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Dramatic Publishing

Valentines and Killer Chili

One-act Comedy

by

KENT R. BROWN

Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(VALENTINES AND KILLER CHILI)

for Barbara

Valentines and Killer Chili premiered at The People's Light and Theatre Company in Malvern, PA on June 22, 1984. The production was directed by Israel Hicks. Set design by Joe Ragey. Lighting design by Arden Fingerhut. Costume design by Megan Fruchter. Sound consultation by Charles Cohen. Properties design by Robert Smythe. Stage management by Katherine Pierce. The cast was as follows:

Jason Lee Devin

Jackie Alda Cortese

VALENTINES AND KILLER CHILI

A Play in One Act
For One Man and One Woman

CHARACTERS

JASON a road man. In his 50s

JACKIE a waitress at Big Tom's Pit Stop. In her 50s

TIME: The present and the past simultaneously

PLACE: Outside of Amarillo, Texas

VALENTINES AND KILLER CHILI

SETTING: *The play takes place simultaneously in the present and the past – as Jason’s memory dictates. As such, the setting is not realistic. A few cubes may comfortably serve to suggest the counter and cafe scenes, the truck cab, and Jackie’s trailer. Except for the candles and the valentine box, most of the props can effectively be pantomimed. Lighting should contribute significantly to the flow and intermeshing of Jason’s memories. The presentation requires that JASON speak to JACKIE as well as the the AUDIENCE. JACKIE, however, relates only to JASON.*

AT THE CURTAIN: *A medley of Country ’n Western tunes can be heard interspersed, perhaps, with the sounds of the road – CB chatter, the shifting of gears, radio static, and strains of Jackie’s good-natured laugh. As the lights fade up on JASON at the “counter” sipping his coffee, Jackie’s laugh lingers for a moment... then fades away. JASON listens to her echo in his “memory.”*

JASON (to AUDIENCE). There’s not much to do on the road, ’cept sing to the windshield... if you can stand it... hum along with the radio maybe... and remember the people you’ve met over a cuppa coffee at 5 a.m... or tankin’ up. Some are dumb. Some don’t think very straight. Most of ’em are good at heart. Humpin’ buns

to make ends meet. *(Pause.)* And some of 'em are... well... real special. Hard to forget. Like Jackie. She was a waitress outside of Amarillo. Worked at Big Tom's Pit Stop. In her... "sunset years" she used to call it. Had a face like a road map... lines goin' every which way. And red dabs of makeup... here and here... on both cheeks. Mascara you could cut with a knife. Eyebrows like two McDonald's arches. Her hair was all up and out like them beehives. Wore it like a helmet. Could see her in the mornin' strappin' it on for a big day at the counter. *(Pause.)* And she had... I'll never forget 'em... she had green fingernails. Like nothin' I'd ever seen before.

(Lights begin to fade up on JACKIE in the "cafe" where she acts out Jason's memory as JASON watches.)

JASON. She'd be working the tables and them fingernails'd swoop in... and down'd go the water! Then they'd flutter up around her hair for a second like green fireflies! Then splat! went the wet cloth on the counter. She'd swish it 'round... up'd come the cream. Swish again and there'd go the ashtray. Another go 'round and up'd come them wire things that hold the syrup! She'd finish off by whippin' that wet cloth under her left arm... right in the pit... like she'd been doin' it that way since she was born. Then she'd rub her nose real quick with the back of her hand and take out her order pad.

JACKIE *(to JASON)*. What'll it be, Big Boy?

JASON. Whatta ya' got?

JACKIE. Eggs... chops... steaks... cakes. You name it... we got it. *(Laughs.)*

JASON (*to AUDIENCE*). She had the straightest teeth I'd ever seen. And when she laughed all them lines just seemed to fade away.

JACKIE. Well, make up your mind, Good Lookin'. I ain't got all day. This is prime time.

JASON (*to JACKIE*). What's the house special?

JACKIE. Killer Chili! Burn a hole right through ya'. Keep ya' alert.

JASON. Ah... I'll have a medium rare and coffee.

JACKIE. No chili?

JASON. Don't think so.

JACKIE. You got a tender tummy?

JASON. Yes, ma'am. Sure do.

JACKIE. Coward. (*Both laugh, JACKIE exits into the "kitchen".*) Clarence! Shoot the cow... nice and easy.

JASON (*to AUDIENCE*). Jackie had been Big Tom's wife. But after the kids all flew the coop he got himself a hot piece of road work and left Jackie behind. She didn't see no reason to change the sign to Big Jackie's. Hell, everybody knew she done all the work anyway. Guys would come in off the road and yell 'Hi ya' doin', Jackie? Only got fifteen then it's back in the saddle.'

JACKIE (*offstage*). Comin' right up.

(JASON watches as JACKIE enters and pantomimes the activity.)

JASON. And then she'd come outta the kitchen carryin' a tall stack, double order of hash browns, chops, gravy, biscuits, coupla cheeseburgers... a fresh pot of motor oil... and her order book stuck between her teeth! And she was friendly too. Always flirtin' with the customers. Not bad flirtin'. Just keepin' 'em happy.

JACKIE (*to "customers"*). Billy, hon... your wife's been callin'. You ain't told her nothin' 'bout us have you? Jimmy Joe? Your daughter feelin' better now? Luke! You got mustard on your chin. Looks real good. (*Looking at JASON.*) You ready for my Chili, Sweetie Pie?

JASON (*to JACKIE*). I'm workin' on it, Jackie. Maybe next time through.

JACKIE. Coward! (*Both laugh again. JACKIE exits into "kitchen." Jason's "counter" light fades out as he moves into a neutral pool of light and addresses the AUDIENCE.*)

JASON. I've pulled everythin' that can swim, fly, shit or crawl! At the time I met Jackie I was haulin' chickens. Feathers everywhere swirlin' outta them wooden crates... lookin' like a damn snowstorm! Smelly critters, too. But you can't be choosy when you're pullin' another man's money. I was new on the route ... Beaumont... Odessa... Amarillo and hot no-nothin' towns in between. Real garden spots. Texas just goes on forever. But I was always happy when I saw that sign. She just made ya' feel good.

JACKIE (*offstage*). Clarence! Keep scorchin' them fries. The boys are hungry.

JASON (*begins moving through the "door"*). One night Jackie caught me comin' through the door. I was starvin'.

(*JACKIE appears from the "kitchen."*)

JACKIE. Hey, Big Boy. Where ya' been. I've missed your pretty face.

JASON. I got every chicken that ever lived in the back of my truck.

JACKIE. Naw ya' don't. We got us some out back. Super Chicken, fried just the way ya' like it. Real tasty!

JASON. Aw, Jackie ... I live with them critters day and night. Don't want to eat 'em if I don't have to. (*To AUDIENCE as he moves to his seat.*) I was walkin' to my booth when one of them green fingernails flew right out into my face.

JACKIE. You don't like it, Sweetie, I'll buy ya' a six-pack. Can't beat that now, can ya'?

JASON (*laughing*). It's a deal. Serve it up.

JACKIE. You gotta be honest now. No takin' me for a ride.

JASON. You're on. (*JACKIE exits into the "kitchen" as JASON turns to the AUDIENCE.*) I didn't want to be inhospitable. She looked so damn sure I'd like it. And I tried too. Almost finished the whole plate the first time. When I came back from the john she had a six-packa Pearl sittin' right in my chair. I kept tryin', but all I could see when I looked down at my plate was them stinkin'... cluckin'... feather flyin' chickens waitin' for me in the parkin' lot.

(*JACKIE reappears from the "kitchen".*)

JACKIE. You ain't tryin' too hard, Big Boy. Left the real tasty parts. Bet it needs a little more garlic. Clarence! Another order of Super. Heavy on the breath! We ain't got it right yet. (*Pats JASON on the back and exits.*)

JASON (*to AUDIENCE*). Got to be a joke around the place. Whenever I stepped down from the cab the

boys'd all yell 'Look out, Jackie. Here comes Super Chicken.' And there she'd be standin' with a plate of chicken in one hand and a six-pack in the other.

(JACKIE reappears from the "kitchen.")

JACKIE. It's now or never, Sweetie. My liquor bill's 'bout to kill me.

JASON *(to JACKIE)*. Can't do it, hon. I'm losin' weight.

JACKIE *(laughing)*. Clarence! You're fired. *(JACKIE exits as JASON rises and crosses into the "neutral" pool of light as the "cafe" lights dim out.)*

JASON *(to AUDIENCE)*. So what did I order? Killer Chili! Jackie was right. Damned near put me under. I could taste it for miles. I liked Jackie. Liked her a real lot. *(Jackie's laugh is heard.)* A coupla hundred miles out I'd begin to hear her laugh. Took my mind off things. *(Pause.)* One morning, early... 'round 2 a.m.... I was pullin' a load up from Beaumont. Hell of a drive. Stopped at Big Tom's. Needed some waffles and bacon... somethin' to help put me to sleep. And... well... I had a present for Jackie. It was a Wednesday... Valentine's Day. I'd bought a big box a chocolates. The guy who'd sold 'em to me said they were the best and... I was hopin' he weren't lyin'. I was gonna leave 'em for her at the counter. Had a note all ready. 'From the Biggest Super Chicken on the Road... Lots of Love.' I thought she'd like that. Make her laugh. It wasn't a big deal... just some silly candy. *(Pause.)* Why not? There was no one else to give 'em to. *(Begins to move toward the "cafe door" but stops.)* I swung down from the cab... and there she was. Could see her

through the window. That wet towel flappin' all around.

(Lights fade up on JACKIE.)

JASON. This old trucker was just sittin' there starin'. His eyes wide open... followin' them nails... here... there... everywhere! I was glad she was there. I held the boxa candy behind my back... *(JASON moves through the "door".)* ...and stepped in the front door. No one else was around 'cept the dude in the corner. I gave her a big smile. *(To JACKIE.)* Mornin', Jackie! What you doin' up so late tonight? Thought you'd be out with...

JACKIE *(cutting him short)*. We're all out of everythin'. A few fries left... a burger... some cherry pie. Coffee flows all the time.

JASON. No waffles even? Been thinkin' 'bout waffles for hours.

JACKIE. What's the matter... you deaf? You want some cherry pie... I'll get you some cherry pie!

JASON. Fine. Sure. Is it fresh?

JACKIE. Hell no it ain't fresh! It's a month old. You know that. Everything in this dump is old.

JASON *(laughs)*. Just how I like it.

JACKIE. What do you mean by that crack?

JASON. Nothin'. Just makin' a joke.

JACKIE. You're not very funny.

JASON. Sorry. Ah... I'll take some of that fine tastin' motor oil. *(JACKIE gives him a sharp look.)* Honest. No joke.

JACKIE. Pie?

JASON. Yeah... yeah. Sure. (*JACKIE exits into "kitchen" as JASON addresses the AUDIENCE and moves to his "booth".*) Didn't know what I'd said to upset her so much. Hell! I was just makin' small talk. No harm in that. I went to my booth and put my coat over the valentine box. Maybe she wasn't feelin' too good. A long day maybe. Lotsa customers maybe.

(*JACKIE comes out of the "kitchen".*)

JASON. Jackie brought a Coke out for the dude in the corner... and brought me my pie and coffee. (*To JACKIE.*) Been workin' hard? (*JACKIE stops and turns to JASON.*) Where is everybody... out with their sweethearts I bet. Chili cleaned 'em all out, eh? (*Laughs. Pauses.*) Pie looks real good. (*Pause.*) I didn't mean nothin', Jackie.

JACKIE. Just leave the money on the counter.

JASON. Always do.

JACKIE. Yeah. Always do. (*JACKIE steadies herself at the table.*)

JASON. You feelin' OK, Jackie? (*To AUDIENCE.*) Them green fingernails kept movin'... but slower... like they didn't know where they was goin'. (*To JACKIE.*) Can I get ya' somethin'? (*Watching her.*) She shook her head and then opened her eyes... rubbed 'em with the back of her hand.

JACKIE. No business on the road tonight. Sent Clarence home early. To hell with 'em. They ain't hungry... I ain't stayin' open. Buncha loudmouths anyway. Get me this. Get me that. I ain't no slave.

JASON. Course you're not, Jackie. Hell, we all come here to see you. Sure as hell ain't Clarence's cookin'.

JACKIE. You makin' another crack?

JASON. No... honest... I ain't makin' a joke. *(To AUDIENCE.)* And then I just did it! I reached under my coat and pulled out the candy box. *(To JACKIE.)* Happy Valentine's Day, Jackie! *(Holding the valentine box out to JACKIE who just stares at it.)* It's got caramels... nuts... 'n things. Real good. *(Pause.)* Bought 'em in the best candy store in Odessa! *(To AUDIENCE.)* Thought that'd make her laugh. But it didn't. *(Looking at JACKIE.)* She looked at me for a long time... her eyes never leavin' mine. Then her fingers started flutterin' up around her face and then... *(JACKIE knocks the valentine box to the floor.)* she hit the box outa my hand! Just knocked it to the floor!

JACKIE. Who told you to come in here tonight anyway! I didn't ask for no... candy! You playin' some damn joke on me?

JASON. No.

JACKIE. What'd I ever do to you?

JASON. Nothin'! I mean...

JACKIE. All them six-packs. And the coffee... and the smiles. I work my ass off 'round here. Nobody makes jokes about me. *(JACKIE turns and exits into the "kitchen".)*

JASON *(watching her leave)*. The guy in the corner kept dippin' his fries into his ketchup. Never even looked up. I picked up the box and dusted it off and just sat there. I didn't know what was wrong. She was supposed to take the boxa chocolates and say 'Why... they're real pretty, Big Boy... and I love ya' for it.' I was gonna say, 'Be my Valentine, Jackie... forever and ever.' And she was gonna laugh... real big... and say 'For you it's always forever, Sweetie Pie.' *(Pause.)* And

maybe a kiss on my forehead. She didn't have to mean it. I wasn't serious... just havin' fun! Thought she'd be happy. (*Pause.*) I picked at my pie for a bit.

(*JACKIE comes out of the "kitchen" and moves to the "jukebox."*)

JASON. Then she came 'round the kitchen door and went to the jukebox. Dropped in all the quarters she had in her blouse pocket. Seemed like a dozen or more. (*A medley of Country 'n Western tunes softly plays in the background.*) 'On the road without ya' honey... Gee, I'm lonely... ain't it funny... I miss ya.' Crap like that! (*JACKIE exits into the "kitchen".*) After a coupla songs I got up to get my own refill. (*JASON rises and moves toward the "kitchen" but then stops.*) She was in the kitchen pacin' back 'n forth by the double freezer... slappin' her towel against the freezer door. Real hard! Like she was whippin' somebody. (*Pause.*) And she was cryin', too, real soft like. But I could tell. She didn't see me. (*Moving back to his "booth".*) The guy'd finished his cheeseburger and fries... kinda gulped it all down. Got up to pay but Jackie never came to the register. 'Just leave it on the counter,' I said. He just shrugged... left the money and went out the door. (*Pause.*) There was nobody left 'cept me and them damn songs. (*JASON rises and crosses to the "jukebox".*) I got up and went over to the jukebox and right in the middle of 'You're gonna love me forever 'til the day you...' (*Yanks the "cord". Music stops.*) I pulled the plug! I just pulled it right outta the socket! Well, hell... they wasn't the best boxa chocolates. But what the ... she weren't the best either. Damn! (*Pause.*)