)

DON

Did you know they were adopting?

PETEY

He never tells me anything anymore.

DON

I thought you two were close.

PETEY

Not really. We never really were. Even as boys. My whole life has been devoted to keeping people from knowing me. I am not Petey Lee - I play the character the world knows as Petey Lee.

DON

Well, we have to talk.

PETEY

That's never good. Nothing good ever came from someone saying "We have to talk."

DON

There's this group out there, and they're trying to rid the business of Communists.

PETEY

You know me, Don. I stay out of politics. Always have, always will.

DON

Bert didn't.

PETEY

Dear old Bert. Always marching, always speaking out. I told him to stay out of politics, out of the satirical world of the Berlin cabarets. They certainly prevented the Second World War, didn't they.

DON

Bert went to meetings. They were Communist meetings.

PETEY

They were anti-Fascist meetings.

DON

Run by Communists.

PETEY

Don, you remember. There was no middle ground - you were one or the other.

DON

That's not going to fly for you. Not here, not now.

PETEY

Back then, you had to choose a side, and I chose the less objectionable side. I didn't want to, but how could I not?

DON

You went to meetings.

PETEY

I had a watered-down drink with a few people at a party.

DON

You signed a goddamn petition!

(HE slaps a copy of the printed
petition from Act One on the table.
PETEY looks it over.)

PETEY

Look - they misspelled Peter Lorre. I'll bet he was angry.

DON

At the bottom. The Red Front Fighters' League.

PETEY

I signed it for artistic freedom.

DON

You signed it because everyone else did. Because you
thought it would do you good. And you made Frankie and
Lilli sign, too.

PETEY

But not you.

DON

No. Not me.

PETEY

Yes. You've always been able to bet on the winning side.
So. What do you want me to do? Erase the past? Say that
period of my life - our lives - never happened?

DON

I want you to write a letter of apology to the newspapers.

PETEY

A letter of apology?

DON

Give it to me by tomorrow morning. I'll deliver it. I know the columnists who'd print it. You also need to say who else was at the meetings.

PETEY

We all were - me, Bert, Frankie and Lilli.

DON

I could plead your case to management to keep your show, but only if you give them their names. And we'd have to let them go.

PETEY

And if I don't?

DON

You're gone. No more show. Out of my hands.

PETEY

What about Frankie and Lilli?

DON

I could probably keep them out of it. Find them a new show. Keep things quiet. Personally, I'll be fine. I'd easily find another show to produce. I could save their careers, but you'd never be on the radio again.

Can I have your assurance that you'll write the letter?

PETEY

I can't say. I'll make no bargain with you or them.

DON

You? You're turning political? You're turning noble all of a sudden?

PETEY

I've lived my life in such a manner that I have nothing to apologize for. Now go away. This is becoming a battle of wits, and it is against my principles to fight an unarmed man.

DON

Study your script. We're live in five minutes.

(DON exits, and PETEY pours himself a drink and downs it quickly. HE puts on the last of his costume - a jaunty, too small hat.)

PETEY

Well, Petey, time to make magic again.

(FADE OUT to jaunty circus music.

(Light change, and as in Act One soon see DON, PETEY, ELISABETH, and FRANKIE all gathered around a studio microphone of the 1940s, scripts in hand. THEY are in the middle of a show.)

DON

Welcome back, kids. How are you doing, Petey?

PETEY

I'm just thrilled to be here, Captain Don. I'm happy to be here for all the kids out there! Hi, kids! Your old Uncle Petey's back back back!

DON

Where are we going today, Petey?

PETEY

We have a special trip today, kids. We're going to the happiest place on earth!

DON

I know what that would be!

PETEY

(off-script)

You're out of luck, Don. We went to the brewery last week. Petey's just joking, kids!

(back on script)

We're going to - the circus! Yes, the circus, with lions and tigers and elephants and clowns, and acrobats and jugglers and hot dogs and cotton candy and sodas and lots of good stuff. And you know who I'm taking? I'm taking you! That's right - we're all going to the circus. But first, we

have to get there - and we're gonna go by the city bus. How many of you kids ride the bus to school? Well, Petey rides the bus everywhere, because the judge took Petey's driver's license away for going 60 in a 35. So let's all walk to the bus stop now...

(Sounds of relatively modern car horns, then an old 1920s "a-oo-gah" horn.)

Sounds like someone's driving a Maxwell.

Here's the bus stop. Lots of people waiting for the bus.

(Sounds of a bus stopping.)

And here it comes now.

PETEY

Hello, Mister Bus Driver!

DON

(as the bus driver)

Hello, young man. Hey, ain't you that fella from the radio?

PETEY

Why, I sure am, Mister Bus Driver. How much is it to ride the bus?

DON

For you, nuttin'. You're welcome on my bus anytime!

PETEY

That's certainly kind of you, Mister Bus Driver.

DON

Say, can I get your autograph for my kids?

PETEY

I'd be honored.

(PETEY mimes signing something.)

"To My Favorite Bus Driver, Keep those wheels rollin'! Your friend, Petey Lee." Here.

DON

Petey Lee? I thought you wuz Charlie McCarthy!

PETEY

But he's a dummy!

DON

There's a close resemblance! Put a nickel in the box and take a seat.

PETEY

Oh, all right.

(Sound of a nickel dropping into the farebox.)

Sometimes public transportation isn't all it's cracked up to be, is it kids? But we're going to the circus!

(FRANKIE lightly jiggles a set of bells.)

What's that, kids? It's the ice cream man! Just outside the bus! Let me open the window a little...

(HE shouts outside:)

Hi, Mister Ice Cream Man! You have any ice cream for me?

FRANKIE

(as ice cream man, in a thick Italian accent)

Anything for you, Petey! What flavor you want?

PETEY

Ooooh, do you have chocolate, Mister Ice Cream Man?

FRANKIE

No chocolate today, Petey, only pistachio.

PETEY

Only pistachio? You're not a very good ice cream man.

FRANKIE

And you're a bratty little kid!

PETEY

That's all right, kids. I didn't want ice cream anyway. Actually, Petey's on a diet.

FRANKIE

(as bus driver)

All off for the circus!

PETEY

We made it, kids! We're at the circus. Thank you, Mister Bus Driver.

FRANKIE

Get a move on, kid! Stop holdin' the line up! I got four more routes to run this morning!

PETEY

Gee, some people take no pleasure from their jobs, isn't that right, kids. But here we are the circus! And look kids, there's Circus Master Don! Hi, Circus Master Don!

DON

Hi, Petey! What brings you to the circus?

PETEY

The bus!

(Pause.)

Well, I thought it was funny.

DON

It was - fifteen years ago!

PETEY

Say, Circus Master Don, what do you do here at the circus?

DON

I have this microphone that can be heard all over the circus. Everyone's listening to me. And I introduce all the acts - the clowns, the lion tamers, the jugglers, the acrobats, the elephants. I know them all, and they're all my friends.

PETEY

That sounds like a great job, Circus Master Don. Can I get a job like that?

DON

Maybe when you're a little older.

PETEY

(dejected)

Oh. I can wait.

DON

You may have to wait a long time to get a job like that, Petey.

PETEY

Say, Circus Master Don, can you introduce me to the lion tamer? That's an exciting job, being a lion tamer.

DON

Why, of course! Here she is - Lilli, the Lion Tamer!

ELISABETH

Hello, Petey.

PETEY

But you're a girl! That's silly! Girls can't be lion tamers!

ELISABETH

Why not?

PETEY

Lion tamers have to be big and strong. Boys are big and strong, not girls.

ELISABETH

We may not be big and strong like boys, but we can tame lions just as well. Watch, Petey! Come here, Lottie. Petey, this is Lottie. She's just a cub.

PETEY

Hey - that's a lion!

ELISABETH

That's what a lion tamer does. I work with lions.

PETEY

You...you do? Aren't you afraid?

ELISABETH

I used to work with snakes. Lions are much easier. You can make a lion your friend. You can never tell what a snake will do. Would you like to pet her, Petey?

PETEY

Uh, do you have a nice little pussycat anywhere?

ELISABETH

But Lottie is like a nice little pussycat. Here, I'll take your hand. Just stroke her back nice and slowly, nice and slowly.

PETEY

Her fur is very soft.

ELISABETH

Yes it is.

PETEY

Lion Tamer Lilli, how big will she get?

ELISABETH

She's just a baby now, Petey. She needs love and care. But when she grows, she'll bigger than you or me. Isn't that amazing, Petey. Did you ever see a baby, a little newborn baby? They grow up to be as big as...

(ELISABETH chokes up a bit.)

They...they grow up really big.

(PETEY looks at her, out of character, and holds for a bit, then looks back at his script.)

PETEY

She's...she's really very beautiful.

ELISABETH

Listen - she's purring like a housecat. She'll be asleep soon. You're not scared anymore, Petey, are you?

PETEY

No, Lion Tamer Lilli, I'm not scared. I'm not scared.

FRANKIE

(in a deep, growling but not unfriendly voice)

Lilli? Who is this young man?

PETEY

I'm Petey. Who are you?

FRANKIE

I'm Frankie. The strong man.

PETEY

Oooh, I better not mess with you!

FRANKIE

I'm a friendly strong man, Petey. Aren't I, Lilli?

ELISABETH

The friendliest I know. That's why I married you!

PETEY

What tricks can you do, Mister Strong Man? Can you lift heavy things?

FRANKIE

Why sure, Petey. I can lift you over my head, and Lilli too!

PETEY

At the same time?

FRANKIE

Here, watch me!

(PETEY and ELISABETH act as if FRANKIE is lifting them up. ELISABETH is calm, but PETEY gets increasingly afraid.)

PETEY

Okay, Mister Strong Man, I get your point. Say, I can see the Bronx from up here! Uh, Mister Strong Man, could you put me down? *Please?*

(FRANKIE does. ELISABETH and especially PETEY relax.)

ELISABETH

You see why I married him, Petey? He's the strongest, most considerate man I've ever known.

FRANKIE

Maybe one day, when you grow up, you'll marry someone like Lion Tamer Lilli.

PETEY

I hope so! Thanks, Mister Strong Man! And I'll always remember you, Lion Tamer Lilli, and you, Lottie the beautiful little lion cub with the soft fur.

(Pause.)

I think it's time for me to get the bus back home.

FRANKIE and ELISABETH
(together)

Bye, Petey!

PETEY

I had a great time at the circus - didn't you, kids? Now let's see, here's the bus stop. I hope I don't get that same nasty bus driver.

DON
(as bus driver)

You again!

PETEY

Oh, hello Mister Bus Driver. I just had a great time at the circus.

DON

Yeah yeah yeah, and I just danced the light fandango with Joe Dimaggio. You got a nickel for the fare?

PETEY

Sure. Gee, some people know how to rain on a parade. Well, kids, I'll meet you back in a few minutes!

DON

(as announcer)

Kids, Petey will be back with his good night story at the end of the show. But now, please welcome your favorite Western buckeroos, Monterey Mike and His California Caballeros!

(We hear some Western swing music, like Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys, as we FADE OUT...)

(...and soon come up on Petey's office and dressing room, a minute or so later. PETEY is alone at his dressing table.)

(HE takes a drink, and leans back. HE takes another.)

PETEY

Well, that went well.

(HE takes another.)

(HE takes two makeup tins from his desk and juggles them.)

(HE goes to the larger desk, takes out a piece of paper, and starts to write. HE stops. HE starts to write again, and soon crumples up the paper and throws it away.)

(HE gets a new sheet of paper, starts writing, stops, crumples it up and throws it away.)

(HE goes and gets another drink, takes a sip, and brings it with him to the desk.)

(HE gets a third sheet and starts writing, but is interrupted.)

BERT

You don't want to do that.

(Unbeknownst to PETEY, BERT has entered. HE is dressed exactly as we saw him last, and HE has not aged. Is HE a ghost? Is HE a figment of PETEY's imagination?)

PETEY

If I want to keep my job I...

(And HE stops dead.)

Bert? Is it you?

BERT

(as Mrs. Goldbloom from Act One)

You wuz expecting mebbe Mahatma Goniff?

PETEY

Is it really you?

BERT

It's me.

PETEY

But I thought you...

BERT

Don't worry about that now. It's all in the past. The long-ago, far-away past. Almost like a fairy tale. A big bad wolf came to get the three little pigs. Four if we count you.

PETEY

Are you back for Lilli?

BERT

You must never mention you saw me to her. She has a new life with a good man. Beginning a family. It's what she deserves.

PETEY

Only the best for her.

BERT

Yes. Only the best for Lilli.

PETEY

Thanks for the money.

BERT

It was the least I could do.

PETEY

Would you like a drink?

(BERT chuckles.)

BERT

That's not necessary.

(Pause.)

PETEY

Help me, Bert. You were always there for me. I respected you. Help me.

BERT

Like you helped me?

(Pause.)

Sorry. I take that back. You did what you had to do. You did what I told you to do. You protected Frank. And her. And by protecting others, you save yourself.

PETEY

What would you do?

BERT

What would Petey Lee do? More important - what would you do?

(PETEY takes a drink.)

You won't find the answer there.

(FRANKIE sticks his head in the door,
but does not acknowledge BERT.)

FRANKIE

You're on in two minutes for your story, Pete.

PETEY

Thanks, brother.

(This registers oddly on FRANKIE's
face, and he begins to close the door,
until...)

Say, Frankie?

FRANKIE

(slightly exasperated, given the time
and that he's in the middle of live
broadcast)

Yes?

PETEY

Congratulations.

FRANKIE

For what?

PETEY

For everything. For your new family. For being alive.

FRANKIE

(shakes his head)

Two minutes.

(And HE closes the door.)

BERT

You know what to do?

PETEY

I think so. I think know what *not* to do.

BERT

Good luck.

PETEY

You too. Will I see you again?

BERT

You'll see me on the radio.

PETEY

I should get out there.

BERT

Yes. Time to make magic again.

PETEY

(steeling himself)

Yes it is. Time to make magic again.

(PETEY exits, as we crossfade to the radio studio, with DON holding a script. PETEY is next to him, with a script, which HE doesn't look at. FRANKIE and ELISABETH are behind them.)

DON

Kids, this is Captain Don. We've had a great time with our Purity Baking friends, but now it's time for us to go. But first, here's your old pal, the clown with the crown and the funniest man in town, Petey Lee, with a goodnight message. Petey?

PETEY

Hi, kids. It's your old friend Petey speaking. We had a lot of fun today at the circus, meeting Lilli the lion tamer and her beautiful lion cub, and the big strong man who lifted me higher than I ever thought anyone could.

I even liked that mean old bus driver and the ice cream man.

But what I liked most of all was sharing it with you at home.

We've been having fun and going on adventures for seven years now.

Some of you have been with me for all that time, and some of you aren't even seven years old yet.

But you're all my friends, my best friends, and I love you all dearly.

I need to tell you that Petey may not be here next week.

And it's not because I don't love you all. I do.

But sometimes, kids, sometimes, people have to do things they don't really want to but they know they should.

Like when your mom says you have to eat your spinach or else you won't grow up big and strong.

You know you should eat it, and do what your mom says, but you look at it and say no, I don't wanna.

And then there's times when it's easy to go along with what other people want you to do, but you know it's wrong, and you shouldn't do it, and you know if you do, you'll regret it the rest of your life.

Not that any of you kids know anything about regret, or can even think of the rest of your lives.

Maybe you're only seven years old.

But one day, you'll be older, like your mom or your dad, and you'll think back to when you were a kid.

And you'll remember a time when you said something that wasn't very nice, or did something to hurt a friend.

And you won't forget it, and you'll try to find a way to fix it. But really, there isn't any way to fix it.

Maybe you all don't understand. That's okay.

But there's one thing I always want you to remember. And it's that I love you all.

So, this is your friend Petey saying goodbye for tonight.

And what do I say to you every week?

The best thing you can do - the absolutely best thing you can do - is to make someone smile. So long, kids.

(HE drops his script, and exits slowly. The rest of the cast take a few seconds to collect themselves. DON motions for the music to start again, and we hear more Western swing.)

DON

(ending the show)

The Purity Baking Hour, with your friend Petey Lee, was brought to you by the Purity Baking Company, bakers of the purest bread in town. Stay tuned for the news over most of these Mutual stations.

(Music fades, and lights cross fade to PETEY's office. HE is changing back to his street clothes, and filling a suitcase with personal things from the office.

(HE pours himself a drink, and drinks. HE tries to pour himself another, but there's very little left. HE holds the bottle high as the drops dribble out, and even shakes it a few times.)

PETEY

(talking to the bottle)

Looks like we're both finished, old boy.

(Raises the glass)

Prost.

(HE drinks what's left.)

(ELISABETH enters.)

ELISABETH

(quietly)

Hello, Pete.

PETEY

Hello. Well, this is the second time you've seen me without my pants. Third if you count that night in Cologne.

(Pause.)

ELISABETH

Don told me the situation. I want to thank you.

PETEY

Nothing to thank me for. I was getting tired of putting the little bastards to sleep every night anyway. There's only so many times you can go to the circus, or the zoo, or the pet store. Or only so many ways my brother can write it.

ELISABETH

So what will you do? Where will you go?

PETEY

Maybe back to Germany. Work the music halls again like I did with Bert. I hear they're starving. For entertainment.

ELISABETH

That's a big move.

PETEY

I'll get by. I'm a survivor.

ELISABETH

You certainly are.

(SHE kisses him on the cheek.)

Take care, Pete.

PETEY

You too. Tell Frankie goodbye for me.

ELISABETH

You won't see him?

PETEY

You tell him. I...I might just slip out. Go home, make arrangements, and leave quietly. Probably better that way for everyone.

(SHE begins to leave.)

I hope Mary Martin gets some bad oysters so you can go on one night. I know the maitre d' at Sardi's. Perhaps I could make a call.

(SHE smiles.)

ELISABETH

Bye, Pete.

(HE sits down at his dressing table, picks up a few of his things, and looks them over.

(Suddenly, HE shoves them all to the floor noisily with a swipe of his arm.

(All except his hat. He picks up it, laughs, puts it on, and looks in the mirror.

(HE crumples it up, thinks about throwing it in a waste basket, but instead stuffs it into a pocket. HE is, by now, fully dressed.

(HE takes his case, opens the door, and walks out.

(Pause.

(The door opens, and the hat comes flying back into the office, where it lands on the floor.

(The door slams shut loudly.)

END OF ACT TWO

END OF PLAY

A note on the history of the play

Petey's Parade takes place during two culturally explosive and fascinating periods in world history – Weimar Germany, specifically Berlin before the Nazis took power, and the American Red Scare, fifteen years later, where Communists, socialists and their so-called “fellow travelers” were named and denied work in their fields, most famously in show business. It also takes its lead from a number of now obscure actors, comedians and television hosts. While times and places mix and flow freely in the play, some characters and events are rooted in historical fact.

Act One: Pre-War Berlin

Berlin in the 1920s and early 1930s was a cosmopolitan city, but one with mounting problems. Unemployment was high, jobs were scarce, and inflation was notoriously steep – those famous photos of Berliners buying loaves of bread with wheelbarrows of near-worthless Deutsche Marks were real. Germany had lost World War One, and the reparations it was forced to pay by the Treaty of Versailles, among other political and economic policies, hobbled its economy. Feeding on this anxiety were the Nazis and their “brownshirts,” gangs of brutal enforcers loyal only to the party, not to the nation.

But in spite of this tumult – or perhaps because of it – culture of the highest ranks flowed through Berlin. Jazz bands filled the nightclubs. Theater saw the works of playwright Bertolt Brecht, his collaborator, composer Kurt Weill, and the Berliner Ensemble. The new medium of film, bolstered by the leading German studio Ufa, saw such seminal works as Fritz Lang's *M*, G.W. Pabst's *Pandora's Box* and *Lulu*, F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* and Robert Weine's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*.

Act Two: 1940s New York

By the end of the 1940s, World War Two was over. Germany and the Axis powers were vanquished, and with Europe trying to rebuild and recover from the war's devastation, America was the world's economic and cultural powerhouse, and its capital in all but legal sense was New York. This was a New York where men wore hats, new roads made living in the outer suburbs possible, and confidence abounded.

In the 1940s, every city had their own clown or kiddie radio host, usually an Uncle This or a Captain That. The programs were seat-of-the-pants, low budget, and barely produced at all. These programs were a ghetto from which few if any performers could escape. One of them, albeit for a national audience, was hosted by Pinky Lee, a former vaudeville and burlesque comic. Born Pincus Leff in St. Paul, Minnesota, his tight checkered suit and too-small hat became the influence for other kids show hosts, and most famously, for Pee Wee Herman. But once a kids show host, always a kids show host. By the 1950s, many of these programs and performers had migrated to local television.

But New York in the 1940s also had an underbelly. Nominally in response to the rise of the Soviet Union, a move to rid show business of any Communist influence wound its way through Hollywood, radio and television, eventually leading to the inquiries of Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s. The House Un-American Activities Committee, known as HUAC, in cooperation with leading Hollywood and other entertainment executives, began to call writers, directors and actors to testify about their political leanings, and to pressure them to implicate others – to “name names.” Those names would be put on an informal blacklist of entertainers who would be denied employment. One such list was *Red Channels*, which noted the radio and television performers who were suspected of being Communists. There were many cases where anti-Nazi sentiments in the 1930s were later seen as pro-Communist in the 1940s.