

TCM THE PLOT THICKENS

Episode 7: Red Scare

BEN MANKIEWICZ: On Labor Day weekend in 1953, Lucy was home at the Desilu ranch in Chatsworth. The kids were with her. She was sitting in a rocking chair knitting, something she liked to do to calm her nerves. Lucy turned on the radio for The Walter Winchell show.

WALTER WINCHELL SHOW: It's time, America, time for Walter Winchell, presented to you by Gruen, the precision watch.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Walter Winchell was a radio and TV announcer. His shows were roundups of celebrity news, gossip, and innuendo. He was powerful. Twenty million people listened to him every Sunday. Including Lucy and Desi.

WALTER WINCHELL SHOW: Walter Winchell of the New York Daily Mirror and The Washington Post.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Winchell said something that weekend that sent the couple into a tailspin. He announced that the star of the country's most popular TV show was questioned by the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities. In the 1950s, that was a really big deal. That committee was on a witch hunt. They were looking for communists. And they had their sights set on Lucy - the most famous woman in America thanks to I Love Lucy. An accusation like that... it could end her career. That's not an exaggeration. In those few seconds, Walter Winchell confirmed what Lucy was afraid of her entire life. That the moment she was finally happy, finally secure, somebody could take it all away.

I'm your host Ben Mankiewicz. You're listening to season three of The Plot Thickens, a podcast from Turner Classic Movies. This season we're telling the story of how Lucille Ball became the funniest, most recognizable woman in America. This is episode 7: Red Scare. To understand how Lucy could end up accused of being a communist, we need to go back. Back through Lucy's life and back through history. In 1936, before Desi and before I Love Lucy, Lucille Ball signed a voter registration card. She was 24 years old. When she signed up to vote, she chose a political party.

AARON SORKIN: Lucy had registered as a member of the Communist Party.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: That's Aaron Sorkin. He's the writer and director of *Being the Ricardos*, a new movie about Lucy and Desi.

AARON SORKIN: She didn't think that there was anything sinister about being a communist. She thought it meant helping the working man and, you know, and being for the little guy.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Lucy learned that from her grandfather, Fred Hunt. Grandpa Hunt was a socialist. He even held communist party meetings at the family house.

AARON SORKIN: You would go to one of these meetings and it would feel more social than anything else, you know, they're passing out food and you're having cocktails and someone speaking. I mean, we were in the midst of a terrible depression with one in four adult Americans unemployed.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Lucy never went to any of those meetings. She wasn't interested in politics. And besides, she was always working. But she was really close to Grandpa Hunt. Lucy would have done anything for him.

AARON SORKIN: Her father died when she was very young. Her grandpa, Fred, raised her. He was the patriarch of the family.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Grandpa Hunt had recently had a stroke and the family didn't want to upset him. So, when he asked Lucy to register as a communist, she said yes. Here's Lucy's cousin, Cleo Mandicos Smith.

CLEO SMITH: He was out recruiting voters and of course he caught Fred and Lucille, they were voting age. I wasn't. And so, he said, "now, this is something that should be very important in your life because de de de de de de de de." "OK, Grandpa." And they registered.

AARON SORKIN: Lucille Ball actually checked the box. I am a member of a Communist Party.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Lucy actually wrote the word "Communist" on the voter registration card. Lucy voted in the 1936 primary but not in the Fall election. She couldn't be bothered. More than a decade later, Senator Joseph McCarthy began his anti-communism crusade.

VINTAGE NEWSREEL: Senator Joseph McCarthy with a series of sensational anti-communist charges

and investigations beginning in early 1950, his political career began a meteoric rise.

MCCARTHY HEARINGS: Don't think you have any conception of the danger of the Communist Party. There is no remote possibility of this war which we're in today ending except by victory or by death for this civilization.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: McCarthy stoked fears about communism during the Cold War. A real war seemed likely. People worried the Soviet Union would bomb American cities.

US CIVIL DEFENSE FILM: Now we must be ready for a new danger. The atomic bomb. That's why these children are practicing to duck and cover, just as you do in your school. That signal means to stop whatever you are doing and get to the nearest safe place, fast.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: McCarthy believed communists had infiltrated the federal government at all levels even US intelligence agencies.

MCCARTHY HEARING: And Communist infiltration of the CIA disturbs me beyond words.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: He also went after colleges.

MCCARTHY CAMPAIGN: One communist on the faculty of one university is one communist too many!

BEN MANKIEWICZ: McCarthy was in the Senate. In the House of Representatives, a separate investigation was underway. It was called The House Committee on Un-American Activities. Or HUAC.

VINTAGE NEWSRELL: The growing menace of Communism arouses the House of Representatives Unamerican Activities Committee!

BEN MANKIEWICZ: In World War II, HUAC had gone after Nazi sympathizers. In 1947, they turned their attention to Communists.

AARON SORKIN: There was a tremendous fear that communists had infiltrated both our government and the entertainment industry and that they were seeking to brainwash our children through movies and television.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: So HUAC went after Hollywood.

VINTAGE NEWSREEL: Opens an inquiry into a possible communist penetration of a Hollywood film industry. The committee is seeking to determine if Red Party members have reached the screen with subversive propaganda.

VINTAGE NEWSREEL: The question is, have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The committee held hearings.

CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS: Stand away from the stand! Stand away from the stand! Officers take this man away! There will be no demonstrations!

BEN MANKIEWICZ: That started what became the "blacklist" in Hollywood. No studio or network would hire anyone on this list. At first there were 10 people on it. And they all ended up going to jail.

AARON SORKIN: 10 screenwriters went to prison for contempt of Congress for refusing to answer the question, are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party? And for refusing to name names, people's careers were destroyed because of the blacklist.

DALTON TRUMBO: You know, are you or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party? I believe I have the right to be confronted with any evidence which supports this question. I should like to see what you have. Oh, well, you would. Yes. Well, you will pretty soon!

BEN MANKIEWICZ: They became known as the Hollywood 10. There were people in town who were angry about this and tried to stop HUAC.

HOLLYWOOD FIGHTS BACK: Hollywood Fights Back!

BEN MANKIEWICZ: They formed a group called The Committee of the First Amendment and put together a broadcast called Hollywood Fights Back. Actors like Gene Kelly and Myrna Loy were part of the broadcast. And Lucille Ball.

LUCILLE BALL: This is Lucille Ball. All of us agree that the Constitution of the United States must be defended, but the way to do this is not by shutting up the man you disagree with.

You must fight for his right to speak and be heard. All civil liberties go hand in hand, and when one goes, the others are weakened just as the collapse of one pillar in a house would endanger the whole structure.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Lucy made this recording when she was 36. She was already married to Desi. But it was before the days of I Love Lucy. Years later she would say she made it because her union asked her to. But Lucy stopped speaking out when things got worse. And she saw friends' lives ruined. Much of Hollywood went silent. They were scared. HUAC's plan was working. The press covered the committee's every move.

VINTAGE NEWSREEL: Refusal to testify results in a contempt of congress charge. Next on the list of witnesses is Ronald Reagan.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The blacklist grew to include 300 actors, directors, and writers including Orsen Welles, and Charlie Chaplin.

ROBERT OSBORNE: Charlie Chaplin once had been this beloved comedian that everybody loved.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: That's Robert Osborne. He was the host of TCM and a friend of Lucy's.

ROBERT OSBORNE: And the hints of him being a communist, which he always adamantly denied, literally ran him out of the country. For like twenty years, his films were not released in this country.

PAUL ROBESON: Ol' Man River, that Ol' Man River.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Paul Robeson made the list too. He was a black singer and actor. HUAC went after him because he tried to get laws passed to prevent black people from getting lynched.

PAUL ROBESON: Are you an American Communist? This is an invasion of my right of secret ballot, Senator Ferguson. Some of the most brilliant and distinguished Americans are about to go to jail for the failure to answer that question, and I am going to join them, if necessary.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Robeson and the others didn't go to prison, but no one would hire them. HUAC also accused Larry Parks. He was an actor and friend of Lucy's. Larry Parks was a rising star in the 40s after making a movie called The Jolson Story.

THE JOLSON STORY: Watch them shuffling along, see them shuffling along...

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The Jolson Story was a huge hit. It won a bunch of Academy Awards, and Parks was nominated for Best Actor. He testified before HUAC in 1951.

LARRY PARKS: My career has been ruined because of this. Don't present me with the choice of either being in contempt of this committee and going to jail or forcing me to crawl through the mud to be an informer. I beg you not to force me to do this.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: But Parks DID name names. And he lost friends over it. And then there was Lela Rogers. She was Ginger Rogers' headstrong mother. She was like a mother to Lucy too. Lela made it her mission to help Lucy's career when Lucy was starting out. When Lela took up a cause, any cause, there was no stopping her. Her latest was ridding Hollywood of communists. She testified before HUAC.

LELA ROGERS: The communist is a trained propagandist, a highly disciplined operator, as he.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Lela Rogers had no idea Lucy would end up a victim of her crusade. A year after Larry Parks testified before HUAC, I Love Lucy was back in production. The show was a huge hit. The number one show in the country. 30 million people tuned in every Monday night to watch it. In just a few weeks, the crew would film one of the most iconic scenes in television history. Lucy and Ethel go to work in a candy factory.

I LOVE LUCY CLIP: Ricardo, I'm going to put you to work chocolate dipping. You say you've had experience. Oh yes. Yes Ma'am. I'm a dipper from way back. They used to call me the Big Dipper.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: And things get out of control from there. Lucy and Desi were America's favorite couple. But that same spring, FBI agents showed up at the Desilu ranch. They were there to see Lucy. The agents asked Lucy why she registered as a Communist. She told them about her grandfather. The agents said a Communist party member had named names and Lucy was one of them. A screenwriter named Rena Vale testified she went to meetings at Lucy's family home in the 1930s. Lucy had an answer for that too. I was working at RKO and in Lela Rogers workshop back then, she said. I was seldom home before midnight. Finally, the FBI seemed convinced. Lucy said they called her "politically immature" and left.

But HUAC wasn't done with Lucy. Not by a long shot.

In 1953, Lucy and Desi would shoot season three of I Love Lucy. Desilu was much bigger by then. They had more shows in production. They moved to newer and larger studios at the Motion Picture Center. Desi had built an empire.

TOM GILBERT: Desi proved himself to be worthy of such a title. Desi's business acumen became more apparent as the company began to grow.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: That's Tom Gilbert, he wrote a book about Desilu.

TOM GILBERT: His mathematics were great. I remember one story that at one point they were coming up with a budget and they presented it to Desi, and he looked at it briefly and he said there's a million dollars missing here. Like just immediately noticed that it's something the calculation was wrong. And, you know, these accountants who are paid to know this stuff were amazed because they had gone over and over it. And he was right. It was there was it was unaccounted for.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: But Desi's empire still rested on the success of I Love Lucy. Again, Aaron Sorkin.

AARON SORKIN: It was the most valuable property that CBS owned. It was the most valuable property that Philip Morris tobacco owned. I Love Lucy was a huge industry.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Lucy and Desi were rich now. They vacationed in Del Mar, a beach town about a two-hour drive south of Hollywood. There was a racetrack there. It was one of Desi's favorite places. They were in Del Mar when Lucy got a phone call. An investigator from HUAC wanted Lucy to come to Los Angeles.

AARON SORKIN: She was asked to testify in front of the committee in a secret session.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Lucy went before HUAC on September 4, 1953, along with her brother Fred and her mother Dede. It was a closed door hearing. Lucy insisted she was never a Communist. When she left, Lucy thought for sure she'd really put it to rest this time. It was finally over.

AARON SORKIN: HUAC, you know, they may have looked at each other and said Lucille Ball isn't a communist and it's not fair to hurt her like this. But that just doesn't quite sound like HUAC does it.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Lucy thought her testimony would be kept secret. But that's not what happened. At least not when Walter Winchell found out about it. A couple of days later, Labor Day weekend, Lucy was in that rocking chair knitting, calming those nerves. She turned the radio on to Walter Winchell.

AARON SORKIN: Winchell was a communist hunter, a very irresponsible communist hunter and Winchell ends his broadcast by saying, 'television's most famous comedienne was questioned by the

House un-American Activities Committee about her association with the Communist Party.' You kind of drop your glass of milk when you hear that. That means your life is over.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Desi was in Del Mar playing cards with friends. He drove straight home when he heard the news. Walter Winchell had just told the world Lucy was a communist.

AARON SORKIN: As much friction as there was in that marriage as much difficulty as there was in that marriage, these two were deeply in love with each other and Desi was very protective of Lucy.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Desi knew what it meant to lose everything in an instant. It happened to his family during a revolution in Cuba. He was not going to let that happen again. Not to him and not to Lucy. The cast and crew showed up for work Tuesday morning in a daze. Word spread quickly.

AARON SORKIN: Everyone on the show, including, and especially Lucy and Desi, assumed that I Love Lucy was over and so were their careers.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Desi wrote about it in his memoir. The excerpts are from the audiobook and are read by an actor.

DESI ARNAZ AUDIOBOOK: It looked like we might blow the whole goddamn Desilu empire and all we had because my wife was being called a communist.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: At that time, I Love Lucy episodes were made in four days. Starting with a Tuesday table read and ending Friday night in front of a live audience. That week they were making an episode called The Girls Go Into Business.

I LOVE LUCY CLIP: Oh, Ethel, I can't stand it we can't let this opportunity go by! Do you have an idea? Yes, how much money have you got? You always get that same idea!

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Everyone was waiting to see if Winchell's news would get picked up by other press. Or whether it would just fade away. Lucy threw herself into rehearsals.

AARON SORKIN: Lucy regards each episode as a life and death experience that she has to kill every week, she has to kill every week for 36 weeks in a row. And this week she is more intense about that than other weeks.

DESI ARNAZ AUDIOBOOK: Nothing broke in the papers Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. We rehearsed our show as usual.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: But then Friday morning came. Lucy and Desi were still in bed.

DESI ARNAZ AUDIOBOOK: When I awoke to see a guy with a camera just outside the big window in our bedroom, I went outside and grabbed the photographer by the neck. What in hell do you think you're doing with that camera out there? I yelled at him.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The reporters wanted to talk to Lucy. Desi was still in his bathrobe. He kicked them off the property and called their editor to say no comment. Although, I'm sure he used other more colorful words. They were supposed to film the episode that night. When Lucy and Desi got to Desilu studios, it was surrounded by reporters. Lucy was the headline in the Los Angeles Herald-Express.

DESI ARNAZ AUDIOBOOK: Before noon they came out with an extra. On the front page the sonsabitches had printed a four-inch banner, in red ink yet, LUCILLE BALL A RED.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Lucy remembers getting ready for the show. She sat under the hair dryer and did her nails. Her hands kept shaking. She had a terrible headache. Lucy was worried everyone would lose their jobs because of her. Desi went right into his office.

AARON SORKIN: People really loved Desi. And he had just collected there wasn't such a thing as a Rolodex then, but he had collected a very good Rolodex.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Desi started working the phones. He knew FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover from the Del Mar Racetrack. Desi asked Hoover if the FBI had anything else on Lucy. They didn't. Desi called the head of CBS to let him know what was going on. Then he called Alfred Lyons, the head of Phillip Morris. The show's sponsor. He made him an offer...if Phillip Morris wanted to pull out, Desi wanted a half hour on national television. He wanted to tell their side of the story. Desilu would pay for it.

DESI ARNAZ AUDIOBOOK: No, young man, I ain't pulling out, said the nice old bastard. Let's go get some good headlines. Those were the first three calls I made that day.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Desi pulled Lucy aside and told her Phillip Morris was standing by them. He burst into tears. Lucy started to tear up too. But she didn't lose it. In a calm voice she said. "Well, that's fine. I'll get back to work." Desi did the same. His next call was to a member of HUAC. California congressman Donald Jackson.

Desi demanded Jackson hold a news conference to clear Lucy. At 6pm that night, just two hours before showtime, Jackson finally held the press conference. He read a statement. "There is no evidence Miss Ball is, or ever was, a party Member."

AARON SORKIN: I mean, it wouldn't surprise me if the very powerful corporations like the Columbia Broadcasting System, Philip Morris, Tobacco Westinghouse, I Love Lucy was such a money maker for these companies that it certainly wouldn't surprise me if some influence was exerted over HUAC.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Lucy and Desi had to go in front of a live audience. 300 people. Most of them wouldn't know Lucy was cleared.

BILL ASHER: The dangerous thing was what would happen with an audience.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: That's Bill Asher, the show's director. He talked to PBS in 1999. Everyone worried anti-communists might be in the audience. They might heckle or do something worse.

BILL ASHER: The nuts, they're around. who would be apt to do anything. That was the real concern.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: They considered calling off the show.

BILL ASHER: And we decided we'd go ahead and do it. Before the show started, what we did: we put some guards on the door.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Desi came out and faced the audience.

AARON SORKIN: Lucy was married to exactly the right guy for that moment. When you're being threatened with the blacklist, Desi is the guy you want on your team. He would, ordinarily on Friday nights, he did the audience warm up. He'd tell some jokes. But on this night, he did something different. And it's what saved Lucille Ball. It's what saved I Love Lucy. It saved the day.

DESI ARNAZ AUDIOBOOK: I went out front and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, I know that you have read a lot of bad headlines about my wife today. I came from Cuba, but during my years in the United States Army I became an American citizen, and one of the things I admire about this country is that you are considered 'innocent until you are proven guilty.' And now the girl to whom I've been married for thirteen years...the mother of my children, the vice-president of Desilu Productions, I am the president, my favorite redhead, even that is not legitimate. The girl who plays Lucy, Lucille Ball!

BILL ASHER: Lucy came out, well she was scared to death. Big smile on her face. The crowd just roared with approval. They wouldn't stop their applause.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Vivian Vance later said that if Lucy heard one "boo" from the audience she would have collapsed. Just in case, Desi arranged for a doctor to be on standby. But instead of booing, the crowd cheered. Lucy's mother Dede was in the audience. The show went on.

I LOVE LUCY CLIP: Well, it's settled then: Lucy and Ethel's Dress Shop. Lucy and Ethel's Dress Shop? Yeah. I think "Ethel and Lucy's Dress Shop" sounds better to the ear. Not to my ear it doesn't.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: They filmed the last scene. When it was done, Lucy turned to the audience and dropped her Lucy Ricardo voice. She used her natural, lower voice. Lucy said to the audience: "God bless you for being so kind." Then she walked back to her dressing room, closed the door and started sobbing. That entire week was lonely for Lucy. A lot of friends vanished.

ROBERT OSBORNE: They all scattered like rats on a ship from her. She was so destroyed by that.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: That's Robert Osborne. He was a friend of Lucy's and used to host TCM.

ROBERT OSBORNE: And she went to bed that night in this great turmoil, got up the next morning and she walked down the stairs and out in her garden. She said that she saw this man sitting in a chair...it was Lou Costello who she didn't really know that well. He said I've been through things like this, and I just thought you might need a friend. And she said she never forgot that because he was the one person that showed up as a friend.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Lucy and Desi had to face the press. That weekend they hosted reporters at the ranch in Chatsworth. They gathered by the pool.

AARON SORKIN: You know, and they passed out lemonade and they, just wanted to make sure that everything was patched up with the press and that they were very clear about Lucy's loyalty to this country, you know.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: While they were taking questions from the press, the doorbell rang. Lucy's friend Sheila MacCrae was there that day.

SHEILA MACRAE: And Desi said, 'Larry Parks is at the door.' He said, 'Lucy you can't open the door. You can't talk to him.'

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Larry Parks was the actor who had named names during his testimony before HUAC. Desi went to the door instead. Larry was on the front porch holding a bouquet of red roses for Lucy.

DESI ARNAZ AUDIOBOOK: And as diplomatically as I could, I told him to get lost. I explained it wouldn't do him or Lucy any good to have a story about Larry Parks bringing Lucy red roses at this particular period in time, some son of a bitch would accuse them of belonging to the same cell. Larry, who had suffered enough from some of this same bad publicity and who had always been a perfect gentleman. Understood. I really felt like shit, but I didn't dare to take the chance.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Desi and Lucy gave reporters copies of Lucy's HUAC testimony. Lucy's eyes watered up several times as she answered questions. But she didn't cry. Reporters pointed out that while she didn't vote in the fall election back in 1936, she did vote as a communist in the primary. No tears then. Suddenly she was fierce. "Big deal," she said. On Sunday, one week later, one helluva week later, Walter Winchell started his radio show. This time he made a different statement. "During the past week, Donald Jackson, chairman of the House Un-American Activities Committee, and all its members, cleared Lucy a hundred percent, so did J. Edgar Hoover and the FBI, plus every newspaper in America, and tonight, Mr. Lincoln is drying his eyes for making her go through this." What a hack. After that, Lucy never talked much about her HUAC experience. But when she did, she was adamant. Here's Lucy on the Irv Kupcinet Show.

LUCILLE BALL: They knew that I was absolutely free and clear. They had nothing on me, but they used it with big red letters. And then he cleared me within twenty-four hours.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The FBI kept watching Lucy. We got her FBI file. It runs over 150 pages and is heavily redacted. It contains entries as late as 1971. It even makes reference to a breakfast program for school children run by the Black Panther Party. It's hard to tell what it means. So much of it is blacked out. The HUAC scare might have changed Lucy, perhaps made her a little more cautious.

AARON SORKIN: She may have felt the need to demonstrate after that red scare, after that week, she may have felt the need to demonstrate how much she hated communism and her allegiance to America. Today, we would call it virtue signaling.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Lucy never voted again. But Lucy also had an impact on HUAC. Going after Lucy made them look mean.

DICK MARTIN: I think they picked the wrong person. Maybe if they'd have picked someone down. Not Lucy! How can she be a communist?

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Dick Martin was a comedian and director who worked with Lucy. He talked about HUAC with PBS.

DICK MARTIN: They couldn't make it stick. They could make it stick with Larry Parks, which was the saddest thing you ever saw in your life.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: HUAC's witch hunt started to lose steam in 1954. The blacklist eventually petered out. Lucy survived the scandal. But there would be others. It seemed with Lucy, the peaks and valleys just kept coming. The next one hit even closer to home. When the movie *The Long Long Trailer* was released in early 1954, the studio billed Lucy and Desi as "America's favorite comedy couple."

THE LONG LONG TRAILER: Just Breezin' Along with The Breeze... We're just going along as we please...when I'm weary, mother nature makes me a bed in the trailer."

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Fans believed they were seeing the real-life couple on a honeymoon. But the truth was, Lucy and Desi were heading for trouble. The following year, the gossip paper *Confidential* published an expose about Desi and other women. The headline asked, "Does Desi Really Love Lucy?"

AARON SORKIN: *Confidential* magazine in those days came out on Monday mornings. On Sunday night, her publicist brought her an advanced copy.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The article described Desi as a "duck-out daddy" who hires "cuddles-for-cash cuties." It said the sex workers he slept with were "paid handsomely."

AARON SORKIN: Lucy loved Desi and Lucy wanted so badly a home life, a family life. She makes that clear to Desi on their first date. And so that confidential article was a gut punch.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Gustavo Perez is a Cuban American professor. He's written a lot about Desi.

GUSTAVO PEREZ: He was a heavy drinker. And as he became more successful and the pressures mounted, he drank more. He ran around more. The police in Beverly Hills already knew him, and they would sometimes find him in front of fancy brothels singing "Babalú."

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Lucy and Desi would have terrible fights about it. Desi not understanding what the big deal was, those women didn't mean anything. And Lucy hurt wondering why she wasn't enough.

AARON SORKIN: It would not be unusual for them to have a screaming match that ended in their ripping each other's clothes off. They were very passionate all over the spectrum.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: Lucy couldn't bring herself to leave Desi. She knew deep down he loved her, and she loved him. But she was so unhappy. Lucy worried about how their fighting and Desi's drinking was impacting the kids.

LUCILLE BALL: And when the children were a certain age where you couldn't say Daddy isn't feeling well. You could only say that for so many years. And he wasn't around. He just wasn't around.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: The Confidential article made it all public. And it was embarrassing for Lucy. She decided to focus on the thing she knew how to do. Her escape hatch from everything that was hard in life. Lucille Ball put all of her energy into work.

AARON SORKIN: The Ricardo's living room, that little postage stamp sized piece of stage became the only place where her marriage worked, even though it wasn't her marriage. It was Lucy Ricardo's marriage to Ricky Ricardo and. It was the only place she was happy. The Ricardos home became the only place where she felt like she had that domestic life that she yearned for.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: On the next episode of The Plot Thickens, Desilu gets bigger and bigger. The pressure on Desi gets more intense, and his drinking gets worse.

MAURY THOMPSON: At 10 o'clock in the morning, he would ask for some tomato soup. And it was loaded with vodka, you know, it's loaded and a couple of sips of it and he's gone.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: And Lucy can't take it anymore. Desi's cheating, his drinking, it all gets to be too much.

DOTSON RADER: And she said, know, you'll fuck them in the maid's room or something but don't use our bedroom.

BEN MANKIEWICZ: And Lucy has to answer the most difficult of questions.

TOM GILBERT: And Clio said, well, you have to get your priorities straight, you know, what do you want? Do you want your marriage, or do you want your career?

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Check out our website at tcm.com/theplotthickens. It has info about each episode and photos from throughout Lucille Ball's life. Again, that's tcm.com/theplotthickens.