

Wolfwhistle

By Alex Bazis

Episode 1

(The scratch of radio static as channels fluctuate back and forth. Then, a sharp whistle is audible. It begins high and distant, like the cry of an eagle or the whine of a distant train)

Bertolio: Banquist, the show's about to start!

Jacob: Signing on.

Eliza: Signing on.

(The whistle suddenly dies away)

Jacob: Good evening, 20th century. This is the Wolfwhistle at 104 WPR Metro, 8:00 in New York City and the moment of truth for any and everywhere else. That's right, ladies and gents, woulds and wannabes. This is where the gold-watches gather round their fireplaces, where the Ivy Leaguers go for their serials...where the kings of this mortal world engage in Great Conversation and sell their golden soap. Here it is, ladies and gentlemen, broadcasted publicly so you can all get a whiff. Wolfwhistle...check and challenger, defender and shield. Greatest show the world has ever seen...

Eliza: And I have a feeling tonight will be particularly great. Don't you as well, Jacob?

Jacob: That I do, Eliza. This week we're continuing our series, Great American Entrepreneurs, our way of heralding the new year of 1934. Now we were going to get to tonight's guest eventually, once the timing

felt right, but per the request of our sponsors, we'll cut straight to him tonight. The man who might be the greatest entrepreneur of them all.

Eliza: I can already feel my heart beat faster.

Jacob: Anyone with pride for industry, a taste for integrity, and the indestructible will for a stronger, better life will undoubtedly hold a candle for this man. This man migrated to our country from northern England with nothing...he was just a child with two shirts and a bible, according to one version...but now, 50 years or so later, he's created the richest steel company in the world. I speak, of course, of a man of outrageous principle. I give you....Jonathan Mura. (Pause) Good evening, Jonathan, if I may be so familiar.

Jonathan: By all means, Mr. DeGrim. I'm honored to be with such prestigious company, with yourself and Miss...Miss...uh,...

Eliza: Eliza Astor at your service, sir.

Jonathan: Miss Eliza Astor, of course.

Jacob: The sentiment is warmly reciprocated. You're an inspiration, Mr. Mura, partly because you're a contradiction; a man who made his fortune in the greatest depression in economic history. But don't take it all from me, folks. Mr. Mura, please tell America about the business of steel.

Jonathan: Well, I suppose steel is just like any other business out there. When you provide a good or a service to the customers, they will always gravitate towards the finest good or service in the market. But in other ways, this business is quite a bit different. Steel, you see, is not some niche product...some fad. If clothing is doing business, that means those clothes are in fashion. Like the dress worn here by the beautiful Miss Astor...

Eliza: Mr. Mura! Are you trying to charm me?

Mura: (chuckles) What? It looks fetching on you! You were in quite the hurry earlier. I saw you bounding through the commissary like a fleeing deer.

Jacob: You did get here only a minute before we started, it's true.

Eliza: Just a last minute meeting with a source. Don't worry, I'll enlighten you both soon enough.

Jonathan: Quite the sight it was! Ah, to be young again. Back to what I was saying...if clothing is doing business, that means those clothes are in fashion. If food is doing business, that mean the people need to eat. But if steel...if steel is doing, business, Mr. DeGrim, so is America. Strong steel companies mean growth across all sectors. Skyscrapers, railroads, happy workers and cheap cars.

Jacob: Well said, Mr. Mura. Why just a few blocks from this studio they're hard at it with a new one...

Jonathan: That they are. For over two years, the Constance Tower has been the sole focus of the Muran Company....

Jacob: For those who don't live in the city, the Constance Tower is a major construction project off Park and 58th. When completed, the Constance Tower will stand a whopping 103 stories above the ground. Now, of course, the Muran Company's only physical contribution to the thing is the steel, but the listeners might be interested to learn that Mr. Mura is funding the entire project, personally writing the checks for all the countless firms involved. Yes, I bet you think that's crazy. But at three quarters completion, let me tell ya...Mr. Mura's pet is the most magnificent craziness I've ever seen!

Eliza: (Sweetly) It is a lovely addition to the city view, beyond doubt.

Jonathan: You flatter me, Jacob. I was thrilled when my communications agent said this show requested me. I can't seem to escape talk of it! 'Wolfwhistle'...next best thing to being in Hollywood, Jonathan!

Jacob: I speak the truth. Here at 104 WPR Metro, we have committed our microphones to the task of fighting this economic calamity...restore our savaged morale by bringing on national paragons to stand as lighthouses in these stormy times.

Eliza: To reiterate for our listeners, this was the founding purpose for this show. A chance to sit down and talk directly with the most prominent people in the country, so our listeners may come to know the human voices that guide their destiny. Many said we couldn't do it...radio is for soaps and cowboy

shows...people will never listen to something as dry and dreary as this. And yet they have—almost a million per episode--and here we are.

Jacob: And we've started our most exciting series yet, directly addressing the dire state of the economy. (Pauses) You may think I am but a voice crackling behind the wood casing of a machine. But I've seen the soup lines. I've seen dirty children crying in the alleys. I see in their eyes they need to believe there's hope in sending another job application, in saving a few pennies rather than seeing a movie to numb the pain. So I take this task seriously.

Jonathan: Of course. As one should.

Jacob: And I think you might provide that much needed spark of hope. But that means I must honor my duty to give my listeners the truth. You said earlier that healthy steel companies signify healthy countries, but this depression has the nation dying in the sick ward. Why now? Why take the supplies, labor, and money to build the world's largest structure in the middle of the world's greatest economic crisis? I mean, even in good times it'd be a headache to get all those beams to the site. And when you add labor costs to that...

Jonathan: (Briefly flinches) Oh, that's not a problem.

Eliza: (Knowingly) You don't say.

Jacob: (joking) Eliza, forgot you were even there. But I do agree with her, Mr. Mura. This can't entirely be a Sunday stroll...

Jonathan: Well, obviously it's not without its challenges, but they are manageable. I've created an organization that has, among other things, wonderfully efficient transportation and logistics departments. In addition to that I also have some of the industry's best running my labor pool. It's actually the city itself that gives us the most grief. Ever tried to build a skyscraper, Mr. DeGrim? Overpaid aldermen will bury you alive! Health codes, fire codes, noise levels, traffic considerations, etcetera ad infinitum.

Jacob: A fair point, Mr. Mura. You'd think that local governments would open their doors to business in times like this. But I think we can all agree that building the world's largest skyscraper in the middle of

its largest city is actually quite hard. Why New York City? Why the world's largest building? And why, for God's sakes, are you the one paying for all of it? All these questions hint at more personal motives.

Jonathan: Like you said, the project is difficult...most certainly difficult...but it is not a problem. This project's difficulty is exactly what motivates us. God knows that in times like these, with all these layoffs and soup lines, people need vast and fearless examples. Yes, things like this will thicken the city's blood. The college cattle of the world would theorize and daydream about how someone else should solve the world's problems. I would stand against the grain, provide hope....lead, as you will, by example.

Jacob: I knew you were the right person to bring on for this series. If I wasn't welded to this damn microphone I'd leap to my feet and salute you right now!

Jonathan: You're too kind.

Jacob: (playfully) And you're too modest.

Eliza: Pardon me, Mr. Mura. A question just occurred to me.

Jonathan: Why yes, lovely Miss Eliza. What is it?

Eliza: You said 'this project's difficulty motivates, us, speaking in plural. Who else is motivated by this project's difficulty, besides yourself?

Jonathan: Look at that attention to grammar, the lovely Eliza would be a wonderful school teacher!

Eliza: Just an innocent question.

Jonathan: Well, then here is your answer. I was referring to my senior managers, my accounting department, and my top shareholders. They understand that the glory that will come of this project justifies the struggle and the expense. To say nothing of the example it would set for the country.

Eliza: What about the workers? Those hauling and raising the steel beams? What do they make of the struggle and expense?

Jonathan: Don't worry about them. They understand our mission. They are thrilled to be following this spirit of creation into a new world.

Eliza: From what I understand of workers, their concerns tend to be more material than 'the spirit of creation' of their bosses.

Jonathan: Spoken from someone who has built how many skyscrapers? Don't concern yourself with these matters. They are all being taken care of. Taken care of by strong, hard working men, who understand the sacrifices needed to shape reality. Perhaps I can find a nice husband for you among them...a good man for a pretty girl like yourself.

Eliza: That sounded more like a dodge than anything.

Jacob: We should probably get back on track. Now...the Constance Tower is going to be 103 stories of nothing but office space. Not to push you, Mr. Mura, but there is a point I would like to bring up to the audience. My sources inform me that the Constance Tower has only attracted a few tenants thus far, leaving the vast majority of the building empty.

Jonathan: That's correct. With the economy so low right now, businesses are unwilling to take risks and invest in new spaces. That is fine. I am patient. The shadow of my tower will loom reassuringly—eventually, they will have faith and come.

Jacob: A fascinating point of philosophy. I'd like to divert here and bring up something you said earlier—you mentioned the "college cattle" of the world. First off, aren't you one yourself? I have here a note, don't ask where from, that says you attended Columbia a few decades back. Now, obviously you're a sharp fellow, but at the same time, these opponents of your actions must be sharp fellows as well. And yet they are writing pieces denigrating you in the Atlantic and New York Times, while you are building the world's largest tower. What lead you down the path to being a man of action rather than a man of contemplation? What essential things must a man learn in order to become so accomplished? As always, don't hold back.

Jonathan: Well, to answer your first question, yes, I did in fact attend and graduate from Columbia. Class of 09....no, that's wrong, I'm sorry...89, summa cum laude.

Jacob: Impressive. Eliza and I are actually both Columbians. Barnardian for her, I suppose, but same thing. Clearly that's not good enough. After all, we're the ones giving the questions at this glorified rumor mill and not the ones getting them.

Jonathan: Oh, you flatter me, Mr. DeGrim.

Jacob: I don't flatter, Mr. Mura. I observe...

Jonathan: You observe well then. Yes, I am a Columbian. But I am also a student of the steel mills, of shrieking stoves and thundering furnaces...I worked in the mills as a laborer during summer break while my classmates dandied about in seaside resorts. From the beginning I was a student of two teachers, a child of two worlds. And I always knew I was meant for something beyond both.

Eliza: How long have you had that little speech prepared? Something below both is more like it...

Jacob: You little chatterbox! Give other people the opportunity to speak! I'm just kidding of course...Eliza and I go way back. But yes, very well-said of you....poetic even.

Jonathan: Thank you. I've tried my hand at the study of rhetoric and oration. Being well-spoken can be helpful in business scenarios.

Eliza: Like getting the Constance Tower financed?

Jonathan: Yes, like financing business projects. Determination is more important though. All the eloquence in the world would be for nothing if it weren't for sheer iron will. Are you normally this rude to your guests? If only you were as professional as Mr. DeGrim here.

Eliza: No, we're actually quite polite. But I think you're worthy of special treatment.

Jacob: All right, rein it in, you two. We are running a show, after all. So, what did you do after you graduated from Columbia? I imagine it was something a little more humble than what you have now.

Jonathan: Well, soon after I graduated the managers at the mill I worked at promoted me to bookkeeping. After about a year in that department I won a job as a foreman after my predecessor was injured. From there, I gradually rose through the management ranks—floor manager, assistant manager, and finally, shop manager.

Jacob: This was the mill that you ended up owning, correct?

Jonathan: Was that the mill? I don't recall...I get a little foggy sometimes. Well, whatever mill it was, it was owned by the Ba...(pauses to think)...Bardman Brothers, for whom I was an executive in the middle stage of my steel career. When mismanagement and the depression bankrupted the firm, I emerged with a vast amount of capital and quickly played the market before my competitors could do the same. Yes, Mura Steel started small—just a single integrated mill outside Youngstown—but the fact that I could deliver higher quality goods at better prices couldn't remain a secret for long. And here I am, "getting the questions", as you so expressly articulated.

Jacob: And here you are indeed. But where are you going?

Jonathan: (with great satisfaction) Well, I think I have a plan for that....(pauses) but at the moment, the Constance Tower is the primary recipient of my attention.

Jacob: It all comes back to the tower. If you don't mind my saying, I think you invest a lot of yourself in that project. You see it as your masterpiece.

Jonathan: Of course I do. It is the culmination of my life's work.

Jacob: And that is?

Jonathan: Study and strength, discipline and self-denial. That is my answer to your earlier question of what a man must learn in order to become as accomplished as myself. You must go further into that pursuit than you thought possible...it must become like a religion, of which you are always leaping into with faith. Most men like to think of themselves as hard working, but they have nothing to show for it.

The only proof of the content of your spirit is what you build of your life. There is nothing else. The molten spirit must become material steel.

Eliza: I believe there's more to your little creed than 'study and strength.'

Jonathan: You have no right to say that.

Eliza: Really?

Jonathan: Of course not. From the outside looking in you might feel baffled by my success at this but I assure you, if you ever do try and build something of your own, you will come to understand. The wealth of this country is proof of that. The foundations of the modern world under your very feet, are proof of that.

Eliza: 'The wealth of this country', in the midst of a terrible depression? I'm sure the listeners would be curious to hear how that came about.

Jonathan: I already told you. I played the game well. People will be inspired when they realize my wealth could be their wealth, if they will give themselves over to the fire within.

Eliza: So all those starving and downtrodden are only temporarily embarrassed millionaires? You omit quite a lot when you speak of your designs, Mura. Not everyone is lucky enough to gamble with the world's largest building as if it were a stack of poker chips.

Jonathan: Luck? Luck is the god little men gaze up at from the muck of their failures and curse for making them so weak. There is nothing, and I repeat, nothing, that a man's spirit can't overcome. The pure, unmuddied quality of spirit. Do you think you do others a favor by clouding that spirit with earthly spoils and pampering? Only the fire can make the spirit molten...only the cold and naked air can make it harden into steel. Not that you'd know anything about that, Miss radio host. (chuckles). The Constance Tower is a realization, an affirmation of all these things that I have learned, built into the sky by the same spirit as this country, forever stalwart against the trues of time's ravages. Brilliant, isn't it? I may over love my child, but how couldn't I? It's my legacy. Long after I'm gone, God will still have my splinter in his eye. Long after I'm gone, the people will walk down the streets and see my spine, my creation. "Do you see that? Do you know who built that, son? I think I do." Constance, Jacob. My tower will live up to its name.

Jacob: That they will. I'm not one to give out an endorsement readily. Hovering above the misery like a powerless angel the way I have, I need to have the utmost confidence in the person to whom I pledge my microphone. But you have inspired me. If this is the course needed to right our country, then I wish the best of luck.

Jonathan: Thank you, Jacob. But, like I said....I don't believe in luck.

(Eliza suddenly pounds the desk with her fists and snaps upright)

Eliza: I've heard enough. The entire time it's been like this. "I am great. I am God. All mankind shall low in my metal shadow." "Bravo, great and noble sir! How fantastic art thou in thy machinations!" Pathetic every word! What do you think, audience? Does it strike you as peculiar that the world's greatest businessman decides to create the world's greatest building now, when there isn't one among you who hasn't known a starving man, a jobless man, a desperate life driven to despair? God above, the unemployment index just hit 34%, and his great face barely cracks. Does he care about your plight, ladies and gentlemen? No! He laughs at it! He just sees it as something that'll make his tower stand taller by comparison. Your children will have to live under his derangement the rest of their lives!

Jacob: (Distraught) Eliza....this is our guest, for God's sake...

Eliza: Does it strike the rest of you as curious that the depression has left this industrial captain as his own, and only, customer, yet he leaps forward with this "difficult" project without care or concern? Things like this don't happen, ladies and gentlemen. They simply can't. Not... (Her voice trails off)...without a catch. (Eliza pauses, breathing hard. Quietly, she continues.) What is the catch, Mr. Mura? You've told our audience about everything else. Maybe they'd like to know that as well.

Jonathan: (chuckling) Yes, Miss....um....oh god, not again...

Eliza: Eliza Astor!

Jonathan: Yes, Miss Eliza Astor. Miss is it? Must have scared off all the potential husbands. I suppose, if it is so important that you be satisfied, there is a catch. The catch is that I'm paying for it all, and that I can afford to pay for it all. What can I say? You caught me red handed. I think you of all people would know better. The only person you're making a fool of is yourself.

Eliza: So you're paying for everything? How has business been? I would think that the depression would have cut your customers to a tithe of your usual fare, but then again, you are Jonathan Mura. Perhaps business is booming. Perhaps there are plenty of egomaniacs out there who need steel for their personal monuments.

Jacob: Eliza, dear lord...

Jonathan: Receipts are down, yes, but that doesn't mean my company is crippled. I've saved and invested diligently my entire career. Times like these vindicate such precautions.

Eliza: Saved and invested diligently into what? The failing banks, the plummeting stock?

Jonathan: To think every financial reserve has been compromised....huh! I happen to have a secure account at a secure bank. My finances are fine.

Eliza: You said earlier that this tower barely has any tenants. This colossus of yours has yet to provide a penny's worth of profit, has it?

Jonathan: Profit is not the point. Principle is.

Eliza: Are you taking on any other projects, any other big plans to refill your coffers? Because, from the sounds of it, you have nothing but your savings and your dwindling sales to pay for this monstrosity. What's your ace in the hole? Some method of cutting costs, perhaps?

Jonathan: What would I cut, and how would I cut it? Straightforward is the only way I can pay for this project.

Eliza: Are you sure about that?

Jonathan: Most sure.

Eliza: Well, that's funny. Guess who it was I spoke with in the commissary, Jacob? A real promising lead. An anonymous source from Hooktown...

Jacob: (Cutting in) A small immigrant town on the Hudson, about 17 miles north of the Bronx, for those New Yorkers among you not familiar with your own metropolitan area. Now please...this was a very energetic volley, you two. But if you'd be so kind as to return to...

Eliza: My new friend in Hooktown says she lives next to hundreds of your workers. And does she talk about the costs you cut, Mr. Mura...

Jacob: Eliza...must we go on like this?

Eliza: You know we do.

Jacob: You're not the only one with sources, you know...

Eliza: Anyway, Mr. Mura. Perhaps you could tell us about the costs you cut...

Jonathan: (nervous) I have no idea what you're talking about...

Jacob: Cut costs? I wonder what that could mean!

Jonathan: (Bewildered) Jacob, please...

Eliza: I think there's only one thing it could mean. b

Jonathan: Jacob, perhaps there is a better format to discuss these questions...

Jacob: Discounts on home rentals, courtesy of Mr. Jonathan Mura?

Eliza: (Aghast) Well....

Jonathan: (Laughs, totally relieved) You're a well-connected man, Mr. DeGrim. You truly are...

Eliza: Jacob, please...

Jacob: What? He needs to explain about what goes on up there. He's our guest, after all.

Jonathan: Then maybe it would be polite to give him the chance to do just that.

Eliza: Well....

Jonathan: (Laughs, relieved) Thank you for your accommodating hostmanship, Jacob.

Jacob: No need to get nervous quite yet, Mr. Mura. We're not all out to get you.

Jonathan: I have cut costs, it is true. But I have cut the costs for my workers as well. The Hooktown camp is an extremely low rent/low upkeep development I built to house my workers. I believe in passing my fortune down to the benefit of others, Miss Radio Host. Those at my camp live more affordably than anywhere else in the state.

Jacob: I'm sure their lives are as comfortable as they are affordable, Mr. Mura. This, ladies and gentlemen, is precisely the soul of my mission. Bringing the voices of the powerful to the masses, so they can know directly that their fates are, beyond a shadow of a doubt, intertwined.

Eliza: Jacob!

Jonathan: WILL YOU PIPE DOWN? You would squint and strain to find any flaw you can in the world that I build, that people like me build, in order to house people like you. You do that because it is all you are capable of doing. Now, kindly stand out of my way. I was saying, Jacob, in order to aid with the construction of my project, I have enlisted...

Eliza: Conscripted!

Jonathan: Enlisted the help of a Lithuanian immigrant community that recently arrived in this country. Around 900 industrious young men and women.

Jacob: Here to pursue success in the land of opportunity?

Jonathan: Exactly! I understand their position completely. That's why, when I learned of their arrival, I immediately contracted their services. I knew that there had to be at least one like me among these new arrivals—at least one true young tiger with a hunger for everything in life and the steel and will to attain them. Yes, I remember when I was like that. I was such a dangerous young man. So full of ideas....so full of potential...

Eliza: So full of....

Jonathan: Look at all these things I've created...the things I've done. Those men are capable of just the same. The godhead you seize with your own hands. The only destiny worth having. Why else would you come here?

Jacob: Hate to cut this short, but we gotta go to commercial. Don't go anywhere, folks. We'll be right back.

Eliza: What? Jacob, how can you believe any of this?

Jonathan: Yes, yes, yes! This mighty country! (His voice is suddenly filtered through microphone distortion) God, how I see it now! I was a rag from a languished cloth... trod into mud and famine by the boots of priests and common dogs. Then, like a warm light spreading, I heard it call my name. "Jonathan," it said, "come now. Your place at the table is ready." And so I went without hesitation, tramping over my homeland's desolates and across the thinking seas, searching like a marlin for whispers through the waves of an unknown dream. So thin that golden cry that led me through gulls and isolation, but so unyielding the wall to my back, and so sharp the scream of "Onward!" in my heart when I feared my resolve would fail. So desperate was I for that voice--that voice of glass that had enchanted my oldest memories--that my motions were its motions, and my motives its motives, and the entirety of my being a mere vessel for this ether to fill in its quest to gaze upon itself. And when I saw the lighthouse upon the diamond shores and heard the seagulls call, I found, to my most perfect delight,

that it had been waiting for me. America....that siren creature. If only you could see her as I see do now....(long pause. The microphone distortion ends) It's too bad we're going to commercial so soon. I have many, many ambitions and endeavors I could elaborate on.

Jacob: Is there anything in particular you were thinking about?

Jonathan: How did you know?

Jacob: Just a feeling.

Jonathan: I guess this is the real reason I came on this show—to give voice to the following dream. My success with business has showed me the rewards my dedication can reap. I will now say that I plan on aiming that inward motion towards higher peaks; namely, the United States Senate. (Breaths out slowly) Now...how's that as a sound bite for your show?

Jacob: (Clapping) Bravo, great and noble sir! Bravissimo!

Eliza: This isn't right....you know this isn't right....there's more to this than he's letting on...

Announcer: (voice warbling through distortive static) What a show, ladies and gentlemen! What will happen next? Will Jacob finish the interview? Will Jonathan confirm his bid for the Senate? Will Eliza ever get the chance to speak? All these questions answered and more tonight on 104 WPR Metro. Stay connected folks, and don't forget to tune in to Midnight Darger, a radio broadcast of the Grotius the Great show, and the Calamitous Calvaries, as well as all the other freaks and oddities WPR brings you from every corner of the globe. We'll be back after these short messages.

(A phone rings)

Mr: M: (answering the phone) Good evening, 20th century. What sort of a proposal do you have to make? Of course not. We never disappoint. If they are wise, then they will look back and know it was due. Dreams of the past contains nightmares of the future.