

JACKIE B'S LAST BROADCAST

AT RISE: The stage lies in shadow, except for Downstage Center, where a small table sits with two swivel chairs beside it. Looming over the table are two microphones on movable arms. On the table is a cart player, a multi-line telephone console with blinking lights, a pair of headphones and a simple sound board - the tools of a low-rent radio station. A large, institutional clock mounted UpStage Center reads 1:32 am. Rumpled radio personality JACKIE B rushes in from Stage Left. Lights come up full, as he shoves the headphones on his ears, and quickly adjusts the microphone to mouth height. He flips a switch and talks into the microphone.

JACKIE B. *(Into microphone, panicked.)* Yes, we're back, ladies and gerbils. And I want you to know those last seventy-four seconds of dead air were brought to you by my bladder. Yes, my bladder, not as durable as it used to be, but still holding its own. Well, almost... *(Relaxing now.)* You are tuned in to the infamous Jackie B...shock talk king of late night radio. And by 'king' I mean, royal failure. According to the latest Arbitron ratings, we have once again achieved a solid lock on last place here in the Greater Poughkeepsie radio market... That's dead last. Bottom feeder. Cellar dweller. Numero loser... We remain the undisputed thirty-fourth radio station out of thirty-four, thanks in part to the irreverent and unadulterated pseudo-creativity of Jackie B's Big Time Radio Show, here on W-A-K-O -- Wonderful Wack-o Radio. I just can't tell you all out there what an honor it is to win last place on the ratings chart for the third month in a row, but hey, I feel twenty-eight years in radio have led me to this highly vaunted position of failure... *(He leans back in his swivel chair, grabs a cigarette and cracks a can of warm root beer.)* You may ask, with such consistently bad ratings, why doesn't the dictatorial programming staff just fire my big verbose butt? Well, I'll tell you. The graveyard shift in this one-hearse town is not exactly prime time, folks. As bad as Jackie B is... there ain't a lot of folks breaking down the Plexi-glass to take his place. No sir, late night radio here in Poughkeepsie is just two steps below sewer inspector. It's the place where old egos go to die. It's where they heap the has-beens of the 'didn't-you-used-to-be-somebody' crowd. And it's where Jackie B is taking up permanent residence...

(He stretches and yawns.)

JACKIE B. However, if any of you are interested in working the midnight-to-four shift at a thirty-fourth ranked radio station in a nineteenth place market, just give old Jackie B a call. Our number here at the studio is five-five-two-one-oh-three-two. So why don't you give me a call so I can remember what this phone looks like when it's ringing?

(Pause. He looks at the studio telephone. Nothing.)

JACKIE B. Okay, so maybe getting you to dial seven digits in a row is asking way too much. Maybe you're not up to the physical ordeal of pushing seven consecutive buttons...

(Again, he looks at the phone. Still nothing.)

JACKIE B. These are insults, folks. Why don't you call me up and fight with me? I could use the company.

(The studio telephone remains silent.)

JACKIE B. Okay. It looks like the wimp-factor has hit the city tonight... No problem. Jackie B will just keep talking at you until he gets your blood coagulating. It's my job to be annoying, and I do it better than anyone... Okay, then... We're coming up on 1:35 AM here on Wonderful Wack-o Radio.

(He looks at his wristwatch, then takes it off and whacks it against the table.)

JACKIE B. Yup. One-thirty-five.... In the good old days, I used to be just waking up at this time, with a champagne hangover and a star-struck bimbo by my side. In those days, the name Jackie B was plastered on every other billboard and bus stop in the city. People got up early for no other reason than to listen to me talk. *(Sighs.)* Radio meant something then... Everything meant something then... Even Jackie B... *(Shakes his head.)* But hey, that was a seven figure income and four thousand whiskey bottles ago... Fame is fleeting, especially in the radio biz. Better get used to it... *(Rouses himself.)* Okay, kiddies. It's time for a word from one of the last remaining sponsors of the Jackie B Big Time Radio Show... A guy who paid virtual bupkiss for this airtime, and then gets my voice thrown in for free. But, hey... Am I bitter? Naaaaaawww.

(He picks up a sheet of paper. Reads it into the microphone with a typical announcer's voice.)

JACKIE B. *(Reading.)* “Would you believe the biggest nuts come from New York? No, we don’t mean crazy people. We are talking about walnuts. New York Walnuts. Crack open our shells and you can’t help but think about the Big Apple. New York Walnuts. We’re as nutty as they get. New York Walnuts. Ask for them by name!” *(He throws the paper down.)* Well, I’ve got to say... in my twenty-eight years in radio, that has got to be the single worst ad that has ever spewed forth from my lips. I mean, listen to this copy... *(With a goofy voice.)* “Would you believe the biggest nuts come from New York? No, we don’t mean crazy people. We are talking about walnuts.” Hardee-har-har. That line is about as funny as sandpaper underwear. And this is the crap they make me read? “We’re about as nutty as they get?” “Crack open our shells and you can’t help but think about the Big Apple?” But, hey... Am I bitter? Naaaaaawww. *(Runs his hand through thinning hair.)* Would you believe, folks, that I used to be the headliner at a top-rated station in New York? That’s right. Old Jackie B was the man! And none of this late night crap either. We’re talking Morning Drive Time, New York City. A twenty-two share rating. But hey, as the proctologist says, ‘all things must pass.’ Here I am down in Greater Poughkeepsie. And if ‘Greater Poughkeepsie’ isn’t an oxymoron, my name ain’t Jackie B! *(Almost pleading.)* So why don’t you give me a call here at the station? As always my number right in the control booth is 5 five-five-two-one-oh-three-two.

(He looks to the telephone, urging it to ring.)

JACKIE B. C’mon, Poughkeepsie. I know you’re out there. I can smell you breathing.

(No response. He sighs.)

JACKIE B. As I mentioned before, we’re wrapping up our third month in this pothole you call a city, and let me tell you, it’s one long downward spiral from morning drive in New York to midnight in this stinkhole. But... Am I bitter? Naaaawww. I get a regular paycheck that gets snatched immediately by my three, alimony-hungry ex-wives.

MORE

JACKIE B. *(Continued.)* And speaking of death by marriage...did you know the word 'alimony' is derived from the Latin term for 'castration?' Well, maybe not, but it sure feels like it from where I'm sittin'.

(His face betrays a sadness hidden from his voice. He waves it away.)

JACKIE B. If truth be told... they were all wonderful women, each gold-digging one of them. They all had the good taste to marry me...and the even better sense to eventually kick me out the door... Which leads us straight to our first dedication of the evening...To all the girls I've loved before...a classic from the J. Geil's Band... "Love Stinks."

(He pops a CD into the player, and the song spills out. Jackie leans back in his chair, cracks open another can of warm root beer and then pulls out his wallet. He carefully lays three small photos on the table in front of him. He examines the photos sadly for a moment, then sings to them, along with the song...)

JACKIE B. *(Singing, off-key.)*

I'VE BEEN THROUGH THE REDS, THE BLUES AND THE PINKS.

ALL I CAN SAY IS... LOVE STINKS!

LOVE STINKS, YEAH YEAH, LOVE STINKS

LOVE STINKS, YEAH YEAH, LOVE STINKS

(He suddenly yanks the CD out of the machine. Tosses it over his shoulder.)

JACKIE B. Enough of that! Welcome to radio designed for those with short attention spans. If you want to hear the full song, go listen to some other station. But since you're here, you're gonna get an earful of nothing but vintage Jackie B!

(A light begins to blink on the telephone console.)

JACKIE B. Well, whatta ya know? Looks like we have a caller. There is life in Poughkeepsie, after all. *(Presses the phone line button.)* Hi there, caller. You are on the air with Jackie B!

CALLER #1. *(Through speaker.)* Who?

JACKIE B. Jackie B. Your late night radio shock talker.

CALLER #1. *(Through speaker.)* What happened to Dierdre After Dark?

JACKIE B. You mean the old cow with the sexy voice? The all-knowing station owners tossed her out on her swishy little can, when they hired me.

CALLER #1. *(Through speaker.)* I liked Dierdre.

JACKIE B. Hey, that's radio, buster! And by the way, they change presidents every few decades, too. So pay attention. You don't want to miss that event.

(He presses the button, disconnecting the call. Another light begins to blink on the telephone console.)

JACKIE B. Sheesh. Looks like it's peabrain night again in the big city. Let's see if this next caller is any more intelligent.

(He presses another button.)

JACKIE B. Hey there, caller. You are on the air with Jackie B!

CALLER #2. *(Through speaker.)* You stink.

JACKIE B. Yeah? You got a smell button on that radio?

CALLER #2. *(Through speaker.)* Why do you have to keep throwing down Poughkeepsie. I lived here all my life. This is a great city.

JACKIE B. So what? An armpit is a great way to connect your arm to your shoulder, but that don't mean I want to live in one.

CALLER #2. *(Through speaker.)* Somebody should get a gun and put you out of your misery.

JACKIE B. Well, there's about six or seven million listeners who might agree with you on that point. That's why Jackie B moves from town to town every few years, trying to keep one step ahead of the mob and the critics.

CALLER #2. *(Ominously, through speaker.)* One day, they just might catch up with you.

JACKIE B. Don't count on it, loser boy. When it comes to sheer brain power, Jackie B is on the inspiration highway, cruising into overdrive...while the rest of you are stuck in the breakdown lane with no tow truck in sight. In case you haven't noticed, it's a DJ eat DJ world out there, and I cut my teeth on the best of them. I've been from Boston to Berkeley. Louisville to Lubbock, casting my pearls of wisdom before ambivalent swine. I've moved from Top Forty to R&B. Rock to jazz. Disco to classical. Hip hop to shock talk. If you don't like it, don't listen. It's all the same to Jackie B. You got that, caller? Caller?

(Dial tone. He presses a button to disconnect the line.)

JACKIE B. I guess it must have been past his bedtime... *(Rubs his chest.)* Okay, while I try to handle the tremendous backlog of adoring fans clogging up my switchboard, Old Jackie B will just spin a classic or two for your listening pleasure. It's Golden Moldy time, and here's a ditty guaranteed to bring a tear to your eye...This is Harry Nielson, singing "Can't Live, if living is without you."

(As the song starts to play, Jackie pulls off his headphones. MORT enters from Stage Left. Mort is dressed in a long black trenchcoat over black jeans and black boots. Jackie has yet to notice.)

MORT. That was always one of my favorites.

JACKIE B. *(Jumping back.)* Man, you just about gave me a heart attack!

MORT. We wouldn't want that now, would we?

JACKIE B. Do I know you?

MORT. We've never met. Not in person anyway.

JACKIE B. Too bad you decided to break that tradition. Hey, you know that Goth look is light years behind the times. They say even vampires are trading in their black trenchcoats for summer pastels.

MORT. Not the vampires I know.

JACKIE B. The vampires you know... *(Shakes his head.)* Just what I need. Another freak in the night. *(Easing back in his chair.)* So, Mr. Whacko. You mind telling me how you got in here?

MORT. The door. I find the traditional approach works the best.

JACKIE B. I thought I locked it.

MORT. You did.

JACKIE B. Oh, I get it. You must be a friend of someone at the station.
Who do you know here?

MORT. I know them all.

JACKIE B. *(Facetiously.)* Whoa. Important man. Remind me to get your
autograph. I can always use the extra toilet paper.

MORT. I don't do autographs.

JACKIE B. Gee. I'm crushed. So what are you? Some kind of stalker or
something?

MORT. Yes.

JACKIE B. *(Surprised by his quick answer.)* A man of few words.

MORT. So I've been told.

JACKIE B. Okay, Mr. Midnight Stalker. Should I be fearing for my life or
something?

(Mort steps forward. Leans over Jackie's face.)

MORT. Most definitely.

(Mort's casual manner unnerves Jackie more than he cares to admit.)

JACKIE B. You don't believe in beating around the bush, do you?

MORT. Not really.

JACKIE B. So you're here to kill me, huh?

*(Mort just smiles. He leans against the wall. After a tense pause, he
says..)*

MORT. That would be telling. Care for a piece of advice?

JACKIE B. Oh, I get it now... Another radio wannabee. And this one feels
the compulsion to give advice.

MORT. I think you might enjoy higher ratings if you didn't make it so obvious how much you hate your job and you hate this city.

JACKIE B. (*Mock innocence.*) You mean listeners don't like that?

MORT. Surprisingly not.

JACKIE B. Well, if truth be told, I don't hate my job. It's an absolute thrill spectacular to be working as a third-string cheerleader for the basement team.

MORT. I can imagine.

JACKIE B. No, you can't. Not unless you put twenty-eight years into run-down, two-bit stations like this puppy.

(*Gestures to the equipment in front of him.*)

JACKIE B. I could build a better sound board than this with six bucks, a pack of chewing gum and a trip to the city dump.

MORT. It's not the equipment that makes radio comes alive. It's the personality behind it.

JACKIE B. Ooooh! Broadcast Philosophy One-Oh-One. What are you? The Dalai Lama of the F-C-C?

MORT. Do you always make jokes when you're frightened?

(*Mort's question shocks Jackie B, but he tries to wave it off.*)

JACKIE B. Naw. I make jokes when I'm bored. I pee my pants when I'm frightened. And guess what, buddy? You're not exactly making me need a diaper here.

(*Mort steps forward. Jackie B slides his swivel chair back a bit.*)

MORT. Oh, you're frightened all right, Jackie. I see it in your eyes.

JACKIE B. Those are just my little tequila roadmaps.

MORT. You've been drinking Kentucky bourbon tonight.

(*A pause, then....*)

JACKIE B. Going through the trash cans don't make you psychic.

MORT. I will keep that in mind.

JACKIE B. So what can I do for you, Weirdo? Aside from rolling over and playing dead.

MORT. That should be sufficient.

JACKIE B. This threatening schtick is getting old.

MORT. Not for me.

JACKIE B. Listen, Freakface. I may look like some burned out old gasbag, but I can still kick your butt any day of the week!

MORT. If you are so sure of that...why are your hands trembling?

JACKIE B. Don't flatter yourself. If you've crawled inside as many bottles as I have, you'd be vibrating like some cheap woman's novelty, too.

MORT. You are finished, Jackie.

JACKIE B. *(Rising.)* The hell I am!

MORT. Your song. It is finished.

(Jackie jumps as he realizes that, once again, he is playing dead air. He throws on the headset.)

JACKIE B. Ooo-kaay! That was 'The Sounds of Silence' by Sammy and the Screw-ups. And now here's...uh... *(Grabs a CD.)* ..an entirely different song by an entirely different band! Courtesy of Jackie B's Big Time Radio Show!

(As the new song starts, Jackie again yanks off his headset.)

MORT. I find the term 'dead air' fascinating, don't you?

JACKIE B. Like I said earlier... If you're trying to creep me out, it ain't working.

MORT. On the contrary. At this very moment, you are wondering whether I am the caller you insulted a few minutes ago...the one you badgered last night...or the unstable fan you pushed over the edge the night earlier, when you questioned his manhood.

JACKIE B. Can I help it if I'm the object of so much affection?

MORT. You are also wondering if I am hiding a weapon under this coat...and if there is anyone left in the building to help you.

JACKIE B. Are you?

MORT. Of course. *(Slips his hand in his coat pocket.)* And no, there is no one left in the building who could possibly help you. There is no one here except you and me.

JACKIE B. I think you've forgotten a little something.

MORT. Have I now?

JACKIE B. You bet. *(Pulls down the microphone.)* Good morning, Poughkeepsie! This is Jackie B, your late night shock jock, who is - at this very moment - being threatened right here in the Wack-o radio booth. That's right, folks and fans. I'm in danger! *(Grins at Mort.)* Our mysterious visitor is six-foot-one, approximately one hundred and eighty-five pounds...

(Mort hesitates, then holds up nine fingers.)

JACKIE B. Make that one ninety... He has black hair and dark eyes. Square jaw. Threatening expression... And he seems to be allergic to any clothing with colors. *(Leans back in his chair, confident now.)* So what our listening audience wants to know, Mr. Stalker...is whether we have some kind of hostage situation going on here? Should all those police cars listening in take notice?

(Mort hesitates, shakes his head.)

JACKIE B. It looks like it's a 'no go' for the hostage scenario. So what then? Some crazed fan-type thing? That would almost be flattering.

(Mort again shakes his head. His discomfort increases Jackie's confidence.)

JACKIE B. Nix on the hero worship. Then please enlighten me as to why I've been fortunate enough to receive this visit from my own personal Midnight Stalker?