

Columbia Workshop
Ann Was an Ordinary Girl
Jul 13 1941

ANNOUNCER: The Columbia Workshop presents Number Eleven of "Twenty-Six by Corwin."

"Ann Was an Ordinary Girl," a bio-drama written and directed by Norman Corwin and starring Florence Robinson, Agnes Moorehead and John McIntire, with original music composed and conducted by Alexander Semmler.

Music: Introductory cue, andante tranquillo. This should have the quality of an American folksong and the flavor of the period.

After it has been established in the orchestra, cross-fade to voice of Ann, humming a variation on the tune. Humming sustains briefly, fading under:

NARRATOR. Let me tell you about the girl humming that tune. Her name is Ann Rutledge. A long time ago she lived with her mother and father and seven brothers and sisters in a tavern in New Salem, Illinois. Her name is familiar to you because a great man fell in love with her and never got over it. Otherwise you wouldn't have known about her, because she was an ordinary girl, a bit prettier than average, but still, very much like a lot of girls you know yourselves. Ann was not a phantom or a legend or a folktune. She was a girl-- she was happy, she was sad, she was angry, she was coy, she was gentle, she was wise; she had fears ... she had dreams. It is these things that she was that our story is about.

First of all, Ann Rutledge was a girl ...

Humming continues aimlessly until:

ANN. Mother ...

MOTHER (*busy with pots and pans*). Yes, Ann?

ANN. I have an important question to ask you.

MOTHER. Can it wait until we do the dishes?

ANN. Oh, yes, I guess it can wait, all right.

MOTHER (*curious*). Very well, what is it?

ANN. Don't laugh at me, now.

MOTHER. Come, do you want to ask me or don't you?

ANN. Mother ... what's it like to be in love?

MOTHER. What? Why, Ann, now why should a thought like that be in your head at this hour of the morning?

ANN. Because I've been thinking about it all night.

MOTHER. You have?

ANN. Yes.

MOTHER. Well, er ... what conclusion did you reach?

ANN. None. I just couldn't sleep. I kept listening to the crickets and the frogs, and the house creaking; and did you know there's a screech owl down in the glen somewhere?

MOTHER. No.

ANN. Well, there is, because I heard it. And I also heard Pa snoring.

MOTHER. I heard that myself.

ANN. Toward morning it got very still, and it seemed everything went to sleep, even the crickets and the frogs. All I could hear was leaves stirring faintly outside my window--very faintly.... it's a beautiful sound, isn't it?

MOTHER. Yes.

ANN. And then I could hear my heart beating ... slowly--like this: *bump-bump* ... *bump-bump* ... *bump-bump*--so slow I was afraid it would stop.

MOTHER. Maybe you shouldn't have eaten afore you went to bed, Ann.

ANN. Oh, no, I felt fine. Only I kept wondering how it must be to hear all those things when you're--well, when you're in love. I mean, when a man's in love with you, and ...

MOTHER. See here, Ann, you're too young to be bothering your head with thoughts the likes of that.

ANN. Too young? I'm seventeen, ain't I? How old were you when you fell in love?

MOTHER (*musings; after a pause*). Sixteen.

ANN. Well, there! (*Coaxingly.*) Mother ... what's it like?

MOTHER. It--it's just what you suppose it's like ... just what you imagine it's like.

ANN. If it's what I imagine--then it's like the way the leaves stirred all last night--and the little sounds kept coming from far away. Or it's like how the hay smelled down at Tuttle's farm just after they finished mowing last week--or the way the sky looks on those clear, clear nights in winter, all bright and glowing, and kind of pure--you know?

MOTHER. Yes, dear.

ANN. Like warm blankets and soft pillows when you're all snug in bed and it's blowing a blizzard outside and there are icicles on the window. (*A little laugh of delight.*) Is it--is it anything like that, Mother?

MOTHER. Yes, Ann ... sometimes. When it's unspoiled. That's the nice part of love.

ANN. The nice part? But what can there be bad about being in love?

MOTHER. Oh ... certain things ... certain things I hope you'll never find out about....

Music: Lyric theme sustaining under and fading after:

NARRATOR (echoing his introductory narration). Ann Rutledge was not a phantom or a legend or a folktune. She was a girl--and she was happy.

Clop-clop of horse and buggy wheels.

MCNEIL. Whoa. Whoa there.

Horse and buggy stop.

MCNEIL. Do you mind my stopping?

ANN. Why should I mind?

MCNEIL. Because I stopped just in order to look at you.

ANN. Then I *do* mind, John McNeil!

MCNEIL. But it's so hard to see your eyes when I'm looking at the road ... why, Ann, you're blushing!

ANN. Am I?

MCNEIL. Yes. And it rather becomes you, too.

ANN. I'm not blushing. It's just the heat of the day. I'm very warm, that's all.

MCNEIL. Whatever it is, you're very beautiful.

ANN. I--I'm glad you think so, John.

MCNEIL (*after a pause*). Ann--would you be offended if I kissed you?

ANN. Kiss me?

MCNEIL. Yes.

ANN (*rather abruptly*). No.

MCNEIL. Oh--I'm sorry.

ANN (*shyly*). I mean no, I wouldn't be offended.

MCNEIL. I ... (*A moment's silence.*) Why ... thank you.

ANN. John, John ... (*Pause.*) Want to know something?

MCNEIL. What?

ANN. That was the first time in my life I've ever been kissed.

MCNEIL. Want to know something, Ann?

ANN. What?

MCNEIL. This is the second.

Music: Sweeps up lushly and comes down for:

NARRATOR. Ann Rutledge was a girl ... and she was happy ... and she was sad.

VOICES (*cross-fading with music; ad-lib*). Well, good night ... good night, Mr. Rutledge ... Mrs. Rutledge ... good night, Ann.... Night, everybody ...

ANN. Good night, Judge Green. Good night, Mr. Lincoln. Good night, Mr. Offut.

Footsteps going off; heavy door closing.

RUTLEDGE (*laughing*). I must say Abe Lincoln is a funny man! I swear I never did hear anybody tell stories the way he tells 'em.

MOTHER. And he doesn't have to wet his tongue to do it, either. He's a fine Christian gentleman, Mr. Lincoln is.

RUTLEDGE (*laughing*). Did you hear the one he told about the ... Land sakes, Ann, what're you looking so glum about?

ANN. Oh, I'm all right, Father.

RUTLEDGE. Do you mean to say you didn't think that bear story of Lincoln's was funny? Have you lost your sense of humor?

ANN. I didn't hear it, Father.

RUTLEDGE. But you were sitting right there listening.

MOTHER. Please leave her alone, Henry. She's tired. She's all worn out.

RUTLEDGE. Well, then--well, then why doesn't she go up to bed?

ANN. I'm all right now. Good night, Mother. Good night, Father.

ALL. (*Ad-lib good nights.*)

Sounds of steps being climbed slowly. A few steps on the landing. Door opens, closes; more steps; then the creaking of a bedspring.

ANN. Dear God, please bless Mother and Father and the children and ... John McNeil ... and please make John change his mind and come back to New Salem as he promised me he would ... because I'm so lonely since he left. Dear God, make him not like the East; make him come back to me. ... I love him so much. ... (*The faintest suggestion of a sob. Then a very small whisper.*) So very much... .

Music: Appropriate mood music, fading under:

NARRATOR. Ann Rutledge was a girl ... happy ... and sad ... and sometimes angry.

VOICES. (*Ad-libs of low excitement, as though somebody had just been injured. Out of the general noise we can distinguish a few speeches, especially close to the mike.*)

MR. WINTHROP. Easy, there. He's bleedin' bad.

MOTHER. Give him air--give the poor man some air.

MR. WINTHROP. My! That's a nasty cut on his head, there.

RUTLEDGE. He's comin' to. He'll be all right.

ARMSTRONG (*bullying; quite drunk*). Well, now, is there anyone else cares to give an opinion about my drinkin' too much? If there is, just speak up--and I'll pile him in the corner with Mr. Williams and the rest of the wreckage. Mebbe that'll teach yer to let me an' the boys drink in peace without no preachin' as to how a gentleman should conduct hisself in a tavern.

RUTLEDGE (*sputtering*). Now listen here, Jack Armstrong. As proprietor of this tavern, I have a right to ...

MR. WINTHROP. Take it easy, Mr. Rutledge. He's ugly.

ARMSTRONG. Rutledge, you see what I just done to Williams?

RUTLEDGE. Yes, and also what you've done to my good chair!

ARMSTRONG. Well, I'll break another one over *your* head if you don't shut up!

RUTLEDGE. Just because you can lick everybody in town you don't have to bully and strut all over the place. I wish I were younger, Armstrong--*I'd* take you on!

ARMSTRONG. Why, you bald-headed old coot, Rutledge, I'll take anybody on--

young and old together! I'll take 'em in pairs, I will. Ain't a man in town's got guts enough to stand up to me. (*Shouting.*) Is there? (*There is no answer from the assemblage.*) Huh! That's the right answer. Hey, Ma Rutledge, some more o' this likker, an' quick--for I'm a pow'ful thirsty man.

MOTHER (*sighing*). Very well, Jack Armstrong. Drink yourself to death if you want to; sooner the better for us.

ARMSTRONG (*goes into a gale of laughter, which stops suddenly*). What you doin'?

ANN (*coldly, determinedly*). Taking this whisky away from you. You've made enough trouble for one night.

MOTHER (*fearful*). Ann--come away.

ARMSTRONG. Ju-u-ust a minute, Annie me gal, ju-u-ust a minute.

ANN. Let go of me, you filthy pig!

Terrific slap.

ARMSTRONG. Hey! That hurt!

ANN. I meant it to hurt.

ARMSTRONG. You did, eh? Well, look here, now.

Crashing of glass to floor, as of bottle wrested from Ann's grip; another terrific sock.

ANN. That hurt too, didn't it?

ARMSTRONG (*after a moment; sullen and mad*). You wouldn't of dared done that if you was a man!

ANN. I wouldn't have had to if you were a man.

ARMSTRONG. Oh, yes? Well ... (*Stopped. All he can do now is repeat himself.*) No man'd dare stand up to me that-away.

ANN (*archly*). Oh, yes, there would.

ARMSTRONG. All right, who? Name him!

ANN. Have you tried Abe Lincoln?

ARMSTRONG (*laughing*). Lincoln? That long-legged, flop-eared donkey of a store clerk?

ANN. I'd like to see you call him that to his face.

ARMSTRONG. You would, would you? Well, come around tomorra by the store, say around the middle of the mornin'.

ANN. I'll be there--and it will be a great pleasure to see them carry you out.

Music: Transitional cue, fading as before under:

NARRATOR. Yes, Ann Rutledge was a girl--she could be happy ... and sad ... and angry ... and gentle.

Music: Cross-fades to a low background of birds and outdoor sounds; river noises also, providing blend is not too muddy.

ANN. Aren't you getting too much sun on you, Mr. Lincoln?

ABE. Won't make much difference to a face like mine.

ANN. But the reflection of light from the water--that can burn, too.

ABE. Never heard of the Sangamon River burning anybody.

ANN (*laughing*). All right, but don't say I didn't warn you.

ABE. For anything concerning my looks, I'm afraid I'll have to take full responsibility.

ANN. You're--you're not bad-looking, Mr. Lincoln.

ABE. Light bother your eyes, Miss Rutledge?

ANN. No. I can see clearly. I *like* your looks.

ABE. Thank you. You're being very kind.

ANN. Aren't you--going to say anything about mine?

ABE. I'm not very good at--at expressing myself on things I feel very--er--deeply about.

ANN. You feel very deeply about my looks?

ABE (*after a pause*). About you.

ANN. Oh.

ABE (*apologetically*). I don't suppose I have any *right* to hope ... but I do, nevertheless. I hope that some day I might perhaps be worthy of your--affection.

ANN. Oh.

ABE (*hurriedly*). But in the meantime, though, I hope you'll just let me keep seeing you--that you'll let me take you for walks, and sit with me again like this, on the bank of the river, and ...

ANN. Mr. Lincoln.

ABE (*scared*). Yes.

ANN. How is your memory?

ABE. Why--all right, I guess.

ANN. Do you remember how you threw Jack Armstrong the time he came down to the store looking for a fight?

ABE. Yes.

ANN. How you got your arms around him and spun him head over heels?

ABE. Yes.

ANN. Well--why don't you try putting your arms around me? ... But leave out the spin.

*Music: Romantic variation of the Narrator's theme,
coming down for:*

NARRATOR. Happy, yes; and sad ... and angry ... and gentle ... and wise ...

PETER (*aged twelve*). Sister?

ANN (*distracted; she is reading*). Yes, Peter.

PETER. Which do you think is the best, a soldier or a sailor?

ANN. I'm sure I haven't the faintest idea.

PETER. That's been puzzling me.

ANN. Very well; now let me read, please.

PETER (*after a pause*). Sister? (*No answer.*) Ann?

ANN. What?

PETER. Do sailors get seasick?

ANN (*annoyed*). Can't you see I'm trying to read, Peter?

PETER (*hurt*). I only wanted to know. I was only asking.

ANN (*repentantly*). I'm sorry, Peter. ... I was absorbed in what I was reading. What did you want to know?

PETER. Do sailors get seasick?

ANN. Well, I shouldn't think so. Not good sailors, anyway. Why do you ask?

PETER. I was just wondering what I'd be when I grow up, a soldier or a sailor. I think I'll be a soldier.

ANN. Why?

PETER. So I can carry a gun and be brave, an' all them nasty old Indians will run away when they see me coming.

ANN. Come over here, Peter. (*Pause.*) Have you been listening to old Dan Potter and his stories about what a hero he was, fighting the Indians?

PETER. He killed twenty-one Indians with his bare fists after his powder ran dry, so the redskins wanted to make him a chief on account of he was so brave; but he didn't let them, 'cause Indians aren't to be trusted, and they're no good nohow.

ANN. Dan Potter is a liar. The only Indians he ever saw are those old trappers who come to trade at Malcolm's store. Get the idea out of your head that Indians are nasty or no good nohow ... and anyway, "nohow" isn't a word anyhow.

PETER. Yes, but Dan Potter says ...

ANN. As for carrying a gun and being brave and making Indians run away when they see you coming, better give that up, too. In the first place, only cowards need guns to make them brave, because bravery comes from your heart and not from anything you carry.

PETER (*not getting it at all; after a pause*). But wouldn't the Indians run away if they saw a soldier coming with a gun? Loaded?

ANN. I doubt it. Ask Abe Lincoln sometime about his experiences in the Black Hawk War. He was a captain in the war, but he didn't see any Indians running away from white men--in fact, to the contrary.

PETER. Yes, but *white* men aren't afraid to die, are they?

ANN. Nobody likes to die--red or white or black or yellow. ... It's just like Abe Lincoln says: the two most unpopular things in the world are not having any freedom and being dead.

PETER. Gosh, being dead's much worse than not having freedom, I should think.

ANN. I wouldn't be so sure. Everybody has to die sometime, and there's nothing they can do about it; but there's plenty a man can do about not being free.

PETER (*not interested*). Do sailors have to learn how to swim?

Music: Transitional motif, coming down behind:

The closing of a door. Slow footsteps.

DOCTOR. Mrs. Rutledge ...

MOTHER. Yes, Doctor?

DOCTOR. You'll have to keep Ann as quiet as possible. Don't let her get up for anything.

MOTHER. Is it--serious, Doctor? (*There is no answer. Perhaps he is nodding his head affirmatively. Mrs. Rutledge tries to keep down her emotion.*) Will she be a long time getting well?

DOCTOR. Mrs. Rutledge ... Ann isn't going to get well.

MOTHER. No! No!

DOCTOR. You might as well know now.

MOTHER. How long, Doctor?

DOCTOR. Don't know. Might be two days, might be two weeks.

MRS. RUTLEDGE. (*A little sob escapes her.*)

DOCTOR. I'm terribly ... (*Gives up trying to commiserate even before he begins; he knows it will not help.*) I'm sorry.

MOTHER. I'm going in to her.

DOCTOR. I've told you nothing, now.

MOTHER. There. (*Sniffs.*) Do I look all right?

DOCTOR. Yes. I'll wait here.

Footsteps. Door opens, closes.

MOTHER (*quietly*). Ann, dear ...

ANN. Yes, Mother?

MOTHER. Are you comfortable? Is everything ...

ANN (*weakly*). I feel wretched, Mother.

MOTHER. You're going to be all right. Doctor says so.

ANN. He says so?

MOTHER. Yes. You're going to be all right.

ANN. Do you believe him?

MOTHER. Why, of course, Ann! What a question!

ANN. Has Abe been here since yesterday?

MOTHER. He came last night, but you were asleep, and he didn't want to disturb you.

ANN. Even if I'm asleep, please wake me up when he comes, Mother.

MOTHER. No, not if you're asleep, dear. The doctor says you need all ...

ANN (*a little painfully; almost angrily*). Mother ... I'll *get* enough rest! More than I need! ... Please! I want to see Abe when he comes!

MOTHER. Yes, dear, of course.

ANN (*immediately repentant*). Oh, I'm sorry, Mother--I didn't mean to sound cross.

MOTHER. There, there, lie back. Here, this will cool your forehead.

ANN. You see, I've got to talk to Abe, because ... well, you know how I feel about him.

MOTHER. We all feel the same way about him, Ann.

ANN. Yes. I love him. I love him. And I've got to see him now--or ...

MOTHER (*after a pause; fearfully, quaveringly*). Or what?

ANN (*almost hysterically*). Or never, Mother, *never!*

Music: Tragic variation on transitional motif, fading under:

ABE. You mustn't talk so much, darling. Rest. Let me just look at you and wish hard.

ANN. Wish hard?

ABE. Wish so hard that nothing can stand up against me, like a--like a tornado blowin' the sky right off its hinges. Then I'd wish away your fever; I'd wish...

ANN. Abe--what are you going to do when I'm gone?

ABE (*trying to be cheerful*). When you're *gone!* What I do when I'm eighty is of no concern to me right now.

ANN. Do you love me, Abe?

ABE (*choking*). I--I--why, Ann--I--God in Heaven, Ann--I ...

ANN. I know. You once told me you weren't very good at expressing yourself on things you feel deeply about.

ABE. Yes. That's it. (*A long pause.*) I do love you, Ann.

ANN. Then go on and be the big man I know you can be. Go on, because it's what I'd want you to be if I were with you.

ABE (*miserably*). Be a big man, Ann? I'll never even be a little man without you. I'll be nothing.

ANN. Abraham Lincoln, I know you. I know you better than you know yourself. You'll grieve for me a bit--but you'll be all right after a while, when you find out that grieving doesn't help... . Abe, if it's at all possible for me to be near you after I'm gone--if in any way ...

ABE (*agonized*). Oh, God!

ANN. Then I *will* come to you, Abe. I will. And when your mind's at peace, you'll go back to your books, and you'll learn more and more, because you've always been hungry for learning ... and you'll keep on being sweet and kind and honest and lovable ... and you'll be great because you're just naturally *made* that way....

ABE. Please, Ann--you're tiring yourself. ... I don't want to be great. I just want you to be well again. Darling, never mind about me. You get some rest, now. You're going to be all right. I'll stay right here by your side.

ANN. Yes... . (*Sighs.*) I am a bit tired.

ABE. That's right. Just rest now.

ANN. You won't leave me, will you?

ABE. No, dear. I won't leave you. I'll never leave you.

ANN. Good ... good.

Music: Sweeps up into finale, sustaining under:

NARRATOR. Yes ... Ann Rutledge was a girl--an ordinary girl, a bit prettier than average, but still very much like a lot of girls you know. And when she died, all that was young and gay in Abe Lincoln died with her. And a sadness came into his eyes that never left them. There were many sorrows in his fitful life, and violence and tempest, and the terrible thunders of a nation torn apart; but never did those brooding eyes forget the little graveyard on the outskirts of New Salem, and the tavern girl who rested there ... Ann Rutledge!

Music: Up and into maestoso finale.

ANNOUNCER: You have been listening to "Ann Was an Ordinary Girl," an original bio-drama written and directed by Norman Corwin as Number Eleven in the Columbia Workshop cycle, "Twenty-Six by Corwin," starring Florence Robinson in the title role, John McIntire as Lincoln, and Agnes Moorehead as Mrs. Rutledge.

This is the Columbia Broadcasting System.