

Chapter 1: Radio Shock

Frankie Brown sat in his dad's old chair and listened to a deep voice from the radio.

"... A fiery horse with the speed of light, a cloud of dust and a hearty 'Hi Yo Silver!' The Lone Ranger!

"Hi Yo Silver, away! . . ."

On a rickety table, between the chair and a small fireplace, the radio rested like a marvelous head. Cloth-covered speakers formed the broad eyes of a magician. A tuning knob in the center became the flattened nose of a clown. A broad mouth at the base of the head held tiny toothpick teeth, for the stations on the dial. The mouth never smiled or frowned, but when Frankie switched on the power, electricity surged to the dial. The face glowed like a beacon and a soft, crackling noise came from the eyes.

In 1944, radio was king of the airwaves. No TVs existed in any home and computers were fantasy. Instead, millions of listeners throughout the world were drawn to the magic voice of a living room box. It was an age when people closed their eyes to listen and see with their imagination. Radio was an adult's window to the world and a child's door to dream. Frankie leaned closer to the face, to listen.

"Franklin Brown!" called his mother from the kitchen. "I've asked you three times to come to dinner."

"But the Lone Ranger – " he shouted.

Frankie loved nightly radio best, with stories like *The Lone Ranger* that

spoke to him of heroism and bravery and the things he badly needed to get through each day. When the radio was on, Frankie could forget his fears, which began with a world war that spanned the globe and led straight to his father, who was fighting in the war far away. At the age of ten, Frankie Brown was grateful for any courage he could get.

Two shots rang from the radio and a pair of cattle rustlers were taken to jail. The Lone Ranger reset his holster and adjusted the black mask that hid his true identity. The lawmen and bandits of the Old West watched him turn away and wondered aloud, as they always did, "Who was that masked man?" Blazing trumpets ended the show, as they always did, and the masked cowboy rode his horse, Silver, into the sunset. *Hi yo Silver! Away!*

That, Frankie thought, was great. He would give anything to be like the masked man, famous and unafraid, if only for a day. He pulled on his coat and flicked off the radio. He would have to hurry now. There were only a few minutes until his next favorite program: the nightly weather. He rushed to join his mother and older sister, Joan, for dinner.

The Brown family lived on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, in a gray clapboard house that faced the wild Atlantic Ocean. A wet, winter wind blew in from the sea all season long. Like most families on Cape Cod, the Browns had no central heat and the house had grown so cold that the entire family stayed in coats and sweaters, day and night, to keep warm. By March of that year, the winter had been so cold for so long that most people forgot about spring, or sun, or how to be nice to anyone at home. Which is one way of explaining why Frankie and Joan had their big fight, which began with the radio, and the weather report, and changed both their lives forever.

Frankie stuffed his dinner of codfish and potatoes into his mouth and dashed back to the radio. He turned the flat nose to find the station and bad news soon filled the house like fog. The voice of the weather reporter droned through the magic eyes. "High winds will batter the coast," the voice moaned, "and rough seas will ground all ships."

Frankie let the images of rainstorms and hurricanes fill his mind. With his eyes closed, he could almost see the great clouds, filled with water and lightning, racing across the sky. The drama and power was awesome; he loved the boldness of weather.

Joan, however, did not. To her, the weather was always bad and she did not need to be reminded every night. To balance the icy news, her blood boiled. At seventeen, she listened only to jazz, because it made her feel older, and to news of the war, because it made her feel closer somehow to her father. "Mo-om!" she yelled, as though this explained everything.

Mrs. Evalee Brown heard the danger signal, but was too tired to stop

anyone. She was a single mother now with a full time job canning fish at a local factory. "Jo-oan!" she called back in the same voice. She believed it best to answer whininess with whininess, and love with love so that the giver of each could see themselves in their own light.

"Mo-om!" Joan whined again as her temperature rose. "I'm serious!"

Joan wanted to be taken seriously. On her seventeenth birthday, she announced her disgust with small town life and changed her name forever, from Joanie to the more adult sounding Joan. "Frankie is always listening to the weather and it's always rotten," she said. "And deplorable!"

Mrs. Brown looked down at the empty plates and sighed. "I've been cleaning cod all day at the factory," she said. "I'm sure you can handle your brother by yourself."

Joan stopped and a bright and worrisome gleam came to her eyes. She certainly could handle her brother by herself.

Without warning, Joan marched straight to the radio, grabbed the flattened nose and turned to a jazz station.

"Mo-om!" Frankie yelled. Like Joan, it was his favorite complaint.

Mrs. Brown did not hear, or did not want to hear, and Frankie was left to fend for himself. He could do that, too. He launched a counter offensive and grabbed the nose of the radio. With a flip of the wrist, he whipped it back to the weather report.

Joan about-faced in soldier style and changed tactics. Turning toward the wall, she pulled the electric cord that led from the back of the radio to an open socket.

The radio fell silent.

After a moment of stunned surprise, Frankie attacked. With the force of an invasion, he grabbed the cord and tried to shove it back into the socket.

Joan maneuvered again. This time, she tried to grab Frankie, but he was too quick. The cord was in the socket and the hated sound of the weather filled the house again. So Joan did the next best thing. She grabbed the radio.

Frankie, however, was also fast. Changing tactics as well, he lunged for the other end of the electric cord and grabbed it at the base of the radio, where it entered the back to power the tubes and wiring inside. Joan pulled from one side while Frankie hung on from the other, until her foot slipped on a small floor rug. As Joan went flying backwards, the thin back board of the radio popped off, leaving the wiry brains exposed.

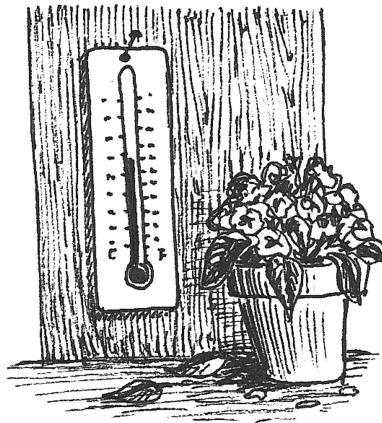
Instinctively, Frankie reached forward to pull the radio back. But his hand fell on one of the tubes inside and he gripped it tight. Since his other hand still held the cord that ran into the back, a perfect connection was made. As electricity surged through his body, Frankie became a human extension cord.

Before anyone knew what happened, his brown, wavy hair stood straight on his head and his eyes lit like light bulbs.

This would have been shocking enough, but then the strangest thing emerged from Frankie's mouth. With his right hand holding the inner tubing and his other hand slipped forward onto the open socket, which was still attached to the cord, which was still attached to the radio. As the boy's hair stood straight and his eyes glowed, the radio reporter continued to read the weather. Like a ventriloquist's dummy, Frankie's mouth began forming the exact same words as the reporter, at the exact same time. So that when the weatherman read, "the wind will come out of the northwest," Frankie was also saying, "the wind will come out of the northwest." It was a weather harmony.

Joan screamed and her mom came running. Mrs. Brown stared at her son, reading the weather. At first, she did not know what to do. If she grabbed Frankie, then she might be shocked too and they would both be reading the weather together along with the reporter. But she couldn't leave her son like this. So she closed her eyes and with a giant leap, she tackled Frankie and broke the chain of electricity that connected her son to the radio.

They all fell to the floor: the radio, Mrs. Brown and Frankie. As Mrs. Brown carefully pushed aside the radio and sat up, Joan rushed over and tried to pat down her poor brother's hair.



Chapter 2: Weather Boy is Born

Slowly, very slowly, Frankie picked himself off the floor. He rubbed his hand on his crackly hair and opened his eyes, which had returned to their warm, brown color.

"I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry," Joan said to her brother.

"It's all right, dear," Mrs. Brown said. "Now let's get Frankie seated in your dad's

chair, so we can look at him."

Together, they picked up the singed and scalded boy and placed him in the special chair. "Look at me, Frankie," his mother said. "Let me take a look at you."

Frankie was tall, but quite thin and the radio shock made him look like a fried skeleton. He stared at his mother with big brown eyes and tried to smile. "Sure, I'm all right, Ma," he said.

No one believed him and for the next hour Joan and Mrs. Brown ran around the small house doing everything they could think to do for Frankie. They called Dr. Proctor, the local doctor, and they brought the boy tea. They set a cool cloth on his forehead and Joan offered a bit of chocolate she had been saving for spring. When they could think of nothing more, they surrounded Frankie with pillow after pillow, to keep him comfortable.

Thirty minutes later, Dr. Proctor threw open the door. A gust of wind and rain blew into the room. Dr. Proctor brushed his hand over a large, soggy moustache and tossed a big, black medical bag onto the floor. "Terrible!" he yelled. "Just terrible weather we're having. I'm about as wet as a stray cat could be!" He threw off his coat and shook Mrs. Brown's hand sharply. "Now Evalee, don't you worry. Whatever the problem is, old Dr. Proctor can fix it. Now where's the patient?"

Dr. Proctor glanced to where Mrs. Brown pointed and saw a thin boy smothered by five large pillows. "First thing," he said, "are those pillows. You're drowning the lad! Get those off and leave him to me."

While Joan removed the pillows, Dr. Proctor opened his bag of tools. He stuck a stethoscope onto Frankie's chest, an otoscope into Frankie's ears, and a tongue depressor down Frankie's throat. Finally, he asked Frankie a simple question. "What's the last thing you remember, my boy?"

Frankie answered weakly. "Warm weather coming from the south," he said.

Dr. Proctor cocked his head and stroked his soggy moustache. "Hmm," he said. "Anything else?"

"Morning temperature will be 61 degrees. A high of 78 tomorrow. And an overnight low of 52."

"Maybe somewhere, my boy," laughed Dr. Proctor, "but not here. Not on Cape Cod in March, I can tell you!" The doctor put his hands on Frankie's shoulders and went

to talk to the boy's mother in the kitchen.

"His physical signs are normal," he said softly. "He's a strong boy. But he's in a state of shock. From the shock mind you! Ha! Get it? Well, what I mean to say is the boy's fine. He needs a good sleep, that's all. And if he seems up to it in the morning, he can even go to school. Just check on him a couple times during the night. Be good as new tomorrow. All charged up, mind you! Ha! Get it?"

After Dr. Proctor had laughed his way to the door, Joan and Mrs. Brown helped Frankie change for bed. As they did every night, the family picked out warm clothes for the next day and placed them near the beds so they could dress quickly in the ice cold of the morning.

This time, Frankie protested. "Not those!" he exclaimed and pointed at the long wool pants and sweater. "I need short pants and a tee shirt! It's going to be sunny tomorrow. 78 degrees. The barometer is rising!"

Mrs. Brown stared at her son, unaware that the best kept secret of World War II was now occupying her son's pajamas. She wondered how worried she should be.

"Mo-om!" Joan whispered. "He's gone crazy.

He doesn't even know what a barometer is!"

"Just do what he says, dear," her mother answered. "He's had a hard day."

* * *

The following morning, Frankie jumped from bed and dressed in a flash. His mother lay on a floor rug beside the bed, where she had slept to be close to her son. She looked up in amazement to see a wiry boy wearing shorts and a tee shirt, ready for school. She tried to stay calm.

"Frankie," she said. "Hold your horses."

Mrs. Brown stood, felt her son's forehead and led him to the kitchen for a bowl of hot oatmeal for breakfast. When she was certain her boy was indeed healthy and relatively sane, she tried to reason with him. "Frankie, you can go to school, but you have to put on warmer clothes. It's winter, remember?"

"No it's not, Ma! Look, it's spring!" Frankie rushed to open all the shades in the

house, which had been closed to keep the heat inside. Outside, the sun was shining and birds sang in praise of the weather.

From a back room, Joan shuffled into the kitchen. She looked at her brother, who was jumping around the house in summer clothes, and then she looked at her mother. "Is he still crazy?" she asked.

"I don't know," Mrs. Brown said. She could not be sure.

"Open the windows, Ma," Frankie said. "Come outside and I'll show you. "

They walked outside and, sure enough, it was as warm as a day in May.

"And look at this, Ma," Frankie said and pointed to a thermometer that was nailed to the front porch.

Mrs. Brown walked over to the thermometer and stared. The mercury stood at 61 degrees, exactly what Frankie predicted. She was so stunned by Frankie's wild but perfectly accurate forecast that she let her son go to school in shorts.

* * *

Eight hours later, Frankie returned home with Tom and Jasper. The two school friends were sweating in heavy winter clothes. Their mothers did not believe that a nice morning in March could possibly last, or get nicer. So the boys decided they had to see this amazing radio for themselves, as well as the thermometer that had proved Frankie was right. Then, they would ask for another prediction, so they could wear what *they* wanted the next day.

When the boys entered the gray, clapboard house at the end of the street, Dr. Proctor was waiting. He'd come to check on Frankie. "Well, my boy!" he shouted. "You look re-charged! Get it? And look at your clothes! You... My gracious. You ... you were right."

Dr. Proctor was suddenly quiet. Very few people in the world could stop Dr. Proctor from talking and there he was, silent as a wide mouthed codfish. Quickly, he spun toward the post on the porch and read the thermometer. Sure enough, it read 78 degrees, the temperature Frankie predicted for the high of the day. Dr. Proctor stared again at Frankie. "How did you know? How could you? My word," he said, "come here

and let me take a look at you."

While Dr. Proctor poked and prodded the patient with his stethoscope, his otoscope, and his tongue depressor, the two friends explained Frankie's new power.

"He can tell the weather!" said Tom.

"He can see it," corrected Jasper. "That's what

Frankie said. Isn't that right, Frankie?"

Frankie answered with the tongue depressor in his mouth. "Ah-hah," which meant Yes.

"He's Weather Boy!" shouted Tom.

"Yeah," said Jasper. "Just like Super Boy, only he can't leap tall buildings in a single bound."

"And he's not that fast, either," added Tom.

Frankie glared at Tom, ready to challenge him to a race, when Joan walked up the road from high school. Living in a small town, all the kids from Kindergarten to Twelfth Grade went to the same school. And with so many kids so close together, news traveled fast, especially when it was about somebody whose new name was Weather Boy.

"Mo-om!" she called to her mother, who had left work early to meet her still fragile son after school. "I told you not to let Frankie wear shorts to school. Now they're calling him Weather Boy. And since, deplorably, he is my brother, they're asking me to make it sunny tomorrow. It's... it's mortifying! "

Mrs. Brown stepped down from the front porch, to console her daughter, when the phone rang. She ran inside to hear the school principal on the line. Mr. Tooper wanted to know why Frankie, who was always a good student, would suddenly lie to everyone that he could predict the weather.

"Frankie would never lie," Mrs. Brown insisted and then added, more politely, that her son was just a little confused. It would not happen again.

She returned to the porch and was surprised by a new visitor. This time it was Jack Strong, the sports coach for the school.

"Good afternoon," said Mrs. Brown with an odd tightness in her voice.

"Yes ma'am," said Jack. "A mighty fine afternoon, in fact. In fact, I wondered if Frankie could tell just how fine it's gonna be the next few days. That way, I'd know if I

should get the field ready for baseball practice. Sure hate to do that and have it get cold and rainy again."

Mrs. Brown sighed. "Why don't you ask the Weather Boy here yourself."

Frankie was only too happy to help. He was about to try when Jasper shouted, "Wait! Wait!"

With a flick of his wrist, Jasper reached into his nap sack and pulled out a black mask. "It's my Lone Ranger mask," he said. "Tom and I figured that, since you're Weather Boy now, you should wear it."

"You'll be a hero," said Tom.

The mask was a black strip with two oval eyeholes and a black tie that went around the back of the head. When Frankie put it on his face, he looked more like a raccoon than a hero. But the mask made him feel powerful and mysterious and not like Frankie at all. He liked it.

"Now," shouted Jasper, who was always shouting, "do the waving and jiggling like you did at school!"

When Frankie had done his predictions at school, Tom and Jasper thought just telling the weather was boring. So they invented extra motions to show the other kids how Frankie's magic powers worked.

On the front porch, with everyone watching, Frankie closed his eyes tight and raised his hands high in the air, like two antennae. He wiggled his fingers for a long time. And then, in a flash, he clapped his hands together.

"Well?!" they said. "Tell us!"

Frankie opened his eyes. He looked more like monkey-boy than a weather hero, but he felt better than he had in two yehrs. As everyone stared in admiration, Frankie _ predicted the weather. "Tomorrow's high. will be 72 degrees," he announced.

The people cheered at the news of more warm weather and waited for Frankie to continue.

The Weather Boy cleared his throat to speak louder. "The next day, Wednesday, we'll have high clouds... but warm again, with a high of 68 degrees. "

"Hooray!" the small crowd cheered again, with Coach Jack loudest of all.

"On Thursday," Frankie said in a deep voice, the way radio reporters talked when

something bad was about to happen, "we'll have morning showers. Rain will increase throughout the day. And temperatures will fall to 52 degrees."

"Awww!" the others grumbled.

"What about Friday?" Joan yelled in spite of herself. "Friday's the Spring Dance."

Frankie closed his eyes again for effect. "Continued cloudiness," he said slowly and dramatically, "but no rain and increasing highs to 67 degrees!"

The front porch went wild with excitement. Even Joan jumped for joy. She practically hugged her brother, until she remembered they were related. Frankie beamed at his mother, who could not help but feel proud of her son. Weather Boy had been born.

Eventually, Mrs. Brown asked everyone to go home so Frankie could rest after another long day. Coach Jack marched happily away and Tom and Jasper left reluctantly. Dr. Proctor, however, lingered on the porch to whisper in Frankie's ear. When the boy whispered back, the good doctor looked sheepishly at Mrs. Brown and then bounded off the porch for home.

When Mrs. Brown asked her son what the doctor wanted, he answered, "Nothing much. Just the weather for Saturday. I guess he needs to practice his golf swing."

As Mrs. Brown watched the strange image of a sixty-year-old man hop-skipping down the street, she made a decision. Before the whole town went mad, she would have to inform her husband, who was on secret mission in England.



Chapter 3: Letter to the Army

By 1944, the Second World War had spread across Europe to Asia, Africa and North America. It was the first time in the history of the world that the whole world was

truly at war. The Nazi army battled for one half and the army of Japan battled for the other. After four years of intense fighting, all sides were exhausted and it seemed to many that the war would never end.

Sergeant Travis Brown, Frankie's dad, was a bit old to be serving in the U.S. Army. He volunteered at thirty-five to honor his own father who fought in the First World War, in 1917. He also liked planes, but never learned to fly. So he chose to fall from one. The role of para-trooper was new, simple and very risky. Wear a parachute and fall thousands of feet from plane to battle. As Travis Brown was much older than the other soldiers, most of whom came straight from high school, he soon became a sergeant. He trained other, younger troopers to jump safely, to make sure the parachute opened correctly, and to float gracefully through the sky to a target far below.

Sergeant Brown was in England now, on a mission so secret that no one knew much about it. The only thing he could say for certain was that a lot of people from the U.S., England, Canada, France and the other free countries – the Allied Army - were preparing for an invasion against the Nazis, who themselves had invaded France four years earlier. The goal was to free France and all of Europe from the boot of the Nazis and their hated leader, Adolph Hitler. Only a few generals knew when or where the invasion would take place, but everyone, including the Nazis, knew it would be huge. It would be the most important battle of the war, and the most complex in the history of the world. Their greatest worry, because it seemed beyond control, was weather. Good weather, on the right day, at precisely the right time, was absolutely critical to success.

After another long day practicing jumps, Sergeant Brown carried a letter from home back to barracks. More precious than fine jewels, letters were proof of family. Sergeant Brown read his letter by lamplight, in a cabin shared with three other sergeants. He read one unbelievable part twice. "Look at this," he said finally. "Incredible!"

Sergeant Joe Smiley, who was once a taxi driver from New York City, snatched the letter from Travis. He glanced at the writing and sneered, which was the closest he ever came to smiling. Bob 'Chicken' Soup, who resembled a chicken from the family farm in Texas, grabbed the letter from Joe. "Give that up," he declared. "You're more trouble than a fox in a henhouse." Until Bo 'Peep' Witkowski, a large and peaceful lobster-catcher from Maine, walked quietly behind Chicken Soup. He stole the letter

again and carefully returned it to Travis.

"What is it?" asked Bo. "Your wife canned another squid by accident?"

"Naa," said Smiley with a taxi snarl. "Maybe ya Boston Red Sox finally beat my New York Yankees. Now that would be incredible."

"Much better," answered Travis. "My boy predicted the weather for the Sox. For the baseball season Opening Day."

"Go on," said Smiley, who did not believe anything but bad news.

"Says right here," Travis insisted and pointed to the letter. "A couple weeks ago, my son Frankie got an electric shock from our radio. I can just imagine how. But the weather report was on and the shock must have gone to his brain. He's fine, I guess, but now it seems he can predict the weather. Anyway, the sports coach at his school has a cousin who works for the Red Sox. So, from out of nowhere, Joe Cronin calls our house, he's the team's manager you know, and he asks Frankie if it's gonna rain or shine on Opening Day."

"Probably got brain damage from the shock," said Smiley and Bo slapped him hard on the back.

"Wait," said Travis who wanted to keep things from getting out of hand, as they often did. "Get this. Guess what they're all calling him now."

"Rain man?" suggested Chicken.

"Captain Flood?" said Bo.

"Nope," said Travis proudly. "My Frankie's new name is Weather Boy!"

As the men laughed, the cabin door burst open and Lieutenant Mac Mason marched into the room. Immediately, the sergeants stood at attention.

"At ease, men," said the lieutenant and Travis leaned away to hide the letter. "Lieutenant," he asked, "what can we do for you?"

"Seems the question is, what can I do for you? What was all that laughing about?"

Travis was too embarrassed to answer, so Chicken Soup responded with sincere admiration. "Sergeant Brown has got a Weather Boy, sir."

"Yeah," said Smiley. "His kid got brain damage and now he can predict the weather."

"The boy," added Bo, as he shoved Smiley hard in the ribs, "made the sun shine

on Opening Day for the Red Sox."

Lieutenant Mason was skeptical. "What do you mean, Sergeant Brown?" he asked.

As Travis reluctantly explained his son's new talent, Mac Mason stroked his chin with new interest. He wanted to know everything about Weather Boy: how old Frankie was; how accurate he was; everything. But most of all, Mason wanted to know the distance. How far away could Frankie predict the weather? .

"Fenway Park," answered Travis, "where the Red Sox play, is about fifty miles from my home. And Frankie got that one right."

"Hmmm," said Lieutenant Mason mysteriously. "Could be the ticket. Which reminds me why I came in here. Tomorrow morning, the Supreme Commander in Chief of this whole program, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, is coming to pay a visit."

"What?!" the men yelled. "The general is coming here! Why?"

"He wants to see you boys jump out of a plane. Says he's going to need you. And," Mason said directly to Sergeant Brown, "if my guess is right and these predictions are not some kind of joke, the General might need your Weather Boy as well."