



# A Frank and Earnest Discussion

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## INTRODUCTION

I walked into my first radio station in 1965. Still in High School — wide-eyed, curious, and convinced that radio was the closest thing to magic a human being could touch. More than sixty years later, I've seen the industry rise, fall, reinvent itself, and lose pieces of its soul along the way. I've seen the craft hollowed out, the people stretched thin, and the magic dimmed but never extinguished.

**Frank and Earnest:** We don't know who Frank and Earnest are, they could be you, me, somebody we know. Or just somebody I made up. The same for **Jason**...maybe we're all three, who knows?

This story isn't about policy or economics. It's about the emotional truth of radio — the old-timers who carried the torch, the younger generation trying to find their footing, and the quiet question that hangs over every transmitter still humming in the night:

### What survives?

This is for the people who lived it.  
The ones who felt it.  
The ones who still give a damn.

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*A SHORT Play in Three Acts*

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## ACT I — THE OLD DAYS

### EXT. TRANSMITTER SITE – LATE AFTERNOON

A lonely building, AM tower seen against a fading sky. Rust on the guy wires. Wind whistles through sagebrush. A loose sheet of metal flaps on the generator shed. Two men standing in the lot...looking at the building the tower, the shed.

**FRANK** — late 60s, ex-engineer, denim jacket, wearing a ball cap from a from some station that no longer exists.

**EARNEST** — early 70s, ex-PD/GM hybrid, suspenders, a face carved by 40 years of remotes, rate cards and transmitters that blew out in the middle of a dark, midnight storm.

The tower hums behind them like an old friend.

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## SCENE 1

**FRANK**

You know... every damn person who's ever worked in that building has said it at least once.

**EARNEST**

"I could run this place better than these clowns."

**FRANK**

There it is. The national anthem of radio employees.

**EARNEST**

Funny thing, though. Not one of 'em ever tried to buy the place.

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## SCENE 2

**FRANK**

They'll tell you it's the money. But that's the polite lie.

**EARNEST**

Half the stations we've seen change hands didn't involve real money anyway. Just paper, promises, and a prayer.

**FRANK**

So if it's not the money... what is it?

**EARNEST**

They want the *idea* of owning a station, not the *responsibility*.

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## SCENE 3

**EARNEST**

You know when it changed? '96. Everything after that...

(shakes head)

People stopped believing they had any control. They stopped seeing how the business worked.

Stopped learning the ropes. Stopped being mentored. Corporate took the wheel, and everyone else just held on.

**FRANK**

When you take away a person's say-so...you take away their spark.

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#### **SCENE 4**

**EARNEST**

We watched the craft get hollowed out. Newsrooms gutted. Live shifts gone. Engineering staffs cut to the bone.

**FRANK**

And the people who stayed? They got tired. Not lazy — tired.

**EARNEST**

Tired of pretending the magic was still there.

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#### **SCENE 5**

**FRANK**

They go home to their little insulated world...and complain. Because complaining is safe.

**EARNEST**

Ownership isn't.

The tower hums.

The light fades.

**FADE OUT.**

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## **ACT II — JASON**

**EXT. TRANSMITTER SITE – NIGHTFALL**

A car pulls up. A young man steps out.

**JASON** — late 20s, hoodie, backpack, earbuds around his neck. The look of someone doing three jobs for one paycheck.

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## SCENE 6

**JASON**

Hey. They said you might be out here. STL's acting weird again.

**FRANK**

She's older than you. She's allowed.

**JASON**

So's everything in that building.

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## SCENE 7

**EARNEST**

You ever think about owning a station, kid?

Jason laughs — tired, not mocking.

**JASON**

Me? No way. I mean... I've said it. Everyone says it. But actually do it? Nah.

**FRANK**

Why not?

Jason hesitates.

**JASON**

I don't have the money.

Earnest raises an eyebrow.

**EARNEST**

That's the polite answer. What's the real one?

Jason exhales — the truth rising.

**JASON**

Because I don't want to fail. I don't want to be the guy everyone complains about. I don't want the pressure. I don't want the responsibility. I just want to do my job, get my check, and go home. And yeah... I complain. It's easier than... all that.

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## SCENE 8

**FRANK**

Kid... you just said what most never admit.

**EARNEST**

You're not weak. You're not lazy. You're tired. And you were trained to be tired.

**JASON**

Trained?

**EARNEST**

By an industry that stopped teaching you how to dream.

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## **SCENE 9**

**FRANK**

We had mentors. We had a ladder. We had owners who'd hand you the keys and say, "Don't wreck it." You never got that.

**JASON**

No. I didn't.

**EARNEST**

And that's not your fault.

Jason looks at the tower — really looks at it.

**FADE OUT.**

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## **ACT III — WHAT SURVIVES**

**EXT. TRANSMITTER SITE – NIGHT**

The three stand together, silhouettes against the blinking red lights.

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## **SCENE 10**

**JASON**

So... what happens to all this? When you guys are gone?

Frank and Earnest exchange a look.

**EARNEST**

That's the question, isn't it.

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## **SCENE 11**

**FRANK**

Radio was never the tower. Never the building. Never the license.

**EARNEST**

It was the people who gave a damn.

**FRANK**

The ones who stayed late. Fixed things nobody saw. Told the truth on the air. Cared about the town.

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## **SCENE 12**

**EARNEST**

We thought if we cared hard enough...the industry would care back.

A beat...It didn't.

Jason absorbs this — not with despair, but with clarity.

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## **SCENE 13**

**JASON**

I don't want it to die. I really don't. I love it. Even the broken parts.

Frank smiles.

**FRANK**

Then you've got the one thing that matters.

**JASON**

What's that?

**EARNEST**

A pulse.

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## **SCENE 14 — PASSING THE TORCH**

Frank pulls out an old ring of keys. He holds them out — not as a gift, but as a promise.

**FRANK**

These aren't for now. You're not ready. Nobody ever is. But someday...you might need them.

Jason stares at the keys.

**JASON**

What if I screw it up?

Earnest places a hand on his shoulder.

**EARNEST**

You will. We did. Everyone does. That's not the point.

**FRANK**

The point is you try.

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## **SCENE 15 — FINAL SHOT**

The three stand together, looking up at the tower.

**EARNEST**

You hear that?

**JASON**

The hum?

**FRANK**

Yeah. That's the sound of something that refuses to die.

Jason looks at the tower with new eyes.

**JASON**

I think I get it now.

Earnest nods.

**EARNEST**

Good. Because someday...this place is gonna need someone who still gives a damn.

The tower hums.

The red lights blink.

The night holds steady.

**FADE OUT.**

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