

- --50, Houston.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

- Wipe that off.

- We're going home right this minute. You ain't going to drag me out to dinner again, I can't stomach it again--

- What are you playing with now? What are you playing with now?

- That boy is always playing with something. He'll grow up to be an idiot. Come here. A matchbox full of flies. Where did you-- isn't that cute? He put the fly in the food, so we wouldn't have to pay for the dinner.

[LAUGHING]

- Get in that car this very minute. Get in the car. I told you, I'm going to blast you good and don't you think I ain't. I don't keep the flies. Get in the car! What do you mean, why am I keeping the flies?

- Oh Harry, don't be stupid. We may be going to dinner somewhere next Sunday.

[LAUGHING]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

- Emma, Peter, darlings, it's bedtime. Mother's got to read you a story, come along-- what are you doing under the bed? What are you doing under the bed? What are you looking for?

There hasn't been one of those things under these beds since we've been in the building. You never saw one of those until you went to your grandmother's, and then you tried to wear it for a hat. Come out under the bed. We don't lock that bathroom, you can go in there any time of night you want to.

Sit over here. No Emma, sit here. Peter, come over on this side. You're going to argue with me when it's not-- what have you got your nightgown on backwards for? Oh, you're going to sleep on your belly, but you want to fool yourself. Go ahead, I don't care.

What did you say, Henry? You want to go in the bathroom? Go around the house. You're not coming through here naked, go around the house. What if Mrs. Jones does see you? She don't go in for knick-knacks, go around the building. Ugh.

I'm going to read you a little story all about Jack and his beanstalk. Jack and his beanstalk, it's a fairy tale. No dear, it's not about your father. Now once upon a time, my dear children, in the days when fairies went about in lovely gowns every day of the year, and not just on Halloween, there lived a young lad whose name was Jack. Jack. That's right.

Now Jack came from a very poor family, so he decided one day he would set out upon his own-- own, on his own-- and try and make his fortune in the world. He had very little to take with him except his clothes he was wearing, and his prized possession, his little beanstalk. That's what it says, right here. You want to see it? Then look, his little beanstalk, see?

Now ever since childhood, Jack had been extremely fond of his little stalk.

Peter, take your hands off me, you're getting fond of yours. What am I going to have to do, wash your mouth out with a whiskey sour or something? You are so vulgar. Just behave yourself, and I won't do nothing to you. If you don't behave yourself, I'm going to really whack you on top of the skull.

It was his pride and joy. And such being the case, wherever Jack went, his little beanstalk naturally dangled along.

[GIGGLING]

Ah, I love these stories myself, I really do. So on the day he mentioned, Jack left his home, and trudged into the woods--

It says so right here trudged, not to cruise. Trudge means to walk very slowly. You just walk and not look at anything. I know what it means, and don't argue with me.

--that grew very heavily around the vicinity. All day long he walked, and walked, and walked without getting nowhere. And when night came he was so tired, he lay himself down under a very large tree and immediately fell fast asleep. With his cap under his head, and his stalk in his hand--

[LAUGHING]

That's what it says. After a while the moon came out. Right here, it says so, the moon came out. No dear no, no, no it's not a Greek fairy tale. It's a plain old-- it wasn't written by Hans Christian, Grimm, or any of those things at all. The moon came out, let it lay there.

And a mischievous little wood nymph passing-- wood nymph. Nymph. The word starts with a N, not a P. A wood nymph passing by saw him lying there, and took pity on him.

No dear, she took pity on him. No dear, pity is something you feel. Listen mother, and I'll explain to you what pity is. She didn't feel the boy. Listen mother, and I'll explain to you what pity is. Pity is something you feel deep within you. No!

"Poor boy," she said. "I will cast a spell over him, so that whatever he treasures most will become so great, it'll make him very happy, and bring him his fortune too." So after saying a few magical words over him, she passed on into the night.

[LAUGHING]

I don't know what she said, or I would say it over your father. Now when Jack awoke the next morning, you can imagine his surprise and delight to find his usually recumbent little stalk sticking straight into the breeze, 10 times as big as life, and twice as natural.

[LAUGHING]

This is a fairy tale. I love these stories.

"Well," said Jack to himself, "this certainly never happened before. It only goes to show you what wonderful things can happen to one when one leaves the farm. It surely does a person good to get out into the world. And just looked at the size of my stalk. Today I am a man."

So saying, he took his stalk in both his hands, and came to Hollywood and made a fortune. So he put his cap on his head, and there it was. And the moral of this tale is, my dear little kiddies, always be kind to everyone because you never know just who is a fairy.

Now tomorrow night, mother is going to read you a new and completely different tale. Mother is going to read you the story all about the little boy who lived in Harlem, who stuck his finger in a big dike to save his country. What? You don't see how that can help him, or the country, or the dike either?

[LAUGHING]

We've got to take these children out more often. They ain't learning nothing staying here at home. We really got to do it.

What did you say, Henry? Go around the house coming back into bed. You're not going to come in this way at all.

Go to bed.

I don't care whether you like it, go around the house. Good, then go out that way. I don't care if you come in or not, but go out that way.

Go to bed now, and mother will be in in just a few minutes, and sing you a hymn. That's right, darlings.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

- It didn't sound anything like my house growing up in the early '60s, around the foothills of Arkansas. I can guarantee you that.

- No, do you see what I mean when I say the sociological content-- I mean, how many times have you been out somewhere, and some woman can't control the kids, and--

- It was wonderful.

- Oh god, he was just so funny.

- While Rae did all of this speaking, and laughing, and talking, did he ever do any singing?

- Yes he did, as a matter of fact. On one of the albums called "Let Me Tell You About My Operation", which we'll get into shortly, he does a song called "I Don't Want To Be A Madam". So, let's have a musical interlude featuring la Bourbon himself.

The reference Rae makes in that song, first of all, to the women he mentions-- Nella Hoagland, Lee Francis, and of course Polly Adler-- they were all famous madams. Polly Adler is the one that, I guess, everyone remembers for her book about her New York house of prostitution, called "A House Is Not a Home", which was made into a movie.

But anyway, Rae's reference to the hospital bill he got in 1956-- he sent out a press release saying that he had changed his sex in Tijuana. This of course proved later to be not true.

But anyway, Rae was trying to drum up some publicity. I mean, one of the other things he did one time, he put out a press release saying he was related to the Bourbons. You know, the famous dynasty in France, which was also not true.

But anyway, in 1956, Rae did put out this press announcement that he had had a sex change, and instead of spelling his name R-A-Y, he said now he was going to spell it R-A-E. So anyway, let's hear what Rae said about his operation. Here's "Let Me Tell You About My Operation".

Well like I said before, the story about Rae's sex change was totally false. He was just trying to get some publicity, but--

- Did it work?

- I guess it did, because he changes the spelling of his name after that from R-A-Y to R-A-E. I have a Variety review here of Rae's nightclub act. The date of this clipping is October 18th, 1950. And they don't give him much space, and it's really an exercise of tongue-in-cheek. I'd like to read it.

It says "Rae Bourbon comedy, 15 minutes at the Park Avenue Restaurant, New York City. Rae Bourbon has been around for some time, but hasn't been recorded in Variety's new act files. He's skilled at femme characterizations, and purveys a risqué brand of comedy that gets over. He has a wealth of Kinsey-esque, but cleverly written material, and has a fluttering delivery which accentuates his characterizations. He's excellent for late spots where no family trade exists."

And a friend of mine, who listened to some of the Bourbon records that I taped, and was really taken by Rae. And this is what he said.

"I must admit that I was immediately first put off by that jackal's laugh of his. What a wicked tongue. Waves of double meanings. But now his laugh is one of the things I really like about him and--" me too, I mean that laugh is just totally unique.

- Once you hear it, you know where it's coming from.

- Right. "The first time I ever heard Rae Bourbon, a collector friend of mine sent me, that he added it as the last few tracks on a tape that he had made. He had some filler space, and he wrote an accompanying letter. He had actually seen Rae perform. He said 'the Rae Bourbon records are really fun, I thought you'd get a kick out of them.'

He, she, was quite the harridan. 'Walk around me, you ugly hag. How do you drink milk with that face? I mean, really.'

I saw him several times in Chicago, near the end of his career. He appeared in several small clubs there. I remember we stayed for several shows at each club. He was genuinely funny, and a very friendly guy. I spoke with him at great length at one of the clubs, and enjoyed him very much.

I remember on one show he dispensed with his regular routines, and just sat on a chair on a stage, and talked with the audience about his life and his career. It was all intermittently sad and funny. The guy was quite a performer. You couldn't help but like him in spite of his grotesque appearance. He was quite elderly at the time, and I've never seen a performer hold the audience in the palm of his hand like he did."

And that was my friend's comments about him. And you can imagine hearing the records, he probably just is twice as funny in person.

- Things that they couldn't dare record.

- Oh sure, but--

- Speaking of recordings, what are we going to hear next?

- Let's see, what have I got here? I think we're going to hear "When I Said 'No' to Joe".

And meant it, Mary.

- That's fabulous.

- The next selection I'm going to play is from Rae's album, "Ladies of Burlesque", UTC number 10. And to me this is Rae's finest work. I mean, this is a very skilled, very well thought out piece. It's called "Parade Girls", and it's about the backstage life of parade girls-- showgirls that used to tour with musicals.

- That was marvelous.

- Yeah isn't it, really.

- Unfortunately we're almost out of time.

- Yeah, and I have to really interject the only down note in the whole program, unfortunately. What happened to Rae Bourbon, this man that gave us so much of laughter and smiles. The poor guy, he was arrested at the Kansas City Jewel Box Revue, a famous female impersonation club in 1968, for a murder rap. And the details of the case are really bizarre, but it stemmed over the disappearance of Rae's pet animals.

Rae was traveling to a gig in Juarez, and he was in Texas. He had 71 animals-- Rae, he was just a fanatic for dogs, cats, he even had a couple of skunks-- anyway, his car caught on fire, and a passing farmer extinguished the car and saved the animals. So Rae had to board the animals at a kennel.

And what happened was Rae really wasn't too frugal with his money, and he had to pay someone to board the animals for a while. And by the time Rae got the money together to get his animals redeemed out of the kennel, the kennel owner had sold them. So in the course of things, the kennel owner was murdered, and they pinned the rap on Rae. And Rae Bourbon died in prison in Brownwood, Texas, on July 21st, 1971. He was 78 years old.

- What a shame.

- Yeah, it is.

- But thank goodness we've got these recordings. How many recordings did he make in total, David?

- Oh I don't know. As I said, I know he made 10 long play albums in the '50s, and an undetermined amount of 78s in the '30s and '40s.

- And we've heard what percentage of that music in the last two hours?

- Oh I'd say we've heard maybe half. With all that, Buddy, I've certainly had a good time, and I want to thank you for being able to share this with my radio audience. This show would not have been possible without the contributions of four people who really introduced me to Rae Bourbon, and helped me get recordings. And they are Rudy Grillo, Ken Clayman, Ted Tilton, and Frank Langer. And I'm going to close the program by letting Rae have the last laugh, and saying Rae, thanks for a lot of laughs.

[LAUGHING]