

**LUCY LOVES DESI:**  
A FUNNY THING HAPPENED  
ON THE WAY TO THE SITCOM  
— *A Live Radio Play*

*By Gregg Oppenheimer*

*Music written and performed by Doug Walter*

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
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LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

*LUCY LOVES DESI* is largely based on the book *Laughs, Luck...and Lucy: How I Came to Create the Most Popular Sitcom of All Time*, by Jess Oppenheimer with Gregg Oppenheimer (Syr. Univ. Press, 1996), which Gregg Oppenheimer completed after his father passed away in 1988. The play premiered in Los Angeles at UCLA's James Bridges Theatre in 2018, as *I Love Lucy: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom*, in an L.A. Theatre Works production recorded in front of an audience and broadcast on public radio. Directed by Michael Hackett, LATW's world premiere production featured Sarah Drew (*Grey's Anatomy*) as Lucille Ball, Oscar Nuñez (*The Office*) as Desi Arnaz, Seamus Dever (*Castle*) as Jess Oppenheimer, Ron Bottitta as William Frawley and others, Matthew Floyd Miller as Don Sharpe and others, and Abigail Marks as Vivian Vance and others. The full-cast recording is available from *LATW.org*, *Amazon.com*, and *Audible.com*. The play's first production under its new title—*LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom*—was produced by Jarvis & Ayres Productions for the BBC, which broadcast it in the UK on BBC Radio 4 in August of 2020. The BBC production, directed by Martin Jarvis OBE, featured Anne Heche as Lucille Ball, Wilmer Valderamma as Desi Arnaz, Jared Harris as Jess Oppenheimer, Stacy Keach as William Frawley, Alfred Molina as Harry Ackerman, and Mike McShane as Hubbell Robinson. L.A. Theatre Works completed a successful 21-city U.S. national tour of the play in March of 2023.

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**CAST OF CHARACTERS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)**

DESI ARNAZ – Cuban-born bandleader, singer, actor, and husband of Lucille Ball. He is in his mid-30s.

“LIZ” – Lucille Ball’s role on her CBS radio sitcom, *My Favorite Husband*.

“GEORGE” – Liz’s husband. Richard Denning’s role on *My Favorite Husband*.

BOB LeMOND – the announcer on *My Favorite Husband*.

JESS OPPENHEIMER – head writer, producer and director of *My Favorite Husband*, and creator, head writer and producer of *I Love Lucy*. In his late 30s.

LUCILLE BALL (“LUCY”) – star of films and the CBS radio sitcom *My Favorite Husband*. She is in her late 30s.

BETTY GARRETT – a 30-year-old stage and film actress and friend of Lucy’s.

RICHARD DENNING – a film and radio actor, playing Lucille Ball’s husband on her CBS radio sitcom, *My Favorite Husband*. He is in his mid-30s.

WILLIAM S. PALEY – CBS’s Chairman of the Board and CEO. In his late 40s.

HARRY ACKERMAN – CBS VP in Charge of West Coast Programs.

HUBBELL ROBINSON – CBS Executive VP in Charge of Programming.

DON SHARPE – talent agent for Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz. (*He’s a brash, high-energy, fast-talking salesman, like “Jerry”—Ricky’s agent on I Love Lucy.*)

RALPH LEVY – director of the *I Love Lucy* pilot and such live television shows as *The Ed Wynn Show* and *The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show*.

MERCEDES MANZANARES (“MERCE”) – Jess Oppenheimer’s assistant and casting director for *My Favorite Husband* & *I Love Lucy*. She is in her early 30s.

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

MILTON BIOW – head of The Biow Company—one of the country’s largest advertising agencies. He is in his late 50s.

MARTIN LEEDS – an attorney, CBS’s Director of Business Affairs.

OPERATOR – a female long-distance telephone operator. (*The voice of the Operator can be pre-recorded or performed live.*)

MARY – Hubbell Robinson’s secretary at CBS’s New York headquarters office.

TED – a CBS executive in the New York headquarters office.

WILLIAM FRAWLEY – a Broadway stage and film actor. He is in his mid-60s.

MARC DANIELS – director of the first season of *I Love Lucy* and, before that, network TV programs broadcast live from New York.

VIVIAN VANCE – a Broadway stage and film actress, in her early 40s. (*Vivian acts and speaks much like her TV character, “Ethel Mertz”.*)

STAGEHAND (*male or female*) – a stagehand at the La Jolla Playhouse.

PARKER McCOMAS – President of cigarette maker Philip Morris, Inc., *I Love Lucy*’s sponsor. He is in his late 50s.

EDDIE FELDMAN – a West Coast representative for The Biow Company.

CLERGYMAN #1 – Rev. Clifton E. Moore of the Hollywood Presbyterian Church.

CLERGYMAN #2 – Rabbi Alfred Wolf of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple.

CLERGYMAN #3 – Monsignor John Devlin, founder of the Legion of Decency.

DR. HARRIS – Lucille Ball’s obstetrician, who delivers her son, Desi, Jr.

“COLONEL” ROBERT R. McCORMICK – the powerful owner-publisher of *The Chicago Tribune*. He is in his early 70s.

PRESENTER (*male or female*) – Award presenter announcing *I Love Lucy* as the winner of the Emmy Award for Best Situation Comedy of 1952.

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**CHARACTER BREAKDOWN**

8 to 29 actors possible (2 to 7 female, 6 to 24 male). 6 female characters, 21 male, 2 either male or female. The following breakdown is for 8 actors (2 female, 6 male):

1. LUCY/“LIZ”
2. VIVIAN VANCE, BETTY GARRETT, MERCE, MARY
3. DESI ARNAZ
4. JESS OPPENHEIMER
5. HARRY ACKERMAN, STAGEHAND, DR. HARRIS
6. RICHARD DENNING/“GEORGE”, DON SHARPE, RALPH LEVY, MARC DANIELS, MILTON BIOW, EDDIE FELDMAN, CLERGYMAN #1
7. BOB LeMOND, HUBBELL, CLERGYMAN #2, PRESENTER
8. WILLIAM S. PALEY, MARTIN LEEDS, TED, WILLIAM FRAWLEY, PARKER McCOMAS, CLERGYMAN #3, McCORMICK

*Actor entrances and exits indicated in this script are without regard to doubling.*

The voice of a female TELEPHONE OPERATOR is also used and can be pre-recorded or performed live. The voices of the STAGEHAND and DR. HARRIS can also be pre-recorded rather than performed live.

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**TIME.** March 1949 to February 1953.

**SETTING.** Offices, radio & TV studios, theater, hotel ballrooms, the Arnaz home.

*Note: This is a radio play, requiring no sets—just mics, mounted on mic stands, and upstage chairs for the actors to sit in when not performing. (See discussion below.)*

**NOTES ON PRODUCTION.** While the play is based on a true story involving real people and events, the pacing and characterizations should be reminiscent of an episode of *I Love Lucy*. For example, Lucy’s conversation with Betty Garrett in Scene 1A should play like a conversation between Lucy Ricardo and Ethel Mertz.

**Pronunciation Guide**

*DESI ARNAZ:* Desi says “Arnazz” (rhymes with “jazz”). Everyone else says “Arnezz” (rhymes with “fez”).

*JESS OPPENHEIMER:* First syllable rhymes with “hop,” not “hope.”

*RALPH LEVY:* “Leevy.”

*MADELYN PUGH:* “Pew.”

*MILTON BIOW:* Pronounced “B.O.” with emphasis on the first syllable.

*MEL FERRER (Scene 13A).* Pronounced “Fur-rare” with emphasis on 2nd syllable.

**Microphones, Scripts**

*LUCY LOVES DESI* takes place from 1949 to 1953 and may be performed in the manner of radio broadcasts of the period: The actors speak their lines into mics mounted on fixed mic stands, reading from scripts they hold in front of them. Alternatively, it can be performed off book, which will permit greater freedom of movement and more physical interaction between the actors. But whether on or off book, the actors should deliver their lines at stationary mics mounted on stands. If performed *off* book,

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

then “LIZ,” “GEORGE” and LeMOND should hold 8.5"x11" *prop* “radio scripts” during the radio broadcast depicted in Scene 1A, and should appear to be reading their *My Favorite Husband* lines from those scripts.

Whenever a character’s dialogue is designated by “**(Filter)**” it is suggested that, if possible, the EQ of the mic in question be adjusted to cut off high and low frequency sounds to simulate the sound of a telephone line or intercom. (Or the actor may speak into a glass or tin can.) It may be useful to have one or two dedicated mics located upstage, used only for such dialogue. For **Filter** dialogue also designated “*(Studio Talkback)*” (Scenes 1A and 7B), reverb may also be added to simulate P.A. system acoustics. Reverb may also be added to COLONEL McCORMICK’s speech (Scene 20A) and the Emmy Awards speeches (Scene 21A), to simulate the acoustics of a large ballroom.

### **Music and Effects**

*LUCY LOVES DESI* is designed to be performed with recorded music cues (licensed together with the script), plus a combination of recorded sound effects (*e.g.*, applause) and live sound effects created by a Sound Effects Artist at an onstage sound effects table (which may be located on an upstage riser for increased visibility). In lieu of a dedicated Sound Effects Artist for live sound effects, cast members may take turns providing the live sound effects when not otherwise engaged, which will add movement to the performance. Making the sounds in as visual a manner as possible adds another visual aspect. Alternatively, recorded cues may be used for *all* sound effects. The following is a list of the sound effects:



LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**SOUND EFFECTS (FX)**

DOORBELL

DOOR OPENS, CLOSES

EMMY AWARDS AUDIENCE APPLAUSE AND CHEERS

EMMY AWARDS ENVELOPE RIPPED OPEN

HOTEL BALLROOM PARTY CROWD NOISE, APPLAUSE AND CHEERS

INTERCOM BUZZER

KNOCKING ON DOOR

NEWBORN BABY CRYING

PAPERS RUSTLING

PUTTING DRINK GLASS DOWN ON TABLE

RESTAURANT AMBIENCE

STUDIO AUDIENCE AND THEATRE AUDIENCE RUMBLE AND APPLAUSE

TELEPHONE HANGS UP, TWO TELEPHONES HANG UP

TELEPHONE DIALING (ROTARY DIAL), RINGING, PICKUP

TELEPHONE RECEIVER PICKED UP FROM COUNTER

TELEPHONE INTERCOM BUTTON PUSHED

TELEPHONE CLICK AT OTHER END OF LINE

TELEPHONE RINGING, PICK UP AND HANG UP AT OTHER END OF LINE

“WALTER WINCHELL NEWSCAST”-STYLE RAPID TELEGRAPH KEY TAPPING

**RECORDED MUSIC CUES PROVIDED WITH THE LICENSING OF THE  
SCRIPT:**

MUSIC 1. LATIN INSTRUMENTAL (“YOU NEVER KNOW”)

MUSIC 2. TAG INTRO

MUSIC 3. THEME (“AVALON”)

MUSIC 4. JACK BENNY THEME (“YANKEE DOODLE DANDY”)

MUSIC 5. BRIDGE

MUSIC 6. TV VARIETY THEME

MUSIC 7. BRIDGE

MUSIC 8. BRIDGE

MUSIC 9. MELANCHOLY UNDERSCORING

MUSIC 10. BRIDGE

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

MUSIC 11. BRIDGE

MUSIC 12. BRIDGE

MUSIC 13. BRIDGE

MUSIC 14. BRIDGE (“TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALL GAME”)

MUSIC 15. BRIDGE

MUSIC 16. BRIDGE

MUSIC 17. BRIDGE

MUSIC 18. BRIDGE

MUSIC 19. BRIDGE

MUSIC 20. BRIDGE

MUSIC 21. BRIDGE (“TIME PASSING”)

MUSIC 22. BAND PLAYS A SHORT FANFARE

MUSIC 23. THEME (“AVALON”)

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**Staging, Sets, Props, Lighting, and Wardrobe**

The play is designed so that it can be performed in the manner of a 1950s radio program, with all actors remaining onstage throughout the performance, “exiting” from the microphones to their seats in a row of upstage chairs when not in a scene. If desired, however, the actors may actually enter and exit the stage instead of rising from and returning to upstage chairs. There are no sets or props (unless the performance is off book, in which case prop radio scripts should be used for the *My Favorite Husband* broadcast depicted in Scene 1A). Some productions have elected to project still images above and behind the actors to suggest scene settings. No lighting changes are required (but if desired, extensive lighting cues may be utilized). All actors may remain in the same business suits and dresses throughout. However, if wardrobe changes are desired, here are some suggestions:

**1. DESI ARNAZ: Scenes 1-3 and 21 (as Narrator) and Scene 21A (at the Emmy Awards):** black tuxedo or suit jacket, black bowtie, white dress shirt, black dress pants and shoes; **Scenes 4-20:** period gray sport jacket and a necktie.

**2. LUCILLE BALL / “LIZ”:** Scenes 1A, 3, 5A, 15A and 15B: period dress; **Scenes 9A and 11A:** period “at home” maternity clothes; **Scene 16A:** period full-length dressing gown; **Scene 21A:** period formal dress or gown.

**3. CLERGYMAN #3 (Monsignor Devlin) (Scene 16C):** black suit, white dress shirt, black clerical vest, clerical collar.

**4. McCORMICK (Scene 20A):** black tuxedo or suit, dress shirt, black bowtie.

**5. BETTY GARRETT (Scene 1A):** period dress (or skirt & blouse) and overcoat.

**6. MERCE, MARY:** Period dress (or skirt and blouse) and a cardigan sweater.

**7. WILLIAM FRAWLEY (Scene 12B):** period business suit and necktie, with the pants worn very high and the necktie tucked into them.

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

- 8. VIVIAN VANCE (Scene 13C):** period full-length dressing gown.
- 9. DR. HARRIS (Scene 19A):** suit pants, necktie, white “doctor’s coat”
- 10. JESS OPPENHEIMER: Scenes 1-18:** period business suit and necktie; **Scene 19A:** no jacket or tie, collar unbuttoned.
- 11. PRESENTER (Scene 21A):** *if male:* black tuxedo or suit, white dress shirt, black bowtie; *if female:* formal period dress or gown
- 12. HARRY ACKERMAN, MILTON BIOW, CLERGY #1, CLERGY #2, MARC DANIELS, RICHARD DENNING/ “GEORGE”, EDDIE FELDMAN, BOB LeMOND, MARTIN LEEDS, RALPH LEVY, WILLIAM S. PALEY, TED, HUBBELL ROBINSON, DON SHARPE:** period business suit and necktie.

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**PLAYWRIGHT’S NOTE**

Everyone knows *I Love Lucy*, the hilarious 1950s sitcom showcasing the unique comedic genius of Lucille Ball. Some also recognize it as one of the most popular and influential TV shows ever, breaking new ground with multi-ethnic stars, on-air portrayal of pregnancy, innovative film production techniques, and the invention of the rerun. But few know the story *behind* all of that—how a small group of talented people combined ingenuity, serendipity, and sheer determination to succeed in the face of daunting obstacles.

When *I Love Lucy* made its debut, the most common TV fare was music, variety, and sketch comedy. As Bob Hope quipped at the time, “When vaudeville died, television was the box they put it in.” But after the *I Love Lucy* phenomenon, scripted comedies and dramas began to fill the airwaves. Movie stars who had viewed TV with disdain signed up to star in their own television series. And TV production rapidly moved from the television studios of New York to the sound stages of Hollywood, to produce shows using Desilu’s TV film production techniques.

With the benefit of hindsight, it’s easy to appreciate *I Love Lucy*’s enduring impact. But at the time, the long term was the farthest thing from anyone’s mind. As my father later recalled, “We were an eager and innocent crew, embarking on a trip in a medium about which we knew nothing. None of us had any inkling of the high-flying success that lay ahead. We were all just deliriously knocking ourselves out to put the show on the air.”

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I’d like to thank my technical advisor, Lucie Arnaz, for her invaluable input as the script went through its many iterations. I’m grateful as well to Marshall Goldberg and my wife, Debbie, for the many insightful editing suggestions each of them offered along the way.

– Gregg Oppenheimer

# LUCY LOVES DESI: A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE SITCOM — *A Live Radio Play*

## SCENE 1

*Desi, as narrator, speaks to the theatre audience.*

**DESI.** (*Cuban accent.*) You know why “I Love Lucy” was created? Lucy an’ I wanted to start a family. An’ the only way we could do it was to work on somethin’ together. That’s the whole reason. (*Beat.*) So now you know the why. But the *how*... (*Little chuckle.*) Now *that’s* a funny story. But don’t worry, Amigos. I’m gonna ’splain the whole thin’. (*Beat.*) OK, cue my orchestra.

**MUSIC 1.** *LATIN INSTRUMENTAL (“YOU NEVER KNOW”), FADING SLIGHTLY AT :09 AND CONTINUING UNDER...*

**DESI.** (*As music fades slightly.*) In 1949 both of our careers were going pretty good. My records were sellin’, an’ my ban’ was so popular that we were on tour most of the time. Meanwhile, Lucy was in Hollywood makin’ pictures an’ starrin’ in a radio show call’ “My Favorite Husban’.” (*Desi exits.*)

**FX.** *STUDIO AUDIENCE APPLAUSE, FADING IN UNDER LAST FEW WORDS OF DESI’S NARRATION AND FADING OUT SHORTLY AFTER MUSIC BEGINS.*

**MUSIC 2.** (*AFTER 2 OR 3 SECS OF APPLAUSE.*) *TAG INTRO, CONTINUING UNDER...*

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**SCENE 1A**

*A radio studio in CBS Columbia Square, Hollywood. LUCILLE BALL, as “LIZ”, and RICHARD DENNING, as “GEORGE”, have entered during the last line of the preceding scene. They stand at their mics, holding their scripts. BOB LEMOND sits on a chair upstage, following along in his own script.*

**LIZ.** *(Overlapping end of music.) (Reading from radio script throughout.) (Whisper.)* George. *(Louder whisper.)* George. Are you asleep?

**GEORGE.** *(Reading from radio script throughout.) (Slightly annoyed.)* Not anymore.

**LIZ.** *(Beat.)* I can't sleep.

**GEORGE.** Why not?

**LIZ.** *(Puzzled.)* I've got a string tied around my finger and I can't remember why.

**GEORGE.** Liz... you're always waking me up in the middle of the night with some silly question. I've *told* you before, this has got to stop. Now will you please keep quiet and let me get some sleep?

**LIZ.** *(Contrite.)* All right, George. *(Pause.) (Pleased with herself.)* George, I just remembered what the string was for!

**GEORGE.** *(End of rope.)* What?

**LIZ.** To remind me not to wake you up any more in the middle of the night. *(Beat, then quickly changing the subject.)* Well, goodnight, George.

**MUSIC 3.** *STUDIO AUDIENCE LAUGHTER INTO APPLAUSE AND THEME (“AVALON”), FADING SLIGHTLY AT :07, THEN CONTINUING UNDER AND SLOWLY FADING OUT BEFORE END OF LEMOND'S SPEECH... (As music begins, LeMond steps up to his mic. Lucy and Denning flash big smiles at the audience throughout LeMond's speech below.)*

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**LEMOND.** (*Reading from his radio script, as music fades slightly.*) You have been listening to *My Favorite Husband*, starring *Lucille Ball* with *Richard Denning*. Tonight's program was produced and directed by *Jess Oppenheimer*, who wrote the script with *Madelyn Pugh* and *Bob Carroll Jr.* *Lucille Ball* will soon be seen in the Paramount picture "Sorrowful Jones." Be sure to listen to *Lucille Ball* in *My Favorite Husband* again next week, brought to you by the *Jell-O* family of red letter desserts. This is CBS, the *Columbia* Broadcasting System, where 99 million people gather every week. Bob LeMond speaking. (*Beat.*)

**JESS (Filter).** (*Studio Talkback.*) And we're out. Thanks everybody.  
**FX.** AUDIENCE RUMBLE, CONTINUING UNDER AND SLOWLY FADING OUT. (*Denning walks to upstage chair and sits, casually looking through his script.*)

**LEMOND.** Good show, *Lucille*. (*Leaving.*) I'll see you on Monday.

**LUCY.** Thanks, Bob. Bye bye. (*LeMond exits as BETTY GARRETT enters.*)

**BETTY.** (*Off, calling.*) Lucy!... Lucy!

**LUCY.** (*Calling.*) Betty Garrett! Come on down here!

**BETTY.** (*Beat.*) (*Entering, cheerful.*) Hi, Lucy.

**LUCY.** Betty! I haven't seen you in ages. How are you?

**BETTY.** (*Happy, smug.*) Pregnant.

**LUCY.** You lucky bum! Desi and I've been trying.

**BETTY.** Don't worry, Honey. Your day will come.

**LUCY.** Yeah, but *when*?

**BETTY.** Now *there* I can't help you.

**LUCY.** (*Resigned.*) Yeah, well... (*Beat.*) So what else is new? Are you still at Metro?

**BETTY.** Are you kiddin'? As soon as the studio found out I was in a family way, I was out on the street. (*Resentful.*) That darn pregnancy clause.

**LUCY.** Mmm.

**BETTY.** Say, can you and Desi join us for dinner?

**LUCY.** Desi's on the road again with his band. He'll be back in a couple of weeks—unless he gets another booking.



LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**BETTY.** (*Sarcastic, à la “Ethel Mertz”.*) I hate to break this to you, Lucy, but trying to get pregnant works a whole lot better if you’re both in the same city.

**LUCY.** Yeah, but what can I do? Oh, here comes our producer. I’m sorry Betty – let’s get together soon. You’ve got my number, don’t you?

**BETTY.** Sure do.

**LUCY.** Then call me tomorrow.

**BETTY.** Okay. (*Leaving.*) Bye, Lucy.

**LUCY.** Bye bye. (*Betty exits and Denning steps up to his mic, as JESS OPPENHEIMER enters.*)

**LUCY.** Well, Bossman, how’d we do tonight?

**JESS.** (*Approaching, pleasantly.*) You were both fine.

**DENNING.** (*Approaching.*) Here comes the other shoe.

**JESS.** What do you mean?

**DENNING.** I get the distinct feeling you’re not telling us something.

**JESS.** No, really, Dick – it was very good. It’s just that I know you can do better.

**DENNING.** See, Lucille, what did I tell you? What exactly do you mean, Jess?

**JESS.** Well... you could start by loosening up more. Have more fun with it! Ham it up! Dramatize what’s going on instead of keeping your eyes glued to the *page*.

**DENNING.** I’m sorry, Jess. That’s something I just can’t do.

**JESS.** Why not?

**DENNING.** Because if I ever take my eyes off that script, I’ll never find my *place* again.

**JESS.** How do you know that until you try it?

**DENNING.** Oh, I’ve tried it.

**JESS.** And?

**DENNING.** Let’s just say it’s an experience I’m not eager to repeat.

**JESS.** But Dick, if you’ll just give it one more try—

**DENNING.** (*Overlapping.*) Now don’t bother trying to change my mind on this, Jess. You’re just wasting your time. Anyway, I’ve gotta get going. I’ll see you Monday at the read-through. (*Leaving.*) Bye, Lucille.

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**LUCY.** Bye bye, Dick. (*Denning exits.*)

**JESS.** What about you, Lucy? Are you afraid of losing your place, too?

**LUCY.** No, but Jess—this is radio, not theatre. The people listening at home can't see what I'm doing, no matter where I look or how much I move around.

**JESS.** But there's a studio full of people right here who *can* see you. *They're* your audience. The folks listening at home take their cue from *them*. Believe me, the moment you look up from your script and start acting things out, the listening audience will know the difference. And they'll love you for it. (*Beat.*) Listen, did I ever tell you about my first job in Hollywood?

**LUCY.** No, I don't think so.

**JESS.** I was writing for Fred Astaire's radio show. Every week the highlight was Fred's big dance number. (*Beat.*) (*Deadpan.*) *Dance.* (*Beat.*) On the *radio.* (*Beat.*) And the only people who ever saw it were the ones in the studio.

**LUCY.** Welllll-

**JESS.** (*Interrupting.*) Then I went to work for Jack Benny. Jack always gets bigger laughs *between* the lines than he does for the jokes themselves. And do you know how he does it?

**LUCY.** How?

**JESS.** He lays his hand upon his cheek. (*Lays hand on cheek, à la Benny.*) Then he opens his eyes wide and looks out at the studio audience, slowly turning his head like a comic lighthouse. And the longer he looks, the more they laugh.

**LUCY.** (*Worried.*) But what if they don't laugh when *I* look at them?

**JESS.** Don't worry, they will.

**LUCY.** I don't know...

**JESS.** Here, I've got something for you.

**LUCY.** Jack Benny tickets? What are *these* for?

**JESS.** I want you to go to *school*.

**MUSIC 4.** JACK BENNY THEME (“YANKEE DOODLE DANDY”) WITH APPLAUSE, FADING SLIGHTLY AT :06 — CONTINUING UNDER AND SLOWLY FADING OUT BY :13... (*As music begins, Lucy and Jess exit, Desi enters.*)

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**SCENE 2**

*Desi, as narrator, speaks to the theatre audience.*

**DESI.** *(As music fades slightly.)* Lucy went to the Jack Benny Program that Sunday. An' when she showed up for the next rehearsal, she just couldn't wait to try out the new attitude she discover'. *(Beat.)* On that week's show Lucy started hammin' it up, playin' straight to the audience. An' Jess was right. They loved it, an' so did the folks listenin' at home. In fact, the show's ratings went up so much that a network VP named Harry Ackerman ask' our agent, Don Sharpe, about starrin' Lucy in a TV version of the show. But as the brass at CBS foun' out, Lucy had other ideas. *(Desi exits. WILLIAM S. PALEY, HARRY ACKERMAN, and HUBBELL ROBINSON have entered during preceding line.)*

**PALEY.** *(Beat.)* Good afternoon Gentlemen.

**HARRY, HUBBELL.** Good afternoon, Mr. Paley.

**PALEY.** Well, Harry, let's have your report.

**HARRY.** I'm afraid we've hit a snag, Mr. Paley. Don Sharpe won't even *discuss* a TV deal for Lucy unless her husband Desi Arnaz is her co-star.

**PALEY.** Desi Arnaz? The Conga Player? *(Slight chuckle.)* Why the hell would I want to star Desi *Arnaz* in a television series? Listen, Harry, I know Sharpe represents both Lucy *and* her husband, but it's *his* job to find work for both of them—not mine. What did you tell him?

**HARRY.** I told him we've got nothing against Desi. It's just that with a successful series the wisest thing is to transfer it to television intact, including the cast.

**PALEY.** Exactly. And?

**HARRY.** And he told me that if we want to move the show to TV, we've got just two casting choices—change the male lead to Desi, or change the female lead to someone other than Lucy.

**PALEY.** I can't believe it.

**HARRY.** Believe it, Mr. Paley. He was dead serious.

**PALEY.** What do you think, Hubbell?

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**HUBBELL.** It makes no sense! Why would they blow a television deal over this?

**HARRY.** According to Don, Lucy's worried sick about Desi spending all his time on the road with his band. (*Sly.*) She wants him here in Hollywood, where she can "keep an eye" on him. But I told him "My Favorite Husband" is just the wrong vehicle for Desi.

**PALEY.** So what did he say?

**HARRY.** He made it clear that if Lucy's going to do a television series, Desi's going to be her co-star. If we can't put Desi in "My Favorite Husband," he says we'll just have to find her a show that we *can* put him in.

**PALEY.** How did you leave it?

**HARRY.** I told him we'd get back to him.

**PALEY.** (*Beat.*) Hubbell, I believe I asked you for your opinion. I'm still waiting to hear it.

**HUBBELL.** Mr. Paley, we can't cast Desi as Lucy's husband. I mean, have you heard the fellow talk? Half the time I can't even understand what he's saying!

**PALEY.** Yeah, I know what you mean.

**HUBBELL.** And what has she got against Dick Denning anyway? He's tall, blond, handsome—just the type of *All-American* leading man a girl like Lucille should *have* on her television show.

**PALEY.** Good point. All right. Harry, tell Sharpe that I've got no problem having Desi Arnaz appear on the network as a bandleader or singer. But not as Lucille's husband. Nobody would believe it! It's simply out of the question.

**HARRY.** I'll tell him, Mr. Paley.

**MUSIC 5. BRIDGE.** (*As music begins, Paley, Harry and Hubbell exit, DON SHARPE and Lucy enter.*)

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**SCENE 3**

*The Arnazes' living room at Desilu Ranch in Chatsworth, California.*

**FX.** (AS MUSIC ENDS.) PHONE RINGING, CONTINUING UNDER...

**DON.** (On first ring.) That'll be Harry Ackerman, Lucy. Why don't you let me get it.

**LUCY.** No, I'll get it, Don. I've got a thing or two I'd like to tell him.

**FX.** PHONE PICKUP.

**LUCY.** Hello? (Pause.) Hello Harry. (Beat.) Yeah, he's here, but whatever you have to say you can say to me. (Pause.) Yeah, I know all about that. Did you talk to Bill Paley? (Pause.) Well what did he say? (Pause.) (Incredulous.) What do you *mean* nobody'd believe Desi's my husband? (Beat.) He *is* my husband! (Pause.) Of course audiences will accept us together. Why wouldn't they? (Pause.) Well that's just a load of bull. (Pause.) (Pleading a bit..) Now look, Harry, this is important to me. Desi's on the road all the time with his band. (Heartfelt.) If I can't find a way to keep him at home, I'm afraid I'm going to lose him. (Pause.) Well, you tell Bill Paley that if I can't work with Desi at CBS, I'll just have to go on the *road* with him, that's all. (Pause.) I've never *been* more serious. (Pause.) Yes, I *realize* that. If I have to give up pictures, that's what I'll do. (Pause.) Yes, it's that important to me. You tell him that. (Pause.) All right then. Goodbye, Harry.

**FX.** PHONE HANGUP.

**DON.** Well, I think you made your position pretty clear.

**LUCY.** A lot of good that'll do me if the answer is still "No."

**DON.** (Comforting.) Now, we don't know that. (Beat.) Oh hey, speaking of CBS, Harlan Thompson called today. He wants you to go on the Ed Wynn Show.

**LUCY.** Have they got something for Desi to do?

**DON.** Not that they mentioned. But I'm sure they'll come up with something if that's your condition for doing the show.

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**LUCY.** You *bet* it is. From now on, if anyone wants me for television, they get Desi, too. *That* oughtta convince Bill Paley that the public will accept us as a team!

**MUSIC 6.** (*FADING IN.*) *TV VARIETY THEME AND APPLAUSE*, FADING SLIGHTLY AT :05, THEN CONTINUING UNDER AND SLOWLY FADING OUT BY :10... (*As music begins, Don and Lucy exit, Desi enters.*)

**SCENE 4**

*Desi, as narrator, speaks to the theatre audience.*

**DESI.** (*As music fades slightly.*) Lucy an' I were a hit on *The Ed Wynn Show*, but that wasn't enough to convince CBS. So I say, "Look, honey, if you really want to try this thin', you should go *with* me, *onstage*, on the next tour I do with the ban'." An' that's just what we did. We launched our vaudeville act, usin' five thousan' dollars of our own money, an' toured the country while her radio show was on summer hiatus. The tour was a big success, but CBS still wouldn't come to the table. Not until December, when Harry Ackerman foun' out we had a TV offer from another network. (*Desi exits. Paley, Harry & Hubbell have entered during preceding line.*)

**SCENE 4A**

*William S. Paley's office at CBS HQ in New York City.*

**PALEY.** Gentlemen, just how serious is this offer from NBC? Harry?

**HARRY.** It's real, Mr. Paley. I believe they're ready to sign Lucy *and* Desi to a TV deal.

**PALEY.** Then we've got to nip it in the bud. We'll make a deal with Lucille first.

**HUBBELL.** With Desi Arnaz as her co-star?

**PALEY.** Of course. Do you think she's going to give up on that *now*? With an offer from NBC in her pocket? No, we'll just have to make the best of it.

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**HUBBELL.** With all respect, Mr. Paley, don't you think someone like Arnaz is going to be a tougher sell on national TV than on the vaudeville stage? I mean, how is he going to play in Peoria?

**PALEY.** (*Slightly annoyed.*) I don't *know*, Hubbell. (*Serious.*) But I do know *this*—I'm not about to let NBC steal one of my biggest stars. (*Beat.*) *Make the deal.*

**HUBBELL.** Yes, Mr. Paley.

**HARRY.** I'll call Don and tell him we're ready to talk turkey. But it may be tough sledding now that NBC is in the game. We need to *do* something for Lucy—something to remind her that she's part of the CBS family.

**PALEY.** What do you have in mind?

**HARRY.** Well, you know how anxious she is to keep Desi close to home?

**HUBBELL.** I thought that's what the *TV* show was for.

**HARRY.** Yeah, but that's not till next fall.

**HUBBELL.** OK, then what's your idea?

**HARRY.** Give Desi his own *radio* program. It'll keep him in town until fall, and keep his band employed to boot.

**PALEY.** That's very clever. Except for one problem. Desi Arnaz isn't enough of a name to have his own musical variety show.

**HARRY.** I agree, Mr. Paley. But I'm not talking about musical variety. I'm talking about a game show. *You* know the one. "Earn Your Vacation." It goes on the air in a few weeks. I'm suggesting we put Desi in as host.

**HUBBELL.** Desi Arnaz? A game show host? That's an even bigger stretch than playing Lucille's husband!

**HARRY.** (*Beat.*) Now hear me through on this, Hub. The show's unsponsored, so we can make any changes we want. (*Beat.*) What if we made all the prizes trips to the Caribbean? And we can change the name of the show. Call it something like... "Your Tropical Trip."

**PALEY.** All right, you may have something there, Harry. But haven't we already hired a host for that show?

**HARRY.** Well, yes. But it's just a staff announcer at Channel 2 in L.A. What's he going to do, boycott the Columbia Broadcasting System?

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**PALEY.** If it'll help us hold on to Lucille Ball, he can be my guest. What do I care if I lose one crummy announcer to NBC? Oh by the way, who *is* the poor schmuck?

**HARRY.** (*Deadpan.*) His name's Carson, Johnny Carson. (*Paley, Harry and Hubbell exit, and Desi enters.*)

**SCENE 5**

*Desi, as narrator, speaks to the theatre audience.*

**DESI.** So CBS gave us a TV pilot deal. An' with the offer from NBC, my radio show wasn't the only concession we got. They gave us a 50% stake in the TV series, which would air only *every other week*, from *Hollywood*, so Lucy could keep makin' pictures. At the time there was no such thin' as a nationwide broadcast, so that meant the East Coast was gonna have to wait a *week* to watch a low-quality "kinescope" film print. But to keep Lucy happy, CBS agreed. (*Jess and Lucy have entered during preceding line.*)

**SCENE 5A**

*Jess Oppenheimer's office at CBS Columbia Square, Hollywood.*

**FX.** DOOR OPENS.

**LUCY.** (*Entering.*) Jess, we did it! We got CBS to make a TV deal—for *both* of us!

**JESS.** Harry called me last night. Congratulations.

**LUCY.** And Desi's going to have his own radio show, starting next month.

**DESI.** An' I've got even *bigger* news. Lucy's gonna have a baby!

**JESS.** Wow. That must have been *some negotiation*.

**LUCY & DESI.** (*Both laugh.*)



LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**LUCY.** Isn't it wonderful? (*Heartfelt.*) We're finally going to have a real family. (*Beat.*) You know they wanted us to do the show in New York? I told them forget it. We're going to raise our children right here in California!

**JESS.** That's wonderful, Lucy. I'm really happy for both of you.

**LUCY.** But we've got to hurry and make an audition film before I show too much. Have you got any ideas yet?

**JESS.** You *do* realize I got the news less than 12 hours ago.

**LUCY.** Well, my due date is in July, and Dr. Harris says I'll be showing by February. He doesn't even want me doing the radio show after the end of March.

**JESS.** Don't worry. Just give me a little time, and I'll come up with something.

**LUCY.** Remember, I want to play an ordinary housewife, in a normal marriage.

**JESS.** Turning the two of you into an ordinary married couple isn't that easy. I've been racking my brain trying to figure out how to do it.

**DESI.** If you're worryin' about *me*, Jess, don't be. I can hannel whatever you come up with.

**JESS.** It's not that at all, Desi. We just need a believable premise that's a good fit for both of you.

**DESI.** I'm glad you feel that way. If it were up to *CBS*, I wouldn't even be in this thin'.

**JESS.** I just need to come up with something that lets *Lucy* be an ordinary housewife—and gives *you* the chance to showcase your talent.

**DESI.** Then we better let you get back to work.

**JESS.** Okay. I'll talk to you later.

**LUCY.** (*Leaving with Desi.*) Bye bye, Bossman.

**JESS.** (*Excited.*) Wait a second! I've been going about this backwards! *Lucy* is the one who needs to prove she's got talent!

**DESI.** What are you talkin' about? Everyone knows how talented Lucy is.

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**JESS.** No, I mean—Look, what if we switched things around on the TV show. What if we made you a successful bandleader and singer—

**LUCY.** (*Approaching and interrupting.*) How is that switching things around? He *is* a successful bandleader and singer!

**JESS.** I know that. But what if *he's* the one who just wants a normal marriage—an ordinary home life. So he marries a girl with *no connection* to show business. You're a housewife, with ordinary household problems. But it turns out that you've been secretly dying to break into show business. And all you want is a chance to prove to everyone how talented you are!

**LUCY.** Oh, Jess, that's wonderful! I love it!

**DESI.** Me, too, Amigo! Let's tell CBS!

**MUSIC 7. BRIDGE.** (*As music begins, LUCY exits.*)

### Scene 6

*Desi, as narrator, speaks to the theatre audience.*

**DESI.** (*Overlapping long final note of music.*) CBS love' the idea. Madelyn an' Bob came home from their European trip to work with Jess on the script, an' by the en' of February, everythin' was ready to go—'cept for one little detail. (*Pause.*) (*More.*)

### Scene 6A

*Jess Oppenheimer's office at CBS Columbia Square, Hollywood.*

**DESI.** Jess, I still don't see why Lucy's name has to go first in the credits. After all, we're *both* starrin' in the show.

**JESS.** We've been through this already, Desi. Lucy's a bigger name, that's all.

**DESI.** Wait just a secon', Amigo. Lucy may be big in the picture business. But in the music business, Desi Arnaz is a big name.

**JESS.** But this *isn't* the music business.

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**DESI.** I know. But it's not the picture business, either. This is TV. On TV, neither one of us is a big name.

**JESS.** Look, Desi, whether you're talking movies or television, it's still *acting*. And as an *actress*, Lucy just has a bigger reputation than you.

**DESI.** I guess you're right, Amigo. I never *have* been much of an actress.

**JESS.** (*Take.*) (*Chuckles.*) You know what I mean. (*Consoling.*) You've got to understand this isn't personal, Desi. The network wants a show starring Lucille Ball, and sponsors will feel the same way. That's just the way it is, and there's nothing either one of us can do about it. (*Sudden new thought.*) Look at it this way. Giving Lucy top billing is the "gallant" thing to do. You know—let the lady go first!

**DESI.** (*After pondering this for a moment.*) ....That's true.

**JESS.** And after all, you've got the title.

**DESI.** What are you talkin' about? The show's call' "I Love Lucy"!

**JESS.** You're just not looking at it the right way. "I Love Lucy" — that's really a line of dialogue, right?

**DESI.** Yeah, I guess so.

**JESS.** So *you* tell *me*. (*Beat.*) Whose line is it?

**DESI.** (*Tentative.*) Mine?

**JESS.** (*Beat.*) Of course it's yours. *You're* the one saying "I Love Lucy." *You're* the one telling the world how *you* feel about your wife. We still don't know anything about *her*, but now we know something important about *you*. Right off the bat, even before the show begins, we know you're a good guy. A good husband, who loves his wife. What better introduction could you ask for?

**DESI.** I hadn' thought about it like that.

**JESS.** All right. Then it's settled. Okay?

**DESI.** (*Resigned.*) Okay, Jess.

**JESS.** Good.

**DESI.** (*Beat.*) (*Quietly.*) Hmmm.

**JESS.** What?

**DESI.** Well I was just thinkin'... Why don't we compromise and make it *alphabetical*? (*After a beat, Jess chuckles, and Desi joins him.*)

**MUSIC 8. BRIDGE.** (*As music begins, Jess exits.*)

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**Scene 7**

*Desi, as narrator, speaks to the theatre audience.*

**DESI.** (*Overlapping long final note of music.*) As the audience took their seats in Studio A on March 2nd, Lucy an' I were already backstage. But up in the control booth, our director, Ralph Levy, was beginnin' to get a little nervous. (*Desi exits. RALPH LEVY has entered during preceding line.*)

**Scene 7A**

*Control Booth, Studio A, CBS Columbia Square, Hollywood.*

**RALPH.** (*Worried.*) Where the hell is Jess? We're supposed to start in less than five minutes. (*More.*)

*FX. DOOR OPENS. (Jess enters.)*

**RALPH.** (*Relieved.*) Oh, there you are. We're ready to get underway.

*FX. DOOR CLOSES.*

**JESS.** (*Approaching.*) Hold on just a minute. They need to move the beds farther away from each other.

**RALPH.** (*Beat.*) What?! Why?

**JESS.** According to the Censor, if the beds aren't at least 36 inches apart, people might get the idea that their relationship isn't strictly platonic.

**RALPH.** You've got to be kidding me. Lucy's five months pregnant! ...How does the Censor think *that* happened?

**JESS.** We haven't told him. So far Wardrobe's managed to hide her condition.

**RALPH.** Thank God for that. Now where the hell did Desi go? As soon as that bed hits the mark, I need him to be *in* it.

**JESS.** I just saw him backstage, talking to Harry Ackerman. (*Jess exits. Harry and Desi enter.*)

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**Scene 7B**

*Backstage, Studio A, CBS Columbia Square, Hollywood.*

**FX.** (OFF.) *STUDIO AUDIENCE AMBIENCE, CONTINUING UNDER, SLOWLY FADING OUT...*

**HARRY.** Look, Desi, I already told you we have to have a signed contract for a series before we shoot the pilot.

**DESI.** Forget it, Harry. I'm not signin' that thin' until it says the ban' gets paid every week. Why is that so hard for you guys to understand'?

**HARRY.** Maybe because the show will only air every *two* weeks.

**DESI.** So what are my musicians suppose to do—only *eat* every two weeks?!

**RALPH (Filter).** (*Studio Talkback.*) Places, please.

**HARRY.** I'm sorry to have to do this, Desi, but either you sign this contract, as is, right now, or the show doesn't go on.

**DESI.** You can't *do* that!

**HARRY.** Of course we can. We're the ones paying for it, aren't we?  
(*Beat.*)

**DESI.** Tell me somethin'—how much is this thin' costin' CBS?

**HARRY.** Let me see. (*More.*)

**FX.** *RUSTLING PAPERS.*

**HARRY.** Here it is. Just over \$19,000.

**DESI.** Okay, then it's settle'. I'll pay for it myself, an' it'll belong to me an' Lucy. Wait here while I get my checkbook.

**HARRY.** (*Alarmed.*) Now – now wait a minute, Desi. That won't be necessary. If you feel that strongly about it, I – I suppose there's no reason we can't go ahead and shoot it now and work out the details later.

You – you just go ahead. (*Leaving.*) We'll talk more after the show.

(*Harry and Desi exit.*)

**RALPH (Filter).** (*Studio Talkback.*) Places please. (*Beat.*) Is Desi in position? (*Beat.*) All right, here we go. Roll kinescope. (*Beat.*) Cue curtains. (*Beat.*) OK, cue applause.

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**FX.** *STUDIO AUDIENCE APPLAUSE*, SLOWLY STARTING TO FADE AFTER A FEW SECONDS... (*After applause begins, Ralph exits as Desi enters.*)

**Scene 8**

*Desi, as narrator, speaks to the theatre audience.*

**DESI.** (*After a few seconds, as applause starts to fade.*) The pilot came off without a hitch. Of course, that was just the first step. The network still had to sell it to a sponsor. (*Beat.*) An' as Jess foun' out when the kinescope arrive' in New York, not everyone at CBS was a fan. (*Desi exits. Jess and MERCE enter.*)

**Scene 8A**

*Jess Oppenheimer's office at CBS Columbia Square, Hollywood.*

**FX.** *INTERCOM BUZZER, PHONE PICKUP.*

**JESS.** Yes, Merce, who is it?

**MERCE (Filter).** It's Hubbell Robinson, Jess – calling long distance on Line 1.

**JESS.** Thanks. I'll take it. (*Merce exits. Hubbell enters.*)

**FX.** *PHONE BUTTON PUSHED.*

**JESS.** Jess Oppenheimer.

**HUBBELL (Filter).** (*Annoyed.*) Listen, Jess, what the hell are you sending me? I can't possibly sell this show. It's the worst thing I've ever seen!

**JESS.** (*Deadpan.*) Thanks, Hubbell. You're tops in *my* book, too.

**HUBBELL (Filter).** Now look, Jess, it's nothing personal. I just still think we made a huge mistake agreeing to use Desi.

**JESS.** Well, I don't.

**HUBBELL (Filter).** You're entitled to your opinion. All I'm saying is, don't quit your day job.

**JESS.** Hubbell, this *is* my day job.

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**HUBBELL (Filter).** Well, then I guess you're screwed.

**JESS.** Goodbye, Hubbell.

*FX. PHONE HANGUP. (Jess and Hubbell exit, as Desi enters.)*

**MUSIC 9.** *MELANCHOLY UNDERSCORING, CONTINUING UNDER...*

**Scene 9**

*Desi, as narrator, speaks to the theatre audience.*

**DESI.** *(After about 5 seconds of music.)* The pilot *didn't* sell. For six weeks Don Sharpe and our audition film got kicked out of every advertising agency on Madison Avenue. By late April, Don was down to his last prospect—The Biow Company, on Fifth Avenue at 51st Street. *(Desi exits. Lucy and Don have entered during preceding line.)*

**Scene 9A**

*The Arnazes' living room at Desilu Ranch in Chatsworth, California.*

*FX. PHONE RINGS ONCE, PHONE PICKUP.*

**LUCY.** Hello?

**DON (Filter).** Hello, Lucy? It's Don. Is Desi with you?

**LUCY.** He'll be home any minute. Why? Have you got news?

**DON (Filter).** I'll say! You're talking to the man who just sold "I Love Lucy" to The Biow Company!

**LUCY.** Oh my God, Don! I can't believe it! *(Emotional.)* Desi and I are actually going to have our own television show!

**DON (Filter).** Lucy, I never doubted it for a second.

*FX. (OFF.) FRONT DOOR OPENS, CLOSES. (On door open, Desi enters.)*

**LUCY.** *(On door open.)* Well, I think you're just wonderful.

**DESI.** *(Entering.)* Who's wonderful, honey?

**LUCY.** Don! He found us a sponsor!

**DESI.** That's fantastic! Who did he get?

LUCY LOVES DESI: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Sitcom  
– A Live Radio Play

**LUCY.** I was so excited I forgot to ask. (*Into phone.*) Don, who's the sponsor?

**DON (Filter).** Philip Morris cigarettes.

**LUCY.** Philip Morris cigarettes, honey. (*Beat.*) Don, you didn't tell them I smoke Chesterfields, did you?

**DON (Filter).** (*Beat.*) I was gonna lead with that, but I decided against it.

**DESI.** (*Beat.*) Don't worry, honey. We'll just put your Chesterfields in a Philip Morris pack, an' nobody'll know the difference.

**DON (Filter).** There is one thing, though.

**LUCY.** What's that?

**DON (Filter).** Philip Morris wants a *weekly* show. So you'll have to give up making pictures for a while.

**LUCY.** Desi, Don says they want a weekly show. I won't have any time to make pictures.

**DESI.** That's a big step. (*Beat.*) But it's up to you, honey.

**LUCY.** (*Beat.*) Don, tell them we'll do it. Desi and I want to work together more than anything in the world. If that means giving up pictures, well then that's what I'll do.

**DON (Filter).** That's great, Lucy. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm heading down to the bar to have myself a celebratory drink.

**LUCY.** Don't you have to call them back and tell them we'll do it?

**DON (Filter).** Nope.

**LUCY.** Why not?

**DON (Filter).** I already told them.

**LUCY.** You *what?!!*

**DON (Filter).** Let's just say I know my clients. Anyway, if you think I'd risk blowing this deal after what I've been through the last six weeks, you've got the wrong agent!

**LUCY.** (*Laughs.*)

**MUSIC 10. BRIDGE.** (*After music begins, Don and Lucy exit.*)

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