

Episode 10:

(The radio studio once more)

Eliza: The clock ticks, and only ten minutes remain till the doors open and death comes bearing down. But we still have time, ladies and gentlemen...knowing exactly how many seconds you have left is a luxury no one else enjoys. So I intend to take advantage. I intend to sit here and speak until my lungs shrivel and my tongue falls out—those of you still listening will hear me speak until I die. I don't know why you're not calling the police, ladies and gentlemen. Maybe you're too scared. Maybe you're confused. Maybe you're up to your necks in apathy and can't muster the caring to lift the phone and save our lives. But I implore you, with my heart of hearts, to act, break yourselves free from your lack of concern, and save us! (slumps down, exhausted)

Jacob: (blankly) Huh...

Eliza: What more can I do? What more can I say?

Jacob: I really don't know.

Eliza: Goddamn it...(pause)

Jacob: (finally speaking) You know, this reminds me of a dream I had not too long ago. I dreamt I was in a cold laboratory deep underground, and that I was bearing witness to an operation. A surgeon took a small dog barely larger than a puppy, and set him on a cold metal sheet. One by one, methodical as a clock ticking the seconds away, he removed the dog's limbs with a large metal knife. Chop. Chop. Chop. The dog didn't make a sound...not even a yelp. It looked up at me, with its big round eyes, and began to twitch. Slowly at first, but then quicker...side to side, as if it was trying to move in spite of its lack of limbs. I stood and watched. It rocked like a worm of madness in its bloody pan, rebelling, stupidly, impotently rebelling against death...and all throughout it would not look away. Now...do you think this bears any parable to our situation?

Eliza: What do you want me to do, Jacob? Give up completely? There are people out there who are gonna listen. Even if you hate the thought of that, at least pretend to believe in it, for my sake. For just ten more minutes...

Jacob: I will do no such thing. I won't give them that satisfaction.

Eliza: What does that even mean?

Jacob: No one is coming. The sooner we accept that the sooner we can sit back and die with some dignity.

Eliza: That's not true.

Jacob: You waste your breath on abstractions, and yet there are only two truths I am aware of: he is dead and those doors are still closed. I think it's safe to say we've been tuned out.

Eliza: (hurt) Jacob, stop it...

Jacob: (grabs his microphone, and smashes it against the wall) No one is coming. No one is listening. There is nothing here but us and the door and that damned clock on that desk where for years we've been peddling the stuff that now's the cause of our death. There's nothing special about us, Eliza. Nothing we can say or do can convince mercy from them. They have no mercy. They don't even care.

Eliza: (crying) Jesus, Jacob...everything I've felt for you is turning to hate and I don't even know why. What happened to you?

Jacob: This did! This clock's been ticking for more than an hour, believe me. And now we're almost through. Ten minutes. Don't need to wait much longer.

Eliza: There's still time...

Jacob: Don't delude yourself. Just break that microphone and let us both die quietly. Don't give them the satisfaction of knowing that they kept you hoping till the end.

Eliza: (calming her tears) And I won't give you the satisfaction of ruining me. I respect your choice to wallow in despair, Jacob DeGrim, but try and force the same desolation on me and I'll bash you till my hands are broken, and bite until my teeth are gone. With all I am, whatever I am, I will oppose you, now till the door opens and beyond (picks up the microphone, and walks around the desks. In a peaceful voice..) Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to remind you that, with ten minutes left, nothing has changed. The door remains closed, my co-host remains hopeless, and I remain convinced that some common good amongst you will manifest in the last moments of our darkest hour. As time goes by this hope seems increasingly unrealistic, but this only serves to remind me of the importance of trust, of humanity, truth, everything. I pray you believe in us as strongly as we believe in you. Thomas Keering, Joe Waterdale, Amy Roarke, Martha Gilbert, Cynthia Wilson, Mary Wilder of Sawyer, Kansas! If this show and everything it stands for mean anything to you, for the love of God prove it to us now!

Jacob: What is this? Some pep talk? Give me that! (tries to snatch Eliza's microphone)

Eliza: No!

Jacob: I've got some pep talk of my own. Hear this, everyone! We got some things to straighten out before I go!

(The living room of Bertolio and Banquist. Banquist is sobbing)

Banquist: (mockingly, through her sobs) Oh thank you, Mr. Whitmore! You look fantastic as well. What's that? A promotion? I'd have to think....yes, I'd gladly accept. I won't let you down. It's over, Bertolio. Whitmore phoned me, regretfully informing that dinner is canceled, since his meeting with this owl company fellow was so important. So no more promotion! And he said their meeting was about 'department consolidations'. Department consolidations! I don't even know if I'll have a job on Monday. (her grief turning to anger) I go into work every day on time, looking nice and acting well. I do everything that's asked of me, sometimes even more. Is it so wrong of me to want a better station? I break my back at that place. I even play along with Whitmore's...disgusting games...just so I can help come up with the rent for this shithole. Of course I want a better job and a higher wage...

Bertolio: Banquist...Banquist...

Banquist: I know what's going on. When I go back into work Monday morning and get a pink letter I'm gonna stab Whitmore in his lizard throat. That's right. I'm going to kill a man. No, not a man. A tapeworm. A great ugly walking, condescending tapeworm! How does that sound?

Bertolio: (slowly, confidently) Banquist, I've made up my mind. I'm calling the police.

Banquist: (laughs maniacally) This has to be a joke. Please tell me you're joking. THIS CANNOT ACTUALLY BE REAL.

Bertolio: I made up my mind. We have to do it.

Banquist: IT'S JUST A SHOW. IT'S JUST A FUCKING SHOW.

Bertolio: NOT TONIGHT. THIS IS REAL. I'M GOING TO CALL THE POLICE AND THAT'S FINAL. NOW WHERE'S THE PHONE?

Banquist: Where it always is. What changed, Bertolio? Something really has come over you.

Bertolio: Yes, something has. I'm going to start acting like I should have a long time ago. What if it was you trapped in that radio station, Banquist? I need to act...

Banquist: And you have this change of heart over a radio show? There are so much more important things to worry about...

Bertolio: Oh don't give me that! You've been groaning about the Whitmores all night!

Banquist: And so what if I have? It's not just a bad deal for me. Now that the promotion is shot to hell, we won't have the money we need to break out of this rat hole. Is that lost on you? Maybe if I broadcasted that over the goddamned radio I could actually get you to listen.

Bertolio: I don't have time for this...I need the phone.

Banquist: Oh no you don't. You're not touching a thing before we have this sorted out.

Bertolio: What is there to sort out? You didn't get the job, and that's that! This is something bigger than just us. I'm not going to sit back anymore....I'm finally going to do something. Now move aside...

Banquist: This isn't just about you and your goddamned nonexistent radio hosts. I want you to live the life we say we share...feel our ups and downs and dramas...

Bertolio: They're not nonexistent! That's the point! I need to help them now!

Banquist: Quit worrying about them! (pleading) Worry about me! (through tears) I need you now! I'm here, in front of you, and I need you. I have flesh and blood and substance...

Bertolio: Not now...

Banquist: Stop! Don't go in there!

Bertolio: Move it, Banquist!

Banquist: (her pleading turning to fury) Go to hell Bertolio!

Bertolio: Get out of my way!

(Their fight is suddenly cut short by the sudden blare of radio static)

Jacob: I've got a pep talk of my own. Hear this, everyone! We got some things to straighten out before I go!

(The Wolfwhistle studio)

Jacob: So here we are at last...the final hour. I should have known from the beginning that we'd all end up here. Yes, it is true, as she said, you are all out there, and you're listening to what must undoubtedly be an entertaining spectacle. But where she would consider you righteous, I would consider myself

more well-informed. For years now I've been sitting here and preaching to all of you about the important things... how you should be righteous, how you should be hard-working citizens who treat each other with dignity and respect. And yet...here we are. I was an idiot. I was an idiot to think you would listen to a word I said, and I was an idiot to think things could ever change. An idiot! Wasted words, all of them (pauses). You know what? I take it back. I take back everything I ever said! Whatever I've so pompously taught you in my misinformed days as a fountain of nonsense I want you now to twist in the other direction. Lie, steal from another. Kill and enslave, show no mercy or remorse! Everything's the same it's been since the beginning of time, you naked apes of war! Everything! Fighting, fucking, walking about on your knuckles. Tarding up your apple-cheeked daughters so they can bring more ugly little soldiers into this godforsaken world. You want to kill me? You don't need me...you wouldn't listen if you kept me alive. (Hysterical by this point) I don't even want to be kept alive in this broken world. I did all I could. I tried to be righteous. I warned you, with all my waking might, to be wary of injustice. But did you listen? Did you even bother to care? Sheep to your dark shepherds you followed them instead of me, and now I stand here, alone, about to die, hateful and bitter and glad, I said glad! It's about to be over for good. Enjoy this show then! Have a good laugh, and go to your dreamless beds contented, at least for a while. Soon it'll be you they come for. And when they do.... I'm glad I'm not going to stay to see any of this. I go willingly, without regrets. I lived hard and fast and I will die much richer than any of you soup-sipping bums. Now, if you monkeys would be so charitable, I have some final requests concerning my estate. I would like my toilet to go to the Secretary of the Treasury, my collection of dirty magazines to go to the Pope in Rome, and the blood-flecked razor I use to shave to go to whatever random hobo it hits when you throw it out of my apartment window. Oh, you're laughing? I'm sorry but there's not much else I have to entrust. I want the rest to be piled onto a long wooden boat bought with my considerable fortune and burnt to cinders, with my body placed on top as to prevent future defacement. God knows what iniquities you'll visit upon my carcass in order to slake your disgusting thirsts.

(Jacob smashes the microphone to the ground)

Jacob: Well, folks, that about sums it up. I plan to go away now, with the rope of my radio comrade, before they can come in and force death upon me. I would just like to say that I hate all of you, and I've loved every minute of it. Also, some good news. I have just received a visitation from Satan. Old Scratch, God bless him, has informed me that he has carved out a special chasm of hell exclusively for my residence. This, ladies and gentlemen, delights me infinitely. Though I am confident none of you have souls to damn, the thought of boarding with you in the afterlife disturbs me to no end. But, fortunately, I will spend my eternity alone, and I wouldn't have it any other way. Good night, ladies and gentlemen. Hell shall be like heaven knowing I won't have to share it with thee.

(Distorted music and radio static. Then, a pre-recording of Jacob plays...)

Jacob: Good evening, everyone. I hope this show hasn't been too hard on the nerves! We're first and foremost a source of entertainment—and what can be more entertaining than a thrill ride such as this? But take a deep breath and a fine draught...we are here to help you come back to reality. Everything shown here was just a glimpse of possibility. We hope that this show has given you plenty to think about, and what's more, we hope it's been fun to hear. Good night, 20th century. We here at Wolfwhistle, thank you for your time.

(The living room of Bertolio and Banquist)

Bertolio: I...I....what?

Banquist: (slowly) I know... can't you see?

Bertolio: Was it all just....

Banquist: A stunt. A fabrication. An act. Oh Bertolio...can't you see it now? It was all just a farce, an exercise to run absolute trash like that and still have poor folks like you listen.

Bertolio: But it's just that...it seemed so real....

Banquist: That's what actors do, Bertolio. They make it real. When you look at their faces or hear their voices over the air you'd swear they were in love, or in danger. But that's only an illusion. They're shape shifters. They take any form their script desires.

Bertolio: I know. I feel like that now...

Banquist: Don't you see how foolish this whole thing is?

Bertolio: Yes, yes, I know...it was so realistic earlier.

Banquist: But what is it now?

Bertolio: Completely unrealistic. Completely unbelievable. Another selfish radio host trying to sound important. You were right. Banquist... I'm sorry...

Banquist: Oh god...

Bertolio: Please forgive me, I didn't mean to be like that!

Banquist: Oh Bertolio... I'm sorry about everything.

Bertolio: No, don't be sorry. It was me. I was being stupid. I acted hideously...

Banquist: No! (suddenly hushes Bertolio. They passionately kiss) I'm so sorry, Bertolio. I've been horrid all night long. I really don't mean to be, but it's just that...well, everything takes its toll on me, ya know? The Whitmores, the promotion, our financial situation. It doesn't make anything better the way my mother talks about how I live here with you...but I don't care about her anymore. Ohh, if I lost my job though, I won't even know until Monday...

Bertolio: It's gonna be fine. We'll get through this together. Even if you have to find a job somewhere else...we'll do it. I'll take classes, study for a better position, work weekends if I have to, until we figure it out. I do care about you, Banquist...I cared when you were worrying about the Whitmores not showing up. I just got...carried away, thinking about that show the way I did. I know things have been rough lately....

Banquist: But we'll get by....together. Right?

Bertolio: Of course we will.

Banquist: Oh Bertolio...you're just too...trusting. That's how people like them can fool you. Oh well...it's not your fault. You have such a good heart.

Bertolio: You look tired.

Banquist: You're right. Goddamn it...I'm so worn out by everything that's happened. I think I'm gonna go to bed now. Care to join?

Bertolio: In a bit. In a bit.

Banquist: All right. You know where to find me (slinks off)

Bertolio: So strange. Never in my life have I believed something as strongly as I did that. And to think...it was all an illusion? Remarkable. Amazing how clearly something can speak even when it isn't real. (unearths the ring from the music box). Eliza said knowing how many seconds one has was a luxury no one can attain. That might've all been a fake, but...well, what I'm feeling now sure is real enough. Oh Miss Banquist! (walks off to join Banquist)

(The radio studio once more. A creaking of rope, as Jacob's body sways from the rafters)

Eliza: (Lifting Jacob's microphone from the ground) It's not broken...thank god it's still not broken. Hello? Is anyone out there still listening? I have only two minutes left, and I am completely alone. If there are any of you out there now, please. Call the police. If I can somehow hold back my assailants for a few moments there's still time to intervene. I don't know how I can convince you this danger is real, or to actually come to my aid. I just know that, whoever you are, listening out there, I am someone worth saving (begins to cry. Her words are choked up by tears). I...am an agent of good in this world. Every day I do all I can to make this world a stronger, better place. It'd be a sin (pauses, and sobs for a moment) I will do anything. Help me and I will reimburse you a thousand times over... I will fight for you, live my life for you, build forever more an empire of gratitude in your honor! If only you will save me now. (Gathers her breath. With great struggle, she regains her composure) The point, Mary, is that you're never truly lost. Are you out there, Mary...can you hear me now? What was it that I told you? That if you keep your eyes open and your feet moving, you'll always pull through a little stronger than you were before. I can't give in...(calmly) Ladies and gentlemen, I have nothing more to say. I have pleaded my case, and now await your verdict. Though I pray my life not end tonight, I know now there is nothing I can change. I will labor to meet my fate, looking it bravely in the eye. Goodnight 20th century, we here at Wolfwhistle thank you for your time.

(The lights fade. After a brief pause, the door to the studio swings open, lingers, then shuts again. The whistle heard at the beginning of the play slices the air in a final wave before going away forever)