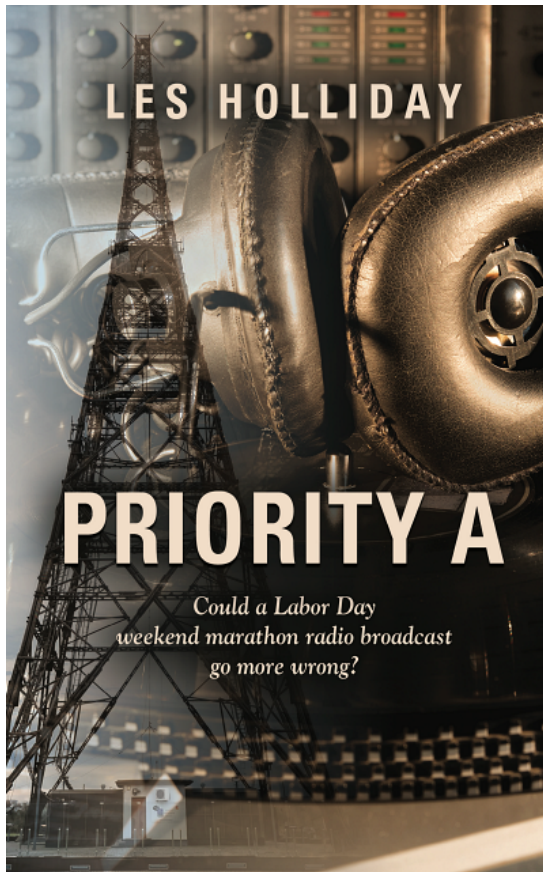




DJ Rick Morgan starts a 1976 Labor Day weekend marathon broadcast. Domestic terrorists seize the station and hold his wife and daughter hostage at their home. It's cooperate, or hundreds die. His desperate plan to stop them MUST succeed.

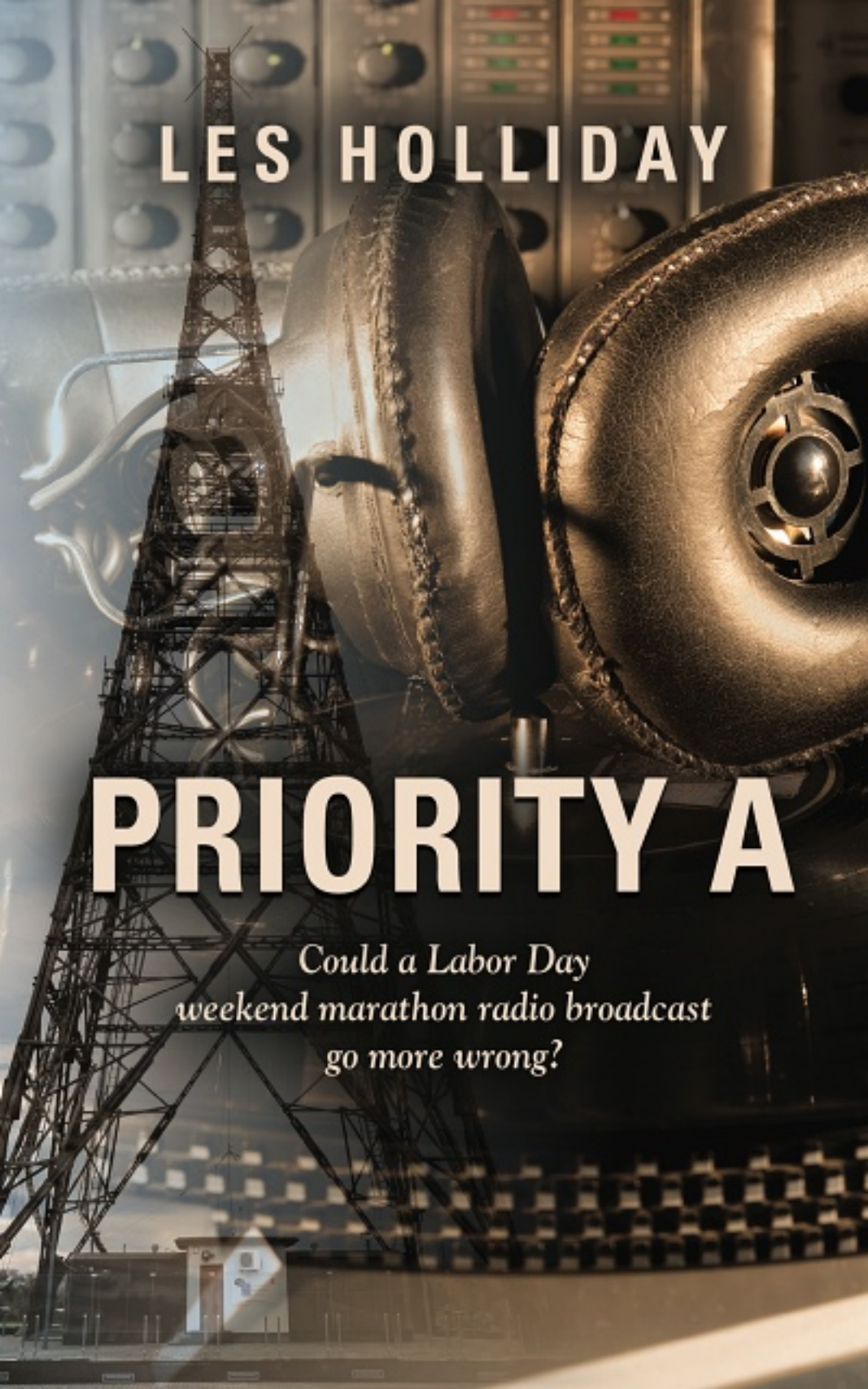
Priority A

By Les Holliday

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LES HOLLIDAY

PRIORITY A

*Could a Labor Day
weekend marathon radio broadcast
go more wrong?*

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CHAPTER ONE

*The Present. Saturday, September 4, 1976. WPYM. 4:30
p.m. Terrorists Seize WPYM*

"Actions have consequences." Zadi poked at the clipboard with the barrel of her AK-47. "What are you writing?" Zadi contemplated Rick as he recorded numbers.

"Transmitter readings. I have to take them no less than every three hours for the FCC." Rick eyed her briefly, trying not to be too obvious. She looked mid-20s, dark hair, with a slim, taut body that made the AK-47 she held across her chest look enormous. Her face was hard. Her brown eyes flickered soft but steeled immediately. It was as if she caught herself thinking something nice and then forced out the thought right away.

"Be careful what you write. I'll be watching you. Think of me as your own private police force," Zadi said with a cruel smile that devolved into a sneer. *You almost smiled*, Rick thought, but he didn't dare say it.

"Don't worry. You've got the gun. I'm just doing my job and staying alive. Just don't hurt anybody." Rick meant his wife Linda and his little girl Lisa, both in their Warrenville home, held hostage by Zadi's fellow terrorists. "Speaking of that, how do I know that Linda and Lisa are still OK? Let me talk to them again."

"Just keep doing your job like nothing is happening, and everyone will be fine."

Rick moved to the EBS book and opened it. “What’s that?” Zadi demanded.

“It’s the EBS book. The Emergency Broadcast System. We get notifications from them when it’s time to run an Emergency Alert over the air. I’m just looking to see when the last one was. I think we’re due for one soon. Look,” he said, showing her the EBS log. “I didn’t want you to freak out and start shooting when I have to run the cart with the EBS message. I have to run it. It’s required by law. If I don’t run one when they send the Alert, the station will be calling attention to itself. You don’t want that, do you?” Rick looked at the transmitter enclosure. Just below the Priority A placard, two brown envelopes were taped on the side of the enclosure next to the wire services—the UPI and weather teletype machines, clacking away and churning out the news, sports and weather he used for the local news that followed the Mutual Network News every hour. One envelope held a yellow cart (a small tape looking not unlike an 8-track tape cartridge) with the standard “This is a test of the Emergency Broadcast System. This is only a test.” The other envelope contained a red cart that was to be used in the rare event an actual Alert would come down the line. Five years ago, on February 20, 1971, an actual Alert message had been sent out from the EBS center in error, and there was mass confusion as the public tried to figure out why some stations had gone off the air. An operator had pulled the wrong envelope. Small stations had signed off the air, directing listeners to tune in to more powerful, Priority A stations like WPYM that were to remain on the air for the

public with EAN (Emergency Action Notification) instructions. It was a mess.

Zadi looked over his shoulder and scanned the log. “Good that you told me. That might have saved Linda one of her fingers.”

“So let me talk to them. How do I know your people haven’t already done that—or worse?”

“You talked to them 20 minutes ago. They’re fine. Do what you’re told and they will *stay* fine.” She thought for a moment. “You can hear from them again after the news at 5:00. Back to work.”

Rick closed his eyes briefly. His blood ran cold. Beads of sweat broke out on his forehead. For a moment, his mind froze. Protecting his family became his priority now. He feigned indifference. “You’re the boss, Zadi.” He wondered who else they might be holding hostage. He thought of Sandra. Heidi. Walker. Joel, Jaybird and Reggie. *At least they don’t have them—I hope.*

Rick turned away and reflected on his most recent poor decision, the one that got him into this mess. At the end of July, he had agreed to cover 48 straight hours of air time over the upcoming Labor Day Weekend. Rick had set it up with Joel Bergman, Jaybird Hawkins, and Reggie Davis a couple of months ago when each of them had been assigned a 12-hour shift to cover the time from 3 p.m. Saturday to 3 p.m. Monday. As the four of them had bemoaned their fate over too many beers, Rick suggested that only one of them should suffer. They thought it was a great idea, and Rick foolishly volunteered to be the victim. It would give him some time out of the house, which he often valued, and it would let the

others get a break, albeit a short one, over the holiday weekend. Joel and Jaybird were full timers at WPYM, and Reggie, a speech teacher in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, was a competent, willing part time weekend DJ on Sunday nights who filled in during vacation weeks in the summer for the full timers.

When daylight came and the haze cleared, Rick lamented his decision, but then he started to think how it might work. He prepared two three-hour program tapes that would air from 2 a.m. to 5 a.m. on Sunday morning and Monday (Labor Day) morning, respectively. He pitched the scheme to program director Walker Wright and submitted the tapes, complete with commercial breaks, station promos and liners, and naturally, the strict music rotation that WPYM demanded. Walker's real name was Bernard Liebowitz, but he had changed to his "Radio Name" years ago and was known as either Walker Wright or "W-Squared." *To each his own*, Rick thought. *I'm not "Charles," so who am I to complain?*

Walker listened to every second of both tapes and commented in a note to Rick, "This is the first six hours of programing from you that actually follows the station format properly. Approved. We'll promote the hell out of this starting in August." It was all set. Rick brought in a sleeping bag so he could catch a couple hours of sleep when the tapes ran. A loud alarm sounded from the reel decks whenever there were jams or tape breaks, so he would be alerted if anything went wrong.

WPYM Presents Forty-Eight Hours of Rick Morgan for your Labor Day Weekend! The station had billboards all over

town, even on the sides of buses, and as promised, every DJ on WPYM “promoted the hell out of it.”

WPYM, simply put, was “**We Play Your Music!** Music of the 60s and 70s.” Six large reel-to-reel tape machines in the upstairs studio were programed to automate the station’s music based on the station’s complex research of what music would play best to the station’s demographics. Large reel-to-reel tapes were loaded with the “High Current,” “Low Current,” “Oldies 1 (70s)” and “Oldies 2 (60s).” The other two tape machines were for special programming and/or for replacing a broken machine. A large rotating carousel held carts upon which commercials, promos, and PSAs (public service announcements) were recorded. These carts were dropped into the scheduled automated rotation of music. Commercials for local businesses that were sold and scheduled by the sales department were to be recorded in a DJ’s “spare time,” usually before or after a shift. Unpaid time, unfortunately.

The last fifteen minutes of the station’s “Wheel” was flexible in that it allowed the DJ to back-time music to join the Mutual Network News exactly on the hour. It was the only time where DJs were expected to cue up and play their own music choices (but only from the station’s approved music list), and the only time Rick could slip-cue his own music with the station’s blessing. The Wheel was a pie chart posted on the wall directly opposite the DJ’s microphone. It divided a given hour into segments where music from the large reel tapes in the other room were played in rotation, where station liners (promos) and IDs would be presented, either live or from the carts, and so on. The DJ’s time was taken up

with reading promo liners; introducing songs in the rotation, taking phone calls and dropping in the occasional request—if it were already on the station’s “approved music” list; changing the tape reels and loading the scheduled carts in correct order; taking transmitter readings; giving the station ID on the hour and half hour; and reading the news, sports and weather when scheduled.

Zadi shadowed his every move, watching closely for any sign of suspicious behavior. She didn’t look as if she would hesitate to order her fellow terrorists to remove Linda’s fingers for the slightest perceived offense. To keep her calm and, perhaps more importantly, to keep himself calm and give him time to think, Rick was careful to explain everything he did.

Rick had started his 48-hour Labor Day Weekend Marathon at 3:00 today. The buzzer for the front door sounded at 4:00, and Rick hit the door release without going down to see who was there. There was no camera or intercom. The sales staff occupied the first floor, and Jenny Anderson, the station secretary, answered the door and admitted callers during the week for their appointments, special programing tape drop-offs, and other sundry calls during the course of business. On the weekends, though, it was up to the on-air DJ to run the whole building, and that included answering the door. The hectic pace upstairs in the studio meant no one ever went down to check. One simple push of the button from upstairs and the weekend’s tapes were dropped off. An hour ago, it was a simple push that changed his life.

He heard the noise of several people coming in through the door but gave it only a passing thought. Then he heard the shouts of “FREEDOM NOW! FREEDOM NOW!” coming from the downstairs lobby. At the same time, four sets of boots clambered quickly up the stairs to the studio level. Rick didn’t even have time to put his clipboard down when Zadi pointed her AK-47 at his chest and shouted, “*Don’t Move or You’re Dead!*” The three armed men who ran up the steps with Zadi fanned out to look into the control room (on-air studio), the back office, the production studio, the music library, and the “lounge” with a ratty old sofa and chair in it for breaks that never came. They were wearing the new Kevlar vests Rick had read about, brandishing pistols and carrying AK-47s of their own. “All clear, Zadi,” Oscar reported. “Stay here with ‘Ricky’ while we set up downstairs and establish a perimeter outside.”

Holy shit! I can’t believe it’s happening! When Rick first joined WPYM, the broadcast studio was in downtown Aurora, Illinois, a small suburban city some 40 miles west of Chicago. After two years, they moved the broadcast studio out here to the concrete bunker that housed their 50,000 watt transmitter tower, complete with a self-contained generator that would keep the station on the air even if a storm wiped out the power for the surrounding communities. In the new digs, the building was isolated: unseen in the middle of a corn field, almost a mile from the main road where a line of evergreen trees had been planted years ago to shield the highway from the extremes of wind and drifting snow. The transmitter building was like a fortress. Rick had mused that the architect who designed the building was a crazed WWII

movie buff because the whole *look* screamed “machine gun nest.” And here they stood with weapons drawn: his worst nightmare realized.

CHAPTER FOUR

*The Present. Saturday, September 4, 1976. WPYM.
4:40 p.m. Confusion at the Station.*

“Where have you been?” demanded Zadi. “You don’t look like you’re with it.”

Rick snapped back to the present. Zadi was sitting on a stool across the console from him in the control room, her AK-47 resting on the surface with the barrel aimed at his face. *How the hell do I get out of this?* Rick looked desperately around him for something, anything, that he could use to help him think clearly. Clearing his throat, he stood up and with Zadi close behind, walked out to the studio’s main area where the teletype machines, the tape decks, and the transmitter were located. The second floor of the building was generally called the studio, while the first floor housed all the offices for WPYM’s staff. “I was remembering the first autograph I ever gave, actually, about 20 years ago. I’m wondering if I’ll live to give anymore. Right now, though, I’ll settle for getting through the 5:00 news and talking to my girls.”

Zadi frowned. “What’s that crate of records for? I thought the station had all the music you play.”

Rick looked at the crate. “I always bring in my own stash of music. The station has almost everything I play, but there are some things I like to play that aren’t on the station’s official list, plus I can find stuff in my own crate a lot faster than digging through the station’s music library. Besides,

today I'm going to recreate one of my 'Solid Gold Beatles Hour' specials like the ones I used to play back in Pittsburgh, so I brought a ton of my Beatles music." He looked again at the clock. As he bent over the crate, a light came on in his head. He stayed hunched over the records so Zadi couldn't see his face. He rummaged quickly to a Doobie Brothers album and pulled it out of the bin.

"What are you doing? You've been squinting at the clock for the last ten minutes. What's going on here?" Zadi challenged him.

"Nothing, Zadi. You see the time? Coming up on 4:45 p.m. The Mutual Network News has to come in at exactly 5:00 on the button. I have to figure out what to play and what to say to get us to the news without a bunch of dead air and without fading out a song like some other DJs around here do. It's called back-timing the music."

"Oh," Zadi sighed. "I didn't know you had to do that. Is that hard to do?"

"Depends on the DJ, I guess. I've been back-timing for 20 years, I think. This song will end at 4:47 and 38 seconds. I have to fill in the time up to 5:00 exactly. That's ... uh ... twelve minutes and twenty-two seconds of programming I need to fill. Let's see here... hmm... OK... I got it..." He grabbed two more albums.

"What are those for?"

"I know what I'm going to play. I'll play the Doobies, the Four Seasons, and the Doors. Let's see... "Black Water" is 3:55 of air play. "December 1963" is 3:17, and that leaves me... uh... a little over two minutes left to fill. I can always count on "Hello, I Love You" from the Doors for a quick two

minutes of air play. Normally, I would play a short Beatles cut here, but I'm doing a Solid Gold Beatles Hour later on, so I'm saving the Beatles for then. That will start at 6:00 and I'll pull all those songs out and get them ordered during the next hour."

"How long is that song by the Doors?" She picked up the albums and looked on the backs of each one.

Rick laughed. "The air play is exactly two minutes and it has a fade at the end if I need a couple more seconds. But I won't. When it ends, I'll have ... hmm... 30 seconds left to fill with what we call "patter" and maybe the temperature and station ID--stuff like that." Rick walked the albums into the control room and laid them on the counter next to the turntables. He put the Doors down first and then laid the Doobie Brothers on top of it. Then he put the Four Seasons album next to the other turntable.

"Why are you doing that?" Zadi asked suspiciously.

"Just getting ready. You see, 'Black Water' will start here," as he pointed to the first turntable. "Then over here," he pointed, "we'll go to 'December.' Then," pointing back to the first turntable, "I'll end up with the Doors back over here. Easy peasy." He looked over at Zadi. She started to smile and then went stone-faced. "You're a liar."

Startled, Rick straightened up. "What the hell are you talking about?" Zadi's shifted the AK-47 with her shoulder. She was holding up the album covers.

"The song you said was 3:55 is actually 4:15. And the Doors song says 2:13. You said it's two minutes. What are you trying to pull?"

“I said *air play*. That’s different from the published track time on the cover. Songs have fades and dead air at the end and sometimes at the beginning. I only count the *air time*.”

Zadi relaxed, and the weapon slid back into place over her chest. “OK. Just don’t try anything funny. You never know who will get the punch line.”

“I get it, Zadi. I get it. Clever pun. I get it. And don’t worry. Nothing to see here.” As “Lowdown” from Boz Scaggs ended on the High Current tape deck, Rick switched over to studio control and flipped on his mic. He started the turntable with “Black Water” on it.

“The Bozzzz... Boz Scaggs and ‘Lowdown.’ But we’re anything but Low Down here at WPYM. We’ve got it all! Here are the Doobies!”

Immediately, the words about building a raft came in. Rick’s face lit up. *A perfect segue under pressure!* Yes! He pumped his fist and smiled. “Oh yeah... now *that’s* a good segue!”

Zadi looked impressed. “That was pretty cool the way you stopped talking and the words came in right away.”

“It’s called ‘talking up the intro.’ Whatever you do, you don’t want to ‘step’ on the intro—that’s where the words come in while you’re still talking. That’s bush league.”

“Is that why you’re the top paid DJ here?” Zadi asked, curiously.

Rick started and looked quickly at her. “How did you know that?”

Zadi looked away and answered quietly, but her voice was hard. “We did our homework, Rick. We know all about you, all about the station, all about everything. We know you’re

here by yourself for 48 hours straight. We know Linda and Lisa didn't have plans for the weekend. This wasn't just a last-minute decision to walk in here and take over. We've spent the better part of this year working on it." She waited a few moments to let it sink in. "I even know how you and Linda met."

Rick blanched. "How did you know that? Leave Linda and Lisa out of this. Do what you want to me, but leave them alone!" He turned to confront her, his face shading red, "Who are you people? What the hell are you *doing*? What are you *going* to do?"

Just then, a shot rang out outside the station. Pastor Tremaine from the First Baptist Church was delivering a tape for the church's regular Sunday morning airplay. Oscar stopped him outside the door of the station and asked him why he was there. Pastor Tremaine, anxiously looking at Oscar and the others with their weapons on display, explained his reason for delivering the tape. "I'll take that in for you, Pastor," said Oscar. Pastor Tremaine walked nervously back toward his car. Oscar shot him in the back of the head. "We can't have any witnesses who can tell people what we're up to here." Oscar motioned to two men to drag the body into a back room of the station, and told another man to move the pastor's car behind the station. "We don't want any new visitors to see his car, and we don't want Zadi to know, so keep this mum."

"What was that? It sounded like a gunshot!" said Rick, alarmed. Zadi heard it, too, and after motioning Rick away, moved to the railing by the steps and looked down into the reception area.

“What was that all about?” Zadi asked Oscar as he came inside. “It sounded like a gunshot.”

“Nothing to worry about,” grunted Oscar. “One of the guys fired his pistol into the air to celebrate. I told them all to stop. Even though we’re out here in the middle of nowhere, we can’t take the risk that someone might hear it. It won’t happen again.” Oscar waved distractedly as he walked out of sight. Zadi shrugged and turned back to Rick.

“It was nothing. Nothing. Don’t worry about it.”

“It didn’t *sound* like nothing. So tell me. What are you planning to do now that you’re here?”

Zadi considered it. “I can’t tell you much. But I can tell you that your family will be safe as long as you just stay on the air and do all the normal things you usually do. Don’t try to be a hero. Just be a good little DJ.”

“I’ll get to talk to Linda and Lisa after the news, right?”

“If you’re a good little DJ.”

Rick shrugged as if it didn’t matter. “Hey, I have a job to do whether you’re here or not. You and your... people... just add some pressure. That’s all. So how long will you be here, anyway?” Rick started thinking. *Jesus! These people are seriously disturbed.* He suddenly flashed on the two brown EBS envelopes. *Priority A station.* Another light came on for him. He shook his head. *This cockamamie plan had better work or I’m toast. I’ve come too far to let it all end now. A long way, in fact.* Rick thought back to 1958.

CHAPTER TEN

*Eleven Years Ago. Monday, September 13, 1965.
Pittsburgh. The Date*

Rick finished his Monday show and took the streetcar back to his house on Caperton. He took a fast shower and pulled on a polo shirt with bold vertical stripes in blue and slipped into his faded Levi super slim jeans. He checked the mirror. His sandy hair looked just unkempt enough to be casual but not unattended to. It wasn't a mop top, and not a pompadour. It was a bit longer on top than on the sides, and it had an uncontrollable wave to it that he hated but which the girls seemed to like. He checked again. Combed on the sides down into his sideburns but messy on top with the wave doing the damage. *It'll have to do. Gotta run.* He fired up the Rambler for the short drive to Mineo's. He said he would meet her there at 7:30. If radio had taught him anything, it was the value of being precise with time. He regularly memorized the lengths of all the Top 40 songs as they came out, and that allowed him to "back-time" his music on the way to a station ID or to the news break on the hour. If he had seven minutes and ten seconds until the news, for example, Rick could play one of his famous Beatles Triple Plays with "Love Me Do" (2:14), "Yesterday" (2:04), and "I Should Have Known Better" (2:42). That would give him six minutes and 50 seconds of air play. Yes, the songs listed longer times, but radio segues often chopped the last few seconds off a song, and the beginnings were not always

at 00:00. To start a song, the record was cued up to the first sound, and the record was held with the needle in the cue position as the turntable, covered with felt, was started up and spun smoothly under the disc. At the right time, the record was released, and *presto!*, the sound was there. Slip-cueing. Rick knew from his practice sessions that those three Beatles songs, although listed at an even seven minutes on the labels, would use only 6:50 of air time with segues. That would give him 20 seconds to give the temperature, his name and a smart remark about something, a station ID, and a toss to the news desk exactly on the hour. He couldn't keep his checkbook straight, but he was a whiz at adding minutes and seconds. He walked into Mineo's at 7:30 and zero seconds, sat in a booth, and ordered two Iron City beers with two frosted mugs.

Linda fussed. The hair wasn't right. The makeup was too much. She wiped everything and started all over. She looked at her current issue of *Cosmopolitan*, the new trend in women's magazines just taken over by Helen Gurley Brown. "I want to look like *her!*" She fussed until her hair flipped just so, applied her lipstick three times until it looked just right: not too "come here and kiss me now," but more "a sweet kiss starts here" look. Demure but daring. *To be, rather than to seem*. That was the ticket. She didn't want to look too inviting, but inviting enough. There was an article in there about "Clothes to Make a Man Hurry Home." She wanted to make Rick think about 'hurrying home' to her but not think too much about hurrying home with her *today*. "Play it cool here. Don't waste this chance, Linda." She settled on a red cashmere V-neck sweater that wasn't too prim, wasn't too

daring. Just enough to entice. She looked at the clock. Quarter to seven. She didn't want to be early, but didn't want to be all that late. She kissed her father's cheek on the way out, taking the keys to his dark green 1960 VW Beetle off the hook by the front door. She had started her job at Taylor Allderdice in February of 1965, replacing Mrs. Woodson, who had retired after breaking her hip in a fall on the ice near the school. She was refreshing new blood in the business department, and her students instantly bonded with her. It didn't take very long for students she never saw in class to say hello in the hallways or in the cafeteria. She walked into Mineo's at 7:36. Rick was already seated at a booth and waved her over. He stood as she slid down the banquette and then sat down opposite her.

"What made you decide to be a teacher?" Rick poured an IC that had just arrived into a frosted mug and slid it across the table for her.

"It seemed like a good idea at the time," Linda laughed, "and why did you become a DJ?"

"Like you, but I'm not sure I had any other options. I'm not a college guy." Rick had scored good grades at Triadelphia, but he knew he didn't need a college education to be a DJ in Wheeling, West Virginia. "Sometimes I think I should take some classes, but I don't know... I just never seem to get around to it. What I *really* need is someone like you."

"Whoa, there, Bucco. Aren't you getting a bit ahead of yourself? You don't even know if I like pepperoni and mushrooms on my pizza. And, by the way, I do."

Rick chuckled. "Oops. Sorry. I didn't mean *that*. I mean that I need someone like you who knows *business*. And

you're a business teacher, so..." Rick coughed, "So what I mean is, I'll bet you're good with money and planning and finances and stuff, right?"

"Well, I sort of run my father's pharmacy in Squirrel Hill. He was having financial trouble in '59, and I was drafted into helping him with the books because I was doing well at math. Yes, I was only a sophomore, fifteen years old, but I had a knack for it. Eventually, I started doing all his ordering and had a lot of contact with the drug suppliers—the *pharmaceutical companies*, not the street dealers. Stop laughing!

"All right, all right. Anyway, I pretty much ran the place by the time I was a senior at Ellis School. *Esse Quam Videri*, you know."

"What's that?"

"*To be, rather than to seem.*" Laura said, mocking an upper-class accent. "The Ellis school motto. I think I bought in 100%, though. I was always... independent. My dad said I was 'saucy and sassy,' but I prefer to think of myself as *independent*." Rick started to laugh. "What are you laughing at?" Linda complained, playfully punching his arm.

"Ow!" Rick pretended to fall out of the booth. "You pack a punch there, girly!" holding up both hands in front of him. "But I think I agree with *both* of you so far. So that is where it all began, and the rest is history, eh?"

"I guess. But let's talk pepperoni now." The pizza arrived, and they ate slowly, drawing out the time. Rick didn't want the date to end. As they ate, he admired her. She was funny; she was smart; she looked like a runway model; and she seemed to like him, the most important qualification for any

date. His eyes traced the V of her sweater, dark red against her tan skin.

Linda caught him staring, and he blushed and smiled. “Oh, he *blushes*! I wouldn’t expect a big radio star like you to blush.” But that’s what she liked most.

Even though he was a big name in Pittsburgh radio, he was almost shy when it came to real conversations. It was easy when the record company reps sponsored a party and provided women who were “more aggressive” than the average date. They carried the conversations and led the romantic moves to completion, a progression that Rick appreciated and enjoyed. Beer and mixed drinks abounded, and joints were as plentiful as hors-d’oeuvres at cocktail parties. That made it easier for Rick, who was introspective in many ways, to slide into his public *persona* of star DJ. He found it easy to talk when he was in character, but when the conversations turned more personal, he started to recede into his shell.

“So what makes you tick, Rick?” Linda queried, with a soft smile, reaching across the table to lay her hand over his. “What is it that motivates you to do all the things you do?” She was smiling, but her eyes, blue, clear and bright, reflected her interest. “What are you after? Fame? Fortune? Women?” She slid her hand away and leaned back for his response.

Rick hesitated, ready to quip “All of the above,” but he didn’t make it a smart remark. “I don’t really know. I guess the easy answer is ‘all of the above,’ but that wouldn’t be the truth. I think I want all of it in a sense, but somehow all that seems kind of superficial, doesn’t it? I mean, there has to be

more to life than getting high, signing autographs, and making money. Don't get me wrong; I love my life. I just want something else that I can't put my finger on."

"Contentment, maybe?"

Rick pondered that idea. "I guess so. You know, every once in a while I look at where I'll be in ten or twenty years, and it scares me. I think—" Rick stopped suddenly. "Hey, look at me, Mr. Philosopher here. Sorry... I'm not usually this boring." Rick laughed and changed the subject. "Do you want another slice? How about another Iron?"

"Yes, please, I'll have another slice. But you weren't boring me. I think I was seeing a real person there for a minute, wasn't I? You can be yourself with me. I won't tell anyone who's really in there." She cocked her head to the side, then looked down to consider her pizza, all to give Rick a respite from what she felt might be an uncomfortable moment. She hoped he would show her more of the real Rick, a man she was definitely starting to like.

"Well, it's not my usual gig to talk about myself. You seem to draw it out of me. Be careful, or you'll find out too much ... and then, of course, I'll have to kill you." Mimicking Uncle Miltie, he continued, "I'll keel you... I'll keel you a mee-ill-yun toymes."

"Oh, that's *funny*!" Linda giggled. "Where did you come up with that? Do you do that on your show?"

"Uh, no. It's a line that Milton Berle used to say all the time on his TV show, and it still cracks me up. But for my show, I try to think up my own stuff. I had to steal that one for now, though. I got nuttin'." Rick paused a moment, then said, "You mean you don't listen to my show? Hmm..."

“Well, I’m in class when you start your show, but I heard you play “Yesterday” this afternoon after the 4:00 news. You built that up like crazy before you played it, too. I mean, claiming ‘it will be one of the most popular songs in *history*’ might be a stretch. But you know better than I do. Anyway, I listen when I get the chance after school. I don’t think I ever watched Milton Berle, but that sounded pretty funny. Did he say it in that goofy way?”

Rick shrugged and nodded, then took a bite from his pizza. Holding up his slice, his mouth full, he managed, “Tough to beat Mineo’s pizza, isn’t it? And I stand by my prediction: it *will* be one of the most popular songs in history.”

Linda nodded but didn’t want to lose the more intimate moment that had started. “Yes, OK ... but I was going to ask you what it is that makes you scared.”

Rick paused. He didn’t want to get into it, but he also knew he really *did* want to get into it. “Oh, it’s nothing, really. I don’t even know. I think it’s that once in a while I get to thinking that I’m not doing anything for my future. You know, I’m not saving any money. I don’t have a plan for my career. I just sort of feel like the ball in that Buckaroo pinball machine over there sometimes, you know?” Rick rubbed his hand along his jaw line, thinking. “Last year, when the Beatles were here, I sat in on the press conference they had over at the Civic Arena, and Paul said the best thing that ever happened to them was getting Brian Epstein as their manager. That got me to thinking that I really need a good manager. Maybe that way I can save some money and get some kind of plan for my life together—Hey, I’m sorry, but I

sure didn't mean to make this date about my career plans!" He looked out the window at the traffic creeping by and said, "Tell me what you like to do for fun. What does an attractive schoolteacher do for fun?"

"No, not at all. I'm finding this really interesting, but if you feel uncomfortable talking about it, that's OK. We don't have to."

"That's the thing. I *never* talk about this, and yet somehow I feel comfortable talking about it with you. That doesn't bode well for you, I'm afraid. You don't deserve this nonsense. But what *do* you do for fun?"

Linda blushed. "Oh, I'm your typical schoolmarm," I guess, she laughed. "I grade papers, plan tortuous homework assignments, and try to make kids miserable." She grinned at Rick. "And if you're bad, you'll have to stay after class!"

"I'm bad! I'm *bad*! Make me stay for detention, please," Rick countered. They both laughed.

"Be careful what you wish for, Mr. DJ. You might have to do some cipherin'."

"No problem! I'm good at cipherin' and I knows my *gazinta*'s: 2 gazinta 8 four times; 4 gazinta 20 five times... I'm as good at cipherin' as any double-naught spy *can* be!"

Linda burst out laughing. "You're Jethro Bodine, are you? That's hilarious. But did you know that Max Baer actually has a degree in Business Administration? And a minor in philosophy, I think."

"Wow! You *are* a fan, aren't you?" Rick chuckled. "I guess in a way that makes us kindred spirits, huh? Groovy! Far out! Psychedelic! And all of them there boss terms." Rick rolled

his eyes and raised an eyebrow. "I would expect nothing less from someone so choice."

"Oh, *please!*—" Linda said. "I hear that kind of talk all day long in the hall. I need adult conversation."

Rick slid out of the booth. "Well, I guess that leaves me out. See ya!" He pretended to walk away only to enjoy Linda's "Oh, come on! I didn't mean it that way. Sit down." Rick slid back into the booth.

"Very funny," Linda said. "Are you always so sensitive, or is that just with me?" It was her turn to raise an eyebrow.

"I'm sorry. I was just teasing. And you knew it. You loved it. And I didn't know that about the real Jethro, by the way. Pretty cool to know." After a pause while both of them grazed on the pizza, Rick offered tentatively, "You know... I was thinking... and as you probably figured out, it was on my mind all the way back at the sock hop... what are the chances you know someone who could be my manager? Or maybe *you* could be my manager." *There. I finally asked her. On our first date. I can't believe I'm such a dork!*

Linda ignored the second part. "I don't know. I'll ask around for you, though. My business department chairman probably knows who might be good. What are you looking for, exactly?"

"I don't even know, really. Brian Epstein, I guess. Someone who can manage my money, book my gigs, and straighten me out." Linda bit her lip in a vain attempt to stifle a smile. "Financially. *Financially!* God! You don't miss a thing, do you? You should teach English!" Rick was glad the table was over his lap so she couldn't see how right she had been. But maybe she knew already. She had to know. *She's*

smokin' hot, and I walked right into that one. Open mouth, change feet!

Linda shook her head. "It's too easy. Give me a real challenge next time." She giggled that light silvery laugh again. She looked at her watch. "Oh, Rick. I'm sorry, but the time is slipping away from me, and tonight's a school night. I have to prepare my lesson plans for tomorrow and grade a set of papers, too. I really have to get going. Six o'clock gets here before you know it." Linda thought, *Leave him wanting more. Don't overplay this, girl.* She leaned towards him and again laid her hand on his. "Thank you for such a wonderful time. I can't think of when I've ever had a better first date. This was so nice! By the way," she said, reaching into her purse and pulling out her wallet, "how much is my share for tonight?"

Rick looked at her blankly. How much was her share? "Nothing. It's a *date*. I asked you out, I should pay. That's the way it goes. You must be Gloria Steinem's cousin or something. No one said anything about going Dutch."

"OK, OK. I didn't mean to offend you. I just wanted to be fair. Just because you're the man doesn't mean you should always have to pay." She smiled warmly at him and put her other hand over his and squeezed. "This has been great, Rick. I've had a great time! But please forgive me. I do have to go." Linda slid out of the booth, still holding his hands in hers. Using his hands for leverage, she pulled herself over the table close to his face. "You're a sweetie. Thanks again!" and she kissed him on the cheek. Before Rick knew what happened, she was walking away towards the door. *Look back. Please look back!* She did, and she was smiling and

blew him a kiss as the door closed and she disappeared into the night.

My god, what a beautiful woman. Rick, you will never do better than that. Don't screw it up. Rick motioned for the check and pulled his wallet out from the left rear pocket of his jeans. He fished out a five, which he knew would cover it, and a single for good measure. It would be about \$2.25 for the pizza and almost \$2.00 for the beers. A decent tip would bring it to about \$4.90, and a good tip would bring it to about \$5.10. Rick felt he should curry good will with their waitress, so he left six dollars on the table and called out to her, "Will this cover it?" She smiled widely and said, "Oh, yes! Thanks, Rick!" *They always take good care of me here, and Sherrie is a good waitress. Cute, too. I'd rather leave \$5.50, but after all, I'm "Rick Morgan," for cryin' out loud. I have an image to maintain.*

Rick drove the Rambler up to his house on Caperton, parked, and went through his normal evening routine: He listened to the new 45 promo records the station and record reps gave him, pored over the Top 10 playlists from all the stations, and studied his copy of *Billboard* music lists as if there were a test tomorrow. He played records one after another, listening to the way they started and ended and rating them in his mind as "hit" or "just OK" or "won't last long" or "ohgoodlord loser." He had been the first one in the 'burgh to break McCartney's "Yesterday" when *Help!* was released in August, and he made a big splash with announcing the single's release just this afternoon. At eleven o'clock, it was time to watch the news on KDKA with Bill

Burns and then Johnny Carson's *Tonight Show* on WIIC. Then it was off to bed for six or seven hours of sleep.

In the morning, he would catch some of Rege Cordic's morning show on KDKA to see if he could catch an "Olde Frothingslosh" commercial for the fake beer invented by Cordic. He was incredibly funny, and Rick went to school on his brand of comedy, creating a few afternoon drive time callers for his own show, like long-haul truck driver Stiller Steve and hippie Howie Token. He would work on a script for Howie for Friday's show. He would "interview" Howie about his new pet, "Red Dog, a wiener dog that is absolutely smokin'!" Rick had to walk the fine line between what the station and the FCC would allow in terms of drug references and what the kids all knew he was talking about, and the scripts had to be run past legal on Wednesday afternoon before he could air it on Friday. The Red Dog Experience from '63 would be the foundation for the bit, and peyote would be changed to "smoking coyote all night long" in Rick's script. Rick would ask him how he got the name for Red Dog, and Howie would say he wanted to name him **Leary Salvatorio Dimitri**. "Why the name **Leary Salvatorio Dimitri**, Howie?" "I have no idea, man. I like Irish, Italian and Russian names, man. So that was it. But it's too long and I couldn't think of how to shorten it. Hence, man, it's Red Dog." It was a start, and Rick thought he could get more into the bit if he worked on it in the morning. Rick fell asleep dreaming of new dialogue for Howie and new segues for his show. Somewhere along the line, he dreamed of pizza and a V in a red sweater that traced its way to heaven. It was a good night.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

*Three Months Ago. Friday, June 4, 1976. WPYM. Summer
Before the Invasion*

TGIF. Summer was ready to burst onto the scene. Rick saw some potential hits on *Billboard's* Hot 100: Walter Murphy's "A Fifth of Beethoven;" "Mamma Mia" from ABBA—not better than their breakthrough hit "Fernando," but sure to climb the charts on the coattail of "SOS." What wasn't on the charts at all was "Rick's Pick," the new Beatles single, "Got to Get You Into My Life," with the B side "Helter Skelter." Although the song was on the *Rubber Soul* album in 1966, the single was released by Capitol only five days ago on May 31. The *real* "A" side for the single was the flip side, a release of "Helter Skelter," a song that had been getting a lot of ink after the Manson murders last August, but Capitol couldn't risk a public outcry by releasing it as the A side. Rick didn't know how far the single would rise, but his unwavering personal Beatlemania informed his predictions, or perhaps controlled them outright. "Rick's Picks" had started back in May 1969, with the group's first *stereo* single, "Get Back." Rick faithfully chose a new single each week from the *Billboard* Hot 100 new releases. It was a given that every new Beatles single would be that week's pick. They included: "The Ballad of John and Yoko" (June 1969), "Something/Come Together" (October 1969), "Let It Be" (March 1970), and "The Long and Winding Road" (May 1970, their last single released on Apple Records). Only "The

Ballad of John and Yoko” failed to reach number one on the *Billboard* charts. It went to #8.

Even though he knew a controversy was brewing over the release of “Helter Skelter,” Rick decided to play “Got to Get You into My Life” on his show, and he played it twice yesterday, once at the beginning and again as he left the air. He knew it would not go unnoticed. None of Rick’s departures from WPYM’s sacred playlist (*The List*) escaped Walker’s scrutiny. Why would today be different? Rick checked his mailbox when he got to the studio at 6:30, half an hour before his 7:00 p.m.-3:00 a.m. shift began.

Even though Rick held down the late day slot, he was the only WPYM jock who had cracked the Arbitron ratings—a real feather in the station’s cap—and he not only maintained his rating but improved it with each new book. Rick’s history and his current popularity among the station’s listeners had insulated him from getting fired, but only just barely, it seemed. His fights with management over playing songs not on the approved playlists kept him from moving to a power shift like morning or afternoon drive. It was a joke to actually call those shifts “drive time,” though. WPYM’s shift for “morning drive” actually started at 3:00 a.m. and lasted until 11:00 a.m. The “afternoon drive” shift went from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. The station got every last minute they could from their DJs and paid them a pittance compared to the top stations in Chicago. In fact, there was a pretty good-sized turnover in on-air talent since Rick had started three years ago. They didn’t care; paying three DJs for three 8-hour shifts over 24 hours was better than doing what the top stations in the area were doing. They hired DJs for four 3-hour daytime

shifts starting at 6:00 a.m., and two DJs filled the remaining 6-hour shifts overnight.

Rick landed the top salary at the station, moving up to \$6.50 per hour for his 40-hour week, compared to his coworker's salaries of \$5.25 per hour which had increased more slowly than his over the past three years. None of the hours spent producing promo tapes and commercials counted. Still, all in all, it wasn't a bad gig for a 40-year-old DJ in a young man's market that was increasingly becoming a young woman's market as well. The weekend afternoon slot was being nicely filled by Maria Ramirez, known on the air as Sandy Beaches, a shapely 22-year-old grad from NIU with a sultry voice who was just starting her career. In Rick's opinion, if she could lose 15 pounds, she could have a career in television, maybe even on the silver screen. The station paid weekend DJs at minimum wage, so they moved on quickly if they were any good. Their philosophy was "Why should we pay more? We could get NIU students to work here for free if we wanted." Sandy Beaches would be moving on soon, he knew.

Rick looked through the handful of mail from his box. A memo to check for new station liners posted in the on-air studio. Three music requests from women who were probably fantasizing about Rick from the sound of his voice on the air, unaware that he was 40 years old and no longer sported the physique of his athletic youth. A handful of ad scripts booked by the sales staff and farmed out to the DJs at random. Plus four commercial scripts from the advertisers who paid extra for Rick's voice. He got an extra \$25 per ad but no residuals. No one else at the station got that kind of

deal. Linda had brokered it for him when he started at WPYM. The two-week paycheck in his hand was \$677.43, which included the bonuses for the special scripts he had recorded as well as the deductions for the Tax Man. Yellow paper caught his eye next. There it was, printed in Walker's signature style, on paper from a lined yellow legal pad, "Walker's Daily Diatribe." A list of every song he had played yesterday, in order, that was not on the approved playlist. *Doesn't he have anything better to do than listen to my show? He must record it and listen at high speed. At least he knew most of the music!* Rick laughed out loud. Yesterday's "sins" were:

Got to get you into my Life—we may never play this

I shot the Sheriff—taken off rotation 2 months ago

Can't get enough—No Bad Company on the list

Love has no pride—Bonnie Raitt?? We aren't a country station!

You're No Good—this Ronstadt **NOT** on list—play one that is

Give me Just a Little more Time—Never even **heard** of this

Abraham Martin and John—**WPYM** ain't no Folk Rock/Protest Radio!

Got to Get... **AGAIN???**

Play the songs on the **Goddamn Playlist!!!** We pay **Good** money to get our format songs, and you have to **Abide** by the **Damn** playlist!!! Just because you're in the Arbitron doesn't mean you can **Dictate** what you get to play.

CUT THIS SHIT OUT!!!

W2

Got to get you into my Life-we may never play this
I shot the Sheriff-taken off rotation 2 months ago
Thick as a Brick-no Jethro Tull on the list
Can't get enough-No Bad Company on list
Love has no pride- Bonnie Raitt? We aren't a country station!
You're No Good -- this Ronstadt NOT on list-play one that is
Give me Just a Little more Time-Nevea even heard of this
Abraham Martin and John-WPVM ain't Folk Rock/Protest Radio!
Got to Get... AGAIN???

Play the songs on the Goddamn Playlist!!! We pay Good money to get our
format songs, and you have to Abide by the Damn play List!!!! Just because
you're in the Arbitron doesn't mean you can Dictate what you get to play.

CUT THIS SHIT OUT!!!

W3

That's it? Only eight forbidden songs in eight hours? You must have missed a few or I made a mistake and dropped in a couple of songs that actually are on The List. Same old, same old. Rick laughed and crumpled up Walker's memo. "Join the rest in File 13," Rick said, tossing it in the wastebasket near the office door. "He shoots! He scores! The crowd goes wild!" By the way, that "time song" is Chairmen of the Board. Rick shook his head. He was particularly rankled by W2's remark about "Abraham, Martin and John." If we play the hits of the 60s and 70s, what better

choice? It made #4 in the nation and was #1 on Chicago's WLS, for God's sake! Rick shook his head again and smiled pensively. Maybe we need a little protest once in a while. Maybe those songs were the reason Rick made the Arbitron Book every rating period and Walker just couldn't figure it out. That and the habit Rick had of skipping the songs in the rotation that he didn't like. For example, he skipped the Captain and Tennille's "Shop Around" and slipped in 1975's "Love Will Keep Us Together" from the duo in its place even though he was supposed to play the former from the "Low Current" tape deck. Later in the hour, he would play Smokey Robinson's version of "Shop Around." Can't beat the original. He got more than one phone call from listeners saying they liked his music choices "better than the other DJs. They play the same stuff over and over." What can he do? Fire me? I'm the only one who gets advertisers asking for me to do their ads. I'm the only one who gets advertisers asking for me to do their ads. I'm the only one who's making the Book. What can he do? Fire me? On the other hand, Rick thought, he shouldn't get too cocky and bold. Pride goeth before a fall, he ruefully reminded himself. Yet he had no reason to complain. He had in hand the best contract of his career. Linda had done it. He was actually loving his work at WPYM. He gave Jenny Anderson a huge smile.

"Got anything planned for today's show?" asked Jenny, the station secretary. She was nice enough, but there was something guarded about her when she was around Rick. Maybe it was because she and Walker were so tight. Maybe something was going on there. Maybe Walker had complained about Rick to her. Maybe it was just because

everyone is guarded until you get to know them better. Yet she seemed interested enough. “I don’t always have the station on at home, but I do when your show is on. You’re funny as hell. I know you get in trouble for it, but they know you’re bringing in ad dollars and listeners, so just make sure you don’t cross too many lines,” she said with an encouraging smile.

“Thanks, Jenny. I appreciate the good vibes. Tonight I’m thinking of asking listeners to call in with their best excuses for missing work. I’ve got plans, baby.... BIG plans!” Rick laughed conspiratorially. “Hey, nice threads, by the way.” She spun around so the fringe of her leather vest swirled in the air.

“Thanks! I love this vest! I just got it at Fox Valley in Penney’s,” Jenny smiled. “I feel so *bourgeoisie* in it even though I’m more *proletariat*,” she laughed.

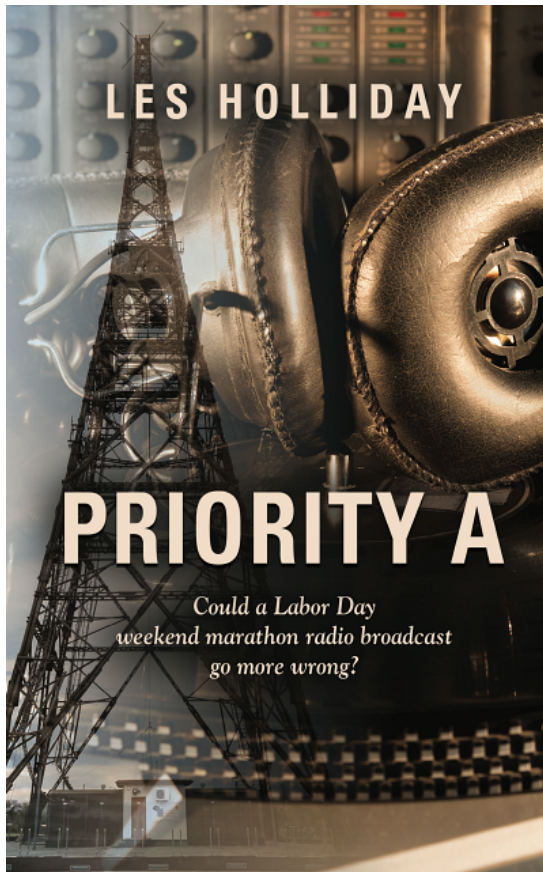
“Whatever floats your boat, Jenny. Enjoy! Tell the Big Guy you deserve a raise!” They both laughed. Rick wouldn’t know “the Big Guy” if he bumped into him. He had never met him in person. All he knew was that Preston Cleveland was the general manager of a syndicate that had bought WPYM and a few other stations. Rick knew everything at the station was handled in-house, and the person ostensibly in charge was Cleveland, a former clothing store owner in downtown Chicago who had moved to Aurora and to WPYM, it seemed. He was in his office with the door closed when he was in the building. When he wasn’t, which was most of the time, the door was open, and all Rick could see was a mahogany desk devoid of paper and a big stuffed leather chair behind it. After Preston, the authority at the station seemed to split

between Bill Zychowski, head of the sales department, and program director Walker Wright. Walker handled the on-air side and Bill handled the sales side. Sports director Kirby Jackson, music director Stuart Ferguson, and news director Marty Harris rounded out the “bosses” at the station. Rick just tried to stay out of everyone’s way. It had been a long journey from his rise and fall in Pittsburgh.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Les Holliday has worn many hats in his life. He has been paid for being a lifeguard, a pool manager, a car salesperson, a teacher, a men's clothing salesperson, an on-air DJ, a mobile entertainment DJ/MC, a reader for audio books, an actor, and more. Unpaid roles include singer, musician, guest speaker for educational conferences, and volunteer roles at his church. He is also a husband, a father of three, and a grandfather of eight. He grew up in St. Clairsville, Ohio. He lived in the Chicago area for twelve years and in the Pittsburgh area since 1979. His undergraduate degree is in literature, an A.B. from Wheaton College (IL); his Master's Degree is in Communication Studies, an M.S. from Shippensburg University (PA), with an emphasis in radio/TV. Les has yet-to-be published works: *The Wedding Maze: A DJ's Guide for the Bride*, about his experiences as a wedding DJ; and *Interpreting Macbeth: an Exercise for Students and Teachers*, a scene by scene analysis of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Les currently resides with his wife, Donna, in the Pittsburgh area, where he enjoys being with his family, bike riding, and traveling.



DJ Rick Morgan starts a 1976 Labor Day weekend marathon broadcast. Domestic terrorists seize the station and hold his wife and daughter hostage at their home. It's cooperate, or hundreds die. His desperate plan to stop them MUST succeed.

Priority A

By Les Holliday

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