

LAUREL AND HARDY

A SHOT IN THE DARK

A screenplay by Phillip Chandler

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TITLE: A SHOUT IN THE DARK

LOGLINE: Desperate for cash, Laurel and Hardy stumble onto a live radio quiz show, turning the airwaves into a chaotic symphony of misinterpretations, misplaced sound effects, and pure pandemonium.

CHARACTERS:

- **STAN LAUREL:** (40s) The innocent, long-suffering half of the duo, prone to tears and accidental genius.
- **OLIVER HARDY:** (40s) The pompous, easily exasperated leader, whose plans inevitably go awry.
- **MR. PERCIVAL "PERCY" PRATTLE:** (50s) The unctuous, impeccably dressed radio host, whose composure slowly unravels.
- **CLARENCE:** (30s) The long-suffering sound engineer, perpetually on the verge of a nervous breakdown.
- **MR. HENDERSON:** (60s) The stern, no-nonsense studio manager.
- **MRS. GRIMES:** (50s) A prim, highly competent quiz contestant.

SCENES:

EXT. LAUREL & HARDY'S BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

A dilapidated, slightly leaning boarding house. A SIGN outside reads "Rooms For Rent - Inquire Within (At Your Own Risk)."

STAN LAUREL and OLIVER HARDY are seated on a rickety porch swing, looking thoroughly dejected. Stan gently POLISHES a single, tarnished penny with a handkerchief. Ollie stares into the middle distance, his brow furrowed.

HARDY

> (Sighs dramatically) > Stan, my boy, this is it. The end of the line. No more beans for breakfast. No more boots for walking. Soon, no more roof for resting, judging by the look of Mrs. McTavish's ledger.

Stan sniffles, holding up the penny.

STAN

> But, Ollie, we still have this! > (He sniffs it) > Smells like hope. Or slightly stale copper.

HARDY

> Don't be absurd, Stanley. One penny won't even buy you a decent sneer these days. We need capital. Substantial capital.

STAN

> Like... a nickel?

Ollie pinches the bridge of his nose, his customary gesture of mounting exasperation.

HARDY

> No, Stan, like... > (He spots something in a discarded newspaper on the floor) > Aha! What's this? 'WXYZ Radio presents 'Brain Busters!' A live quiz show! Win \$250!

Stan's eyes widen.

STAN

> Two hundred and fifty pennies?

HARDY

> Dollars, you nincompoop! Dollars! Enough to pay Mrs. McTavish, buy ourselves a slap-up dinner, and still have enough left over for... > (He dreams) > ...a small, pre-owned yacht!

Stan looks skeptical.

STAN

> But, Ollie, we're not very good at... questions. Remember the time we tried to guess how many beans were in that jar? We were off by... well, a jarload.

HARDY

> Nonsense, Stan! This is our chance! It's on the radio, Stanley. No one can see us. We only have to sound intelligent. And *I*, my dear boy, sound exceedingly intelligent. You just... listen to me. And try not to breathe too loudly.

STAN

> But what if they ask about... planets? I always get Venus and Jupiter mixed up. Is one a god or a pudding?

HARDY

> We shall study, Stan! We shall prepare! We shall conquer! Now, come on! To the library! And try not to trip over your own feet this time!

Ollie attempts to stand with dignity, but the porch swing creaks ominously, nearly tipping him off. Stan giggles nervously.

FADE OUT.

INT. WXYZ RADIO STATION - RECEPTION AREA - DAY

A bustling, slightly chaotic reception area. Posters for various radio shows adorn the walls. A harried SECRETARY is on the phone.

Laurel and Hardy enter, Stan looking bewildered, Ollie attempting an air of confident professionalism, which is undermined by his slightly askew bow tie.

HARDY

> (To the secretary, with a grand gesture) > Good day, madam! We are here for the 'Brain Busters!' > (He beams) > We are the 'Brains'!

The secretary gives them a weary once-over.

SECRETARY

> Names?

HARDY

> Hardy. Oliver Hardy. And this is my associate, Mr. Stanley Laurel.

SECRETARY

> (Checks a clipboard) > Ah, yes. The 'Wisdom Warriors.' Mr. Prattle is expecting you. Studio B, down the hall, second door on the left. Don't touch anything. And try not to trip over the cables. They're rather expensive.

STAN

> (To Ollie) > Cables? Are they for tying us up if we get the answers wrong?

HARDY

> (Whispers fiercely) > Stanley! Don't be ridiculous! They're for... electricity! Now, come along, before we attract any more unwanted attention!

They navigate the maze of corridors, Ollie trying to maintain his stride, Stan constantly looking over his shoulder, almost bumping into a passing sound technician carrying a large microphone.

INT. WXYZ RADIO STATION - STUDIO B - DAY

A soundproofed studio. Large, old-fashioned MICROPHONES hang from the ceiling. A long TABLE stretches across the room, with three chairs on one side and two on the other. SOUND PANELS line one wall, where CLARENCE, the sound engineer, sits, looking stressed.

MR. PERCIVAL PRATTLE, a slick, urbane man with a perfectly coiffed moustache, adjusts his tie in a mirror. MRS. GRIMES, a severe-looking woman with her hair in a tight bun, sits patiently at the table, clutching a small dictionary.

HARDY

> (Entering, puffing out his chest) > Mr. Prattle, I presume? Oliver Hardy, at your service! And my esteemed colleague, Stanley Laurel!

Prattle turns, offering a strained smile.

PRATTLE

> Ah, the 'Wisdom Warriors'! Or is it 'Wits and Wanderers'? No matter. Welcome to 'Brain Busters!' I'm Percival Prattle, your host. And this is our reigning champion, Mrs. Agnes Grimes.

Mrs. Grimes gives them a curt nod, her eyes narrowed in suspicion.

MRS. GRIMES

> (Voice like a rusty hinge) > And I trust you won't be relying on any... unsportsmanlike conduct. Some contestants try to sneak in notes. Or, heaven forbid, consult a tiny, disguised, accomplice.

She glares pointedly at Stan, who immediately looks guilty and tries to hide his hands behind his back.

STAN

> (Muttering) > I only brought a sandwich... just in case I got hungry.

HARDY

> (Elbowing Stan) > Ignore her, Stanley. Pure intimidation. We are paragons of sporting fairness! Now, where do we sit, Mr. Prattle?

PRATTLE

> Just here, gentlemen. Facing the microphone. Remember, speak directly into it. It's a very sensitive instrument. And no sudden movements, please. Clarence gets rather agitated.

Clarence, already looking agitated, gives them a warning glare. Stan reaches out a curious finger to touch the microphone.

HARDY

> (Slapping Stan's hand) > Stanley! Hands off! Remember what Mr. Prattle said. It's sensitive!

Stan pulls his hand back quickly, knocking over a glass of water on the table. The water splashes onto the sound panel. Clarence yelps.

CLARENCE

> My panels! You imbeciles!

PRATTLE

> (Forcefully calm) > S-settle down, Clarence. Just a little spillage. We're on air in T-minus sixty seconds!

Ollie quickly mops up the water with his handkerchief, making it worse by smearing it across the panel, causing a few lights to flicker erratically.

HARDY

> (To Prattle, with a nervous laugh) > Just a quick polish, Mr. Prattle. Keeping things shipshape!

PRATTLE

> (Eyes wide) > Ship-shape... indeed. Right. > (He clears his throat, regaining composure) > And remember, gentlemen, and Mrs. Grimes, this is a live broadcast! Millions are listening! So, clear voices, quick answers, and absolutely no... > (He eyes Stan) > ...sandwich eating during the show.

Stan nods vigorously, his mouth full. Ollie slaps his back, making him choke.

FADE OUT.

INT. WXYZ RADIO STATION - STUDIO B - CONTINUOUS

A "ON AIR" light flashes red. Clarence gives a frantic countdown.

CLARENCE

> Five... four... three... two... one! We're live!

A jaunty, brassy THEME TUNE plays briefly, then fades.

PRATTLE

> (Into microphone, smooth and resonant) > Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, and welcome back to 'Brain Busters!', the quiz show that separates the clever clogs from the complete cabooses! I'm your host, Percival Prattle, and tonight we have a truly fascinating contest in store!

He introduces Mrs. Grimes, who gives a practiced, small cough.

PRATTLE

> And now, making their debut, our challengers, the 'Wisdom Warriors'! Give a warm radio welcome to Mr. Oliver Hardy and Mr. Stanley Laurel!

HARDY

> (Loudly, into microphone) > It's a pleasure to be here, Mr. Prattle! We're ready to bust some brains!

Stan, trying to emulate Ollie, leans too close to the microphone and bellows.

STAN

> HELLO! CAN YOU HEAR ME AT HOME?!

A sudden, ear-splitting SQUEAL OF FEEDBACK assaults the airwaves. Clarence winces, frantically adjusting dials.

PRATTLE

> (Wincing, then recovering) > Uh, yes, well, a little too much... enthusiasm there, Mr. Laurel. Just a conversational tone, if you please. We're not broadcasting from a mountaintop.

STAN

> (Whispering, but still audible) > But I thought it was like shouting across the street!

HARDY

> (Whispering back) > It's a microphone, you simpleton! Not a megaphone!

PRATTLE

> Alright, let's get down to business! The first round is 'General Knowledge Goulash'! Our first question goes to Mrs. Grimes. Mrs. Grimes, for five dollars: Which celestial body is sometimes referred to as 'Earth's closest natural satellite'?

MRS. GRIMES

> (Without hesitation) > The Moon.

PRATTLE

> Correct! Excellent! Five dollars to Mrs. Grimes!

Clarence makes a "DING!" sound effect.

PRATTLE

> Now, to the 'Wisdom Warriors'! Gentlemen, for five dollars: Who wrote the classic novel 'Moby Dick'?

Ollie immediately turns to Stan with a confident smirk.

HARDY

> (To Stan, clear as a bell) > Stanley, this is your moment! Your nautical knowledge!

STAN

> (Eyes wide with sudden panic) > Oh, dear. Nautical... wasn't he the fellow who built the ark?

HARDY

> (Frustrated whisper) > No, you blithering idiot! That was Noah! We're talking about the whale book!

STAN

> (Suddenly enlightened) > Oh! The whale book! It was... > (He pauses, thinking hard) > ...Captain Ahab?

Ollie slaps his forehead. Prattle looks on, a vein throbbing in his temple.

HARDY

> (Into microphone, trying to sound calm) > My apologies, Mr. Prattle. My colleague is merely... thinking aloud. The answer, of course, is Herman Melville!

PRATTLE

> (A strained smile) > Mr. Hardy is correct! Herman Melville! A narrow escape there, gentlemen. Five dollars to the 'Wisdom Warriors'.

Clarence provides a weak "DING!" sound effect, then glares at Stan.

STAN

> (Proudly, to Ollie) > I was close, though, wasn't I? Captain Ahab was in the story!

HARDY

> (Growls) > Close only counts in... in horseshoes and hand grenades, Stanley!

FADE OUT.

INT. WXYZ RADIO STATION - STUDIO B - CONTINUOUS

The quiz is in full swing. The score is Mrs. Grimes: \$45, Laurel & Hardy: \$20.

PRATTLE

> Alright, gentlemen, for ten dollars: In which famous city would you find the Eiffel Tower?

HARDY

> (Confidently) > Paris, France! Next!

PRATTLE

> Correct! And swiftly answered! Ten dollars to the 'Wisdom Warriors'!

Clarence hits the "DING!" button.

PRATTLE

> Mrs. Grimes, for ten dollars: What is the primary function of the human heart?

MRS. GRIMES

> (Crisply) > To pump blood throughout the body.

PRATTLE

> Absolutely correct! Ten dollars for Mrs. Grimes!

Another "DING!"

PRATTLE

> Now, for a tricky one, 'Wisdom Warriors', for fifteen dollars: Which element has the chemical symbol 'Au'?

Ollie looks stumped. Stan suddenly brightens.

STAN

> Oh! I know this one! It's because of the little dog, isn't it?

HARDY

> (Confused) > What little dog, Stanley? Don't tell me you're thinking of 'Old MacDonald Had a Farm' again.

STAN

> No, no! The one that goes 'Au! Au! Au!' when it barks! So, it must be... a dog! Or... a bark!

Ollie's face contorts in pure agony.

HARDY

> (Gritting teeth, into microphone) > My apologies, Mr. Prattle. My colleague's mind has momentarily... wandered into the canine kingdom. The answer, of course, is Gold!

PRATTLE

> (Rubbing his temples) > Indeed, 'Au' is the symbol for Gold. Another point for the 'Wisdom Warriors'. Fifteen dollars.

Clarence sighs as he presses the "DING!" button.

PRATTLE

> Now, a little 'Sound Sense' round! I'll play a sound effect, and you tell me what it is. Mrs. Grimes, this one's for you, for twenty dollars.

Clarence plays a sound effect of a CAT MEOWING.

MRS. GRIMES

> A feline. Specifically, a domestic cat.

PRATTLE

> Spot on! Twenty dollars to Mrs. Grimes!

Clarence presses the "DING!" button.

PRATTLE

> And now, for the 'Wisdom Warriors'! For twenty dollars! Listen carefully...

Clarence plays the sound of a TRAIN HORN.

HARDY

> (Immediately) > A train whistle!

PRATTLE

> Correct! Twenty dollars!

STAN

> (Whispering to Ollie) > I knew that! But I thought it was a very large teapot whistling.

Ollie rolls his eyes.

PRATTLE

> Next sound, gentlemen, for another twenty dollars!

Clarence plays the sound of a COCKEREL CROWING.

HARDY

> (Hesitates, then) > A chicken! A rooster!

PRATTLE

> Very good! Twenty dollars!

Clarence presses the "DING!" button. As he does, Stan leans over, fascinated by the buttons on the sound panel.

STAN

> Oh, look, Ollie! So many noises! > (He presses a random button)

A loud, prolonged, realistic sound of a COW MOOING fills the studio and the airwaves. Clarence drops his headset, jaw agape. Prattle's eyes nearly pop out.

PRATTLE

> (Stammering) > What in the blazes?! Clarence!

CLARENCE

> (Panicked) > He touched the panel! The bovine button!

STAN

> (Innocently) > Oh! A cow! Is it my turn to guess that one, Ollie?

HARDY

> (Grabbing Stan's hand, his face crimson) > Stanley! You nincompoop! You've disrupted the broadcast!

Mrs. Grimes looks utterly appalled.

PRATTLE

> (Forcing a laugh into the mic) > Well, folks, it seems we have a rogue cow in the studio! Just a little... ambient farm noise for your listening pleasure! We'll just take a brief, unscheduled commercial break!

The THEME TUNE suddenly blares, cutting off Prattle mid-sentence.

FADE OUT.

INT. WXYZ RADIO STATION - STUDIO B - CONTINUOUS

The commercial break is over. PRATTLE is visibly frazzled, dabbing his brow with a handkerchief. MR. HENDERSON, the stern studio manager, stands over Clarence, whispering furiously. Laurel and Hardy sit, looking sheepish, though Stan is trying to surreptitiously open his sandwich.

HENDERSON

> (To Clarence, in a low, furious tone) > One more bovine interlude, Clarence, and you'll be playing kazoo in the street! And you two! > (He points at Laurel and Hardy) > You're walking on thin ice! We have a reputation!

HARDY

> (Attempting to be charming) > Our sincerest apologies, Mr. Henderson. A mere technical hiccup. My colleague was merely testing the acoustics. > (He glares at Stan) > Weren't you, Stanley?

Stan nods, trying to swallow a large bite of sandwich. He chokes.

PRATTLE

> (Into microphone, voice trembling slightly) > Welcome back, dear listeners, to 'Brain Busters!' After that... truly unique sound experience, we continue! The score stands at: Mrs. Grimes, a formidable \$100! And the 'Wisdom Warriors,' at a respectable \$60!

Mrs. Grimes gives a smug smile.

PRATTLE

> We're now entering our final round: 'The Grand Grapple'! Each correct answer is worth \$50! The stakes are high!

MRS. GRIMES

> (Confidently) > Bring it on, Percival.

PRATTLE

> Mrs. Grimes, for fifty dollars: What is the capital city of Australia?

MRS. GRIMES

> Canberra.

PRATTLE

> Correct! Astounding! Mrs. Grimes pulls ahead with \$150!

Clarence delivers a robust "DING!"

PRATTLE

> Now, 'Wisdom Warriors'! For fifty dollars! Here is your question: What is the largest ocean on Earth?

Ollie immediately turns to Stan, a glimmer of hope in his eyes.

HARDY

> (Whispering urgently) > Stanley, remember our studies! Oceans! This is crucial!

STAN

> (Thinking hard, then snapping his fingers) > Oh! I know! It's the one with all the fish, isn't it? The big one!

HARDY

> (Eyes widening) > Yes, Stanley! The name! The name!

STAN

> (Beaming) > The... the Wet Ocean!

Ollie slowly bangs his head on the table. Prattle stares, aghast.

HARDY

> (Lifts his head, into the microphone, voice strained) > My apologies, Mr. Prattle, a slight misunderstanding of terminology. The correct answer is, of course, the Pacific Ocean!

PRATTLE

> (Sighs audibly) > The Pacific Ocean is correct. Fifty dollars to the 'Wisdom Warriors', bringing your total to \$110.

Mrs. Grimes snickers. Stan looks genuinely confused.

STAN

> But isn't the Pacific Ocean wet?

HARDY

> (To Stan, through gritted teeth) > It's *assumed* to be wet, Stanley! That's why they call it an 'ocean'!

PRATTLE

> Next question, for fifty dollars, to Mrs. Grimes: Who painted the Mona Lisa?

MRS. GRIMES

> Leonardo da Vinci.

PRATTLE

> Correct! And that brings Mrs. Grimes to a staggering \$200!

The pressure builds. Laurel and Hardy are now \$90 behind.

PRATTLE

> Now, for the 'Wisdom Warriors'! Your final question, for fifty dollars! If you get this correct, you tie Mrs. Grimes and we go to a tie-breaker! Listen very, very carefully... > (He takes a dramatic pause) > What is the sum of the interior angles of a triangle?

Ollie's eyes light up. He was good at geometry in school.

HARDY

> (Confidently, to Stan) > Stanley, this is it! Simple arithmetic! It's... > (He pauses, calculating) > ...one hundred and eighty degrees!

Stan has a sudden, inexplicable flash of inspiration, perhaps from a forgotten school lesson or a stray thought.

STAN

> (Suddenly, loudly, interrupting Ollie) > No, Ollie! It's THREE! Triangles have three corners, so it's three angles!

Ollie's jaw drops. Prattle's eyes bulge. Henderson, who has been lurking in the background, lets out a strangled gasp.

HARDY

> (Staring at Stan in horror) > Stanley! What are you blathering about?! It's one hundred and eighty! Say one hundred and eighty!

STAN

> But it is three! Look! > (He tries to draw a triangle in the air) > One, two, three!

PRATTLE

> (Voice barely a whisper) > I'm afraid, gentlemen, I need a definitive answer. Mr. Laurel, Mr. Hardy?

Ollie is sputtering, unable to form words, his face puce. Stan looks at him innocently.

STAN

> It's three, Mr. Prattle! Definitely three!

PRATTLE

> (Closes his eyes, then opens them, defeated) > I'm afraid, Mr. Laurel, that is incorrect. The sum of the interior angles of a triangle is one hundred and eighty degrees.

Stan looks crestfallen.

STAN

> Oh. I thought it was how many angles there were.

HARDY

> (To Stan, in a low, furious growl) > You... you... numbskull! That was the \$250! The yacht, Stanley! The yacht! Sunk by your idiocy!

PRATTLE

> And with that, ladies and gentlemen, Mrs. Agnes Grimes is our undisputed 'Brain Buster' champion for this evening! She walks away with a grand total of \$200! And our valiant challengers, the 'Wisdom Warriors,' finish with a respectable, if somewhat... unorthodox, \$110! What a show!

Clarence hits the "WINNER!" sound effect button, which promptly gets stuck, emitting a continuous, blaring, TRUMPET FANFARE.

Ollie, absolutely furious, stands up abruptly, inadvertently knocking over the microphone stand. The microphone SWINGS down, hitting him squarely on the head. He stumbles back, tripping over a cable, and lands with a CRASH onto the sound panel, his rear end pressing all the buttons simultaneously.

A cacophony of sound effects erupts: a COW MOOING, a TRAIN WHISTLE, a CAT MEOWING, a DOG BARKING, a foghorn, and a baby crying, all at once, mixed with the stuck trumpet fanfare. Lights flicker wildly.

CLARENCE

> (Screaming) > My panels! My beautiful panels!

Mr. Henderson rushes in, his face purple.

HENDERSON

> (Shouting over the noise) > What in the blazes is going on?! Get them out! Get them out of my studio!

Stan, meanwhile, sees Ollie struggling on the floor amidst the chaos. With a benevolent smile, he leans down to help, but accidentally steps on Ollie's hand. Ollie lets out a yelp.

HARDY

> (Muffled, from under the sound panel) > Ow! Stanley, you clumsy oaf! Get off me!

Stan tries to pull Ollie up, but in doing so, he yanks on Ollie's coat, causing Ollie's trousers to slide down.

Mrs. Grimes, clutching her dictionary, stands up and flees the studio in disgust. Mr. Prattle has collapsed onto his chair, his head in his hands.

PRATTLE

> (Muttering) > I need a very long holiday. In a very quiet place.

Henderson points a trembling finger at Laurel and Hardy.

HENDERSON

> (To a security guard who has appeared) > Escort these... these 'Wisdom Warriors' off the premises! And make sure they never set foot in any WXYZ studio again!

The security guard, a burly man, grabs Ollie by the arm. Ollie, still struggling with his trousers, tries to maintain some dignity.

HARDY

> (To Henderson, indignantly) > But, sir, we nearly had the \$250! It was all Stanley's fault!

STAN

> (Tearfully) > I only wanted to help, Ollie!

HARDY

> (As he's dragged away) > You've helped us right into the poor house, Stanley! The poor house!

The security guard pulls Ollie out the door. Stan follows, casting a last, sad glance at the still-blaring sound panel.

EXT. WXYZ RADIO STATION - DAY

Laurel and Hardy are unceremoniously deposited onto the pavement outside the radio station. The trumpet fanfare and animal sounds are still faintly audible from inside.

Ollie adjusts his trousers and re-straightens his tie, his face a mask of profound dejection. Stan fiddles with his hat, sniffing.

HARDY

> (Sighs) > Well, Stanley. There goes the yacht. There goes the slap-up dinner. There goes... everything. All because you couldn't tell the difference between 'three angles' and 'one hundred and eighty degrees'.

STAN

> (Tears welling up) > I'm sorry, Ollie. I thought... I thought it was simple.

HARDY

> Nothing is simple with you, Stanley! Nothing!

Ollie sighs again, then spots something on the ground. A folded piece of paper. He picks it up. It's an invoice.

HARDY

> (Reads aloud, incredulously) > 'Invoice: Damages to Studio B sound panel, microphone equipment, and emotional distress compensation for Mr. Percival Prattle: \$500.' > (He looks at Stan, utterly defeated) > They're charging *us*, Stanley. Five hundred dollars. We were trying to *win* money!

Stan's lip begins to tremble.

STAN

> But, Ollie... we only went in there because you said it would be easy!

Ollie pinches the bridge of his nose, then slowly, deliberately, pulls off his hat. He looks up at the sky, utterly despairing.

HARDY

> (To the heavens) > Why me? Why always me?

He puts his hat back on, glances at Stan, then shrugs, a familiar resignation settling over him.

HARDY

> Come on, Stanley. Let's go home. Perhaps Mrs. McTavish has run out of paper for her ledger.

Stan snuffles, then manages a small, hopeful smile.

STAN

> At least we made a lot of noise, Ollie. Everyone will have heard us!

Ollie casts one last, long-suffering look at the radio station, then at Stan. He shakes his head slowly, and together, the two men shuffle off down the street, their figures slowly receding into the distance, still arguing softly, as the faint, distant sound of a perpetual trumpet fanfare and a lonely cow moo echoes behind them.

FADE TO BLACK.