

End of Act I

Act II

Episode 3

(An orchestral interlude. There is the diffuse roar of a crowd, as if packed into a theater)

Bertolio: I can't believe it! Everything you said was true! How is this place real?

Banquist: The cream of the crop come right here. Why they could mistake us for a king and queen!

Bertolio: How much did these tickets cost?

Banquist: We'll worry about that later. Right now, there's only tonight. There's only us.

(The crowd breaks out clapping, as if performers were coming on stage. The clapping is broken up by distortion and static)

(The Wolfwhistle siren sounds, as if the show is beginning. The whistle then veers off pitch, as if whoever was producing it was suddenly and violently struck).

Grotius: Woah, woah, not so fast! I think we've all had enough of that for now!

(The whistle responds with a sharp up pitch squeak, as if in questioning).

Grotius: Oh, don't give me that! And don't give these folks that, either! They're certainly sicker of it than I am!

(The whistle then plunges down, crestfallen).

Grotius: Live with it, squeaky. Be sure to shut the door on your way out.

(The whistle trails away like a distant hum, moving slowly away from its position, before suddenly 'tripping' over something with a wild squeal and a comic cymbal crash.)

Grotius: And stay out! Good riddance to you, ya puffed-up pile of pretension. Your time and place was two hours ago. Your crowd has since gone to four-post bed, smoked out on their Cuban cigars. The only people awake now are those hungry for that earthy realism that only Grotius the Great can provide. And provide it he will, folks, because I've got a whopper of a show headed your way. It's.....GROTIUS!

(Snare drum roll. Scattered applause and isolated cheers salute the show's opening)

Grotius: Thank you, thank you, you're all too kind...except you. You could use some work. All right, folks...ready to get this show on the road?

(Indistinct muffling)

Grotius: That's what I thought. Good to be back! Good to be back...(Grotius paces around the studio) How's that old chestnut go? 'I just flew in from Philly, and boy are my wings tired.' Wings! Get it! Take my wife, please! (The crowd laughs, mockingly) Don't actually laugh at that garbage! You wicked westerners, how many of there are you? The regulars, of course. From union halls and car parks, butcher shops and boiler rooms. Even a few worker bees of the radio station itself, kind enough to join me as a chorus in the studio! The dust accumulating under humanity's radio, all gathered here for a smoke break. Just as it's always been...You folks want a show? (The crowd cheers) You folks want a show? (The crowd cheers louder) YOU FOLKS WANT A SHOW? (The crowd goes crazy, hooting and whistling and cheering) That guy has the right idea. We have to be quick about it. You know they kick me out of here at 1am sharp, every single night? It's true! There's another bit they have to make time for. A late night cowboy soap. Midnight train conductors and security guards in Billings, Montana need radio too! It's all right, I don't mind. I'm used to it. Where do I sleep? The janitor closet floor can be surprisingly comfortable. Beats paying rent.

(A voice from off stage) Hey Groty!

Grotius: What? (The assistant manager, a young woman, enters)

Assistant Manager: Hate to rain on your parade, Grotty, but we're gonna need the floor earlier. 12:45, you gotta be packed and out. Boss's orders.

Grotius: Packed up by 12:45? Are they buying up my slot too?

Assistant Manager: They might be. They have some prop they have to set up for their show, a big wooden thingamajig they plan on tearing down in front of the microphones. Look, I don't give the orders, I just relay em. From the big boss himself, the one who always stamps his letters with a little owl. He's gonna have a new schedule for you soon, the letter said.

Grotius: You know I'm on air right now? There are people listening to this as we speak. You couldn't have given me this memo before the show started?

Assistant Manager: Can't be helped! I give the orders as soon as I get them. Your fans will be fine, if they're up this late I don't think they're extra busy. I'll be back closer to the hour. Don't dawdle, Grotty!

Grotius: Can you believe this? The uncommunicativeness. The disdain! I thought I left the circus years ago! It's all right, though. I knew this might happen, and I'm prepared. I just want to say, I'm glad to be back. I really am. For those of you who don't know, I went all the way to Paris for vacation last week. I know, right? Even me they let out of the cage every once in a while. Traveling across that ocean...jeez, I thought I had died and been reborn. No one on the boat knew who I was. I wore a nice double breasted wool suit, ate buttered salmon, smoked Peter Stokkebye tobacco, read the Atlantic. I could have been a Rockefeller for all they knew. When I got to Paris I stayed in a hostel by the Seine. I ate pork shank and beef bourguignon with onion sauce and port wine. Pretty young students rode by on bicycles and waved. At me! The same shmuck who can barely get a waiter at his favorite bar. At night I walked the banks of the river, just as all the lights were going up; old folks took off their caps and said how-do. It seemed like they had all been waiting for me to come there. The whole city all in white, oily lights on the dark waters, the cream of the crop saying 'How-do' to me...me....jeez, let me tell you. The whole world was art back then. Then I come back here, and I immediately get screamed at by a cab driver. Squealing pistons and dirty streets and a cramped bedroom with no one in it but me. And now they're kicking me out early so they can play with their Lincoln logs? Well no more. Tonight is special! Just to let you folks know in advance, tonight's gonna be a little different from the others. Tonight, we're gonna give a little credit where credit is due. No, I don't mean me. I'm of course talking about Henry Challenger, my best

friend and companion for many years! Give him a hand, folks! It's his third anniversary on my show and it deserves to be celebrated!

(Several members of the audience clap and howl in reply. Henry chuckles)

Henry: Oh geez...huh uh....yer too kind (hiccups).Thanks you all very much, everybody. I coulda'n'done it without yous...

Grotius: Yes, yes, that's very nice, they all love you too Henry. Now (slaps his hand on the desk)...to business. Henry, if you could have anything in the world, what would it be?

Henry: Well, uh...let me think. (Pauses) Uh....an end to all these good folks' money troubles?

(Several members of the audience begin to cheer. Grotius growls)

Grotius: Ok, very good, I'm sure FDR would be proud. But what would YOU want most in the world, Henry?) Think...about...you....

Henry: Uh...well, I guess a....a....a lot of money at a bar sounds kinda good right now...(chuckles).

Grotius: Yes! Very good, Henry! And guess what? That's exactly what you're gonna get! A paid expenses, charge-free tab at a high-class Midtown bar! Whaddya think, folks? Pretty generous?

(Cheers flare up)

Henry: Gosh, Groty...that's real nice of ya. How can I ever repay?

Grotius: No need, kind and noble friend. You've given me enough in these past three years to last several life times. Don't waste time, Henry! Your prize awaits! Leave the studio and take the train and go to West 52nd Street. Follow it west, until you reach a bar called the Elysian Fields. Go in and tell em proudly who ya are. Remember, time is of the essence! Get there as fast as you can!

Henry: (excitedly) Uh, right, Groty! I'll go now! (stands up from his chair) Thank you very much, Groty! You're very kind! (Dashes off and exits the studio)

Grotius: (rising from his desk) Atta boy, Henry! Go get em tiger. (Goes silent. The sound of Henry's footsteps grows fainter and fainter, until a door slam is heard and they disappear completely) AND STAY OUT!

(The audience gasps)

Grotius: What? I told you tonight was gonna be different. That's right...I'm shaking things up for good. You see...I've always fashioned myself to be a champion of the common man...the kind of radio host you'd buy a drink for if you met him on the street and somehow knew what he looked like. But then, I realized, my older, smarter brother Wolfwhistle has been raking in some serious time share for quite a while now. Why? Cuz they cater to the crowds with class...the people the rest of you shmucks work for when you're not hanging on to my every word. So, I figured, why not try that approach? Follow in their footsteps...become a radio host of intellectual legitimacy and have salad with my steak every night of the year. I didn't waste time...I decided to get rid of that bum Henry Challenger and lined up some real characters for tonight.

(A series of angry boos and yells is heard from the audience)

Grotius: That's right! Henry Challenger is no more. Ya honestly think I'd keep that pook around forever? That two-timin, one-track boozing bozo was the absolute epitome of my show's disreputable stature. Yeah, you're getting angry? Course you would! You all love him cuz you're the same type! More shots in a night than books in a life, am I right? Well forget about all of it! I'm scrapping Henry, and I'm scrapping you! I'm bringing on serious cultural heavyweights and making my shot for the title. That's right, everyone...Grotius the Great is officially a member of the cultural elite!

(Comic rimshot)

Grotius: Very funny. You don't believe me? I'll count em off. First, we have Lesley Torrence, a Princeton professor of fine art, here to discuss a number of gallery works he's recently reviewed. Second, we have Arnold Shaun, an esteemed British diplomat who'd love to explain to you the inner workings of international relations. And last but certainly not least, we have the one and only Alex Vallance, Secretary of the Treasury and financial guru supreme. That's right, everyone. This show's days as an airwave monkey house are over. Now, as some of you have already figured, these guests of mine aren't from around. They're from respectable places, places of culture and learning...places that'll take the

train a long time to reach. So, while we're waiting for them to arrive....(A few tense seconds pass in total silence).

(A man enters with long, dignified footsteps. Grotius springs up in his seat)

Grotius: That must be him right now. Hello professor, good to have you on...

(Then, without speaking a word, the man slaps down a small piece of paper in front of Grotius and walks away)

Grotius: Um...I guess that wasn't him. He left a note. Ahem...'I regret to inform you that an unfortunate and unmentionable reversal of circumstances has rendered Professor Torrence incapable of executing his contractually pre-arranged duty on your show...' Ah, ta hell with it! Well, that's a professor for you. He probably just got weak in the knees. These book types.... But that's okay, folks. We got more where that should've come from.

(Another set of footsteps enter)

Grotius: Mr. Shaun?

Man: His emissary. I bring a missive: Mr. Shaun will not be able to appear on your show tonight. He is currently entangled with extraneous commitments...commitments of an importance exceeding any obligations he made with your show.

Grotius: And what the hell does that mean? He's too good for me?

Man: Well...(pauses)....yes. He is too good for you. He has better things to do than waste time on an airwave monkey house (leaves quickly and curtly).

Grotius: Talked off to by a diplomat's diplomat. At least he had enough stones to give me the shakedown in person. Well, that's all right, everyone. There's always Alex Vallance. You know, truth be told, with our economy in the toilet right now, I figured he'd be the most interesting speaker. (Chuckles) Guess he's the winner by default, huh? Huh...yeah, right.

(A beautiful young woman enters. Her entrance is greeted by a series of whoops and catcalls from the audience)

Grotius: Well well well....finally, things are looking...up....for once. And who would you be, honey cakes? Vallance's secretary? His wife? Mistress? Personal or professional acquaintance who just so happens to be the most beautiful thing I've ever laid eyes on? Spill the beans, sugar. I already know....Alex doesn't want to appear....he's too cultured and high-brow to show up in a monkey house. We've all heard it before. Still....he's certainly got better taste in messengers than the last guy...

Alex: Well, not quite. I actually happen to be Alex Vallance. And I thought it would be most political to announce my contractual termination in person.

(A series of cheers from the audience)

Grotius: (Puffing) Well...um....uh....do you have like, a note, or something? Something to make it official?

Alex: In a way, I suppose I do. (Slaps Grotius full on in the face, then saunters off. The audience goes wild with laughter and applause.)

Grotius: Ow...that kind of hurt. Huh. Well...I guess that's it. All three of my guests backed out, and all for the same reason. (Tenses, then begins to rummage excitedly through his desk) But wait...I just remembered. Don't worry, folks...this show is still on...(unearths a document from the desk) Here burning is the candle of remotest hope, ladies and gentlemen...the last line of defense my show has to offer. Here, dated and signed, from my correspondence with the hosts themselves, is a letter that presents an amazing possibility...the possibility that Eliza Astor and Jacob DeGrim of Wolfwhistle might be visiting my show. No, it's not a guarantee, and no, I don't think it'll happen either. But maybe, just maybe, my hope will finally be rewarded. I guess there's nothing we can do but wait, folks...our breaths held, and our spirits high....

(Silence, as Grotius waits in rapt attention. Somewhere off in the distance, the sound of a door opening is heard. A series of footsteps approaching the stage become audible).

Grotius: (Reverent) Could it be them?

(The footsteps stop. Grotius inhales, his excitement reaching a peak. Then...)

Henry: Hey, Groty! I think you gave me the wrong address!

Grotius: WHAT? HENRY? Wha...what....what are you doing here?

Henry: I don't know. I went to dat place ya told me bout, but it weren't there. I think it might be on anotha street.

Grotius: I don't even...how did you get back so fast? Can you fly all of a sudden? Goddamn it! There I was, folks...THERE I WAS! Thinking I had a shot. And what did I have? A shot guzzler! Goddamn it all! (Kicks the desk in rage. Then, defeated and destroyed, he sinks into his chair and sobs)

Henry: Gee, Groty...I knows you're upset I didn't get my anniversary present, but don't take it too hard. I mean, there's always another one, right?

Grotius: Another what, Henry?

Henry: Ya know...another anniversary. Sure, you might have to wait around for a while...like, maybe another year or something, but it's gonna come around. And when it comes around, oh boy...what a celebration it'll be, Groty.

Grotius: I don't know about that. Did you know that in addition to being legendarily thick, you're also useless?

Henry: Not in particular. I think if ya listened to what I'm sayin, I'd be pretty handy.

Grotius: All right...so in another year or so I'll have another chance. Thank god. Oh well...I don't know what else I should expect from you. (Pauses, and takes a moment to brood). I don't know what to expect from anyone anymore. I was thinking I'd try my hand at playing something other than the stiff, the funny guy, the knockaround who plays second fiddle to the A-listers. Maybe that wasn't meant for me....or, maybe it was. Maybe you're right, Henry. Maybe everyone gets a shot these days, and maybe that

includes me. Someday I'll get my time in the limelight. Then, all eyes will be watching. Until then...until then. All right, folks...we're going to break. You don't go anywhere on me...we'll be right back.

(An anachronistic piece of electronic music plays, like an Olympic anthem)

Announcer: And now an experimental composition by two young German men named Rolf Hutter and Florian Schneider. This piece is Europa herself, the journey of modernity and progress on reason's rails, bringing wealth and glory for all the continent and her children. Over the Alps, across the fields, over the ocean, straight to your living rooms. New York City, we are all aboard this train together. (The music fades out)

(A cold wind blows. Footsteps, as Jacob walks home. He stops in his tracks)

Jacob: Who are you?

Mr. M: (walks towards him) It doesn't matter.

Jacob: Are you gonna let me go home, or..

Mr. M: We need to talk.

Jacob: Do we now? What do you want? Money, a subway ticket, your store advertised on the show?

Mr. M: I want what's best for you Jacob. You've stepped over a threshold, one from which you cannot return. You know this to be true...

Jacob: I think you've mistaken me for someone else, pal...

Mr. M: If you want to preserve your show, you will meet me at the Longfellow Club at this hour in exactly one week. Think well on your future, Jacob. You know where she'll lead you if nothing is done. Think well. And perish the thought, take nothing for granted... (the cold wind builds to a howl, and is joined by a mad flapping of wings)