

Public TV Episode 4: The Mission

By

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COLD OPEN

FADE IN:

INT. TV MONITOR

On screen we see SHIRLEY WOZNIAK, host of Milwaukee Public TV's *Sewing With Shirley*. She is a twitchy, nervous woman in her early sixties. She wears a short bob of gray/blond hair, a 2-piece, Sea Foam Green polyester leisure suit and reading glasses with a bejeweled lanyard around her neck.

She speaks to the camera as she stands beside a table full of different fabrics.

SHIRLEY

Now, no matter which fabric you choose for your quilt, tape backing is essential. Make sure it's facing down and smoothed out so there are no folds. Do not make the mistake of stretching your backing too tight. This will cause the fabric to contract when you release the tape and give a poor result.

She twitches her way over to a sewing machine.

SHIRLEY

Now, I already have a sample set up for you on the machine. We've placed the batting over our backing fabric, then placed our quilt top right side facing up over the batting.

She sits and prepares the machine.

CUT TO:

INT. TV STUDIO BOOTH. - DAY

In the booth are Director JACK AARONSON, his YOUNG ASSISTANT and CLAUDIA WYNN.

Jack nervously pops antacids as he directs. The Assistant hits the switcher on command. Claudia sits nearby taking notes. Jack and the Assistant have microphones in front of them, Claudia wears a headset.

JACK AARONSON  
...and cut to close up on Camera  
Two.

ASSISTANT  
(With lateral lisp.)  
Cutting to close up, Camera Two.

We see Shirley's hands on the monitor, arranging the fabric. Her hands look like Frankenstein's monster; full of sewing machine scars and needle holes. Some are quite fresh and bleed a bit. Her finger tips are an array of bandages.

CUT TO:

INT TV STUDIO - DAY

TOM BIRCH is the floor director. He stands next to Camera Two wearing a headset and holding a clipboard. He stares at Shirley's hands, nervously.

TOM  
Think she'll do it again?

CUT TO:

INT. TV STUDIO BOOTH.

JACK AARONSON  
She's done it five times, already,  
she can't do it again.

ASSISTANT  
She wouldn't do it again.  
(turning to Claudia.)  
Would she do it again?

CLAUDIA  
She could do it again.

CUT TO:

INT. TV STUDIO.

We see the chubby CAMERA #2 operator with greasy hair, glasses and doughnut crumbs on his mouth operating the camera.

CAMERAMAN #2  
Oh, she'll do it again.

CUT TO:

INT. TV STUDIO BOOTH.

JACK AARONSON  
Quiet on set, please.

ASSISTANT  
Everyone quiet on set, please?

CLAUDIA  
(To herself.)  
She can't do it again.

CUT TO:

INT. TV STUDIO.

SHIRLEY  
And here we go.

Shirley puts the machine in gear and starts to slowly sew the fabric.

CUT TO:

Close up tracking shot into Tom's face.

CUT TO:

Close up tracking shot into Jack's face.

CUT TO:

Close up tracking shot into Assistant's face.

CUT TO:

Close up tracking shot into Claudia's face.

CUT TO:

Shirley keeps sewing, suddenly she twitches and the machine goes into high gear. Her fingers get pulled in to the machine.

SHIRLEY

(Reacting.)

Ahh! Sweet Miraculous Jesus in  
Heaven!

TOM

She did it again.

CAMERAMAN #2

I told you she'd do it again.

TOM

Okay, cut! Let's take fifteen,  
everyone!

Shirley pulls her fingers out of the machine. Multi-colored strands of thread dangle from the tips of her fingers. Tom goes to her.

SHIRLEY

Oh, Tom! I'm so sorry. It's that  
new machine, I'm sure of it.

TOM

Of course it is, Shirley. But let's  
take a break, okay? Get yourself  
cleaned up and get some of those  
loose strands out of there. Come  
back in fifteen.

SHIRLEY

Alrighty, I'll be in the dressing  
room if you need me.

She points, the strands of thread flailing in all  
directions.

CUT TO:

INT. TV STUDIO BOOTH.

Claudia takes off her headset and heads out the door.

CLAUDIA

See you in fifteen, guys. Anyone  
need anything?

JACK AARONSON

(Head in his hands.)

Valium.

ASSISTANT  
Could we get some Valium?

JACK AARONSON  
(Cutting her off.)  
No, don't! I'm just...

He sighs, heavily. The Assistant pats him on the back.

ASSISTANT  
We're fine, thanks.

Claudia heads out the door.

CUT TO:

INT. TV STATION.

Claudia makes her way down the long, narrow stairway. A FAT TECHNICIAN is making his way up in the handicapped lift chair. She squeezes by him and on to the main floor.

CUT TO:

INT. TV STATION HALLWAY.

Claudia weaves her way down the hall; past a man holding an exotic badger, through a group of technicians huddled around the doughnut and coffee table, and past a clown with a bright red nose, rainbow afro and paint-stained coveralls. She heads into the production office.

INT. TV STATION PRODUCTION OFFICE.

Claudia tip-toes into the cubicle-filled production office. She notices an empty cubicle. She sits and starts typing into the computer in front of her.

We hear LYDIA COOPER'S voice off camera.

LYDIA'S VOICE  
What the HELL do you think you're doing?

CLAUDIA  
(Caught.)  
I'm sorry...I'm sorry...I just have to log this--

Lydia pulls Claudia's chair back from the desk.

LYDIA  
No, No. No, I told you, keep your greasy fingers away from my desk.

CLAUDIA  
Please-o-please-o-please-o-please, just five minutes--

LYDIA  
(Sternly.)  
Shut up.

Claudia does.

LYDIA  
Get up.

Claudia does.

LYDIA  
Come with me.

Lydia takes Claudia by the arm and walks her out of the production office.

CUT TO:

INT. TV STATION HALLWAY.

Lydia walks Claudia down the hall and into the copying room. Standing at the copy machine is a DEEP BROWED MAN. He has a blank stare as he makes hundreds of copies on the machine.

Lydia looks at him, sternly.

LYDIA  
Hey Uni-Bomber...want to copy your manifesto someplace else?

The Deep-Browed Man gathers up stacks of copies he's made and hustles out of the room. Lydia shuts the door behind him. Suddenly her demeanor softens. She speaks calmly to Claudia.

LYDIA  
So they're not getting you a replacement computer, is that right?

CLAUDIA  
(Confused.)  
Yes...right.

LYDIA

Oh man...and you had Denny  
requisition one?

CLAUDIA

Yeah, like three weeks ago.

LYDIA

God, the wheels in this place turn  
like molasses. Well, let's see what  
we can do. There's got to be a way  
around this, you can't do your job  
without a computer.

CLAUDIA

Wait, who are you and what have you  
done with Lydia?

LYDIA

Oh, that is *SO* clever.

CLAUDIA

No, seriously--

Lydia holds up her hand to quiet her.

LYDIA

Look, I am a middle-aged woman of  
color with two teenage children, a  
mortgage and a TV show I have to  
keep running every week. If I don't  
play my bad-ass side, nothing gets  
done.

CLAUDIA

(Curious.)

Huh...

LYDIA

The only way I can get ahead at all  
in this insane asylum is under the  
threat of racial unease and  
possible violence.

CLAUDIA

Really?

LYDIA

How do you think I got my own  
parking space?

CLAUDIA

You've got your own parking space?

LYDIA

Damn right. I told Maurice, either I get a prime space or he loses a testicle.

CLAUDIA

Nice!

LYDIA

It's the only way to get anything around here.

CLAUDIA

(Exhilarated.)

So I should just march in and *demand* a computer. Kick some ass. Takes some names--

LYDIA

No, no, no...what, are you an idiot? *I* play the bad-ass. *I'm* the angry black woman, they expect that from me. It's a role I fulfill for them. Makes them feel better. You go ballistic, you'll just be a crazy, bitchy young white chick and be out on your ass in a heartbeat.

CLAUDIA

(Disappointed.)

Oh...So what do I do?

LYDIA

You go ask nice, and you bring your angry black woman with you. Come on.

Lydia leads Claudia out of the copy room and down the hallway. They pass Tom.

TOM

(Seeing Claudia.)

We're back in-studio in five.

CLAUDIA

Yeah, I'll be there. Did you know she's got her own parking space?

TOM

Yep. And Maurice has both his testicles.

CLAUDIA

Okay, see you in five.

Lydia leads Claudia down the hall and into STAN FRITZEL'S office. It is a treasure trove of electronic gear; cameras, microphones, monitors and, yes, computers, all stacked up to the ceiling.

Stan sits at a desk at the far side of the electronics warehouse.

STAN

(Looking up.)

Oh, hello ladies. What can I do you for?

Claudia looks around the room in awe.

CLAUDIA

Oh my God...

LYDIA

(Going bad-ass.)

Hey Mr. Pencil Neck. This young lady needs a computer, and she needs it now.

STAN

A computer, eh? Did she requisition one?

CLAUDIA

Yes, yes I did.

LYDIA

You bet your slide rule lovin' ass she did.

STAN

So, we'll just wait for the requisition to come through and we'll see what we can do then.

LYDIA

You can't do anything now?

STAN

I'm afraid not.

CLAUDIA  
 (Looking around.)  
 But, you've got all this stuff...

LYDIA  
 Yeah, it's like a damned Best Buy  
 in here. What about one of these?

Lydia points to a stack of laptops on a shelf.

CLAUDIA  
 Ooh, a laptop. That would be great.  
 Perfect.

STAN  
 Oh, no no. I'm afraid not. Not  
 these.

LYDIA  
 Why not?

STAN  
 (Nervously.)  
 Well...I have six.

LYDIA  
 Uh-huh.

STAN  
 (More nervous.)  
 And...if I gave you one...that  
 would leave me with only five.

LYDIA  
 Uh-huh.

STAN  
 Well...five is one less than six.  
 And...I *need* six in my  
 inventory...for emergencies.

LYDIA  
 What kind of laptop emergencies you  
 think you're gonna have? Jeff  
 Goldblum and Fresh Prince gonna  
 blow up an alien spaceship?

STAN  
 (Really nervous.)  
 Ha, ha...no. It's just...See, end  
 of next month we're getting another  
 shipment of six...That would give  
 me twelve. If I give you one then,

(MORE)

STAN

I'd be left with eleven...which is better than five...but not quite twelve.

(muttering to himself.)

Twelve pipers piping, skyping, typing. Monkeys typing novels.

LYDIA

So she needs to wait a month so you can have twelve, minus one...which is better than six minus one now. Even though if you gave her the six minus one now, then when you get the six next month it would make the eleven you were willing to have then, rather than the five you would have now.

STAN

Exactly.

LYDIA

That's messed up.

STAN

Sorry...that's all I can do.

(Muttering.)

Do-do-do-doo-voo-doodio...Poo-poo schmoo...Poop pants party Pinocchio.

Lydia slowly nears Stan till she is nose to nose with him.

LYDIA

(Quiet and threatening.)

We'll be back.

Claudia and Lydia exit his office and stand in the front reception area..

CLAUDIA

So what do we do now. You open up a can of "Wupp-Ass" or something?

LYDIA

No, girl, I'm afraid even the King Sized can of Wupp-Ass won't pry the techno gadgets outta *that* geek's ass.

CLAUDIA  
So, what do we do?

LYDIA  
We're going to get your new laptop,  
from that office, tonight. Meet me  
here, at the front desk, at nine  
o'clock.

CLAUDIA  
Tonight? But, why? I don't  
underst--

LYDIA  
Just do it! Tonight! Nine o'clock.  
The front entrance. Got it?!

CLAUDIA  
Got it. Yes.

LYDIA  
And wear black!

Lydia hurries away. Over Claudia's shoulder we see a well dressed, middle-aged woman banging violently on the door with the trash can. The buzzer sounds. The door swings slowly open.

Entering through the door is DELMONT MCCLEARY, the head of the "PTV Pals", the fundraising arm of the station. He is tall, in his late fifties, with a thick head of dark hair (gray at the temples). He has a deep tan and wears a very expensive three-piece suit complete with gold watch chain. He sports a gold Rolex on his wrist and a diamond pinkie ring on his left hand. He has the bearing of a man who has the world by the balls.

He is followed by a mindless bevy of what Tom Wolfe referred to in *The Bonfire of the Vanities* as "social x-rays"; upper class women of means, all wearing elegant, designer dresses and fine jewelry. Their hair is perfectly coiffed and their skin is pulled tight on their faces from too much sun, exercise and plastic surgery. They follow after Delmont like a loyal herd of chickens.

Delmont stops when he spies Claudia in the lobby.

DELMONT  
(Smiling.)  
Well hello there. You must be the  
new producer I've heard so much  
about. I'm Delmont McCleary.

She smiles and holds out her hand.

CLAUDIA  
Yes, Claudia Wynn, nice to meet--

Delmont reaches out and pulls her to him in a warm embrace.

DELMONT  
Welcome to the family.

CLAUDIA  
(Slightly surprised.)  
Thank you...ha, ha.

Delmont doesn't release her. He just emits a strange series of warm, comforting moans.

DELMONT  
Mmmm...hmmmm-mmmmm...mmmmhmmmm...

Still in his embrace, Claudia pats him on the back to try and break free.

CLAUDIA  
(Smiling uncomfortably.)  
Okay.  
(pat, pat, pat.)  
All right.  
(pat, pat, pat.)  
Okay.  
(pat, pat.)  
Here we go.  
(pat, pat, pat.)

He finally, slowly, releases her.

DELMONT  
Well, I do hope you'll be attending the staff meeting in twenty minutes. Love to see that beautiful smile again.

CLAUDIA  
Wouldn't miss it.

DELMONT  
Good. Good. See you then.

He heads off as the Chicken Ladies leer at her and cluck their tongues. They follow after him.

Claudia shivers a bit.

CLAUDIA  
(Creeped out.)  
I need a shower.

CUT TO:

INT. TV STATION.

The camera is mounted on a coffee/doughnut cart as it wheels it's way through the halls of the station. It is stacked with crullers, jelly filled, creme filled and plain.

It makes it's way into a large conference room. It is filled with people. We see the ravenous hands of the technicians and engineers grab the doughnuts from the cart until it is nothing but crumbs.

CUT TO:

INT. STATION CONFERENCE ROOM.

The conference room is filled with the TV staff; DON LITTLE the Wisconsin Outdoors host, set designer JIMMY HANKEY, DENNY VLASIK, STAN FRITZEL, TOM BIRCH, LYDIA COOPER, JACK AARONSON, Jack's ASSISTANT, painter BOB BEEMER, pet show host JUDD MICKELBURG, sewing host SHIRLEY WOZNIAK (with frayed thread still hanging from her fingertips), the CAMERA CREW, SOUND CREW and TECHNICIANS and a host of others. Packed to the gills.

Everyone sits around a group of tables arranged into a large oval. At the head of the oval sits MAURICE COOMES, DELMONT MCCLEARY and Delmont's contingent of wealthy, clucking CHICKEN LADIES.

Claudia enters last. She squeezes her way to the coffee cart and attempts to pour a cup: empty. The doughnuts are gone. She takes a lone, odd, greenish-brown piece of coffee cake from the cart. She sits.

Maurice stands. He carries one of his ornate canes that has a dragon's head carved on top.

MAURICE  
All right, everyone, I think we can  
get started here.

The murmuring dies down.

MAURICE

I'd like to thank you all for coming. I don't have to tell you all that it's that time of year again.

Everyone chuckles.

MAURICE

Fall pledge is coming up right around the corner. It's a big year for us. We've raised our pledge goals and we're expecting big things from our contributors this year. I'd like to introduce, as if you don't know him already,

(more chuckles.)

Delmont McCleary, head of the PTV PALS fundraising group. Delmont.

Delmont stands as the group applauds. The applause dies down, except for the group of Chicken Ladies who continue to clap loudly and look at Delmont with awe and chicken-lust.

DELMONT

Thank you.

He waves his hand at the clapping Chicken Ladies. They stop applauding.

DELMONT

Well, as Maurice stated so eloquently, we are on the fast track this year to try and raise a record pledge goal. It's going to take an awful lot of effort from the entire staff, but I think we can do it.

The Chicken Ladies clap again. He quiets them.

DELMONT

But I'm going to let you in on a little secret.

The Chicken ladies lean forward, expectant.

DELMONT

I did some negotiating and string pulling with the folks at the national broadcast offices, and I think I can safely say that I put together a dynamic, secret weapon

(MORE)

DELMONT  
 that will help us, not only meet  
 our new goals, but surpass them.  
 Lights please?

The lights dim. Delmont sits. A video is projected on the screen hanging on the wall behind Delmont.

We fade up from black to see a huge, old country estate. The camera slowly tracks in as symphonic music plays. A BRITISH ANNOUNCER'S voice is heard in voice over.

BRITISH ANNOUNCER  
 Last season, on the *Bittermans of Buckingham*.

There are excited gasps from the group in the conference room.

On screen we see an older, distinguished British man, LORD BITTERMAN. He is dressed in a suit from the 1920s. He has a handlebar mustache and reading glasses. He pages through a leather-bound book as he stands in his massive, ornate library. The doors to the library burst open and CECIL enters. He is a younger man with a 1920s haircut and a tuxedo.

LORD BITTERMAN  
 Good Lord! Cecil!

CECIL  
 Father!

LORD BITTERMAN  
 What is it?

CECIL  
 It's Emily.

LORD BITTERMAN  
 Good Lord!

CUT TO:

INT. BRITISH MANOR MASTER BEDROOM.

Lying in an ornate, wooden bed is EMILY. She is young, pale and dying. Cecil and Lord Bitterman stand by her bed. Cecil holds her hand.

LORD BITTERMAN  
Good Lord. Emily. What is it?

EMILY  
Oh Father...it's Derrick.

CECIL  
Derrick. Damn him!

LORD BITTERMAN  
Good Lord!

CUT TO:

INT. BRITISH MANOR GARAGE.

The pristine garage is filled with old cars from the 1920s, including a Rolls Royce limousine.

Standing by one of the cars is DERRICK, the chauffeur. He is young and dressed in a chauffeur's outfit from, you guessed it, the 1920s.

Cecil and Lord Bitterman enter. Cecil grabs Derrick violently by the lapels.

CECIL  
Damn you, Derrick!

LORD BITTERMAN  
Cecil, Good Lord!

DERRICK  
You don't understand. I love Emily.

CECIL  
But you're the chauffeur!

DERRICK  
I don't care and neither does she!

LORD BITTERMAN  
Good Lord!

CUT TO:

EXT. BRITISH ESTATE.

On the spacious garden patio of the estate sit Lord Bitterman and a very old and wrinkled DAME LADY BEATRICE. She is dressed in an ornate, black 1920's dress with a frilly hat and veil. They sip tea as they look out over the vast estate.

DAME LADY BEATRICE

This family has endured the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. From war and pestilence to abundance and great wealth. And through it all, one thing has stood steadfast.

LORD BITTERMAN

And what is that, Mother?

DAME LADY BEATRICE

There have always been, and will always be, Bittermans.

LORD BITTERMAN

(Agreeing.)

Good Lord.

CUT TO:

INT. BRITISH ESTATE DINING HALL

The family is seated around a huge, long dining table filled with succulent dishes of duck, steak, loins, salad, etc. Lord Bitterman, tuxedo clad, stands as he clicks his spoon on the side of his champagne glass.

LORD BITTERMAN

May I have your attention, everyone? I'm afraid I have some frightfully bad news.

We cut to the various faces of pensive, but well dressed, members of this wealthy British family.

LORD BITTERMAN

As of noon today, this family is down to it's last twenty-five million pounds.

CECIL

Father, we're not--

LORD BITTERMAN  
 --Yes...I'm afraid we're destitute.

EMILY  
 No!

CECIL  
 Damn it!

Derrick pokes his head through the dining room window.

DERRICK  
 What?!

DAME LADY BEATRICE  
 The Bitterman legacy has ended.

LORD BITTERMAN  
 Good Lord!

CUT TO:

The wide shot of the British Estate. The voice over is heard again.

BRITISH ANNOUNCER  
 And now, the exciting new season  
 of...*The Bittermans of Buckingham*.

Music swells. Video out. The lights come up. The room  
 applauds. Delmont stands.

DELMONT  
 That's right, folks. In conjunction  
 with our Fall pledge we will be  
 premiering the new season of *The  
 Bittermans of Buckingham* two days  
 earlier than the national schedule.

The group gasps happily and applauds.

DELMONT  
 Of course, that will mean an  
 alteration in the way we present  
 our pledge breaks for the show.  
 Nadine, if you will?

NADINE, one of the Chicken Ladies, gets up and holds a stack  
 of printed materials. She starts handing them out.

NADINE  
 Thank you, Delmont. I have here a  
 handout that I'll...hand out. It  
 (MORE)

NADINE

outlines our approach to this year's pledge drive that will have a *Bittermans of Buckingham* theme.

RAMONA, another nervous Chicken Lady speaks up.

RAMONA

It's a hi-res, four color print.

EUNICE, still another of the Ladies chips in.

EUNICE

On glossy stock.

The handouts get passed around. Claudia gets one. She examines it.

On the cover is Delmont. He wears a three piece wool suit with elbow patches. He also sports a monocle and a Sherlock Holmes hat. He clenches a Meerschaum pipe in his teeth as he grins at the camera. The title on the headline reads: BY JOVE! IT'S PLEDGE TIME!

CLAUDIA

(Unimpressed.)

Wow...

DELMONT

Isn't that fun?

Claudia opens the handout. Inside are other pictures of Delmont in British garb; as a London cab driver, as a Policeman (Bobby) and as a British judge with a long, curly white wig. For some reason there is also a picture of Delmont in a swim suit and holding a surfboard.

DELMONT

Now normally I would address the viewers with something like:  
"Hello, I'm Delmont McCleary of the PTV Pals. If you like the shows you're currently watching, won't you please call in and give a pledge? Our programming depends on your support. So give, won't you?"

The Chicken Ladies applaud.

DELMONT

But with this new *Bittermans of Buckingham* theme, I could say something like.

(He breaks into an extremely bad Cockney accent.)  
 "'Allo Guvna! If you been a likin' this ere programmin, won't you pick up a wireless and pledge a pence? With a little bit-o-luck we can tea bag yer uncle and keep bringin' you great shows on the custard and jelly!"

The Chicken Ladies applaud loudly. The rest of the group follows, not quite as energetic.

NADINE  
 Just wonderful!

RAMONA  
 Like Dick Van Dyke from *Mary Poppins!*

DELMONT  
 You know, something like that. But it means we're going to have to re-work the set with a British theme.

Jimmy Hankey speaks up.

JIMMY  
 I could repaint the old *Reading Rangler's* set, add some faux brick, fake fireplace, some old books.

DELMONT  
 Wonderful.

DENNY  
 We can bring in tea services for the phone bank volunteers. Maybe get some British-y clothes for them from the costume room.

DELMONT  
 Fabulous. This will be great.

Claudia raises her hand.

MAURICE  
 Yes, Claire?

CLAUDIA  
 Claudia...Uh, I don't mean to be a fly in the ointment, here. But I have another suggestion.

The room grows silent as the Chicken Ladies turn a suspicious eye at Claudia. They make low, disapproving clucks under their breath.

CLAUDIA

First of all, wow, what a coup. The *Bittermans*. Great job, Mr. McCleary. I mean, who doesn't love a good...corset. And the character stuff you're doing is fabulous. I'm not sure about *tea bagging your uncle*, but...

Delmont starts to frown.

CLAUDIA

I just realized that this year will be the 40th anniversary of the station.

DELMONT

(Suspiciously.)

Uh-huh.

CLAUDIA

Well, look at our viewership. What demographic not only is our largest block of viewers, but also pledges the most amount of money during our pledge drives?

Everyone looks baffled.

CLAUDIA

Women between the ages of forty-five and seventy. Most of these people were our original audience back in 1952. They grew up with WMGT and all the programs throughout the years. Here...

She takes a stack of papers and passes them out.

CLAUDIA

I put together a list of all the old shows dating back from 1952 to around 1980.

The Chicken ladies get their copies.

NADINE

These are black and white.

EUNICE

On *plain* stock.

CLAUDIA

This is a list of all the old shows dating back to 1952.

DENNY

(Reading the list.)

Hey, *Captain Stubby's Playboat*! I loved that show!

JIMMY

(Smiling.)

*Mr. Boom the Science Man.*

DON LITTLE

*The Wack-A-Zoo Kids, Howlin' Henry Gerkin.*

STAN

Oh boy, *The Dizzy Dwarf Dancers*, that brings back some memories.

CLAUDIA

We can do a nostalgia themed pledge. I know airing the *Bittermans of Buckingham* costs the station quite a bit of money. Well we've got a whole tape library of all these old shows just sitting there. Free. We can air the old shows during the week, and then bring out some of the original hosts and characters live on set to help us out with the pledge drive. I'm sure a lot of these folks are still alive and would love to get back in front of the cameras one more time. And if this list brings out this kind of nostalgia in us, think of what it would do to our viewership, to see all these old shows again. To see some of their favorite characters from their childhood.

The room is silent as everyone mulls this. The Chicken Ladies cluck and turn their heads nervously at one another. Delbert looks sullen and a tad angry. He cracks a smile to hide his anger.

DELMONT

Well, this is a very...cute idea. We do, however, have a built-in audience for *The Bittermans of Buckingham*. And I just think that this premiere--

Maurice cuts off Delmont.

MAURICE

I like it.

The room grows silent again. The Chickens cluck louder. Delmont glowers at Maurice.

DELMONT

Excuse me?

MAURICE

It's a good idea. Fresh. Intuitive. Hits the mark. Of course it's in the early stages. I say we do some research, Claire. Find out about the old hosts and show characters. See how many are still around, how many are willing to come on the air.

CLAUDIA

Claudia...will-do.

DELMONT

Maurice...

MAURICE

The Bittermans is still a "go", Delmont, don't worry. You'll be able to do your Chimney Sweep impersonation. But I think adding on the nostalgia idea will just help us to the goal faster. At very little cost to the station.

DELMONT

(Slow burning.)

I see...

MAURICE

Let's meet back here one week from today and see what we come up with.

The room adjourns. People approach Claudia as they leave.

DON LITTLE  
Nice job, Claudia.

STAN  
*The Dizzy Dwarf Dancers...can't*  
wait to see it.

CLAUDIA  
Thanks.

The room empties. Claudia is approached by a sullen Delmont and his brood of unhappy Chicken Ladies. Delmont tries to smile as he shakes her hand.

DELMONT  
Well, very nice work, Ms. Wynn.

CLAUDIA  
Thanks.

DELMONT  
But before we go ahead with your  
idea, I think there is one thing  
you should know...

He pulls her closer and whispers, threateningly.

DELMONT  
I *am* this station. I raise the  
money that keeps us on the air. And  
I'm the one who decides what goes  
over the airwaves and what doesn't.  
So before you get too full of  
yourself, keep that in mind.

He glowers at her. She looks down at their shaking hands.

CLAUDIA  
Are you trying to hurt my hand,  
'cause it's really not doing  
anything. Just feels weird.

He looks embarrassed and lets her go. She wipes her hand on her shirt.

CLAUDIA  
Like Jello-O, you know?

Delmont storms off with a sullen group of Chicken Ladies staring daggers at her as they cluck away.

CLAUDIA  
(Worried.)

Oy.

CUT TO:

EXT. TV STATION - THAT NIGHT.

The exterior of the station as the sun goes down.

CUT TO:

INT. TV STATION.

Lydia Cooper waits in the front reception area. She wears black pants, a black turtle neck and a black knit hat. She hears a faint banging against the security door. She reaches over the empty receptionist's desk and hit the buzzer. The door opens.

Claudia enters. She is wearing a tight little black dress, black high heels and a string of pearls around her neck. Her hair is up in an elegant bun.

LYDIA  
(Incredulous.)  
What?...I told you to wear black!

CLAUDIA  
I did. I love this little thing.  
Fits in anywhere.

She twirls a bit. Lydia grabs her arm.

LYDIA  
Moron...we're trying to pull a  
heist, not throw a cotillion.

CLAUDIA  
A heist?

LYDIA  
You are prime time stupid, you know  
that? Come on.

Lydia leads Claudia through the darkened hallway to the back storage room. Claudia slips a bit.

CLAUDIA  
Ah damn! Hold it...I broke a heel.

She takes off her shoe and walks awkwardly. She smiles and breaks into a Katherine Hepburn impersonation.

CLAUDIA  
 (Jokingly.)  
 "I was born on the side of a hill."

Lydia looks at her.

CLAUDIA  
 Sorry...Katherine Hepburn.

LYDIA  
*Bringing Up Baby*, I know.

They head in to the store room. Lydia takes off her hat and puts it tight on Claudia's head. She takes out a tin of black makeup and begins smearing it on Claudia's face.

CLAUDIA  
 What is that?

LYDIA  
 Makeup, what do you think?

CLAUDIA  
 (Pointing at her blackened  
 face.)  
 Is this even politically correct?

LYDIA  
 Do you give a shit?

CLAUDIA  
 Not really, no.

Lydia finishes and picks up some gear from the floor; a waist harness, some climbing ropes, carbiners, pulleys and a step ladder. She hands Claudia the harness.

LYDIA  
 Put this on...around your waist.

CLAUDIA  
 Whoa, where did you get all this cool stuff?

LYDIA  
 My husband's a spelunker.

CLAUDIA  
 (Surprised.)  
 Really?...Wow.

LYDIA

What?

CLAUDIA

Nothing, it's just...I didn't know black people spelunked.

LYDIA

Who said my husband was black?

CLAUDIA

Oh...I'm sorry. He isn't?

LYDIA

No, he is. He just likes climbing in dark, damp places, that's all.

Claudia nudges her, suggestively.

CLAUDIA

Good thing for you, huh?

LYDIA

The fuck does that mean?!

CLAUDIA

Nothing. Let's go.

Lydia leads Claudia to the hallway outside of Stan's office. She sets up the ladder in the middle of the hall, climbs it and pushes a ceiling tile out of the way. She climbs up into the ceiling area above the tiles. She turns and pokes her head out, looking down.

LYDIA

All right, James Bond. Let's hit it.

Claudia climbs the ladder and up into the area above the tiles.

CUT TO:

INT. TV STATION CEILING CRAWLSPACE.

Claudia and Lydia crawl their way in the ceiling crawlspace towards Stan's office.

LYDIA

(Chuckling.)

"Dark, damp places." That's actually kind of funny.

CLAUDIA  
 (Agreeing.)  
 Right?

Lydia points to her crotch.

LYDIA  
 'Cause, you know, I've got a--

CLAUDIA  
 (Cutting her off.)  
 --Yes. Right. That's why I said it.

They stop crawling.

LYDIA  
 Okay, we should be above  
 Pencil-Neck's office.

Lydia slides away a ceiling tile to reveal the electronics storehouse that is, indeed, Stan's office.

CLAUDIA  
 Bingo.

Lydia starts attaching ropes to Claudia's harness. They whisper.

LYDIA  
 Okay, I'll get this secured to these water pipes and lower you down. But be careful. They've got the whole room set up with motion laser sensors.

CLAUDIA  
 Get the fuck out.

LYDIA  
 I'm not lyin'. You know what kind of budget he has for all his electronic do-dads? I hate to see what sort of sexual self-stimulation devices he's got in that desk.

CLAUDIA  
 The mind races.

LYDIA  
 Okay, here we go. Just move slowly.

CLAUDIA

Right.

Lydia starts to lower her into the room, slowly. Of course, very much like Tom Cruise from *Mission Impossible* (I really didn't have to say, did I?)

CLAUDIA

Almost there.

LYDIA

Okay.

The rope suddenly jerks and Claudia falls inches from the floor. She hangs helplessly as the room fills with rays of red laser lights.

CLAUDIA

Oh shit! The lasers. Lydia, the lasers.

She twists her body to look up. Lydia is gone. We can hear Lydia crawling through the crawlspace, climbing down the ladder and running down the hall.

CLAUDIA

(Whispering.)

Lydia! Lydia! You're going for help, right?!...Right?! Oh my God, my sinuses are filling up.

There is no answer. She looks up again and sees Mickey Rooney peering down at her. He smiles and waves.

CLAUDIA

Mickey! Mickey, you have to help me out of here! I was going for a laptop and, I know I shouldn't have, but--

Tim replaces the ceiling tile. We hear him crawling away.

CLAUDIA

Oh perfect.

Claudia hangs, twisted and contorted, in the laser filled room.

CUT TO:

INT. STAN'S OFFICE - THE NEXT MORNING.

There is a close up on a pool of clear liquid on the floor. We follow a string of liquid up to Claudia's snoring mouth. She is drooling in her sleep.

Suddenly there is a clunking noise and the lasers go out. The door opens and in walks Stan, whistling *Keep Your Eye On The Sparrow* the theme from *Baretta*. He goes to his desk, takes off his jacket, hangs it on a wall hook and puts his lunch box in his desk, all without ever noticing Claudia.

He picks up a clipboard and exits the room. The door slams behind him.

The slamming door wakes Claudia with a start.

CLAUDIA

Wha!

She writhes in pain.

CLAUDIA

Ahhhhh!

CUT TO:

INT. TV STATION.

Claudia limps down the hallway in her black dress, waist harness, broken shoe, knit hat and black-face.

CUT TO:

INT. PRODUCTION OFFICE

Claudia goes to her desk and slumps in the chair. She takes off the knit hat. Her hair sticks out in a tangles mass, like a bird's nest.

Stan Fritzel walks by and sets a box with a new laptop in it on her desk.

STAN

One laptop computer, as per your request.

He walks away. She stares at the box a moment, then looks up. Tom and Lydia are in the doorway, grinning. They fist-bump one another and exit.

CLAUDIA  
I will make them suffer.

Maurice strides up to Claudia's desk, cane in hand.

MAURICE  
Claire, I've made an executive  
decision. We're going full on with  
your Nostalgia idea for pledge.  
You'll be working closely with  
Delmont and his team for the next  
three weeks. Good job. Tally-ho.

He exits. She looks out through the doorway and sees Delmont  
and the Chicken Ladies standing in the hall. They are  
seething. They glower at Claudia as they walk away.

CLAUDIA  
Wonderful.

There is a pause as she stares at the laptop box.

CLAUDIA  
It's *Claudia*.

CUT TO BLACK

CREDITS.