

Episode 6

(Old time music playing)

Banquist: Look at this new coat! Isn't it grand? The fur trim, the color...I'm a real Continental catch in this.

Bertolio: Where did you get the money for that?

Banquist: I got a bonus from Mr. Whitmore.

Bertolio: Weren't you worried about...

Banquist: It's my money, Bertolio! I earned a little extra, I'll spend it as I see fit!

Bertolio: Oh. Well...you're already so beautiful, a little trim of silver fox doesn't add much more.

Banquist: Thank you, Bertolio. I know you mean it. But the world doesn't agree. If I want to be a Somebody, I have to start looking like a Somebody. Did you turn in those applications yet?

Bertolio: No not yet.

Banquist: My mother was clawing at me the other day to get you to do that? She is merciless...the things I had to promise her to calm her down. And you haven't started?

Bertolio: No not yet...

Banquist: The world could be ours for the taking, Mr. Bertolio. Don't you ever want to move out of here?

(Radio static continues. Then, through the aural haze, an out of time signal is picked up. CNN coverage of the 1989 US invasion of Panama to depose Manuel Noriega can be heard)

CNN Host:and looting businesses there. This has forces loyal to Manuel Noriega, including members of the so called dignity battalions, are battling US troops. The US controls major Panamanian military bases today. Defense Secretary Dick Cheney told CNN that some American troops could be home by Christmas...

(Jacob is leaving the radio station and walking out into the streets of New York City)

Jacob: Yes, it is cold out. That's the first straight thing she's said all day! (chuckles to himself) What time is it? Can you believe it? The damn thing's stopped. Oh well...I'm sure I'm fine. (He silently walks for a moment) Damn this city and whoever designed it. (Keeps walking) Every night I leave WPR with a feeling of great humanity, and every night that feeling gets about two blocks down Houston Street before it shrivels like an empty bag of chips. When your job is talking about the great and righteous things it's easy to get your head into it, and when you get your head into it part of you thinks the whole world should play along. I walk out and I feel like there should be great works being accomplished—scientists writers composers and the like all up and down the old tar paths playing symphonies and building statues or something. But when I walk out it's always late, more than often cold. The only activity I see is the frantic walking of strangers down the sidewalks, occasionally a car quietly drifting by like a sad metal fish. No sound, no work being done. No talk among the strangers. No food, either...the vendors went to bed a long time ago. But I guess there are always the bars. At any rate...it's always best to keep moving (keeps walking) My dad had a word for this kind of feeling. It wasn't something he invented—heavens no, he was a simple man, although he fancied himself otherwise—but the way he used it made it his own. Distraction. Distraction, distraction, distraction. When I was a young boy, there to tend the farm outside Owosso, my dad used to take me fly fishing by the Saginaw River. If I could count the number of days I spent on that little crest of sand down by the ford. The sun would spread over those Michigan trees and caress my body, until I would take my shirt off and lie down. I'd stick my legs into the water, grip the mud tight with my toes, close my eyes and then just...lie there...at first dimly aware of time, then slowly forgetting it with each passing murmur of the water's throat. Bliss...incomparable bliss...the happiest times of my post-womb life. Everything was golden. Everything was clean.

Jacob: One day, in the midst of my stupor, my father told me to stand up out of the water. I asked what he wanted. He leaned very close to my ear. "You know, son," he said, speaking as if were the great trade secrets he was now passing on. "Life is but a series of distractions." Like a fossil in my pocket I kept those words without ever understanding what they meant. But I knew...no, felt...felt...that I had been brought into the brotherhood of the truth. Two years later we had to sell the farm and come to New York...my uncle was a foreman in a vacuum tube factory, and could offer my dad a job. When we first pulled in on the bridge and saw Manhattan's electric halo it all began to make sense. Back in the country the idea of distraction was nothing. But when I got to the city I felt it, like I had never felt anything before. I felt it everywhere I went, saw it in everything. Door to door, building to building, face to face to endless face.

Everywhere I went in this jungle the cats were at play, and distraction was their game. But distraction from what? I had no idea. I only knew that I looked out and saw what light was commercial to my eyes and knew there was something I could not see...an ancient eel coiled patiently beneath the skin of my understanding. So I held my tongue from there on out. For years that serpent was dormant...I drank, loved, was at peace, was distracted. But now my defenses are failing, and I'm aware of its return. I don't know what it wants. I like to think it's after me but in doing so I assume that I have something it values...or, possibly, am something it considers worth hunting. Too early to say for now. I guess I'll find out...

Jacob: I've been aware of this for about a week now---why, I haven't slept an hour in seven days. Strange, shifting nightmares. Iron birds, goblins, empty glasses and clocks. Intimations of alien technology...wars and plagues, yet to come. Like my mind is a radio antenna picking up a signal from another world. The most notable visitation, however, occurred three nights ago. I dreamt I was walking down an alley where I saw an emaciated white cat I thought was looking for milk. When the cat saw me it looked up at me with egg-yolk yellow eyes and pleaded wordlessly for help. I was moved when I saw its eyes...lifted from my feet and drawn by a nightmare's pull I followed the cat through the shadowy alleys, until I came upon a great statue, towering into the skyline, its face obscured by the clouds, its body garlanded by spotlights. And like Babel itself I saw countless words carved into its trunk, its legs of stone...poems, speeches, chants, cries...all my own words...our words. What tender empathy I felt for Jonathan! The face of the statue was his, weeping, hidden by the clouds...he had to tend to his monument because no one else would. If he didn't maintain his tower himself, the world would let it crumble into dust. He was certainly right about that. Do you realize that, Eliza? He was right about that. When she first came here from Kansas, seeing the city for the first time, she saw beauty and daydreams everywhere---I was starting to find the sight of my own species strange. I wish I could remain with her in childhood. All around this tower, I looked for her....believe me, I tried...to find her, in a future we could share. She was nowhere to be found. But you were....you were there.

(Jacob enters a bar, empty and silent. He slowly pulls out a chair and sits down)

Jacob: Here we are. Home at last! Huh. Two templetons, on the rocks, please! (Jacob drinks a shot with a loud gulp, then sets the glass down loudly) Ah! That's more like it. And one for you as well. My new business partner, it would seem...You've always been there...always alongside me. That's how you knew so much about me when we hadn't even met. Here we are...right where two like us belong. The oaken halls and backrooms were great minds find their league. We must work together if we are to save the people, stumbling children that they are. You understand this all, though. The owl has brought you the wisdom that only comes at night. What do I need to do?

Mr. M: You must protect your show, and yourself.

Jacob: I understand I made some people mad...who doesn't? From time to time. No...the show will be preserved. Just tell me where to go, and what to do.

Mr. M: We will need your cooperation, as to the show's content. This is of course for protection. We know you are willing to play the game.

Jacob: And what do you need from me?

Mr. M: Your signature. And a recording.

Jacob: A recording? Of what?

Mr. M: You will know, in time. There will be a great test of your faith soon. We will soon know the exact usefulness of our alliance.

Jacob: What does that mean?

Mr. M: You will find out soon enough. But for now, as a proof of your good will...

Jacob: (Pause, a whisper...) Of course! Move that cigar aside, I'll gladly sign. Let me buy you one, in celebration! Oh, don't worry, you've been too kind. Cheers! (takes a drink) You, everyone else here! Listen to my show, boys! Wolfwhistle will teach you to look out for injustice, and it will teach you who you should be wary of in the important spheres of life. You don't believe me? Of course you don't. You probably weren't even paying attention! Ah hell...why bother wasting my time? No point (takes another shot). Everyone carry on. Talking, ignoring, and drinking...the three essential activities. You'll all listen eventually. Someday there'll be a show for you that'll shake your world to its core! Someday soon. Very, very soon....(Jacob lets out a long drunken laugh that hangs in the air before finally disappearing)

(A phone rings. After a few seconds, Kay answers it)

Kay: Hello? Yes, speaking. What is it? (Pauses) Wait....what? WHAT??????? Are you kidding me? I'll call the cops on you you lousy piece of....what? That won't....you already talked to them. Uh huh...you already talked to them. I can't. I won't...NO! I won't. I don't have to I won't! What? How do you know

about them? Where are they? YOU BETTER NOT! (pauses, and breathes heavily) Then I have to then, don't I? I still can't....no, oh god no...yes, I can. I can....I will (hangs up) God have mercy on us all.