

## Episode 5

(Distorted music playing)

Banquist: All right, quiz me again...

Bertolio: What is the number of the statute that gives the county the right to...

Banquist: Oh my god, I'm at wit's end! All these things to remember, all these graduated girls I have to compete with! I don't know if I can do it...oh god, I need to breathe...

Bertolio: Hey hey hey, it'll be all right. You'll get it, I know you will.

Banquist: I need this job. None of the other firms called back...mother no longer has enough money to help with rent.

Bertolio: I make enough! We don't live in a castle, but it's fine. You worry too much.

Banquist: And what if you lose your job?

Bertolio: Well...

Banquist: Quiz me again...

Bertolio: We've done enough work for one night. Banquist, maybe just breathe. It might do the trick. Sit in the chair with me, put on another story...

Banquist: My mother says you'll never go anywhere, Bertolio...

Bertolio: Why go anywhere! I like it right here, with you!

Banquist: And if we need money later on, if we plan on getting...

Bertolio: We have plenty of time....

(The radio station. Cooper, the station janitor, is making the rounds through the studio at night, whistling a jaunty tune)

Cooper: (whistling transitions to singing) Oh go look in the valley, go look in the sea. Go look on the mountain, you'll find no one like me! (laughs, and pauses to take a swig on a flask) Ahhh! Good stuff, good stuff...keeps me going through the night. Now, wait a second...if everyone's all gone home, why are all these drawers wide open? (Drops his mop and flask) There's a thief here, isn't there?

Eliza: Cooper? (Cooper jumps and yells, dropping his broom)

Cooper: Why...why....Miss. Eliza! What are you doing here so late?

Eliza: Late? What time is it?

Cooper: 12:52! How long have you been here?

Eliza: A while. I was writing a letter to Dwight Elkland...he's a California labor organizer...to see if he wanted to come on the show. But then I got sidetracked answering letters from listeners. That was at about...10 o'clock I think? I must have dozed off for a while. I haven't been able to keep up with all the mail these last couple of days.

Cooper: Since that one death defying episode you two put on! Let me know if you plan on doing this every night, you just about gave me the greatest start of my life!

Eliza: Cooper! You gotta be tougher than that. What happens if you see a thief in here late one night? You can bet they'll be scarier than me, whoever they are.

Cooper: Miss Eliza...I've worked here since you were in grade school, and not once during that entire time have I ever encountered a robber in this building!

Eliza: Well that's good luck then. But that might change with times being as bad as they are now. I hear stories of break-ins and thefts all the time since the Depression started.

Cooper: That's a good point. Well if that ends up being the case I figure the best course of action is to scream for help as loudly as possible. Do you think I could handle that?

Eliza: Yes, actually. My ears are still ringing.

Cooper: Fantastic! Glad to know you approve. Well, I need to finish up this floor. Are you planning on being here long?

Eliza: Yeah, I'll probably be here for a couple more hours. I've been buried in letters since last week. When do you usually finish up at night?

Cooper: Around 2, I'd say.

Eliza: Every night?

Cooper: Without fail.

Eliza: Oh Cooper.... All this work will kill you if you let it.

Cooper: I appreciate your concern but must respectfully decline. Working this way is what keeps me going. My body is strong, my mind is clear, and every night I get to go home with an unbeatable feeling of satisfaction. These are things that that retirement can't offer me. To hell with that!

Eliza: I'm sure your bosses love hearing that from you. At least go on a nice vacation for once! I know of a cabin in Quaker Hill, just east of Poughkeepsie. The rates are cheap, it's quiet....the meadows go on for miles....

Cooper: Sounds lovely. Well, perhaps someday, missy. But for now, I have my work, and my work has me (chuckles). Now how late do you plan on spending here? Are you gonna get a cot so you can sleep in this here studio?

Eliza: Not a bad idea honestly. I'll probably be here past two.

Cooper: All right then. I'll let you finish your work. Will Jacob be coming by to help you finish?

Eliza: (Pauses) No, I don't believe so. He hasn't helped with the mail, unfortunately. Haven't heard much from him at all outside of the show. He's busy, I think. He's been having meetings with people...for the future of the show he says.

Cooper: Ah, well. I won't intrude then.

Eliza: Don't worry about this room. There's still a broom in the closet, right?

Cooper: I do believe so.

Eliza: All right...I'll just give the place a good sweep-down before I leave.

Cooper: Then you're all set. Good night, Miss Eliza!

Eliza: Good night, Cooper! Say hi to your family for me!

Cooper: I will! (Exits, slamming the door behind him. Eliza returns to the desk, and resumes sifting through the mountain of letters presented before her)

Eliza: So much to read...so much to write. Have we really become this popular? (Picks up a letter)

“Dear Miss. Astor....I regularly listen to your fine radio program and am consistently impressed by your professionalism. Keep up the good work! Here’s hoping Wolfwhistle takes you places you never thought you could go. Sincerely, Martha Gilbert of Gilman, Iowa.”

Ah! That’s very sweet. (Takes a pen and a piece of paper) “Dear Mrs. Gilbert...I’m delighted to hear from you. Feedback from listeners is what makes the show worth all the work that goes into it. I hope that you continue to listen to Wolfwhistle, and I hope that neither I nor my co-workers disappoint you in our future endeavors. Best wishes, Eliza Astor.”

Here’s another:

“Dear Miss Astor....I just wanted to write and thank you as cordially as possible for the fantastic radio program you provide. Every week my family has made the broadcast of your show a special event. Since the death of my husband last year, I have had to work long and hard in the tire factory to make ends meet. Finances are tight, leisure time is limited, and the needs of my three boys are almost too much for me to handle. However, I can always count on your show to kindle a small flicker of hope in this dreadful time. You are truly an exceptional young woman, Miss Astor. If more people were as thoughtful, diligent, and caring as you, then maybe our country wouldn’t be in such a terrible mess. Sincerely, Cynthia Wilson of Bronxville, New York.” (puts the letter down and chuckles)

Eliza: You know, I’m not entirely sure I deserve this kind of treatment. Don’t get me wrong...every single time I read these letters I feel like hunting their writers down and kissing them on the lips but every single time I don’t know if the whole thing has any good purpose behind it. What’s so special about us, about me? We’re just sound, searching through the air. Urging others to do the great works we can only speak of. Anyone could do this job. Well... I suppose not, anyone. We do have a certain charm. What do you say to someone like this? You reached out to me because you needed something...

“Dear Miss Wilson: Thank you so much for your correspondence. Such generous comments from audience members everywhere are the lifeblood of this show, the reason my co-host and I bother get out of bed each morning.” Not specific enough. ‘Certain charm’? Perhaps not. (Pauses, contemplates) What do I say to...her? “But I also have to say that this one-sided exchange is unfair, the same way all one-sided exchanges are unfair. You slave away in an infernal factory, stowing away money so you can feed three young sons who have lost their father and now have only you as a source of financial support and parental love. You do all of this every day without thought of yourself, and yet, in spite of everything, you take the time to write a beautiful letter to an expendable radio host who runs the show you listen to in your spare time. It is you who should have the letters written to, Miss Wilson, you who should be thanked instead of me. Your strength and selflessness of character fill me with an assurance I haven’t felt in a long time. It’s easy to think that the world is dark and predatory, that at the end of the day we’re all out for ourselves. But then I read your letter and I realize that for every Jonathan Mura out

there that there are a hundred, a thousand silent saints who live their lives for others. You're an inspiration, Miss Wilson. Sincerely and with many thanks, Eliza Astor."

Eliza: (Yawns) I don't know how many more like that I can write. Maybe I should just pack it in and call it a night. Well, maybe I should just do them all now and suffer tomorrow morning (gets up from the desk). But if I do this, I can't do it without help. (Walks over to the other side of the desk, where she takes a coffee pot and pours herself a cup of coffee. She takes several sips, savors the coffee for a brief minute, and then returns to her chair.) Much better. 'Why yes, Jacob. I'd love it if you helped. This mountain of letters won't reply to itself after all.' I know you've been troubled by all this pressure, but...I can help you with it. If only you came by...I can't get distracted. Hopefully the rest of these will be easier. (Takes another letter)

"Dear Wolfwhistle Lady..." No. (sets the letter aside. Picks up another letter)

"Dear Eliza....(pauses, yawns, sets the letter down)

I just can't do all this. Coffee isn't working...I'm still tired. Christ, look at the size of that stack! I could be in here for the rest of the night! And with no one to help...(pauses) You view these people as a burden, but you don't need to. Everything we talked about when we were younger...we've finally lit the match! The fire started, our voices heard! And that's when you decide to close yourself off from me for good. (Sighs) I hope someday, when we've found some others to take this show from us, this mantle...then we can rest easy. But I bet you'll be completely gone by then. (Eliza takes another letter and begins to read).

"Dear Eliza..." Eliza? "My name is Mary Wilder. I am in 5th grade. I live on a farm in Sawyer, Kansas with my parents and brothers." Sawyer? What are the chances... "You've probably never heard of Sawyer, and that's because it's a town of only about 100 people. We have a general store but not much else—I like to go there after school with my friends and play hopscotch and look at the nickelodeons and buy taffy from Mr. Robertson. But that gets old. When I'm done with that I walk back to my house and help my mother make supper for my father and brothers as they come out of the fields. When I'm done I help clean up, then read my books for school and get ready for bed. It's kind of boring. But last year my dad drove all the way to Wichita, and when he came back, he had a huge radio with huge dials. Now I use it to listen to your show before I go to bed. I love your show, Miss Eliza. My dad says the people you talk to do bad things to other people, but you tell everyone about it and make it all right again. I would love to do that someday. Maybe not as a radio host, cuz I have a squeaky voice and I won't sound very intimidating, but maybe as like a senator or something. I know I can do it...I get really good grades and study hard all the time. There are a lot of bad people in the world, Miss Eliza. I think everyone should do what they can to help fight against them. So, I was wondering if you could tell me what you have to do to be like you and fight against the bad people. I'll do everything I can to be like you. I'll even help you if I can, fighting against the bad people the way you do. Sincerely, Mary Wilder of Sawyer, Kansas."

Eliza: Is it possible? Cutting through the static of all my problems....someone just like me, down to the bone. When I was a girl, four feet tall and very freckly, I often wondered how all the crazy dreams I was spoiling myself with would play out. Journalism's a tough game to break into, my dad said, and you're, well....there aren't many farm girls from Kansas in journalism. But radio...radio is universal...it connects us as closely as if we were in the same room. It's what allows someone fifteen hundred miles away to dream the same way I did when I was her age, the same way it put us both into a correspondence that wouldn't have happened otherwise. That's what I've tried to tell people through this show. And it turns out they listen, in droves. Now there's a little girl telling me at 1:00 in the morning that I inspired her, and that she needs my help becoming the champion I think everyone's got inside. So, for now, I forget everything else.

"Dear Miss Wilder...This is Eliza Astor, and I would just like to say that I am thrilled to hear from someone as intelligent and passionate as you. I would also like to say that, surprisingly, I have heard of Sawyer, Kansas. In fact, I lived just a stone's throw away. Have you heard of St. John, the head of Stafford County just north of you? I grew up there in a nice yellow farmhouse that's probably boarded up and termite ridden by this point in time. Yes, I grew up in St. John's, but for my money I'd say the majority of my childhood was spent in Sawyer, Kansas—every week or so my dad would take me down there so he could visit his friends and I could play with their children. Does Sawyer still have that tall red water tower poking out of the town center? And what about that big grain elevator off Center Street? I get ahead of myself...you probably didn't write to hear about my childhood, so I'll get down to business. Now, if you want to get into politics, I'm afraid I can't be of much help. However, I can give you some basic life lessons I've learned that I think will help you whatever you decide to do."

"First off, and do take note: always be sure to associate with the right people. I'm sure your mother and father will tell you this when you get a little older, but it's a lesson that you can't be too young to learn. The world is filled with billions of people, and within those people there are types into which they are all organized. You know already that there are young people and old people, and so forth. But the most important distinctions are not readily obvious. There are people who care about fighting the injustice in the world, and then there are those who would rather dig themselves into a comfortable little hole and pretend there isn't a storm raging outside. Find people like you...those who share your beliefs, your convictions, your sense of what is right in the world. They will strengthen you and you will strengthen them. Fall in with those who are apathetic, however, and you will follow them into ruin.

"Second, always listen. You know how to do this, obviously...just stand there with your ears open and you can hear the distant train whistles or the sound of wind moving through the plain. But to hear something and understand it, especially when that something is the confidence of another person, is a very difficult thing to do. Many people, in fact, never learn to do this...and so they go through life alone for their refusal to recognize the humanity of others. When someone comes to you crying and in need of a shoulder you should give it to them...when they start talking about their woes you should know that you're likely to share them somewhere down the road. Your undivided attention is the greatest gift you can give someone. Learn to be generous with it, and you will have many genuine friends all through your life.

“Third, and I would definitely read close now, because for my money this is the most important one of all--never feel too dejected for long. It’s impossible to imagine what sort of problems you’ll run into in the future, and it’s even harder to know how you should prepare. But rest assured you will encounter nights that go on for weeks at a time...great black pits in your life when you’ll just want to throw your head on your pillow and cry until you go to sleep for good. When I was your age I felt this way a lot, actually. Being an idealist and a girl in a town that only believed in men and barn dances was as lonely as being a tree in a field. One night it became too much, so I decided to leave for good. Packed up some food and clothes and struck out on the road late one spring night, no intention of ever turning around again. I had no idea where I was going; east, somewhere...it really didn’t matter where. I had family in Lawrence but it’d take a year to walk that far. So out I went. Venturing out into the night like that was the most terrifying thing I had ever done. As soon as I was down the road from my front porch the night swallowed me; I could see bits of farm light in the distance like corn chips for the first leg of the journey, but after I passed the county line even those became useless and obscure. It didn’t take long for me to realize east or west had past a certain point become irrelevant, maybe four miles ago, maybe ten. I was obliterated that night.

(Eliza pauses, and takes a deep breath). “And believe me, in those darkest moments, I wanted nothing more than to turn around, to go back to the home I hated, and have someone throw their arms around me and make me warm. Someone special, someone strong. I was so scared at first. I truly believed that I had died of frostbite and was now wandering through the afterlife—a lonely little ghost, silent, unsure. And yet slowly, gently, unafraid, as well.” (pauses) Should I be telling this to a fifth grader? “Being lost in the night is not the worst thing that can happen to you, Mary—believe me, I’ve tried. Once you’ve gone over that crest where you know you can’t go back you feel your soul start to hum, and when it’s done, everything from your life before is just a curious recollection. Everything you feared and hated in life is displayed before you like glass exhibit cases in a museum—you can reach out and touch them, and feel nothing at all. My fear died then and there. Part of me was angry when the sun came up over the hills; I was just starting to get used to the idea of being some formless wraith in the night. I snuck into a farm nestled by a quarry lake and I slept in the barn loft with only the cows knowing I was there. In the morning I convinced the family to take me to Lawrence; from there, it wasn’t that hard of a struggle to get my aunt and uncle to take me in. My family knew I had been depressed in St. John—to this day in my letters I try to let them know it wasn’t their fault, that I was simply following where my heart was leading me. To keep moving forward, so that when I die, I’ll look back at the museum of my soul and my life and be as happy and peaceful as I was that freezing night.

“The point, Mary, is that you’re never truly lost. If you keep your eyes open and your feet moving you’ll pull through no matter what, always a little stronger than you were before. We’ve a lot more in common than you might think. I can’t wait to see what you’ll go on to do, Mary. I know that someone as talented as you will succeed at any career they choose (also, I wouldn’t write off radio just yet. You’ll be amazed at how forceful you’ll sound someday) Best of luck in everything. Sincerely, Eliza Astor.”

(Eliza holds the letter for a moment, then sets it down. Then, with a rustle of paper, she takes up a new letter to read)



(More distorted whistling. Radio static hisses alongside)

Penny Calvary: Oh Cliff...I never really knew what it was like to be in love till I met you!

Cliff: Me neither, Penny. Once we marry, and once you sign that deed to your family's land, we can raise a family there and be happy. Now run along and buy the best wedding dress in the catalogue! It's going to be the best day of our lives.

Penny: Of course! Oh, I can't wait! (Gets up and leaves)

Cliff: Ah, the pretty little idiot! Once she signs that deed, all her father's land, and all that oil, belongs to me! I'll be the richest man in Texas by next week! (laughs) As long as that brother of hers doesn't get in my way...

Announcer: Keep your hats for a mongo cliffhanger, folks! Last week's episode of The Calamitous Calvaries saw Penny Calvary and Cliff Coldriver planning to elope on the day of Grace Calvary's wedding. But Old Man Donald's eldest son Billy has returned from the Great War, and won't take kindly to any ruffians getting near his youngest sister. Will the lovers' plan succeed? Stay tuned and find out.

Mr. M: This studio will work quite well for our purpose. We must get to work immediately. Bring me the names of the maintenance staff. And be discrete, as always. We're going to make some improvements to this room. (pause) Our little experiment will be very informative..