

# Assignment TV

By **TERRENCE O'FLAHERTY**

NEW YORK—It has been several years since I bought my parents their first television set to keep them off the streets at night. I wasn't really sure how they would take to it because they are a lively pair with many interests. They should be getting old, but they never seem to have the time to do it.

As with our first electric refrigerator when I was a youngster, the initial delight with television has diminished with the passing of time. The frozen delicacies from either box must be very special to get much attention in a busy home.

"Shouldn't you be watching something tonight?" asked my mother when I visited them last week. This is a kind of concession she usually makes to the peculiarities of my job. It was 9 p.m. Thursday night.

"THE COLUMN is in. Let's just sit and talk," I said, poking up the fire and pouring down a drink. So we talked about the things we like—about old times when we used to take automobile trips to see the wild flowers on Sundays, and Dad said he wished was at the Ritz Hotel in Madrid, and Moaher asked what Mrs. Johnson looks like close up—but I could see their thoughts were elsewhere.

"It's 9:20," said my father. "Are you sure there isn't something you'd like to watch," my mother asked again. By 9:20 they were openly fidgeting. Two minutes later the truth came out: "Darling, your father and I have simply got to watch 'Peyton Place,'" she said suddenly. "I hope you don't mind," said Dad, leaping to the TV set.

So I sat with these two old dears and watched this nighttime soap opera about the ambush of morality at the crossroads of a pretty little New England town. Sex is so much more palatable if the people are pretty. It was obvious that my folks are hooked on the serial.

WHEN IT WAS over and ABC had smoothed out the sheets for the show that was to follow, my mother turned to me and said:

"Now please tell us what's going to happen to Elliot."

"Elliot who?" I asked.

"Allison's father on 'Peyton Place.' The one who is out of prison," she said brightly.

In a moment of sheer madness last Christmas I told her that I knew what was going to happen in the future and she has never forgotten it. (Actually I can't remember just what it was, but she doesn't believe it.)

"Come on, tell. We won't tell a soul."

"Not even Mame Crow?" I asked. (Mame Crow is her best friend.)

"Not even Mame Crow," she replied solemnly.

"What about Edwina Perkins?" I asked. (Edwina Perkins is her second best friend even if she is a Democrat.)

"Edwina doesn't watch it."

"WELL, THEN, listen carefully," I said. "Elliot is going to marry Betty and run for mayor of Peyton Place. Constance will be sent to prison for killing Elliot's first wife even though she didn't do it. Leslie Harrington actually did it with the help of Betty's mother who was really in love with Elliot. Allison will marry Frank Sinatra which will drive Norman to suicide and Rodney to homosexuality . . ."

My mother gave me a stony stare. "After all I've done for you . . ." she said.

"You'll just have to get in training for summer," I said.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, if you take that vacation you'll miss out on several weeks' worth of plot. The show won't have summer repeats. It will keep right on going."

"What?" she gasped.

That'll give her something to worry about.

She has suggested that the ship's captain might make two daily reports to passengers—one from Vietnam and another from Peyton Place. She's working on this.



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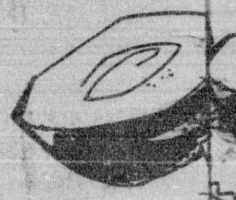
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