

Wisdom for Radio Widows

A Straight-from-the-Shoulder Talk to the Woman Whose Husband Belongs to the Order of the Sleepless Knights of DX

By Larry Triggs



DX, DX! Ah! Whisper it softly, you Mrs. Greens, Mrs. Smiths and Mrs. Joneses. Breathe it gently into the ether whence it is to be sought and sometimes found. For it is a sacred thing, as you shall see. You who promised to love, honor, and obey your radio-fan husbands, you who darn their socks and bake their favorite pies, you who look to them for solace in time of woe, for pay-checks when the larder runs low and new frocks when it is spring—let not your hearts be troubled

with bounty from an ethereal world of jazz bands, bedtime stories and chain broadcasts.

You will probably remember that first shriek from the basement the night John finally got the radio set hooked up. Wonder of wonders! With his own hands he had created the miracle which spanned continents and whispered back to him what the other half of the world was doing. The shriek came when he put on the headphones and was able to distinguish a jew's harp solo from the station on the other side of

town. Think you he slept that night? Fond woman!

Then arrived that strained period of apprenticeship which came finally to fruition in John's announcement that he was going to build a set that would get DX. Ah, mystic symbol! Breathe it softly!

You stood, arms akimbo, the fires of rage gnawing at your breast. All those weeks of nagging him to quit fussing and come to bed, or stop fiddling down there and go see what Junior's doing in the attic; all these, were they all to be done over again? Right in the middle on a wonderful concert from BOOB, was John again to spring suddenly from his chair, pliers in hand, to tear the very entrails from the machine in order to correct a slight distortion in the tone? And was he to do it again, and again, and again? And was the radio always going to be in the basement, dismembered, when company came—and with such a good program on from WUMP, too?

THE ENDLESS QUEST

Ah yes, fond woman! All these things were coming again and again and yet again. And did you let a little fire kindle in your chest and grow larger and larger, all because you didn't understand DX, or your husband? Ah, tragedy—for John, patient beast.

He wrought this miracle with his own two hands—he who couldn't have fixed a

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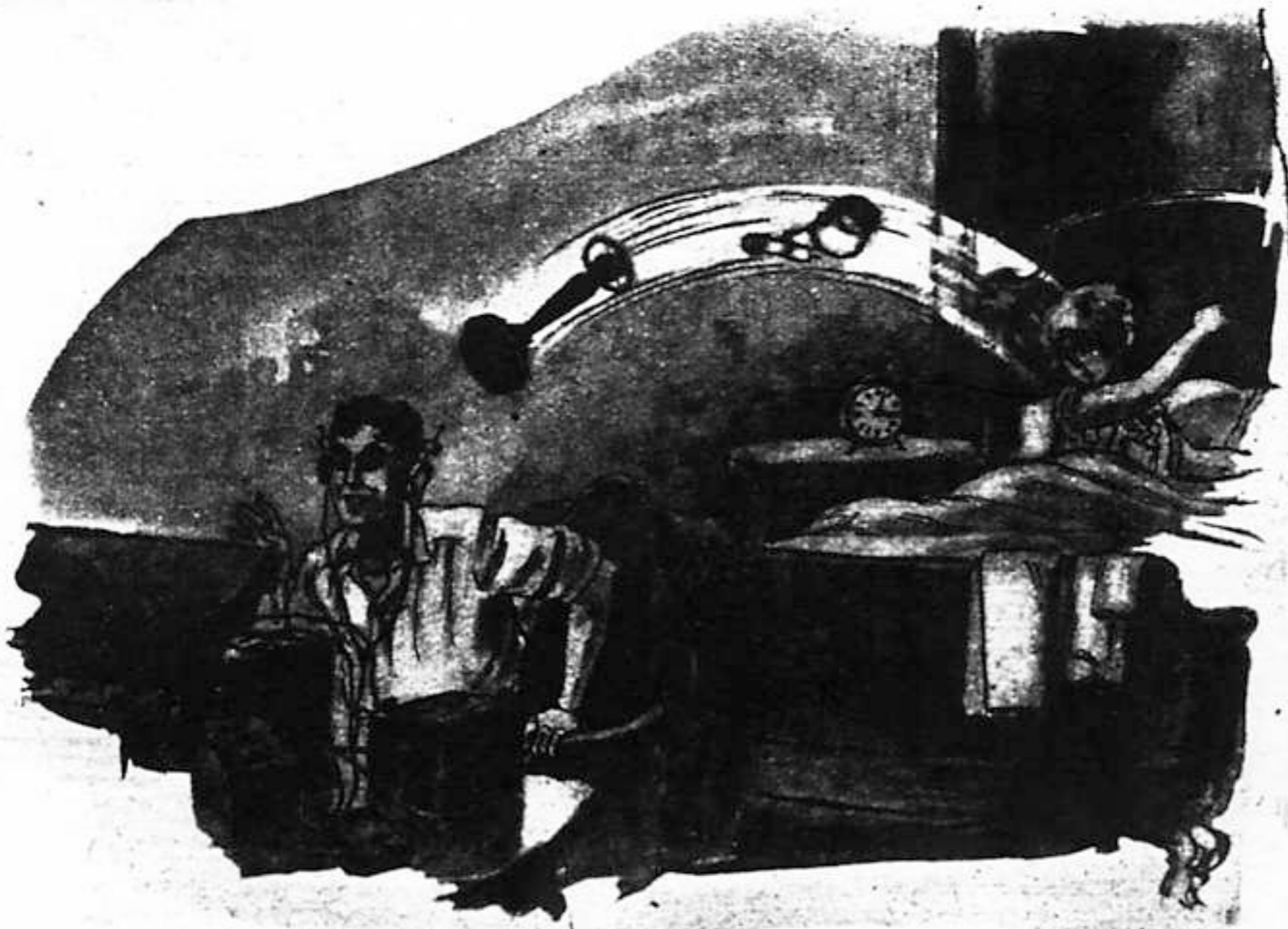
You stood, arms akimbo, the fires of rage gnawing at your breast, fussing and fuming at John while he tried for DX.

nor your minds be vexed. For it is a thing which surpasseth understanding, at least for most radio widows.

Your shoe-store-clerk or bank-president husband had probably never made anything with his hands before in his life, except possibly an elder-stem whistle or a cat's cradle. Or he might have even built a footstool once, or fixed the kitchen sink. But these things are as rain on the sea. They are commonplace creations of a moribund world. They hold as much mystery as a plate of apple sauce.

A STRANGER IN THE HOUSE

But, ah! the night John came home with a radio catalog under his arm! Then began that mystic tutelage, that divine ministrations from other spheres whereby John became a priest in the temple of vacuum tubes and "B" batteries and wrought with his own hands the miracle; the miracle that gropes in the outer darkness to return laden



—questing to the ends of the earth for some faint sign, for some faraway signal, no matter how weak, getting DX and other things.

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screen-door decently before; he created this thing. You probably liked it at first, thought it was a brilliant achievement; and then, exercising the legitimate prerogative of womankind, you accepted it calmly and conclusively as one accepts the telephone or washing machine. And since you are a woman, it is obvious why you grew indignant because John always had the darned thing torn to pieces. But, lady!—just as if that's not what it was for! I suppose it's an evidence of feminine logic to assume that a husband's radio set, once in working order, is to be left that way, immutable, static, a completed object. What folly!

Mrs. Jones, did you not know that a gem-like flame burns also in your husband's breast, and burns there still—in his, who couldn't properly open a can of tomatoes before?

Ah, the exaltation that surges through his veins when he turns a switch and hears music where there was only ether before! Had you understood this? Had you not seen the wild gleam in his eyes?

THE JOY OF CREATION

He did it, you understand, with his own hands, his own two hands, his very own two hands. Did you not comprehend the subtle significance of that? Thousands had labored before him, for hundreds of years, to perfect and simplify and coordinate physical theories and facts which he himself had never thought of or heard of before. Then, like a visitation from Olympus, the entire mystic scheme of things burst upon his consciousness like the dawn upon a burnished sea. And, lo! he suddenly knew as much about radio as these aged masters who toiled of old. Is that not indeed an endowment? Is that not indeed the gift of magic powers unseen? Did Balboa, or Moses, or Joan of Arc have anything on your husband now?

Ah, Mrs. Jones, fret not when John tears out the radio-frequency gadget to put in a new set of space-wound thingamagigs. Grieve not thy soul when he dismantles the audio-stage wampus to put in a new pair of giant-transformer dinguses which amplify equally at all frequencies. Tear not thy hair when he rips out both radio and audio stages and puts an intermediate whoosis in between them to make a super-heterodyne out of it.

Try hard to understand that what he is doing, Mrs. Jones, is not meant to aggravate you, but rather to appease these little electric gods of his, by amplifying signals at a much higher wavelength than that received by the radio-frequency dinglebat. It will greatly improve the reception, Mrs. Jones, reduce static, and extend DX. (Ah, marvel of sound! Breathe it softly). You must not cavil when John uses the bread box to shield his coils and condensers; for it reduces interstage coupling, whatever that is, and amplifies and purifies the harmonics.

You must not object when he builds a ten-foot horn out of papier mache, for it is a horn with principle—a horn with an exponential principle, which is to say it is a horn whose cross-sectional area doubles at equal intervals along its air-column length.

And this, Mrs. Jones, makes for more natural sound, approaching closer and closer to the fundamental wave, where purity alone is to be found. Is this not of the essence of clarity? Well, never mind. Try the next paragraph.

A MAN AND HIS HOBBY

When John explains these things to you, try, oh, struggle very hard indeed to look as if you understood, though indeed you do not understand—as you undoubtedly will not, because, as you are a woman, you don't want to. But you will try to look as though you understand; because if you do not, you will arouse a tiger in your husband's breast. And lady, it will be a deep throaty roar!

Two things will take place if you scorn your husband's admonitions regarding radio: (1) Your husband will say, or at least will think, nasty things about your mental powers. He will probably allege they couldn't be measured in anything larger than a coulomb or an erg; and (2) he will sense your disaffection and will anticipate your calling him away from his tinkering to mash the potatoes or give Junior his bath. This reflection will have the same effect on him as it would on a tiger whose nice, juicy chunk of meat is suddenly and malignantly snatched away. These effects, combined, arise from his intense application to the mystery of ohms, feed-back currents, plates, grids, filaments, inductors, variometers, potentiometers, volts, amperes, milliamperes, kilocycles, grid leaks and condensers. Don't ask me what they are. I only know they are the marrow of his bones, the symbols in his sacred shrine, the little gods in his miracle world to which he does obeisance. To disturb them will start him oscillating in a most fearful manner.

And it is not because he doesn't love you, Mrs. Jones, or because he doesn't love Junior or your raspberry tarts. It's because he is a mere man who has suddenly had the miracle and mystery of an inaccessible universe thrust upon him, a crimson cloak of stupendous glory thrown about his otherwise average shoulders, mantling him with wisdom which surpasses the terrestrial sphere.

WEEP NO MORE, MY LADY

When you go to bed alone at night, forbear, oh, forbear Mrs. Jones, to insist that he, too, retire, no matter how cold your poor feet may be. For it is at night that DX is abroad in the land. It is then that he communes with the infinite; it is then that he cruises the air, questing to the ends of the earth for some faint sign, for some faraway signal, no matter how weak, that he is getting DX (Breathe it softly!)

It is his Holy Grail, it is the ultimate recompense for his devoted oblation. To hear stations no one else ever heard before is not enough. To hear stations better than anyone else ever heard them before is not enough, although it has its compensations. But to hear stations farther away than anyone has ever heard them before; ah, that—that is the consummate goal, the final reward. And that is called DX, Mrs. Jones (Breathe it softly!)

Even if he wakes you up at 3 a. m. with the news that he has Australia, resist the

impulse to say: "Well, what of it!" Oh, be not so murderous, so cruel. Bear with him, rather, in this hour of gladness, this moment of divine rhapsody. Try hard, try hard to make the eyes shine and the face illuminate. It will be balm to his poetic soul (otherwise so dull, so dead). For DX is his faith, his hope and his dear desire—his religion. It may burn out after a while, and again it may flame higher. But despair not. It might be worse. He is happy now. You could put crackers in his bed and he wouldn't mind. But treat his DX disdainfully and he will go mad; he will go mad if

you do not grant him his hour of glory. Poison will gnaw within him if you do not understand that, in his soul of souls, he bears you no malice but is simply a radio-fan, exultant in his victory over the mundane earth, a giant of power in his own demesne, wrathful as a tiger when disturbed or taunted, but gentle as a lamb and sweet as a June day when he is getting his (say it softly!)—his DX!

Ah, to have understanding, Mrs. Jones, or at least to seem to understand—ah, this is the ultimate charity!