

LUCILLE BALL

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sandwich board meetings, studio staff meetings and contract-signing into the backbreaking schedule of her show. In the second place, the then president of CBS, James Aubrey, known in the trade as "the smiling cobra," seemed less than enchanted with Desilu. One show idea after another kept being nixed by the network, so that *The Lucy Show* had to carry the overhead for the entire lot.

But when Aubrey left CBS, the outlook for Desilu improved. Now the network said it really wanted new series ideas, and Miss Ball proposed three half-hour shows selected from twenty-five scripts she reviewed. Then she was informed that CBS was looking only for hour-long series.

For two days and two nights, Lucy and her husband—Morton was her executive producer—pondered the problem. The night before the deadline, Morton suddenly remembered a script he had read a few months back. The next morning, his wife placed a call to CBS in New York.

"I've got the right script," she announced. "It's different, but it's good. The title is *Mission: Impossible*." The rest, as they say, is history. *Mission: Impossible* won an Emmy in its first year for the best dramatic series; and *Star Trek* became a hit the next year, shoving Desilu firmly into the black. Suddenly the company became prey for merger-hunters.

At first Lucy wasn't interested, and turned down some thirty-odd offers. For one thing, she wasn't about to sell Desilu to anyone who might only be after its valuable land and would raze its building and put the studio out of business. For another, she had grown to like her job, and her stockholders had grown to like her in it.

But when Charles Bluhdorn came along, Lucy had met her match. The dynamic Austrian-born financier had just picked up Paramount Pictures for Gulf & Western and had set his sights on Desilu, which happened to be the set next door.

As Bluhdorn's offer became more and more tempting, Lucy reacted in typically feminine manner. She fled. Her attorney and board member Milton A. (Mickey) Rudin finally found her hiding out at the Hotel Fontainebleau in Miami Beach, and got on the next plane.

"Mickey said he had to have an answer in twenty-four hours or we'd blow the deal," Miss Ball recalls. "Well, we went over the whole thing again, and

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