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The Farnsworth Invention

by Aaron Sorkin

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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“A Page to Stage Production of The Farnsworth Invention
Produced in 2007 by The La Jolla Playhouse, La Jolla, California
Christopher Ashley, Artistic Director & Steven Libman, Managing Director”

“Original Broadway Production by Produced by Dodger Properties,
Steven Spielberg and Rabbit Ears, LLC; Produced in association with
Frederick Zollo, Jeffrey Sine, Dancap Productions, Inc., Latitude Link
and Pelican Group; Associate Producer: Lauren Mitchell”

THE FARNSWORTH INVENTION opened on Dec 3, 2007 at The Music Box Theater in New York City, produced by Dodger Properties, Steven Spielberg and Rabbit Ears, LLC; in association with Frederick Zollo, Jeffrey Sine, Dancap Productions, Inc., Latitude Link and Pelican Group. The Associate Producer was Lauren Mitchell, Executive Producer was Sally Campbell Morse. The production was directed by Des McAnuff with the following cast and creative staff:

DAVID SARNOFF Hank Azaria
 LIZETTE SARNOFF, MARY PICKFORD and others Nadia Bowers
 PEM'S FATHER, CLIFF GARDNER and others Kyle Fabel
 ATKINS, WALTER GIFFORD,
 DOUGLAS FAIRBANKS and others Maurice Godin
 YOUNG PHILO T. FARNSWORTH and others . . . Christian M. Johansen
 WILKINS, ANALYST and others Aaron Krohn
 GEORGE EVERSON,
 VLADIMIR ZWORYKIN and others Bruce Mckenzie
 YOUNG DAVID SARNOFF and others Malcolm Morano
 STAN WILLIS and others Spencer Moses
 LESLIE GORRELL and others Michael Mulheren
 JUSTIN TOLMAN,
 JIM HARBORD, DOCTOR and others Jim Ortlieb
 SARNOFF'S FATHER, SIMMS, LIPPINCOTT,
 HOUSTON CONTROL and others Michael Pemberton
 BETTY AND OTHERS Katharine Powell
 HARLAN HONN,
 RADIO ANNOUNCER, LENNOX and others Steve Rosen
 PHILO T. FARNSWORTH Jimmi Simpson
 RUSSIAN OFFICER, WILLIAM CROCKER and others . . . James Sutorius
 SARNOFF'S MOTHER, PEM'S MOTHER,
 AGNES FARNSWORTH, MINA EDISON and others Margot White
 PEM FARNSWORTH and others Alexandra Wilson
 WACHTEL and others William Youmans

Assistant Director: Daisy Walker
 Scenic Design: Klara Zieglerova
 Costume Design: David C. Woolard
 Lighting Design: Howell Binkley
 Sound Design: Walter Trarbach
 Hair and Wig Design: Mark Adam Rampmeyer
 Company Manager: Jennifer Hindman Kemp
 General Manager: Dodger Management Group
 Production Stage Manager: Frank Hartenstein
 Technical Supervisor: Peter Fulbright and Tech Production Services, Inc.
 Stage Manager: Kelly Martindale
 Assistant Stage Manager: Stephanie Atlan

ACT I

(As the audience enters, a scrim curtain is down. The curtain is a huge diagram of Philo Farnsworth's television operating system, complete with indecipherable equations and ungodly electronic components.)

(The scrim conceals the playing area, a raked stage which will have to serve many purposes. The action should flow from scene to scene seamlessly, with a new scene being defined by a sudden lighting change, a sound cue or a set piece being slammed.)

(With the exception of the principals, actors will double and triple in roles.)

(As the house lights go out, a small pool of light comes up behind the scrim revealing DAVID SARNOFF.)

(SARNOFF is of indeterminate age but he's an alpha male. Confident with a dry wit, he's generally the smartest person in any room he walks into. He doesn't suffer fools but he's able to recognize character and intelligence in his enemies, of which he has many.)

(He addresses the audience directly and informally.)

SARNOFF. Good evening, I'm David Sarnoff. There's a rule in storytelling that says you never tell your audience something they already know but I'm gonna chance it anyway by starting like this: the only reason you can see me right now is because light is reflecting off of me. *Light* bounces and I wanted to make sure everyone knew that or 20 minutes in you're gonna be thinking what in the hell is happening? Can we show everyone else?

(Pools of light hit up on the other ACTORS in the cast placed variously around the stage.)

SARNOFF. (*continued*) Thank you.

(*The CAST exits.*)

You also need to know that 17 is a very important number but I'm gonna remind of you of that later. And by the way the ends do justify the means, *that's what means are for*. Now it's 1921 and not a lot of people were thinking about electrons except the writers of comic books and the readers of comic books, one of whom was a kid from Indian Creek, Utah whose family had just moved to Rigby, Idaho to live on his uncle's potato farm. If there are any Brits in the house they're gonna start shouting John Logie Baird at me but they're wrong, Baird didn't have it. Neither did Nipkow or Ernst Alexanderson and neither did Vladimir Zworykin. I know they didn't have it 'cause I knew these men and Zworykin worked for me. Nobody had it, nobody was close and lemme tell you nobody cared that much 'cause at best it was gonna be considered a nifty parlor trick. Nobody had it except a 14-year-old kid in Rigby, Idaho standing in a field of potatoes. He rode a three-disc plow, drawn by a mule, making three parallel lines in the earth at once. Then three more. Then three more and three more until he was done with his work. He stepped off the plow, looked back at the rows and rows of parallel lines, and that's when he realized the key to the most influential invention in history. So he did what any world-class electrical engineer would do in that situation: He went to see his 9th grade science teacher.

(*LIGHTS CHANGE TO:*)

Classroom

(Where TOLMAN is working at his desk. YOUNG PHILO taps on the open door.)

YOUNG PHILO. Excuse me.

TOLMAN. Yeah.

YOUNG PHILO. Mr. Tolman?

TOLMAN. What can I do for you?

YOUNG PHILO. Are you Mr. Tolman?

TOLMAN. Yeah.

YOUNG PHILO. My name's Philo Farnsworth. My family just moved here, I'm starting school on Monday.

TOLMAN. Well you're gonna have me for Basic Science.

YOUNG PHILO. I wanted to ask you about that.

TOLMAN. Yeah.

YOUNG PHILO. I was wondering if I could skip Basic Science and take your chemistry class instead.

TOLMAN. You've gotta have Basic Science before you can take Chemistry.

YOUNG PHILO. I understand.

TOLMAN. Good.

YOUNG PHILO. I think that's perfectly reasonable.

TOLMAN. Thanks. *(pause)* Anything else?

YOUNG PHILO. Could I ask you a quick question?

SARNOFF. *(to the audience)* Remember, it's 1921, the guy hasn't started ninth grade and we're in Huckleberry, Idaho. Listen to what comes out of his mouth.

YOUNG PHILO. When light hits photoelectric material it releases a spray of electrons, right?

TOLMAN. Hm?

SARNOFF. "Hm?" This is Justin Tolman, by the way. He's a decent enough guy but he'll be easy to destroy during depositions. Right now he has no idea what's just walked into his classroom. Go ahead, ask the question again.

YOUNG PHILO. Photoelectric material, like, say, selenium, it releases a spray of electrons when light hits it?

TOLMAN. Yeah.

YOUNG PHILO. And a cathode does essentially the opposite, right? It takes invisible electrons and makes them glow?

TOLMAN. *(beat)* I think so.

YOUNG PHILO. Okay. Thank you.

(And PHILO exits –)

TOLMAN. What the hell –

SARNOFF. Yeah, get used to it, my friend.

(to the audience)

He'd already told his father about the idea. He'd explained that "tele" was Greek. It meant "distant." Vision from a distance. Television. The father said he shouldn't repeat this stuff to anyone else 'cause no one would take him seriously again. This is like Toscanini's dad telling him no one's gonna take you seriously with that stick in your hand. *(beat)* It's Tuesday, second day of school.

(A school bell rings –)

TOLMAN. *(to the class)* All right, that's it. Everyone put the homework assignments on my desk as you leave this room as quickly and quietly as possible.

(The students are filing out, dropping off the homework on the desk –)

SARNOFF. It was a one-page assignment from the front of the textbook.

TOLMAN. Whoa, whoa, what's this?

YOUNG PHILO. Homework.

TOLMAN. This is last night's homework?

YOUNG PHILO. No, I just went ahead and did it for the whole year, is that okay?

(TOLMAN starts leafing through PHILO's pages.)

TOLMAN. All right, you know what, you stay for a second.
The rest of you, let's go. C'mon, let's go.

(The rest of the students exit...)

TOLMAN. Kid. Your father, he works for the government?
He's a scientist?

YOUNG PHILO. He's a potato farmer.

TOLMAN. You read at home?

YOUNG PHILO. Yes sir.

TOLMAN. Tesla?

YOUNG PHILO. Yes.

TOLMAN. Edison?

YOUNG PHILO. Yeah.

TOLMAN. Marconi?

YOUNG PHILO. Yes.

TOLMAN. What else?

YOUNG PHILO. I like the Sears Roebuck catalogue.

TOLMAN. Okay, well, you've passed Basic Science.

YOUNG PHILO. Hey thanks, that's great news.

(And PHILO just stands there...)

TOLMAN. *(pause)* That's it.

YOUNG PHILO. Can I draw something for you?

TOLMAN. Excuse me?

YOUNG PHILO. Can I draw something for you?

TOLMAN. Yeah.

(TOLMAN hands him a piece of paper and PHILO starts drawing -)

YOUNG PHILO. *(while he's drawing)* You trap light in an empty jar, roughly the size of what your mother would use to keep fruit fresh only it would have to be a vacuum jar. A vacuum jar, and the inside of the jar is treated with a special surface that reacts to light and converts it into electrical impulses. And we scan the impulses. Line by line. 50, 60 lines, I don't know, 500 lines. The effect would be instantaneous but in actuality we'd be reading it line by line. The way we plow a field.

TOLMAN. Son, the cathode, the selenium, the vacuum jar, what's all this about?

YOUNG PHILO & PHILO. I think there's a way to transmit pictures electronically through the air the way we're doing with sound and radio.

*(And this last line was spoken by the adult **PHILO FARNSWORTH** who's walked up behind his childhood self to deliver the punchline to the scene.)*

*(**PHILO**'s a few years younger than **SARNOFF**. He has a quick, often self-deprecating wit, and like a giant who's careful not to trample a mouse, **PHILO** knows not to use his intellect to pick on anyone who isn't his own size. **SARNOFF**'s the only man who's ever met that description.)*

*(As soon as **PHILO** says the word "radio," it begins to rain and a **RUSSIAN POLICE OFFICER** enters shouting –)*

RUSSIAN OFFICER. *Komendah! Zazhgite fakuly!*

(LIGHTS CHANGE TO:)

Uzlian Shtetl

(As some more OFFICERS enter with lit torches.)

PHILO. *(to the audience)* Shtetl is a Yiddish word that means ghetto and this shtetl was in the Uzlian Province of, I think, Minsk, but I'm not sure, there's a lot about his history that's a little cloudy to me.

OFFICER. *Komendah!*

(Upstage, a little BOY and his PARENTS are packing the last of their stuff onto a wagon –)

PHILO. Sarnoff's 10-years-old when the Czar sends the cops to empty out the village.

OFFICER. *Zazhgite fakuly!*

PHILO. *(to SARNOFF)* Translate the Russian please.

SARNOFF. I don't remember a lot of Russian.

PHILO. You remember this.

SARNOFF. It had something to do with lighting the –

PHILO. Translate the damn Russian.

SARNOFF. *(beat)* Komendah means – it's "company," "battalion," he's calling to the other officers.

PHILO. Zazhgite fakuly?

SARNOFF. Light the torches.

PHILO. An officer comes up to the boy.

OFFICER. *(in Russian – to the BOY)* *Ne nada bayat'sia. My ne zveri.*

SARNOFF. *(translating)* Don't be scared, we're not monsters.

OFFICER. *(in Russian)* *U tvaego atsa mnoga knig.*

SARNOFF. *(translating)* Your father has a lot of books.

OFFICER. *(in Russian)* *Ty lyubish knigi?*

SARNOFF. *(translating)* Do you like books?

PHILO. And 10-year-old Sarnoff says to the armed Russian officer... ?

YOUNG SARNOFF. *(in Russian)* *Pashol k chortu.*

SARNOFF. Go fuck yourself.

OFFICER. (*pause – in Russian*) *Chto ty skazal?*

SARNOFF. What did you say?

YOUNG SARNOFF. (*in Russian*) *Nichevo.*

SARNOFF. I didn't say anything.

OFFICER. (*in Russian*) *Ladna.*

SARNOFF. Good.

YOUNG SARNOFF. (*in Russian*) *Tol'ko pashel by ty k chortu.*

SARNOFF. (*translating*) Except go fuck yourself.

OFFICER. (*in Russian*) *Pashushai, druzhischa.*

SARNOFF. Take your hand off me before I make you shoot me in front of 200 people.

YOUNG SARNOFF. *Uberi ruki, a to budesh vynuzhden zastrelit' menya pri vsekh.*

PHILO. And then they burned his house down while he watched. The family moved to the lower east side of Manhattan where Sarnoff sold Yiddish newspapers on a street corner. His father died when he was 13 and by 14 he had absolutely no trace of a Russian accent. The New York Herald was hiring messenger boys and he went in for the job but when he got to the Herald building he went into the wrong office.

(*LIGHTS CHANGE TO:*)

Office

(Where TWO MEN are working at a desk and a third is sitting at a table. The THIRD MAN has headphones on and is transcribing a message at a wireless set.)

(YOUNG SARNOFF walks in –)

MAN #1. Can I help you?

YOUNG SARNOFF. The paper said you need messenger boys and I'd like the job.

MAN #1. This isn't the *Herald*, you're in the wrong office, you want to go down the hall.

YOUNG SARNOFF. I'm sorry?

MAN #1. This isn't the newspaper, we just lease office space here. This is the Commercial Cable Company.

YOUNG SARNOFF. Sorry.

MAN #1. Not a problem, you want to be down the hall.

(And YOUNG SARNOFF starts to leave but stops...)

YOUNG SARNOFF. What do you do?

MAN #1. We send and receive cable messages. *(beat)* Radio, you heard of it?

PHILO. He was in love. I know how he felt. It took him a week and a half to become the company's best wireless operator but they fired him anyway 'cause he wouldn't work on the Jewish holidays. That was fine, though, 'cause it set the stage for his first triumph and it was on a massive scale.

(LIGHTS CHANGE TO:)

American Marconi

(Something's going on. There's a large crowd and people are being held back by a few police officers.)

(YOUNG SARNOFF *is manning a wireless machine. Every once in a while he'll shout out a name to the crowd as he writes it down.)*

YOUNG SARNOFF. *(shouting)* James Cooley! James W. Cooley!

PHILO. He'd been hired by American Marconi, the American arm of the British owned Marconi Wireless Telegraph and Signal Company. American Marconi rented a tiny room on the second floor of Wannamaker's Department Store. On this night, the police were handling the crowd that was growing down on the street and there were even a few officers upstairs with some V.I.P.'s that had been let in. It was Sunday night and 30 hours earlier, the *Parisian*, a passenger ship about 300 nautical miles off the coast of Nova Scotia, had gotten a radio message.

YOUNG SARNOFF. *(calling out)* Mrs. William Christiansen.

(WACHTEL makes his way through the crowd at the door and over to SIMMS, who's busy and energized –)

WACHTEL. Eddie, what the hell is going on, I've been on a train from Chicago for sixteen hours –

SIMMS. The *Carpathia's* got 712 survivors on board.

WACHTEL. Confirmed?

SIMMS. Yes.

WACHTEL. How do we know?

SIMMS. They radioed another ship, the *Parisian* and we're on with 'em right now.

WACHTEL. They've got the names?

YOUNG SARNOFF. *(calling out)* Douglas W. Winston.

(SIMMS stops his movement...)

SIMMS. We've got the names.

YOUNG SARNOFF. Winslow. I'm sorry, Douglas W. Winslow.

WACHTEL. Are you telling me we're the only ones with the names of the survivors?

SIMMS. Yeah.

WACHTEL. How the hell did – ?

SIMMS. We got all the other wireless stations on the Atlantic coast to shut down to avoid interference.

WACHTEL. Would there have been interference?

SIMMS. No!

WACHTEL. Who got them to do that?

SIMMS. (*indicating YOUNG SARNOFF*) He did.

YOUNG SARNOFF. (*shouting out*) Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Meriweather.

WOMAN FROM THE CROWD. And Julianne? Julianne Meriweather?

(**YOUNG SARNOFF** holds up his hand to indicate "just a moment" –)

WACHTEL. Who is that?

SIMMS. He got fired from the Commercial Cable Company 'cause he wouldn't work on Hannukah or something, I don't know what the fuck, but he's been sitting there for 30 hours straight, he won't give up the chair.

WACHTEL. What's his name?

SIMMS. David Sarnoff.

PHILO. And American Marconi was on the map. Or at least on the map enough to catch the attention of the War Department, which decided that it probably wasn't a good idea to have a foreign company installing electronic communications systems in our ships. By Congressional mandate, American Marconi had to be sold and they asked the General Electric Corporation to pick it up for some lunch money. GE did their duty and at a press conference held on Sarnoff's 22nd birthday, with Sarnoff and his beautiful French wife, the former Lizette Hermant, Jim Harbord announced that GE had acquired American Marconi and was converting its assets into a new company.

CHAIRMAN. (*from the podium*) The Radio Corporation of America.

(*And the RCA logo, to much applause, is revealed by TWO SEXY WOMEN on either side of an easel.*)

PHILO. Sarnoff was appointed Commercial Manager at 45 dollars-a-week. It was an executive job but the one no one else wanted. The job meant coming up with new uses for radio, and other than, "Please help me my boat is sinking," there were no other uses for radio and the other guys who'd founded the company with him gave him a hard time about it. In fact, at the press conference, one of two colleagues asked him exactly what did he have in mind for future uses and Sarnoff coolly responded –

SARNOFF. Farm reports.

SIMMS. What?

SARNOFF. Weather reports for farmers.

PHILO. He kind of walked away to listen to the rest of the press conference, so these two guys never heard him add –

SARNOFF. And music.

PHILO. And music is right. Information and entertainment. Why? Because Sarnoff's vision for radio wasn't one person talking to another person, it was one person talking to a million people. A network of radio stations, all under the RCA banner, broadcasting a signal to millions of living rooms with RCA radio receivers.

SARNOFF. He was out of high school, out of the Navy and after a year at Brigham Young, ran out of money for tuition. It was time to build a television set. Through a series of letters, Farnsworth made an appointment to see George Everson and Leslie Gorrell at the local Community Chest in Provo.

(*LIGHTS CHANGE TO:*)

Community Chest

(Where **EVERSON** and **GORRELL** are sitting and working.)

SARNOFF. Professionally, Everson and Gorrell were fund-raisers for charitable organizations, but privately they'd been considering investing some of their own money in technology, though what they probably had in mind was farm technology.

(And **PHILO**'s entered the storefront office –)

EVERSON. I'm George Everson.

PHILO. Philo Farnsworth.

EVERSON. This is my partner, Leslie Gorrell.

GORRELL. Philo's an unusual name.

PHILO. My grandfather was an officer in the Civil War and he got the name from –

GORRELL. Which side?

PHILO. I'm sorry?

GORRELL. Which side was he on in the war?

EVERSON. Leslie.

GORRELL. I'm not allowed to ask which side?

EVERSON. It's not polite.

GORRELL. *It was a war, George!*

EVERSON. He's upset today because our car won't run.

GORRELL. And you gotta tell people?

EVERSON. We went in on a car together.

PHILO. That Chandler roadster outside?

EVERSON. He hates the car. 75 dollars-a-piece. Mint condition, reliable. Comfortable, speeds up to 50 miles –

GORRELL. Reliable?

EVERSON. Excuse me, but that car has been –

GORRELL. The car is sitting in front of the – *it's inert!* What should we rely upon it for exactly?

EVERSON. Maybe if we exhibited a more business-like demeanor and stuck to the matter at hand.

GORRELL. Sure.

EVERSON. Thank you.

GORRELL. *(pause)* What the hell was your name again?

PHILO. Philo Farnsworth.

GORRELL. And what do you want?

PHILO. I need \$20,000 to set up a lab and create a device that'll transmit pictures, moving pictures, electronically through the air, and then reassemble them at great distances, all in a fraction of a second.

GORRELL. *(pause)* Hm?

PHILO. You see if you can convert a light image into many horizontal lines –

GORRELL. No, you want how much?

PHILO. \$20,000. *(beat)* It's a lot, but it's what I believe it'll take to create a working prototype. Bare bones. You have to understand we'd be starting with nothing but a work-table and a generator so I'd have to –

GORRELL. This is the Community Chest.

PHILO. Yes.

GORRELL. We're fundraisers.

PHILO. Yeah.

GORRELL. We raise money for charities. There's a flood, a town needs a new school, that's what we like.

PHILO. But your letter said you might be interested in investing in a new –

GORRELL. What letter?

EVERSON. I sent him a letter.

PHILO. It was in response to my letter.

GORRELL. Which said?

PHILO. That I was seeking investors for an idea I have for something that would transmit pictures through the air.

GORRELL. *(turning to EVERSON)* Are you losing your mind?

PHILO. If it helps, I can tell you that sound would be synchronized and transmitted simultaneously.

GORRELL. Would it?

PHILO. Yes.

GORRELL. (to **EVERSON**) And you wrote back saying?

EVERSON. That it sounded very interesting.

GORRELL. Okay, let's stop here, 'cause –

EVERSON. We always talk about maybe getting involved in an endeavor.

GORRELL. (to **PHILO**) Yeah, what is it you want to do?

PHILO. I want to transmit moving images electronically through the air, capture them again in a cathode ray tube and then project them onto a screen in your house.

(**GORRELL** looks at **EVERSON** –)

EVERSON. Why not?

GORRELL. Because I didn't understand a fucking word this kid just said and neither did you.

EVERSON. So let's hear him say more.

GORRELL. Why?

PHILO. 'cause while you're listening I'm gonna fix your car.

SARNOFF. And he did.

(*LIGHTS CHANGE TO:*)

The Street

(At the Chandler Roadster:)

SARNOFF. *(continued)* I have no reason not to believe his biographers when they say he started the car.

PHILO. Which is probably more than we can say for the Titanic story.

SARNOFF. Excuse me?

PHILO. Wannamaker's has never been open on Sunday.

SARNOFF. Listen you ridiculous hayseed-savant, I'm the world's first communications mogul, you don't think we fucking knew how to get into our – nevermind. There were 712 survivors, you want me to name 'em? Meriweather, Cooley, Dobson, Dotson, Winslow – Phil, there's no reason for me to make this shit up.

PHILO. *(calling to EVERSON)* Keys?

(EVERSON tosses PHILO the keys and PHILO gets under the hood.)

EVERSON. Your letter said you were in the Navy.

PHILO. Yes sir.

(to GORRELL)

The U.S. Navy.

GORRELL. Thank you.

EVERSON. Why'd you leave?

PHILO. Anything you invent while you're in the Navy belongs to the Navy.

EVERSON. So how does it work?

PHILO. It's been demonstrated repeatedly that electrons can be influenced to travel in a beam if they're shot through a vacuum and aimed with a properly shaped magnetic field, did any of that mean anything to either one of you?

GORRELL. No.

EVERSON. Sure.

GORRELL. Shut up.

PHILO. A glass vacuum tube. Now the beam of electrons is aimed at lines of phosphor dots. Magnetic fields of precise shape, strength, and duration.

GORRELL. I understood the words “tube” and “dots.”

PHILO. Let’s start at the beginning, an electron behaves in the following manner:

GORRELL. You’re saying that you can send a photograph from here to there electronically?

(PHILO gets out from under the hood.)

PHILO. I can but that’s not what I’m saying. I’m saying I can send a live moving image from here to there electronically.

GORRELL. Well I wouldn’t say it out loud to that many people, but for the sake of amusing myself, how far and how fast?

PHILO. As far as you want and roughly at the speed of light.

(PHILO turns the key and the engine starts.)

PHILO *(continued)* I also adjusted your carburetor.

(GORRELL looks at PHILO...then reaches in and turns off the car.)

GORRELL. We don’t have \$20,000.

EVERSON. We don’t. We don’t have \$20,000, but we do have \$3000 earmarked –

GORRELL. George –

EVERSON. Leslie, for an endeavor.

PHILO. Well, \$3000 would –

GORRELL. No.

EVERSON. I say we take him to see Crocker.

GORRELL. No.

EVERSON. Crocker likes science. He loves science. He funded the radiation lab up there where they’re doing cancer research.

GORRELL. *(to PHILO)* Your thing, what are you calling it?

PHILO. Television. It's from the Greek word for –

GORRELL. Does it prevent cancer?

PHILO. No.

GORRELL. (to **EVERSON**) Then no.

EVERSON. We're going there anyway. We take him with us
and arrange a meeting.

GORRELL. (to **PHILO**) You fixed our car...and you know a
lot of big words, most of which I think you're making
up, but I'll spring for a train ticket and arrange the
meeting.

EVERSON. Great.

GORRELL. And that's it.

PHILO. Where are we going?

SARNOFF. San Francisco to see William Crocker.

(LIGHTS CHANGE TO:)

Meeting Room

SARNOFF. *(continued)* Everson and Gorrell knew Crocker 'cause he was a regional director for Community Chest and he'd made a hobby out of funding scientific research which he could afford to do 'cause he was also the president of Crocker First National Bank. Oh, and his family built the Union-Pacific Railroad.

(PHILO is making his presentation to CROCKER and a couple of his DEPUTIES, along with EVERSON & GORRELL. He stands in front of a large chalk board, filled from edge to edge with various diagrams. It looks like future world. As he speaks, he's animated, like a teacher who loves teaching.)

SARNOFF. *(continued)* He'd been given strict instructions by Gorrell to keep it short. Try for 15 minutes but no more than 20. He began his presentation at exactly 10 AM and finished it at ten minutes past two.

PHILO. Now, I need lab space, a worktable, a glassblower and a high quality vacuum pump. I'll need to make some precision tools. *(pause)* Any questions?

ATKINS. The signal can only travel in a straight line, right?

PHILO. Yes sir.

ATKINS. How do you account for tall buildings, mountains, or the curvature of the Earth for that matter?

PHILO. I could bounce the signal off a series of stationary balloons.

WILKINS. Who else is working on television?

PHILO. There are five others that I know of. Paul Nipkow in Germany, John Baird in England, Herbert Ives at the Bell Lab, Ernst Alexanderson at GE and a Russian named Vladimir Zworykin who's working at the Westinghouse Lab in Pittsburgh.

ATKINS. Aren't you afraid they're gonna beat you to it?

PHILO. No sir.

WILKINS. Why not?

SARNOFF. Because they were working on mechanical television, which involved spinning a wheel that had tiny holes in it. The problem was that to spin it fast enough to do anything you'd need an engine you could run at the Formula One Grand Prix of Monaco. Mechanical television wasn't gonna work and Farnsworth knew that and that's why he was working on electronic television, which Zworykin and the rest of the team told me was never gonna work but which obviously did. Yeah, my guys may have called that putt a little early.

ATKINS. You've just named five of the best minds in electricity.

PHILO. Yes sir, I'm surprised they're sticking with it.

SARNOFF. Oh fuck off.

WILKINS. Didn't Zworykin file a patent application for an electronic system a while back.

SARNOFF. That's right, buddy.

PHILO. Yes sir, four years ago.

SARNOFF. Four years ago.

WILKINS. Why wasn't it granted?

PHILO. It doesn't work.

SARNOFF. It doesn't matter.

WILKINS. Why didn't it work?

PHILO. You've gotta scan the image and break it down into lines, that's how it's gonna happen. *(pause)* Any more questions.

ATKINS. Mr. Crocker?

CROCKER. Do you play a musical instrument?

PHILO. I'm sorry?

CROCKER. Do you play a musical instrument of any kind?

PHILO. Yeah, yeah, I play the violin.

CROCKER. No kidding, me too. *(beat)* Not well. My dad taught me a few songs when I was a kid. Turkey in the Straw, that sort of thing. You know, I never practiced much but I liked the lessons. Son, if you go out that door and make a left, that's my office. Would you wait there while we talk?

PHILO. Yes sir.

CROCKER. There's a violin back there. Feel free to fiddle around if you get bored.

PHILO. Thank you.

(PHILO exits)

ATKINS. He's not particularly credentialed in the field.

CROCKER. No one's credentialed in the field.

ATKINS. What he's suggesting defies intuition.

(Silence. Then...)

EVERSON. Why did you ask him if he played an instrument?

CROCKER. I'm just struck by the number of times people who are this gifted in math and science also play music. I don't know, they look at a staff, they look at an instrument, it just makes sense to them, they get it.

(beat)

All right, here's what I'm gonna do, I'm gonna give him the money. Half. Ten-thousand dollars for the first six months. But he's gotta transmit a picture. If he does, he gets what he needs. If he doesn't, we shake hands and say better luck another day. Leslie, why don't you go get him.

ATKINS. Hang on, Les. Bill, say it does work – and setting aside that at the moment a home television system that may or may not work retails for \$10,000 – what do you imagine the practical application being? To say nothing of the marketable one?

CROCKER. The practical and marketable applications of owning the patent on a device that would allow anyone access to all visual information in the world? I'm sure we'll think of something. Les, go get the kid.

(GORRELL starts to head offstage but gets stopped – they all get stopped – by the sound of a Tchaikovsky violin concerto being played offstage.)

SARNOFF. Yeah, turns out astro-boy was also a concert level violinist.

GORRELL. Mr. Crocker.

CROCKER. Yeah.

GORRELL. Everson and I are in for 3000 dollars.

(LIGHTS CHANGE TO:)

Outside Pem's House

SARNOFF. He tried liquor for the first time when he was in the Navy 'cause he was trying to fit in with guys who couldn't touch his IQ with two hands and a step-ladder so he was happy when Everson and Gorrell produced a celebratory bottle of Bushmills on the train ride home. It was after midnight when the train pulled into Provo, but he got in his car and drove straight to the house of Elma Gardner, who everyone called Pem, and began scouring the ground for a couple of small pebbles.

(PHILO, drunk, is looking around in the dark while muttering to himself –)

PHILO. Solder and a soldering iron. Filament, filament, filament, filament, some kind of filament wires...

SARNOFF. He'd been in love with Pem for the six months since she scolded him for talking to a group of kids at her church about electro-magnets instead of talking to them about how Jesus had once lived in Utah. When she asked him why he'd changed the topic, he said that he thought there was little evidence to support her theory. She smacked him. And then she kissed him. And I imagine he's been confused ever since.

PHILO. *(to himself)* Varnish, I'm gonna need...coil wires. Copper. These things are gonna heat up, it's gonna matter what kind of varnish.

(He loses his knees for just a second –)

Whoa. All *kinds* a gravity in this area over here.

SARNOFF. She thought he was crazy but she wanted to be with him no matter what absurd future he had in mind for electrons.

PHILO. The most important thing? Your relationship with a glassblower. And how many people can say that?

(He tosses a pebble at a second floor window –)

(quietly:) Pem.

(He tosses another pebble –)

PHILO. Pem.

(The window opens and a tired MAN sticks his head out –)

MR. GARDNER. Philo?

PHILO. Mr. Gardner.

MR. GARDNER. Watchya doin' out there, son?

PHILO. I'm sorry, sir, I'm turned around, I thought that was Pem's window.

MR. GARDNER. It's pretty late.

(MRS. GARDNER joins her husband in the window –)

MRS. GARDNER. Philo?

PHILO. Good evening, Mrs. Gardner, sorry to wake you up.

MRS. GARDNER. Don't be silly, dear. How did it go in San Francisco.

PHILO. It went very well. I just got back and I was hoping to speak to Pem.

(The front door opens and PEM comes out in a bathrobe –)

PEM. Phil –

PHILO. Pem.

PEM. *Ssh.*

PHILO. Guess what, I parked right on your lawn.

PEM. Phil –

PHILO. Wait, that's not good.

PEM. Are you drunk?

PHILO. Yeah, a little bit. Look –

PEM. *(calling up)* Mom, dad, it's okay, go to bed.

MRS. GARDNER. There's chicken in the ice box.

PHILO. Thank you, ma'am.

PEM. *(scolding)* This is Provo, Utah.

PHILO. How come anytime you're mad at me you tell me where I live?

PEM. Because this is Provo, Utah.

PHILO. I know that, Pem, my mail is delivered here.

PEM. And since you've driven up on my lawn, drunk, at one in the morning and thrown rocks at my parents, is there anything else I do that annoys you?

PHILO. You will leave a cigarette burning in the ashtray without putting it out. So a trail of smoke just kind of curls up to the ceiling for what seems like forever. That doesn't bother you?

PEM. Not as much as you telling me about it.

PHILO. Well, just put that cigarette out with commitment.

PEM. Why are you here right now?

PHILO. I have two reasons and they're both pretty good.

PEM. Phil –

PHILO. The first is that Crocker's gonna finance me.

PEM. (*pause*) What?

PHILO. I'm gonna build it, he's gonna finance me.

PEM. Oh my God.

PHILO. Ten thousand dollars but I have to get a picture in six months or that's it.

PEM. Are you – Oh my God – are you joking? Is this a joke? 'cause your jokes are stupid, Phil.

PHILO. It's real. And my jokes are simply way ahead of their time. Years from now you're going to remember one of my jokes and you're going to laugh, and you're gonna –

PEM. You're going to San Francisco?

PHILO. Yeah. I'm gonna need your brother to come with me and help. And my sister.

PEM. They're gonna be thrilled when they hear the news. They're gonna be – I mean – I can't believe it.

PHILO. Neither can I.

PEM. What was the second one?

PHILO. The second one?

PEM. You said there were two reasons you were here, what was the second one?

PHILO. *(beat)* I don't remember.

PEM. That's because you've been drinking and we're in Provo, Utah, and –

PHILO. I know where we are, can we prioritize?

PEM. Fine.

PHILO. My point is this: I will be working all the time, I mean I have six months to build the image dissector and the receiver so I'll be in the lab the whole time with –

PEM. *(a proud girlfriend)* You're gonna have a lab.

PHILO. And I figure, we'll still be together in San Francisco, I mean we'll be together. We'd have a small apartment and I'll have a small salary, but we could –

PEM. Wait a second.

PHILO. Sure.

PEM. Why will I be in San Francisco?

PHILO. *(pause)* Okay, now I remember what the second one was.

PEM. *(pause)* You're asking me to marry you?

PHILO. Yes, I'm – yes. I'm – yes I am.

PEM. Well...?

PHILO. What?

(PEM rubs her eyes, bends and over straightens back up in exasperation...)

PEM. ASK!

PHILO. Will you ma –

PEM. Yes.

(And she throws her arms around him and kisses him...)

PEM. Wait. When does the six months start?

PHILO. Now. We're gonna leave in the morning. And we're gonna need your mom's chicken.

HARBORD. *(holding up his glass)* To the Patent Pool!

ALL. Here here!

(LIGHTS CHANGE TO:)

RCA Party

(Music plays as a cocktail party is underway for radio executives.)

PHILO. A party at the Union Club celebrating the formation of the patent pool – a business arrangement between RCA, AT&T and Westinghouse. Sarnoff hated being in business with AT&T because he hated the company's CFO, Walter Gifford. That's gonna matter later, but for now Sarnoff's consumed with giving people a reason to own a radio.

(BETTY, a pretty woman in her early 20's, comes up to SARNOFF.)

BETTY. Excuse me, Mr. Sarnoff?

SARNOFF. Yeah.

BETTY. I'm Betty Jordan, I'm from the GE secretarial pool and they've assigned me to work with your group.

SARNOFF. Great. Do you know anything about prize fighting?

BETTY. I'm sorry?

SARNOFF. Boxing.

BETTY. No sir.

SARNOFF. Bone up. Four weeks from now we're gonna broadcast a heavyweight title bout from Jersey City between Jack Dempsey and a Frenchman named Georges Carpentier. The signal's gonna travel over 500 miles, that's West Virginia, Ohio, Delaware, we've gotta get some radio sets where the people are. That's what we'll be working on for a while. 7 AM tomorrow?

BETTY. Yes sir.

SARNOFF. Welcome to radio.

(JIM HARBORD calls over –)

HARBORD. David.

SARNOFF. Yes.

HARBORD. I had lunch with Walter Gifford in the back room at Delmonico's. He tells me you're giving his station manager a hard time over 25 bucks?

SARNOFF. Jim, Walter Gifford runs his radio station like a whore house.

HARBORD. You'd think it'd be more popular then, wouldn't you?

SARNOFF. I wish it were a joke. His guy is on the air telling us it's probably gonna rain on Friday. Then two minutes later he's telling us to remember our umbrellas, and if we don't have one we can pick one up at this place on Queens Boulevard. I do some checking and, yeah, the guy on the air got 25 bucks from the place in Queens to say the name of their store and he did it another two times in the hour.

PARTY GUEST. (*calling over*) Jim!

HARBORD. I'll be right there.

(*to SARNOFF*)

What's the problem?

SARNOFF. Well first of all, now I don't know if it's really gonna rain on Friday or not.

HARBORD. A hundred people were listening.

SARNOFF. Gimme three years, it'll be a hundred million, and then –

HARBORD. Enjoy the party, David, it's a party.

SARNOFF. Credibility can't be regained. You lose it and you're in the circus.

(**HARBORD** *walks away into the party.*)

HARBORD. I like the circus.

SARNOFF. (*calling after*) Everybody likes the circus, that's not the – ah fuck it.

LIZETTE. Watch your language, Mr. Sarnoff.

(**LIZETTE**, *who speaks with a light French accent, has come up behind SARNOFF with two drinks.*)

SARNOFF. I'm sorry, honey, I didn't see you there. I was talking to Jim.

LIZETTE. You were angry.

SARNOFF. Walter Gifford is allowing people to pay money to advertise during informational programming.

LIZETTE. How long is this feud going to go on?

SARNOFF. 17 years.

LIZETTE. Why?

SARNOFF. (*to the audience*) U.S. patents last 17 years.

LIZETTE. My darling, advertising during informational programming is not the reason you don't like Walter Gifford.

SARNOFF. I promise you Liz, it's business and nothing else.

LIZETTE. I've been talking to Tatiana Zworykin. Her husband is working on a kinescope.

SARNOFF. That's right.

LIZETTE. What's a kinescope?

SARNOFF. It's...well I guess you'd have to call it – what – a television receiver. It's like a radio receiver but instead of receiving a sound wave, it receives a light image. Also it doesn't work.

LIZETTE. What do you mean it receives a light image?

SARNOFF. Just what it sounds like.

LIZETTE. You're trying to transmit a picture?

SARNOFF. Well I'm not, Zworykin is, and some guys in Europe, but it doesn't work.

LIZETTE. You mean *project* an image.

SARNOFF. No I mean transmit an image. You'd be standing in another room and you could watch a kinescope and see this party.

LIZETTE. That's incredible.

SARNOFF. Except for one thing?

LIZETTE. What?

SARNOFF. It doesn't work.

LIZETTE. Will it?

SARNOFF. What.

LIZETTE. Work.

SARNOFF. Television?

LIZETTE. Yes.

SARNOFF. I don't see how, but if television gets invented it's not gonna get invented by a guy at Westinghouse, it's gonna get invented by RCA.

PHILO. (*calling*) Cliffy!

(*LIGHTS CHANGE TO GREEN STREET LAB*)

(*Where PHILO, PEM and AGNES are greeting CLIFF, with STAN waiting to be introduced.*)

CLIFF. Phil. Hey, Pem. Hey, Agnes. We've been sweeping up the place. Welcome to your lab.

STAN. Mr. Farnsworth, I'm Stan Willis.

PHILO. From Cal Tech.

STAN. Mr. Crocker's office hired me to help you.

PHILO. Well, I'll take all you can spare. When did you graduate?

STAN. I haven't, I'm a junior, they're giving me class credit.

PHILO. Okay. Well that's my wife, Pem.

PEM. Nice to meet you.

STAN. Ma'am.

PHILO. And her brother, Cliff Gardner and that's my sister Agnes.

STAN. How do you do.

AGNES. Nice to meet you.

CLIFF. How did I beat you here?

PHILO. We had car trouble.

CLIFF. What happened?

PHILO. Agnes drove into a salt flat.

AGNES. You were yammering about birdseed.

PHILO. I was yammering about Birdseye. Clarence Birdseye. Stan, did you see in the paper today?

STAN. Yeah.

PHILO. (*to CLIFF*) This guy's gonna flash freeze vegetables. Freeze them in an instant so they retain their cellular structure.

AGNES. Who cares?

PHILO. Anyone who eats food.

CLIFF. You know, Phil –

(to PEM)

Should I ask him now?

PEM. Go ahead.

PHILO. What?

CLIFF. Pem said you were gonna need glass tubes and since money's tight I thought I could teach myself how to make them and maybe cut out the expense of a glass-blower. *(beat)* I want to be a part of this, Phil. I'm not smart enough to, you know, I'm not like you –

PHILO. You're plenty smart.

CLIFF. I can learn how to make glass tubes.

PHILO. Glassblowing's hard and it's dangerous. These guys apprentice for a long time and I'm looking for them to make me one that's gonna be hard to make.

(HARLAN HONN *enters*)

HARLAN. Mr. Farnsworth?

PHILO. *(to CLIFF)* You are gonna be a part of it.

(to HARLAN)

Yes.

HARLAN. I'm Harlan Honn, I'm in the lab next door.

PHILO. Nice to meet you.

HARLAN. I'm working on new methods of refrigeration.

PHILO. What's wrong with the old methods?

HARLAN. If it leaks, there's a risk to consumers that they might die from the poisonous gas that's emitted.

PHILO. Well you better get on that then. Hey, Stan, do you have a place to live?

STAN. I was just gonna get a room down at the Y.

PHILO. We're gonna rent an apartment across the Bay, why don't you stay with us and save a couple of bucks.

STAN. Gee, thanks.

PHILO. *(to PEM)* Is that okay?

PEM. You betchya, Phil. Just me, you, my brother, your sister and a junior from Cal Tech. Aggie, let's go find a four bedroom apartment for 30 dollars a month.

PHILO. Hey see if you can find one that has a nice view of the –

PEM. Shut up.

PHILO. You bet.

(PEM and AGNES exit.)

HARLAN. Well if you need anything I'm in the lab next door.
If you need any equipment or another pair of hands.

PHILO. I wouldn't want to distract you from what you're doing.

HARLAN. Refrigeration? Please distract me.

(HARLAN exits.)

PHILO. Okay. Stan, what do you know about moving pictures.

STAN. I know a film projector has to move a series of photographs past the human eye at a speed of 16 frames per second to fool the brain into thinking it's watching fluid movement.

PHILO. Yeah we're gonna try something a little different.
You go get us a generator, Cliff and I are gonna start building a lab.

SARNOFF. So now he's got his team. His brother-in-law, a 19-year-old kid and a refrigerator repairman. I mention this because 50 PhD's at Bell, AT&T and Westinghouse told me that what was about to happen was impossible.

ACTOR #1. United States Patent Application 1-773-980, made by Philo T. Farnsworth of Berkley, California.

(And now, while we watch PHILO, CLIFF, STAN, HARLAN, PEM and AGNES come on and off, assembling various parts of the lab which is getting more and crowded, lights come up on a CHORUS of cast members reciting sections of Philo's patent application. They should speak over one another, sometimes three, four or five voices at once.)

ACTOR #2. This apparatus relates to the apparatus and process for the transmission of a moving image to a distance.

ACTOR #3. The transmission is by electricity –

ACTOR #2. Heretofore attempts have been made to transmit an image. These prior attempts have generally embodied a method or apparatus –

ACTOR #4. – in which each particular elemental area –

ACTOR #1. – that the human eye will retain a picture is of such short duration that the conversion of the light shades of the original image of the object to electricity and reconversion of electricity to light –

ACTOR #5. – cross section of such electronic discharge from the place, in which each portion of the cross section will correspond in electrical intensity with intensity of light imposed on –

ACTOR #3. – developed, fluctuating in intensity to the variations of the light current transmitted without the necessity –

ACTOR #2. Figure 2 is a diagrammatic view of the television receiver. Figure 3 is –

ACTOR #4. Figure 16 is a perspective view of a biaxial crystal showing the refraction of –

ACTOR #1. Figure 22 –

ACTOR #3. Figure 31 –

ACTOR #5. Figure 45 –

SARNOFF. In testimony whereof, I have heretofore set my hand. Philo T. Farnsworth.

PHILO. All right, let's try it.

(STAN flips a toggle and BOOMPH!, the whole thing blows up in an electrical surge. CLIFF, STAN, HARLAN and EVERSON and GORRELL, who came to watch the equipment test, jump back immediately. PHILO doesn't move, he just stands expressionless. HARLAN and CLIFF grab buckets of sand and throw it on the small fire that's started while STAN goes to the generator.)

STAN. It was a power surge, Phil.

HARLAN. It was the generator?

SARNOFF. The one thing in the room they hadn't built from scratch.

PHILO. It was the *generator?!!*

STAN. I'm sorry, sir, that was me.

PHILO. Don't worry about it.

GORRELL. Don't worry about it? *(beat)* Do you have anything to show for our money?

PHILO. *(pause)* The table works.

GORRELL. You have five weeks left.

(EVERSON and GORRELL exit)

PHILO. All right, well...we'll fix the generator, but once we do, is there a photoelectric material that's a better conductor than potassium?

HARLAN. Sodium.

STAN. We tried sodium.

HARLAN. Topaz?

PHILO. No.

HARLAN. No, could use willemite?

PHILO. I was thinking of cesium.

HARLAN. Yeah, but where are we gonna get it?

PHILO. Don't they use cesium pellets in the tubes that they put in radio kits? That you see in the Sears Roebuck catalogue? Little cesium pellets?

STAN. They do, I had one, but they're tiny.

PHILO. Yeah, we're gonna have to go to every hobby store in the city and buy every radio kit they've got.

SARNOFF. They spent all day buying radio kits, then all night smashing the tubes open with a hammer, emptying the pellets out and grinding them into a paste. The change to cesium was gonna help but the selenium hadn't been his problem and he knew that. His problem was that no one had been able to build him the glass tube he wanted. He'd be through five

different glassblowers. Two of them produced tube after tube that broke apart the moment they cooled, two others turned down the job outright and the fifth was doing the best he could. It was after midnight and Crocker was coming to the lab the next morning. His six months were up. He sat on the roof with a glass and a bottle of Bushmills.

(LIGHTS UP ON ROOF)

(where PHILO's standing)

PHILO. *(to himself)* Cesium'll send a spray...maybe manipulated through...rubidium...

PEM. *(offstage)* Phil, you out there?

PHILO. Yeah.

(PEM comes out on the roof.)

PEM. You want anything?

PHILO. No thanks.

PEM. You want your violin?

PHILO. No, I'm fine.

PEM. *(pause)* You wanna hear something funny? Bill Crocker says there's a correlation between music and science.

PHILO. Music is what mathematics does on a Saturday night.

PEM. Stan and Harlan are in there trying to rebuild it again.

PHILO. We don't have it.

PEM. We will.

PHILO. Not by tomorrow morning.

PEM. Then you'll get more money from someone else. This isn't the end.

PHILO. I'm sure you're right.

PEM. But if it doesn't work I'm not gonna make love to you until it does.

(PHILO smiles.)

PEM. No, I'm serious.

HARLAN. (*from inside*) Phil!

PHILO. Then I'm screwed.

PEM. Not until you get a picture you're not so let's go.

(*LIGHTS UP ON LAB*)

HARLAN. (*calling*) Phil!

(*STAN and HARLAN are looking at something with great interest as CLIFF stands nearby and PHILO and PEM come in from the roof.*)

PHILO. What are you guys doing?

HARLAN. I think you better look at this.

PHILO. What is it?

STAN. Cliff made it.

(*STAN holds out a glass tube...PHILO looks at it...*)

PHILO. (*to CLIFF*) You made this?

CLIFF. He let me watch for a few weeks, and then he showed me some things...and you've talked about what it needed and what it was –

PHILO. When did you do this?

CLIFF. The first two were no good but I did this one yesterday. And then I let it cool. I did it during lunches and at –

PEM. (*is this for real?*) Phil?

PHILO. Cliff made a cathode tube. (*beat*) This is the one we're using, we gotta tear this thing apart and rebuild it again.

STAN. You know there won't be time to test it before they get here in the morning.

PHILO. Have any of the tests worked?

STAN. No.

PHILO. Then what does it matter. Let's go.

(*A SOUND CUE. A low, pulsing, tension-building beat begins underneath*)

SARNOFF. Harlan bumped into the camera, right?

PHILO. Yeah.

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