

Series: Arch Oboler's Plays
Show: Johnny Got His Gun
Date: Mar 09 1940

MUSIC:

(THEME)

ANNOUNCER:

Arch Oboler's Plays ...

MUSIC:

(THEME)

ANNOUNCER:

A story in the night ...

MUSIC:

(TO A FINISH ... THEN OUT)

ANNOUNCER:

Tonight, James Cagney in Arch Oboler's dramatization of the most talked of book of the year, "Johnny Got His Gun" by Dalton Trumbo.

MUSIC:

(DRAMATIC, FOR AN INTRODUCTION ... THEN SOMBER IN BG)

VOICE:

We tell you of Joe Bonham. Twenty-two years ago, he went to war. They carried him back from that war. They carried him back because he had no arms, no legs, no ears with which to hear, no eyes with which to see, no mouth with which to speak. Today, he lies alone in a room, in a hospital close to your city. He's living flesh and he waits. Your world is shut off from Joe Bonham. He has only the world within his own mind. We tell you of Joe Bonham. These are the thoughts of a boy who, twenty-two years ago, went to war.

MUSIC:

(OUT)

JOE:

Somebody listen to me.
I'm talkin' to ya.
Somebody listen to me.

Gotta talk to somebody.
It's dark, lonely. Somebody--
No. Goin' out of my head again.
How can you hear what ain't got a tongue, ain't got a mouth, ain't got--
No. Won't think o' that any more. Gotta think of somethin'-- Yeah. Somethin' else. If I don't
think-- my head, yeah, quick! Think about -- when I was a kid.

BOY:

Hey, Joe! Come on in swimmin'!

JOE:

Yeah, swimmin'. When I was a kid, I went swimmin'.

SOUND:

(SPLASH OF WATER)

JOE:

Dive in the river, feel the water against my legs and my arms. Now I haven't got any le-- No. No,
won't think of that. Think about ...

SOUND:

(CROWD BUZZES)

JOE:

My town.

MAN:

It's the nicest little ol' place on earth, Shale City.

JOE:

I gotta remember.

VENDOR:

Hamburger! Get your hot hamburger! Get your hot hamburger!

JOE:

Yeah. Best hamburgers in the world.

FATHER:

All right, boy, here's thirty cents. Go down and get three hamburgers.

JOE:

Pa!

MOTHER:

Oh, they're delicious. If I could only cook like this.

JOE:

Ma! She--

SOUND:

(CROWD OUT INSTANTLY)

JOE:

No. No, don't think of her. Think about--

SOUND:

(FAIRGROUND NOISES: CROWD BUZZES, BARKERS SPIEL)

JOE:

County fair!

1st BARKER:

See the lady cut in half! The fourth part of a dollar!

2nd BARKER:

... Motorcycle rider! Defying death inside a straight-up-and-down circular wall!

SOUND:

(FADES OUT)

JOE:

I - I - I can't remember any more. I gotta remember -- I gotta! If I don't remember things, I'll think, and if I think-- No. I gotta remember somethin'. Somethin'. (BEAT) Girls. Think about girls. Quick, think about girls.

KAREEN:

Joe?

JOE:

Kareen?

KAREEN:

Joe, I'm scared. I'm so scared.

JOE:

No.

KAREEN:

Kiss me. Hold me.

JOE:

Wait. We shouldn't have turned the lights out. Your old man'll be sore.

KAREEN:

He understands.

JOE:

Mm, your lips.

KAREEN:

Mmm. Don't go. They'll kill ya.

JOE:

I gotta go. When you're drafted, ya gotta.

KAREEN:

Oh, Joe. Joe, I don't want you to go. Hold me. Tight. Maybe we'll never get another chance. Now, Joe. In your arms, Joe. In your arms. In your arms. (FADES)

JOE:

(DISTRESSED) My arms! My arms!

SOUND:

(TRAIN STATION NOISE, BELL RINGS)

CONDUCTOR:

Board! Board!

KAREEN:

Joe, hold me. Don't go, Joe!

PASSERBY:

(SINGS) Johnny getcha gun, getcha gun, getcha gun ...

KAREEN:

Joe, I'm part of you now. Don't go.

SPEAKER:

As that great patriot, Theodore Roosevelt said ...

PASSERBY:

(SINGS, IN BG) Over there, over there ...

SOUND:

(TRAIN WHISTLE BLOWS)

CONDUCTOR:

All aboard, soldier! All aboard, soldier!

KAREEN:

No, no! Hold me, Joe! Hold me! Hold your arms tight around me!

OTHER MEN:

(JOIN THE SINGING IN BG) For the Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming everywhere ...

KAREEN:

Hold your arms tight around me! Hold your arms tight around me! Hold your arms--!

JOE:

No! No! STOP!

SOUND:

(ABRUPTLY OUT)

JOE:

(DISGUSTED) My arms. (SOBS) I haven't got any arms.

(BREAKS DOWN AND WEEPS, STRUGGLES TO SPEAK) You hear me, Kareen?
I haven't got any arms.

(SOBS) Haven't got any arms.
(GASPS, BREATHES HARD)
What's the matter with me?
I didn't find it out yesterday. Or the day before. It was--

VOICE:

(QUIETLY) Nineteen thirty-nine ... Nineteen thirty-eight ... Nineteen thirty-seven ... (FADES)

JOE:

(SOMBER) A long time ago.

KAREEN:

Joe?

JOE:

Kareen? Still in my head? I'll tell you -- as if you were here. Here's how I found out everything about myself.

SOUND:

(GENTLE MOVEMENT THROUGH WATER)

JOE:

I woke up, like out of a dream. It was like I was - I was in the water. I tried to swim but - I didn't have any arms.

SOUND:

(STEADY HUM OF MEDICAL EQUIPMENT)

JOE:

I started to kick my legs to float up in the air out of the bed. But I couldn't kick. I didn't have any le--

SOUND:

(OUT)

JOE:

I threw my head back.

SOUND:

(STEADY HUM OF MEDICAL EQUIPMENT)

JOE:

I started to yell. I only started. But how can you yell when you haven't got a m--?

SOUND:

(OUT)

JOE:

I began to reach out, Kareen. The only way I could reach out.

SOUND:

(STEADY HUM OF MEDICAL EQUIPMENT)

JOE:

With the nerves of my skin. The hole in my face. Could feel the skin creepin' around the edge of it. It went-- It went--

SOUND:

(OUT)

JOE:

I was BLIND!

(BREATHES) What a lousy dream.

Nobody could live like that!

Just dreamin', that's all.

It wasn't a dream.

It wasn't a dream.

(PANICS) Mother?!

Mother, where are you?!

Hurry, Mother! Hurry, hurry, hurry, and wake me up! I'm having a nightmare, Mother! Where are you?! Mother, listen to me! I can't stand it! Mother, please! Please tell me it's not me! Not me!

Not me! No, no, not me! Oh, please, not me ... (FADES)

(AFTER A PAUSE, CALM) That's the way I found out.

A long time ago.

Who was I telling that to?

KAREEN:

(GENTLY) Joe?

JOE:

Oh. Kareen?

Still in my head.
In my heart.
Now, now I'll tell you - about how I found out about time.

SOUND:

(TICKING CLOCK)

JOE:

About the days. Knowing about the days you're living through, that's important, see? But all I remembered was ...

SOUND:

(WHISTLE OF MORTAR SHELL)

JOE:

... dive in the dugout, and then ...

SOUND:

(SHELL EXPLODES, THEN ABRUPT SILENCE)

JOE:

And that was all.
A day in September, 1918. And that's all.
Time stopped then.
(DECISIVELY, TO HIMSELF) Start time over again.
But how could I catch hold of time when I was caught inside myself?

SOUND:

(INDISTINCT FOOTSTEPS ON TILED FLOOR, HEAVY WITH ECHO)

JOE:

Vibrations.
I had it!
When the nurse came into the room, the vibration of her footsteps, running up through the floor, through the bed, through the springs of the bed, into me!
All I had to do was count the seconds, then the minutes, then the hours between each visit she made until I had twenty-four hours counted up in my head. And, after that, I'd be able to figure the days out just by counting up her visits.
One day, the minute the nurse left me, I began to count.

WHISPERED VOICE:

One, two, three, four ... (CONTINUES IN BG)

JOE:

Second by second, second by second. When I counted to sixty, that meant a minute, as nearly as I was able to figure it. But I always lost count.

WHISPERED VOICE:

(FADES)

JOE:

I'd think of something else. Then I'd lose count again.

ANOTHER VOICE:

(IN BG) One, two, three, four ...

OVERLAPPING VOICE:

(IN BG) One, two, three, four ...

JOE:

Day after day after day, but I could never keep track. I couldn't. I couldn't.

SOUND:

(VOICES OUT)

JOE:

And all the time ... all the time, the days were running away from me.

And then -- one day, it happened --

The skin on the side of my neck, the half of a forehead, above the mask.

Lyin' there all the years gone by, I got to thinkin' that maybe there was some way I could use those pieces of skin. Skin free to the air. They were healthy. I got to thinkin' what a man did with his skin.

WHISPERED VOICE:

To feel with.

JOE:

But that didn't seem enough.

WHISPERED VOICE:

To sweat with.

JOE:

Yeah, sweat with! Hot and cold.

WHISPERED VOICE:

Sunrise and sunset.

JOE:

Just like that!

The idea came into my head just like that.

All I had to do was to feel with my skin. When it changed from cool to warm on that little piece of skin, it'd be sunrise - and the beginnin' of a day.

I got to thinkin' about the nurse and how many visits she made me each day and when she made them. Yeah, I'd better start with the nurse. She changes the bedding. In a hospital, they - they must change bedding in the morning. Maybe around, er, eight o'clock. So all I gotta do is wait till she changes the bedclothes. That'll mean - it's morning. Then wait maybe eighteen, twenty hours and that'll be next morning. That'll be--

Sunrise.

You can feel the heat of sunrise against your skin. Yeah. So ...

I waited until the next time she changed the bedding.

SOUND:

(INDISTINCT FOOTSTEPS ON TILED FLOOR, HEAVY WITH ECHO)

JOE:

She walked away!

Calm down, calm down because - you haven't proved anything yet.

Calm down, and wait, and count her visits.

SOUND:

(FOOTSTEPS)

JOE:

Number two. I dozed off and woke.

SOUND:

(FOOTSTEPS)

JOE:

Visit number three. Mm, time got all mixed up.

SOUND:

(FOOTSTEPS)

JOE:

Then four, and then--

SOUND:

(FOOTSTEPS)

JOE:

The fifth time. Now, all of a sudden, I knew what was happenin'. My heart stopped, my breath stopped. I knew what was happenin'!
Slow at first, crawlin' along my skin.
Warmer and warmer.
The rising sun.
In my room.
In my room!
I'd won! I'd won!
I'd caught up with time again.
The sun. It was dawn.

MUSIC:

(WARM AND GENTLE, IN BG)

JOE:

It was dawn. For the world. And for me.
I - I could smell the dawn.
Yeah, me without a face, lyin' there, and the smell of the dew on the grass. And me without eyes, shadin' my eyes and seein' the sun comin' up over the mountains back home. And the hills goin' pink and lavender like the inside of a seashell.
The sun warmin' my little piece of skin, and me, seein' without eyes the town where I was born and me without ears, hearin' the lowin' of the cows waitin' to be milked. And babies, kickin' in their cribs and rubbin' their eyes with their fists.
It's sunrise. And I've got it. And now I'll always know when it's sunrise.
And they can't take it away from me.
Thank you, God.
Thank you, thank you, thank you.
I may never have anything else - but I'll always have dawn - and the mornin' sunlight.

MUSIC:

(OUT)

JOE:

A year went by fast. I was a busy guy, learned a lot. Yeah, could even tell my nurses apart. The day nurse - always walked to the bed with four steps.

SOUND:

(FOOTSTEPS)

JOE:

She was always the same, but the night nurses seemed to change. One of 'em...

NURSE:

(SHUDDERS, WEEPS BRIEFLY IN BG)

JOE:

... must have cried when she looked at me. I felt her tears wet on me.

I like to think she was young and beautiful.

But every night, summer and winter, week in and week out, month in and month out, every night

- I was with you, Kareen.

With you, darlin'.

My arms around you.

Yours around me.

With you, Kareen.

KAREEN:

Joe, my darling.

JOE:

Close to you.

KAREEN:

My dearest.

JOE:

My arms around you.

KAREEN:

My lover.

JOE:

And yours around me.

KAREEN:

Mine.

JOE:

With you, Kareen.

KAREEN:

Oh, Joe, Joe.

JOE:

Two years went by after I discovered time.
Three years went by ... after I discovered time.
The fourth year started awfully slow.

SOUND:

(SEVERAL SETS OF FOOTSTEPS)

JOE:

One day, I felt vibrations. Vibrations, heavier and heavier, and then they stopped.

SOUND:

(FOOTSTEPS STOP)

JOE:

I - I knew they were standing around the bed.
After all these years -- visitors.
And, all at once, crazy thoughts went through my head.

WHISPERED VOICE:

It may be your mother.

JOE:

No!

WHISPERED VOICE:

Kareen?

JOE:

No, no, not Kareen. Not Kareen standing by my bed. You can't see me -- not this way. Not you, Kareen! Go away! Go 'way, go 'way, go 'way, go 'way, go 'way ... (FADES)

(AFTER A BEAT, SIGHS) Then, a hand came to rest on my forehead. Man's hand.

WHISPERED VOICE:

Doctors?

JOE:

Yes. Maybe doctors, come to examine me.
Mm, somebody was touchin' at my nightshirt. Over my left breast.
The cloth fell back against my chest again.
It was heavy now.
Weighed down by somethin'.

SOUND:

(DRUM ROLL BUILDS IN BG)

JOE:

(EXCITED, AS HE REALIZES) Medal!
They'd given me a medal!
Me! A medal!
Me! A medal!
ME!

SOUND:

(DRUM ROLL ABRUPTLY OUT)

JOE:

(SUDDENLY COOL AND BITTER) The generals were here.
Around my bed.
The generals.
The big guys. The famous guys who still had arms and legs and could still see and talk and smell
and taste. In my throat, I felt a tearing of something that used to be a voice. I was talkin' to them.
And they couldn't hear me. I was sayin':
Listen, big guys, I'm lyin' here like a side of beef, and for what?!

ECHO VOICE:

(SHOUTS) War! We're goin' to war!

JOE:

Yeah! Someone said that, so I went! But why?! Why?! Somebody just said:

ANOTHER ECHO VOICE:

(SHOUTS) Let's go out and fight for liberty!

JOE:

Liberty?!

What kind of liberty?!

How much liberty and whose idea of liberty?

A guy says, "Come on! Let's fight for liberty!"

And he can't show you liberty. If you're going to die for liberty, you've got to know in advance what liberty is and - whose idea of liberty they're talkin' about and - just how much of that liberty we're going to have!

(SUDDENLY QUIET) Maybe that's a bad way to think.

The big guys say it's bad. And I heard 'em.

In the schools, in the newspapers, in the legislatures and the congresses. That's their business.

They sound wonderful.

PROPAGANDIST:

(ECHO) This ground is sanctified by blood.

2nd PROPAGANDIST:

(ECHO) They shall not have died in vain.

3rd PROPAGANDIST:

(ECHO) O, noble dead!

JOE:

But I'm askin' ya, big guys -- what do the dead say? Did any one of them ever come back and say ...?

1st DEAD SOLDIER:

(NO ECHO, FLATLY) I'm glad I'm dead, because death is always better than dishonor.

JOE:

Did they say ...?

2nd DEAD SOLDIER:

(NO ECHO, FLATLY) I'm glad I died to make the world safe for democracy.

JOE:

Nobody but the dead know whether all these things people talk about - are worth dyin' for or not. And the dead can't talk.

So, the words about noble death and sacred blood and honor and such are all put into dead lips by those that got no right to speak for the dead.

I'm askin' ya, big guys, how did they feel about it just before they died?

Did all those guys die thinkin' of democracy and freedom and liberty and honor?

(SAVAGELY) You know they didn't!

DYING SOLDIERS:

(GASPING, COUGHING, CRYING IN BG)

JOE:

They died cryin' in their minds like little kids. They died cryin' for the face of a friend. They died crying for the voice of a mother or father or wife or baby. They died moanin' and cryin' for life. I KNOW!

DYING SOLDIERS:

(FALL SILENT)

JOE:

I'm the nearest thing to a dead man on Earth!
There's nothing bigger than life!
What's noble about havin' your legs and arms blown off?!
What's noble about bein' blind and deaf and dumb?!
I'm dead, big guys, and - I died for nothin'!
D'ya hear me?!
Nothin', NOTHIN'!
D'ya hear me, BIG GUYS?!
(AFTER A PAUSE, QUIET) But they didn't hear me.
Just as you couldn't hear me, Kareen - if you were standing next to me.
All the generals heard was the blowin' of the air in the tube in my throat.

SOUND:

(FOOTSTEPS SLOWLY AWAY)

JOE:

When I heard the vibrations of the footsteps that said they were goin', I began to think. The vibrations. Up to now, I'd thought only of the vibrations coming TO me. How about making my vibrations go to them?
Yes, vibrations TO them.
A footstep on the floor's a kind of vibration.
The tap of a telegraph key is another kind.
I had it. I had it!

SOUND:

(RAPID CLICK OF TELEGRAPH KEY)

JOE:

When I was a kid, Bill Harper and me, we - we had a telegraph set.

Used to telegraph to each other. Dot-dash, dot-dash, dot-dash, dot!
I remember the code, the Morse code.

SOUND:

(TELEGRAPH KEY FADES)

JOE:

All I had to do to break through to the people outside was to lie in bed and dot-dash to the nurse!
I could give messages and receive messages.
I raised my head from my pillow.
I dropped it.

SOUND:

(HEAD DROPS ON PILLOW)

JOE:

Then, I did it twice quickly.

SOUND:

(HEAD DROPS TWICE ON PILLOW)

JOE:

That was it! With my head. Raise my head, let it fall on the pillow. The Morse code!

SOUND:

(HEAD TAPS OUT S-O-S ON PILLOW, OVER AND OVER, IN BG)

JOE:

S-O-S, help -- I tapped it out on my pillow with my head.

S-O-S!

All over the world - that meant help.

S-O-S, help, help!

Then the door of the room jarred open and - and the nurse's footsteps came up to the bed.

SOUND:

(FOOTSTEPS IN, HEAD TAPS CONTINUE RELENTLESSLY)

JOE:

S-O-S, S-O-S -- over and over again.

She was lookin' at me. I knew it, I knew it.

S-O-S, help me. S-O-S, help me. S-O-S. Oh, why can't you understand? S-O-S, help me. S-O-S,

help me. S-O-S, S-O-S...

ANOTHER VOICE:

(OVERLAPS AND CONTINUES IN BG) S-O-S, help me, S-O-S, help me.

JOE:

My head full of it. Tappin' it out with my head over and over, over and over, couldn't stop. Why won't they hear me? Why won't they understand? Why won't they hear me? Kareen, why?!

SOUND:

(TAPPING AND VOICE FALL SILENT)

JOE:

No. There isn't any Kareen.
There isn't nothin'.
I've been talkin' in my head.
There's nothin' for me.
Nothin'.

SOUND:

(TAPPING AND VOICE RETURN, IN BG)

JOE:

I don't know what day it is.
I don't know what month it is.
I don't know what year it is!
I've been tappin' for years and years and nobody hears me!
Nobody, nobody, nobody!

SOUND:

(TAPPING AND VOICE FALL SILENT)

JOE:

Someone's come into the room.

SOUND:

(FOOTSTEPS IN)

JOE:

Footsteps, light. My regular day nurse, hers are heavy.

Who's this one?
Start tappin' now.
What--? What is this one doin'?
Openin' the nightshirt.
She's moving the tip of her finger against my skin.
What?
Huh?
Drawin' somethin'.
I - I know. The letter "M."
(EXCITED) I know! Shake - shake my head yes, yes, I know, I know! I understand!
It's "M"! - "M"! - Wonderful "M"!
(BEAT) Writin' something else on my skin. "E" ... Yes, yes, I got that. "R," yes! Another "R,"
yes! Now what?
"Y"!
Nothin' more.
M-E-R-R-Y.
Merry!
Writin' again.
C - H - R - I - S - T - M - A - S.
Merry Christmas!

MALE & FEMALE VOICES:

(CHEERFUL, OVERLAPPING) Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas! Merry
Christmas! (CONTINUES IN BG)

JOE:

Yes, nurse, I understand. Nodding my head to tell you I understand.
I can't say it so you can hear me but - in my heart I'm saying it.
Merry Christmas, nurse.
And God bless you.

SOUND:

(VOICES FADE, WIND BLOWS, CHURCH BELL RINGS)

JOE:

Bells in my town. I'm hearing them in my head, nurse.

MUSIC:

(A MUSIC BOX PLAYS "SILENT NIGHT" IN BG)

MOTHER:

(READS) "'Twas the night before Christmas ..."

JOE:

Mother ...

MOTHER:

(READS) "... and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse."

JOE:

Mother, I hear you.

MOTHER:

(READS) "The stockings were hung by the chimney with care, in a hope that St. Nicholas soon would be there."

JOE:

Every Christmas Eve, I remember.

MOTHER:

(READS) "He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle, and away they all flew like down from a thistle. But I heard him exclaim 'ere he drove out of sight, 'Merry Christmas to all, and to all, a good night.'"

JOE:

Merry Christmas, Mother. Merry Christmas, Mother.

MUSIC:

(FADES TO SILENCE)

JOE:

Nurse? New nurse. Smart nurse. She'll pay attention to me. Old nurse didn't understand. New nurse, you've GOT to understand. Tappin'! I'll start.

SOUND:

(HEAD TAPS OUT S-O-S ON PILLOW)

JOE:

There, nurse, I did it. Do you understand it?

Three, two, and three.

S-O-S.

Did you understand it?

I'll do it again.

SOUND:

(HEAD TAPS OUT S-O-S ON PILLOW)

JOE:

Morse code, you understand? Morse code. Watch, nurse, watch. If I had a tongue, if I had a mouth, I'd yell it at ya, I'd scream it at ya. But I have nothin' but the tappin' of my head, so watch, nurse, watch. If you turn and walk out of the room and never come back, you will be carrying my life with you. You're life and death to me, nurse. Look, I'll - I'll tap it again.

SOUND:

(HEAD TAPS OUT S-O-S ON PILLOW)

JOE:

See? S-O-S, help me. S-O-S. Oh, I'll do it again.

SOUND:

(HEAD TAPS OUT S-O-S ON PILLOW, OVER AND OVER IN BG)

JOE:

I'm prayin' now, nurse. Me, just an ordinary guy, I'm prayin'. Oh, please, God -- make her understand what I'm tryin' to tell her. Please, God, make her understand. I know you're a busy guy. I know there's millions of people prayin', prayin', prayin' to ya, every minute. I know all these things, God - and I don't blame you for gettin' behind in your orders, nobody's perfect, but - what I want is such a little thing.

All I want you to do - is to take a tiny little idea that's in my mind and - put it in her mind - two, maybe three, feet away. That's all I want, God. Just a little idea that's in my mind - and put it in her mind. It's such a little thing, God. Such a little thing.

SOUND:

(FOOTSTEPS AWAY, TAPPING STOPS)

JOE:

She's goin' away.

She's gone out of the room.

No, no, can't be true. Can't shove me down under the ground again! Bury me deep again! No!

No! I won't believe it! I won't!

I won't start cryin' now. She'll come back. She's my life. She's my chance at life. She will come back! She will! She will! She will!

SOUND:

(DOOR OPENS)

JOE:

Door?

SOUND:

(FOOTSTEPS IN)

JOE:

She's back.

SOUND:

(ANOTHER SET OF FOOTSTEPS)

JOE:

Brought someone with her. ... Man's finger on my head. What--?

SOUND:

(FINGER TAPS ON FOREHEAD, MORSE CODE, IN BG)

JOE:

Finger tappin' on my head. Tappin' out "W" ... "H" ... Tappin' out the code on my head. "A" ... "T" ... W-H-A-T, "What"! D-O-Y-O-U ... Y-O-U, "You"! ... W-A-N-T.

SOUND:

(TAPPING STOPS)

JOE:

W-A-N-T. ... "What - do - you - want?"

SOUND:

(ALARM CLOCK BELL RINGS, IN BG)

JOE:

(SLOW, INCREDULOUS) What - do - I - want?

(BUILDS IN INTENSITY) What do I want?!

What do I want?!

I want to get out!

Let me out! That's all I want!

I've been lyin' here for years and years in a room in a bed with a - a little coverin' of skin!

Now I want out! I've GOT to get out!

If I had legs, I could run away, I could get away, I could - I could get out and into the open where there's air, where there's room and where I'm not in a hole and smotherin'!

Inside me, I scream and holler and push and fight for room and air, for escape from the smotherin'! From the loneliness!

SOUND:

(BELL STOPS RINGING)

JOE:

(QUIETLY) Let me out of here. ... And take me back into the world.

No. I didn't tap that out.

What I just said, I only was thinkin'.

Won't say it to ya waitin' up there. No. Before I ask you up there, before I tap it out with my head, I've gotta think out - just what I'm gonna tell ya.

May be my last chance.

Hmm. I've got it. I've got it.

Listen, you up there. I'm tappin' it out with my head.

SOUND:

(HEAD TAPS OUT CODE ON PILLOW, IN BG)

JOE:

Let me out of here.

Let me out of here. Let me out!

I can earn my keep.

I can do a job like anyone else. Take me out of here and build a glass case for - for me - so people can see me.

SOUND:

(TAPPING OUT, CROWD BUZZES)

JOE:

Take me in my glass case to the beaches, to the county fairs and the church bazaars and the circuses and the traveling carnivals.

You'd do a wonderful business with me. And I can pay you for the trouble.

They've never seen NOTHIN' like me. I'm something you can really holler about.

I'm the dead-man-who's-alive! The live-man-who's-dead!

I'm the man who made the world safe for democracy.

SOUND:

(FACTORY NOISES)

JOE:

Take me into the places where men work and make things. Take me there and say, "Boys, here's a cheap way to get by! Maybe times ARE bad and your salaries ARE low. Don't worry, boys, because you'll have your chance. There'll be another war along pretty soon, and then maybe you'll be lucky like me!"

SOUND:

(SCHOOLHOUSE NOISES)

JOE:

Take me into the schoolhouses, all the schoolhouses in the world. They'll scream at first - and have nightmares at night but - they'll get used to it, because they've GOT to get used to it. And it's best to start them young. Take me into the colleges and universities and academies and convents. Call the girls together, all the healthy beautiful young girls. Point to me and say, "Girls, here is your father. Look, girls! Here is your lover!" Call all the young men together and say, "Here is your brother, here is your best friend, and here are YOU, young men!"

SOUND:

(CROWD OF STATESMEN BUZZES)

JOE:

Take me wherever there are parliaments and diets and congresses and chambers of statesmen. I want to be there when they talk about honor and justice and making the world safe. Put my glass case upon the speaker's desk ...

SOUND:

(GAVEL BANGS, IN BG)

JOE:

... and, every time the gavel drops, let me feel its vibration through my little glass case. Then let them draft notes and ultimatums and protests and accusations. But before they vote on them -- before they give the order for all the little guys to start killing each other -- let the main guy rap his gavel on my case and point down at me and say ...

SOUND:

(GAVEL STOPS)

JOE:

... "Gentlemen, here is the only issue before this house! And that is: are you for this thing here or

are you against it?! And if they are against it, then let them stand up like men and vote. And, if they are for it, let them be hanged and drawn and quartered and paraded through the streets and thrown out into the fields where no clean animal will touch them - and may no green thing ever grow where they rot.

SOUND:

(CHURCH BELLS)

JOE:

Take me into your churches, your great towering cathedrals, which have to be rebuilt every fifty years because they are destroyed by war. Carry me in my glass box down the aisles where kings and priests and brides and children at their confirmations have gone so many times before to kiss a splinter of wood from a true cross on which was nailed the body of a man who was lucky enough to die.

Set me high on your altars and call on God to look down upon his murderous little children, his dearly beloved little children.

Then bring in the fierce ones, the spawners of hate, the inventors of slogans! Bring them in and make them look at me! And then DARE them -- DARE THEM! -- to break the peace!

MUSIC:

(A BUGLE ... "TAPS" ... IN ITS ENTIRETY ... THEN OUT)

ANNOUNCER:

Ladies and gentlemen, tonight we have brought you James Cagney, playing the leading role in Dalton Trumbo's memorable novel of the year, "Johnny Got His Gun." The book was dramatized for radio by Arch Oboler. The musical score was written-conducted by Gordon Jenkins.

Mr. Cagney can now be seen in the Warner Brothers picture "The Fighting 69th" and in the forthcoming production "Torrid Zone." In preparation is "City of Conquest."

The book "Johnny Got His Gun" is the prize-winning novel by Dalton Trumbo. All of us want to thank Mr. Cagney and Mr. Trumbo for their great contribution to this program.

Next week, it is our pleasure to present an actor known and respected by all of us, Mr. Ronald Colman, in an unusual play, "The Most Dangerous Game." Next week then, Mr. Ronald Colman. "Arch Oboler's Plays" are a presentation of the National Broadcasting Company. Tonight's play came to you from Hollywood's Radio City. This is the National Broadcasting Company.

MUSIC:

(NBC CHIMES)