

Act III

Episode 7

(The clomping steps of an approaching horse)

Billy: Woah, Nelly! (the horse stops) Easy there, girl.

Man in the Suit: Can I help you, sir?

Billy: I sure reckon you can. Name's Billy Calvary, and I aim to find the wedding of my sister Grace. Word has it the ceremony's at the home of her betrothed, Wesley Parkins. Know where such a character might reside?

Man in the Suit: Two clicks up the main road then one down the path to the right. Leads you past a creek and through a stretch of wood. Couldn't miss it if you were blind.

Billy: Much obliged, partner (tries to trot off)

Man in the Suit: Oh Billy!

Billy: (stops) Yes? What the....what the hell is this?

Man in the Suit: It's the gun Cliff Coldriver paid me to kill you with if I saw you headed toward the wedding. But....I intend to do no such thing. Your father helped my farm survive after the twister of '94 destroyed our fields and killed the livestock. If it weren't for him, I'd be dead or starving for sure. I can't repay him with treachery such as this. Here. You're gonna need it. Cliff sets on riding off with your baby sister Penny. She's young, and foolish...don't know what kind of things a varmint like Cliff Coldriver will have in store. Now I reckon you can still make it, if you gallop over there like a storm. But be careful. Coldriver's set to have a whole rack of goons bought with daddy's money hanging around. And I'm certain they're not gonna be of the friendliest sort.

Billy: I don't know how I can repay you, sir.

Man in the Suit: I expect no compensation for my actions, Billy. Just make sure that serpent Cliff don't lay a finger on that darling Penny Calvary.

Billy: He won't. On that I stake my honor and my life. Yah! (Gallops off)

Voice Announcer: This is but a taste of the excitement in store on tonight's episode of The Calamitous Calvaries. Will Billy arrive on time? Will he be able to thwart the machinations of the dastardly Cliff Colderiver? All these questions and more will be answered, later tonight!

(The living room of Bertolio and Banquist)

Bertolio: Banquist! Banquist! Come here! It's almost on!

Banquist: Oh stay put! There'll probably be ten minutes of commercials before the show actually starts.

Bertolio: If you say so...

(Banquist enters)

Bertolio: What took you so long?

Banquist: Uh! This evening gown was a mess of wrinkles! I saw my grandmother's face in it and had to attack it with an iron until the apparition went away. Now which of these is better? The blue earrings, or the black?

Bertolio: I don't understand why it matters so much. Both are fine. The Whitmores aren't gonna care at all.

Banquist: That's sweet and all but I consider myself more sensible than that. We can't all have it made like you data entry types. Sorting and filing papers all day looking like the same beat-up two-piece camel you always do, never having to worry about anyone batting an eyelash. I, my dear Mr. Bertolio, command a post that requires presentability and poise. I...am an assistant legal clerk!

Bertolio: Huh! Pretentiousness and posing is more like it.

Banquist: As if! You should come down someday and try it out. Don't be surprised if it's a bit harder than you imagined. Going in 7 every morning and out 7 every night, tearing through stack after stack of legal paperwork, all the while hoping to God your bosses find you prettier than any one of the hundred thousand law school drop outs combing the streets of this city like job-hungry rats! If anyone actually read the papers I sort through I could stay on by job skill alone...

Bertolio: But no one does.

Banquist: Exactly. Looking better is preferable to doing better. Especially when looking for a promotion. Ahh, it's just wonderful thinking about it. From clerk to manager. With all these new acquisitions our firm is making, it could be quite the steal.

Bertolio: Ah, come on, there's always a promotion to fret about. Let's just relax a minute. Wolfwhistle is on...and then later tonight, the grand finale of this season of the Calamitous Calvaries is going to air...

Banquist: (Sighs) So many shows! Our college days are long past us, Mr. Bertolio. But what were you saying earlier?

Bertolio: Wolfwhistle's almost on. I said hurry down because you'll miss it.

Banquist: Normally I would but tonight's not the night. The Whitmores will be here any minute. We don't have time.

Bertolio: Well they're not here now. And until they are, let's just relax and pass the time with this.

Banquist: Bertolio you always pass the time with that. You'd spend your life with that electric box if you had the chance! I have yet to do my make-up and the doorbell might ring any minute. This isn't just another night out with your friends. I have to look good for Mr. Whitmore.

Bertolio: (hint of jealousy) Don't you mean The Whitmores?

Banquist: (mock excitement) Oh no, Mr. Bertolio! Errol Whitmore and Errol Whitmore alone! Oh my...so handsome! So strong! (Suddenly returns to a normal tone) Mrs. Whitmore can't write my check or give me a better job, Bertolio. She's not the one I have to tart myself up for. (Leaves the room. Bertolio sighs, and sits down)

Bertolio: 'Tart up'? You shouldn't be tarting up for anyone.

Banquist: What was that?

Bertolio: Nothing!

Banquist: Mr. Bertolio, have you seen my lipstick anywhere?

Bertolio: How should I know? Ya think I stole it and gave it to the cat?

Banquist: Oh put yourself to bed, you fussy little sodomite!

Bertolio: Language, Miss Banquist.

Banquist: Please! It's not like we have children or anything. And until that day comes I'll use all the foul and unfavorable terms and phrases at my disposal, you half-cooked bowl of afterbirth! (Bertolio gasps) How do I look, dearest?

Bertolio: Like a debutante in a circus.

Banquist: Splendid. Hopefully Mr. Whitmore feels the same way.

Bertolio: All right, you. What's with you and Mr. Whitmore? Before tonight I just thought he was your boss but all of a sudden I'm getting some strange new ideas.

Banquist: Is that jealousy I hear? How sweet. Don't be intimidated. He's my boss and nothing more...well, hopefully he'll be my boss and promoter by next week. If I made my living the way I think you're imagining I'd be out of there in minutes, all the interns I'd have to compete with. Really...stop worrying. I really don't like that you're thinking that.

Bertolio: (sits back down) All right, I'm sorry. It's in my nature, ya know?

Banquist: I know. I'm sorry if I'm acting....different. But I have to get my head in this. This could be great if it works out. Better pay, better hours...we'd finally be moving up. Why, we could finally get a proper house.

Bertolio: We could! Gee, that'd be swell. Somewhere a little up the Hudson, a fenced in garden...a fireplace!

Banquist: It'd be just grand! I know your family has been pushing for that...my mother too. God if I could do anything to keep her off my back, always shrieking at me like a banshee for this and that.

Bertolio: Her shrieking would be too far away to hear, up in tree-lined Westchester.

Banquist: Yes it would! So, Mr. Bertolio: a proposal.

Bertolio: (Shakily) A....a what?

Banquist: A proposal about your role in these business dinners.

Bertolio: (relieved) Oh, of course. I'm listening.

Banquist: If I have your cooperation in charming Mr. Whitmore tonight, and possibly dinners in the future, and these matters are successful, I promise you, for your birthday, I will dedicate funds towards a brand new, walnut cabinet Westinghouse radio. How does that sound?

Bertolio: Why, it sounds great! For you, I'll be more charming than Valentino.

Banquist: Splendid! (Lovingly) Oh, you most certainly will be, darling. Just remember--Westchester. Oh, I can't think about it too much. I'll sabotage myself. Now where are my gloves? (leaves the room, whistling to herself)

(Bertolio rises from the chair, and unearths a music box. Tinkling of music)

Bertolio: (Aside) It's true...it would be nice to move up a little. My late mother's ring. Hidden away in a dusty old music box, where Banquist will never look. The last thing my mother told me before she died was that I should have it, and that I should use it when the time came. But only when I knew the time was right, and the woman. For a while now I've been lying awake at night wondering if I'm faced with either. I've always been a pancake, and believe me, I've got testimonies to prove it....but I know this isn't the kind of thing you rush in on. No matter who you are....

Banquist: Bertolio! (Bertolio abruptly closes the music box to silence it) Are you all ready to go?

Bertolio: Yes, Miss Banquist. I've been ready for half an hour now.

Banquist: Well then. Is there anything else?

Bertolio: I don't think so.

Banquist: Well, then. I guess we have some time.

Bertolio: (snaps up) Yes we do! And you know what that means! (scrambles over to the radio, where he immediately begins adjusting the knobs to increase the volume)

Banquist: Uh! You're like a boy when it comes to that show. I'll listen to it, Bertolio, I'll listen to it with you...but the instant that doorbell rings that thing goes off and we go out! Understand?

Bertolio: All right, all right. I think it's coming on.

Banquist: Be ready any moment! It won't be long before they come...

Bertolio: Quiet! (Silence. The show's whistle begins to play)..

104 WPR METRO

(Footsteps can be heard as Eliza and Jacob enter the radio studio)

Eliza: Hello? Is anyone here?

Jacob: Kay? Joe? Dwight? Anyone?

Eliza: What is going on here...(gags) And what is that smell?

Jacob: Jesus, it's like something died in the floorboards (walks in). Caroline told us everything was a go. Maybe everyone got...bogged down with something.

Eliza: Bogged down with something so major they couldn't come into the studio right before the show begins?

Jacob: I guess. (frantic switch clicking) The lights won't turn on.

Eliza: What?

Jacob: You heard me, the lights won't turn on.

Eliza: Why not?

Jacob: No idea.

Eliza: Maybe that's why no one's here. They couldn't turn the lights on and thought the room was closed for repairs.

Jacob: Maybe. Doesn't seem likely. Here...we'll turn on the flood lights and get set up. Hopefully someone will show up in a bit. (Quietly) He didn't say anything about this....

Eliza: The floodlights? Those aren't very bright. We'll only be able to see the desk.

Jacob: They'll have to do. Here...Fucking hell....here we are...

Jacob:....the hell?

Eliza: What is that? A paperweight...of a metal bird. Is this a joke?

Jacob: A black metal owl. How fitting of you...there's a letter and letter opener underneath it. (Opens the letter) 'Good evening, Eliza and Jacob. My name is Mr. M, and I am here to bring you great and terrible news.'

Eliza: What in God's name...

Jacob: 'As you may be aware, everything that begins must also end. In light of this development, we have a proposition to make. You will have your radio hour, same as always, but at the end of the hour, you will die. Use your final moments as you see fit. Good night to you both, and may all the stars of fortune shine gladly on your paths.'

Eliza: What do you make of that?

Jacob: Seems like a really twisted joke to me.

Eliza: We should tell Kay about this right away. Joke or not, this is way too far.

Jacob: All right. I'll go get him. (walks back to the door off by left stage) Was the door closed before? (tries to open the door, but the door doesn't budge) What the hell....(bangs on the door and throws his body against its frame) It's locked! HEY! OPEN UP! Goddamn it...what the hell is going on here...

Eliza: Are you sure it wasn't shut earlier?

Jacob: Yes, I'm sure. This was closed after we entered. (Stops banging on the door for a moment, and breathes deeply) This is bad, Eliza. This is really starting to get to me...

Eliza: There's no way this can be for real, Jacob...I'm sure this is just a joke. If they're gonna go to the effort of coming up with that....thing, I'm sure they'd be willing to lock us in here for a little while too. Just to mess with our heads...

Jacob: No, I think they want something from us. Really, really strange. (Pause) No, you're right, this must be a joke. Goddamn it, when this door opens, I swear I'm gonna kill em.

Eliza: That's the spirit. In the mean time, how about we just continue business as usual. If that clock's right then it's almost time to begin.

Jacob: How are we supposed to start the show? We don't have Dwight, we don't have Kay...

Eliza: We'll make it work. We've done it before, haven't we? Here...(pulls out the chair from behind Jacob's desk) We might as well give it a go.

Jacob: If you say so (the two hosts sit down, gather up some papers from the drawers of the desk and begin to position the microphones. After a brief moment of preparation, Eliza gets up and walks to the end of the room) Damn it, don't fall, don't fall...there it is. (The sound of switches being flicked can be heard. The show's signature whistle can be heard)

Jacob: Signing on.

Eliza: (hurrying over to her desk and grabbing the microphone) Signing on.

Jacob: Good evening, 20th century. This is the Wolfwhistle at 104 WPR Metro, 8:00 in New York City and a moment of confusion for here and everywhere else. In a bizarre turn of events, ladies and gentlemen, my co-host and I have become the victims of what we think to be a particularly cruel practical joke—we've been locked in our studio with the lights off, a horrible stench, and no one to keep us company save a metal owl that identifies itself as "Mr. M." What all this signifies exactly is beyond me. I just know that someone's gonna get a stern talking to once this all sorts out.

Eliza: They'll be lucky if that's all they get, Jacob. Unfortunately, our prankster wasn't kind enough to provide us with tonight's guest, Dwight Elkland, so, until that door unlocks, we'll be unable to carry out our broadcast as originally planned.

Jacob: But that's all right, folks. We're gonna bear our hardship in stride and continue the show to the best of our abilities. So...how are you doing today, Eliza?

Eliza: (laughs) I don't know if that'll make for the most gripping radio, Jacob.

Jacob: Probably not, but given our situation, we're just gonna have to make do.

Eliza: All right, I'll play along. My day is going fine, Jacob. How about yours?

Jacob: Aside from the fact that we've been locked away in the dark of our studio with no one around except for an avian paperweight that tells us that we're going to die in an hour, I'd say I'm doing pretty well.

Eliza: Oh really? That's fantastic! The audience must be delighted to hear that.

Jacob: I bet they are.

Eliza: Keep that up and you'll have them wrapped around your finger in no time.

Jacob: I'll have them on "lock-down" (laughs).

Eliza: (laughs) Oh Jacob. What would I do without you?

Jacob: I don't know. But luckily for you I don't think I'm going anywhere (both laugh. Brief pause) You know something, Eliza?

Eliza: Yes, Jacob?

Jacob: For a joke, this sure has been going on for a while.

(Inside a separate studio. A crackling fireplace. Nocturne Number 2 by Frederic Chopin plays)

Mr. M: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Mr. M, and I am here to present you with a fantastic possibility. We all live in the modern age, a time of enlightenment and brotherhood built upon thousands of years of cruelty and oppression. In this day, every man is owed his voice and the freedom to use it. But what if this fundamental right came under threat? What if sinister forces conspired to silence our rebellious inclinations and radical conjectures, subjugating individual thought for good? Keep listening, and perhaps you'll find out. What you are about to bear witness to is a very special episode of Wolfwhistle. In it, we find our beloved hosts Eliza Astor and Jacob DeGrim pitted against these fearful powers. Locked in their studio with nothing but one hour of radio time before their assassination, Eliza and Jacob have no choice but to turn to you, their audience, for help. Imagine yourselves in this dreadful state of affairs, ladies and gentlemen. What would you say? What would you do? Upon these thrilling questions we hinge Wolfwhistle's final episode...its last cry into the dark before going away for a long time, due to a number of contractual conflicts, among other reasons. The following events will be graphic, ladies and gentlemen, and those among you not disposed to dealing with such intense discourses are advised to avert your ears...change the channel to something a little tamer and avoid all that will soon transpire. We would like to remind you that these events, of course, are fictional, and no matter how ghoulish they become, no one is in way of any real harm. That being said, what will soon be heard is not meant for the faint of heart. Listen well, ladies and gentlemen, and take care. If tonight's proceedings don't change you, then perhaps you weren't listening closely enough.