

## HARRY LESTER: VENTRILOQUIST ROUTINE

In *Other Voices* author Stanley Burns writes that Harry Lester was ...

1. The first to originate the routine of attempting to light a cigarette while the dummy keeps blowing out the match.
2. The first to have the figure yodel perfectly.
3. The inventor of the telephone voice: Lester used three distinct voices conversing with one another.

But Burns notes that although Lester popularized the “Drinking Bit,” he was not the first to use it.

The routine listed here, “Heaven and Hell,” was originally reprinted in the book by Stanley Burns (on pages 136-38). Much more information on Lester can also be found in Burns’ book.

### “Heaven and Hell”

Ventriloquist: Do you have a sister?”

Figure: I did have,  
but she died and went to Heaven.

V: Oh, I am sorry to hear that.  
Would you like to talk to her?

F: How can I do that?

V: It’s quite simple. I will phone St. Peter.

(Ventriloquist lifts receiver of phone. Tone signal is heard.  
Then female voice.)

Operator: This is Central (Operator). Number please.

V: Will you put me through to Heaven please?

O: Hold the line, please. (Do tone signal)

St. Peter: Hello, hello.

V: Yes, hello, hello. Is that heaven?

StP: Yes, this is heaven. Who is this?

V: This is Lester. Who am I speaking to?  
(Figure is watching all this business. Keep him moving.)

StP: This is St. Peter, keeper of the gates.  
What can I do for you?

V: I am trying to locate a young lady.

StP: What is her name?

V: (to figure) What is your sister’s name?

F: Frances Byron.

V: (into phone) Hello. (no answer)  
Hello, hello.

StP: Hello. Did you get the name?

V: Yes, it is Frances Byron.

StP: Hang on. I will look in the book.

F: Gee, I hope he finds it ok.  
 (Ad lib with figure for a few seconds)

StP: Hello.

V: Yes, hello.

StP: When did she arrive?

V: (to figure) When did she arrive?

F: Two weeks ago.

V: (into phone) Hello.

StP: Yes.

V: She arrived about two weeks ago.

StP: Two weeks ago? Hold the line.  
 I will check again. (Tone)

StP: Hello, hello.

V: Yes, I am here.

StP: I am sorry, but there is no one here by that name.  
 (Figure looks at phone, then at ventriloquist)

V: (to phone) Thank you for your help. Good bye.

StP: Sorry. Good bye.  
 (Click of receiver being hung up.  
 At end of line, tone.  
 Vent hangs up his receiver)

V: Well, your sister isn't there.

F: That's funny, she should be.  
 (Figure looks at vent, then looks upward towards ceiling  
 and back to vent, then down to floor, then looks at vent)

F: You don't think ...  
 (his voice trails off)

V: That she went to the other place?

F: Yes.

V: Well, there is one way to find out.  
 (Picks up phone – tone signal)

O: Number please.

V: Will you get me Hades, please.

O: Hold the line please.  
 (busy signal)  
 Hello, the line is busy.  
 Will you call later?

F: Boy, that must be a busy place.  
 Do you think she may be there?  
 I hope not.

V: Hello, operator. Will you try Hades again?

O: Hold the line. (tone – click)

Devil: Yes, hello, hello.

V: Hello. Is that Hades?

D: Yes, yes, this is Hades.  
 What the devil do you want?

V: I want to speak to the Devil.  
D: This is the Devil speaking.  
What can I do for you?  
V: I am trying to locate Frances Byron.  
Would she be in your place?  
D: Frances Byron? Hold on.  
I will look in the Big Red Book.  
(Tone)  
F: What do you think, Lester?  
V: I don't know what to think.  
D: Hello, hello.  
V: Hello, I am here.  
D: Yes, she is here.  
F: Oh, my. See if you can talk with her.  
V: Hello, Mr. Devil. Can I talk to her?  
D: I am sorry, but she is busy.  
F: Busy doing what?  
D: Shoveling coal. Good bye.  
V: (Hangs up) Well, there you are.  
F: Oh, my poor sister.  
Down there shoveling coal.  
Oh, my poor sister. (etc)  
(Figure starts to cry. Do crying business, etc.  
Use handkerchief, etc. Have figure blow nose,  
dry figure's eyes, etc. Then go into dialogue)

In his book, Burns omitted some lines from the routine.  
Or the following may have been a different conclusion for the routine.

FRANK: Hello down there.  
SISTER: Hello up there.  
FRANK: What are you doing down there?  
SISTER: Shoveling coal.  
FRANK: I don't hear nothing.  
Must be soft coal.