The Uncle Artie Show

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Abstract

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“Okay, uh, Janie, what we want you to do is go through your dance one time. Oh, and make sure to stay on the wooden part of the floor, okay honey? Use little steps just right for your little feet.” That’s what Uncle Artie said to Janie that day at the t.v. studio. Uncle Artie’s got this big-time kid’s show every afternoon that took over the Three Stooges’ time.

Janie’s my little sister, my dumb little sister. I used to think that I was the only one to know so, but now everybody in the whole town does. I mean, you’ve got to be dumb putting up with all that dancing school junk like she does; they tried to get me in there once but I locked myself in the bathroom. That was a long time ago, when I was just Janie’s age; I was sure a lot smarter than she’ll ever be.

I really got to thinking about how crazy that sister of mine is when last week me and Mom and Janie all went to the t.v. station. Miss Rogers, Janie’s dancing teacher who thinks she knows all about “show biz,” went and got the big idea that my little, squirt six-year-old sister should dance on t.v. Now who in the whole town is gonna want to watch the
Uncle Artie kid show anyway, especially if a kinda ugly kid in braids turns up doing "The Turkey in the Straw"?

I had a ball game but Mom made me come along with her and Janie for the big, important, "audition." She said this was a once in a lifetime opportunity; I felt like asking her if that was a promise. When we got there, they didn't treat us like big shots or anything like that. We sat in a big room and watched a bunch of eyes on a string thing dangle from the ceiling. I looked for movie stars at first, but none ever showed up. I was beginning to wonder if we weren't really in the waiting room of some new doctor's office where we were gonna get another shot, for our own good.

Finally a lady came and took us to this big room that looked like the school gym, only it was dark and had cords all over the floor. Janie was holding the lady's hand and humming "Turkey in the Straw" all the time until I thought I was gonna get a headache. Mom was talking to a man at a piano so I started to just kinda look around. I ended up in a corner where they had the whole kitchen for that Martha show; but it wasn't really a kitchen at all, only a corner with a fake window.

Mom yelled at me and I had to come back—I wasn't gonna touch nothing. I listened to her say, "Jeffrey, this is Mr. Matthews; you know, 'Uncle Artie' from the show." He didn't have on his Uncle Artie clothes but after I looked awhile I could tell that it was him, all right. Stupid Janie couldn't, though. She whispered to me and asked who it really was. I told her, but she wouldn't believe me. She got real mad and yelled, "Oh no, you're not Uncle Artie! Uncle Artie doesn't wear clothes like that and, besides, I saw you smoke!" See, that's the kind of dumb stuff she does all the time!

"Janie, behave yourself, Mr. Matthews wants you to do your Turkey for him—now." Mom said this while she gave her one of those looks that's the very next thing before she reaches for the hairbrush. Mr. Matthews, that's Uncle Artie, showed her where to stand and she went through that dumb dance, but she glared back and forth at him and Mom the whole time. I got bored and started watching the piano player; I knew I wouldn't miss much after seeing her turkey all
over the house the past week.

Uncle Artie told Janie that she had real talent and that he'd be seeing her again next week. Then he said something to Mom and she got out a little book from her purse and wrote in it. We were supposed to thank Mr. Matthews, so I told Artie that I'd be seeing him. Janie just stared, I think she would have stuck out her tongue if Mom hadn't grabbed her hand when she did and started to leave.

I could tell that this was a special day because we stopped and had hamburgers for lunch. "Well, Janie, how about that; you're actually going to be on 'The Uncle Artie Show' next week. Do you feel scared?" Sometimes she says stuff as stupid as my sister!

"Nope, I'm not scared," Janie said as a big drip of ketchup fell down onto her chin. "I'm not scared, 'cause I'm not gonna be on his old show."

"What do you mean? Of course you're going to be on the show! Don't tell me you're beginning to feel stage-fright already."

"He laughed at me."

"Who? Jeff, were you making those turkey noises at her again? Now come on Janie, just think how everyone will get to see you on t.v."

"Tell them not to turn their sets on then, 'cause they won't see me. That phony Uncle Artie was laughing at me and I hate him!"

"Don't be dumb, Janie; why would old Artie want to waste time laughing at you? He was probably just surprised that you didn't really goof up. Remember, he gives out free ice cream to all the kids on his show, so you just better count on going."

Mom told me that Janie was just going through one of her moods again and that I should try to talk her into being on the show. She promised me that new Whitey Ford first baseman's mitt that I'd been wanting, if I could get her to do it. From that time on, all Janie heard from me was about that show and how she'd be the only kid in the whole school to ever be on t.v.

On the big day Mom got out plaid shoe ribbons and new blue jeans. I'd never seen my sister in a pair of jeans
before, but today she had some on, patches and everything. Mom braided Janie's hair and then called Grandpa to remind him to watch the show. We finally got into the car and Janie wanted the window seat, but it was my day and Mom wouldn't let her have it.

“Okay now, Janie, why don't you run through your dance before we start the show for real?” Old Artie was really giving Janie the sweetie-pie business; I was wishing he'd get busy with the free ice cream instead.

“I'm not gonna dance if you watch me.” That was the first thing that Janie had said since we'd climbed out of the car.

Mom wiped her forehead and got one of her headache looks. “Now, Jane Ann, that's not polite at all. Watch yourself, or else, young lady!”

Uncle Artie told us he had to go get some coffee anyway plus some ice cream for the kids and me and sweetie-pie. After that he made a big wink at Janie. She just stood and watched him leave, but as soon as he left she started to change into her tap shoes. When Artie came back, Janie acted like she forgot her dance and quit right in the middle of it.

“Don't get nervous now, honey; the men will start running those big cameras pretty soon. Why don't you just stand right here until I call for you. I'll say your name and then everyone will clap when I say 'How about it, kids?' Then you come out on the floor and give me a big kiss before you start your dance.” As soon as Uncle Artie stopped talking Janie turned around and walked over to some folding chairs. When the show started, she just sat there, clanging the metal from her taps on the chair legs. They ran an extra cartoon that day.

The three of us walked back to the car without saying a single word. Mom muttered something into her purse as she tried to find her keys. I opened the door and got in first, giving the window seat to Janie.