

The Unseen Hour  
Episode 26  
PATIENCIA  
Waiting For...

by

James Carney

Atmos noise.

NARRATOR

Shut your eyes. Stop your ears.  
Hold your breath. Your moment has  
not yet come. Will you know  
opportunity when it comes  
knocking? Will you be ready to  
seize your chance for fulfilment?  
Will you be prepared to meet your  
doom? Good or bad a defining  
moment must surely be drawing  
near... some time... one day...  
any moment... not quite yet...  
soon... or at length... but always  
at The Unseen Hour.

Music.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

We spend our days striving for  
something - for happiness, for  
success, for wealth, for  
excitement. But if we achieve it,  
what then? All worldly things are  
fleeting. Such trivialities are  
merely killing time as we wait for  
the end. As we wait, like one  
Rufus Strideforth, hastatus,  
fourth class, of the rearguard  
cohort of a Roman legion,  
protected from the damp morning in  
his fine tweed toga.

ACT 1

STRIDEFORTH

So. Here we are. Courageous and  
clever Strideforth. Helmet on  
head. Gladius in hand. Ready to  
meet the oncoming hoards. Ready to  
fight for the great Empire which  
has brought civilisation to the  
barbaric world. Ready to - in our  
magnificent Emperor's words - Make  
Rome Even More Great Than It  
Already Is. Catchy slogan. Ready  
to lay down his life here on this  
barren earth, under this  
spindly... possibly dead tree.  
Ready to be hacked to pieces by an  
army of barbarians in the vague  
hope that it might delay their  
advance on our army's main force.

(MORE)

STRIDEFORTH (CONT'D)  
 Ready... You know what? I'm going.  
 I'm not just saying that, I'm  
 really going.

Brice SFX: Walking.

PERCH  
 Where are you going?

STRIDEFORTH  
 Me? Going? No. Just... walking up  
 and down. Stretching my legs. Not  
 deserting.

PERCH  
 Oh. Right. No. Because that would  
 be bad. Cowardly and bad...

STRIDEFORTH  
 Yes. And we are heroes of the  
 Empire...

PERCH  
 Exactly... Seen any barbarians  
 yet?

STRIDEFORTH  
 Nope. Just endless desert. It  
 looks like it wants to rain.

PERCH  
 You know... If you were to  
 leave... Just desert... Not that  
 you were... But, since there's no  
 commanding officer here... I'd go  
 with you.

STRIDEFORTH  
 You would? Perch and Strideforth!  
 Fugitives on the open road! We'd  
 better go before the Centurion  
 sees us!

FAWLKES  
 Yup! That's me! Hello! Wait! I'm  
 here! Commander Lawrence Sebastian  
 Fawlkes of the Roman rearguard  
 cohort! Once a grand Legionnaire,  
 commanding - what's that? - a  
 thousand elite soldiers!

(MORE)

FAWLKES (CONT'D)

Celebrated through the streets of the Capitol, praised in the forum, hand in hand with the Emperor himself from the top of the Colosseum! I was respectable in them days. Now look at me. They wouldn't let me through the door. Little bit about me there, in case you were wondering. Sorry I'm late. Trouble with my sandals. I think they're too small. Any barbarians yet?

STRIDEFORTH

No sir.

PERCH

All quiet sir.

FAWLKES

Alright. They said tomorrow or the next day.

PERCH

Didn't they say that two days ago?

STRIDEFORTH

Or three?

FAWLKES

Who do I look like? Theodosius of Bithynia? Inventor of the universal sundial? Look. We just wait here til the barbarians come.

STRIDEFORTH

Maybe they've already gone past.

FAWLKES

You're overthinking it. Take it from an old soldier. You want to avoid existential introspection and minor activities which are broadly symbolic of the human struggle. Now I think I've got a stone in my sandal. I'm going to have to try to take them off. Here's your rations.

STRIDEFORTH

A tiny carrot.

PERCH

A colourless radish.

FAWLKES

Yup. Enjoy.

STRIDEFORTH

Oh no! What's that on the horizon!  
Is it barbarians?!

PERCH

I'll just shuffle up next to you  
here, and peer in the same  
direction. No, those don't look  
like barbarians. They're too  
decrepit. They're wizened,  
hunched, shambling things.

STRIDEFORTH

Aaah! Zombies! I knew something  
terrible and exciting was going to  
happen! It's zombies!

PERCH

No, it's just an old lady and her  
servant. You talk to them Rufus.

STRIDEFORTH

Why me?

PERCH

Character doubling.

STRIDEFORTH

What?

FAWLKES

No reason. You just talk to them.

SOB

'Ello dearie.

STRIDEFORTH

Hello! Old lady! Identify  
yourself! Are you barbarians?  
Zombies?

SOB

Oh, no. We're just a pair of poor  
vagrants, wandering this  
featureless desert.

STRIDEFORTH

Why is that man with the long  
white hair carrying all your bags?

SOB

He's trying to impress me.

PHLEGM

I'm trying to impress her.

STRIDEFORTH

Alright. Well listen, there's a Roman Legion, a barbarian horde, and possibly zombies in this featureless desert. So be careful.

SOB

Oh we haven't seen anything like that. And we've been all around.

FAWLKES

Really? No vicious barbarian horde just over the horizon.

SOB

Oh no, nothing like that. Just endless, featureless desert under a sky like damp grey wool.

PHLEGM

Horrible wool!

STRIDEFORTH

You must be hungry. Here, share this feeble carrot.

SOB

Oh, that's very kind of you. Just the sort of gesture that would be rewarded if we turned out to be not wandering vagrants, but disguised gods, or secret magicians.

All SFX: Munching carrots.

SOB (CONT'D)

Well, we'd better be going.  
Buhbye.

James & Joey SFX: Footsteps.

STRIDEFORTH

Huh. Disappointing.

FAWLKES

Look. It's getting dark.

PERCH

It looks like the barbarian horde won't come today. Maybe tomorrow.

STRIDEFORTH

Let's go.

FAWLKES

Yep. Let's go.

PERCH

Let's go.

FAWLKES

And the stage goes dark as  
twilight gives way to monologue.

-- Monologue Interlude --

STRIDEFORTH

So. Here we are. Brave,  
intelligent Strideforth ready to-

PERCH

You again!

STRIDEFORTH

Yes me again. Why shouldn't I be  
here?

PERCH

I thought you had deserted.

STRIDEFORTH

Never! I'd sooner hang myself from  
this spindly tree.

PERCH

Well that's an option. We could  
hang ourselves. That branch would  
probably take your weight.

STRIDEFORTH

That's not a branch, it's  
emergency musical guest James  
Carney.

PERCH

Well it would probably take your  
weight.

STRIDEFORTH

Alright. Let's try it. Give me a  
leg up. Hrrg.

PERCH

Uff...

FAWLKES

What are you two up to?

STRIDEFORTH & PERCH

Aa!

STRIDEFORTH

Not hanging outselves, certainly.

FAWLKES

Ah, good. I expect the barbarians will be here any minute.

PERCH

Look, do we really have to fight the barbarians? It seems a little...

STRIDEFORTH

Pointless.

PERCH

Yes. Pointless.

FAWLKES

Ah... No, I suppose not. You two can scarper if you want. It's probably not that important.

STRIDEFORTH

Great! Let's go.

PERCH

Yes. Let's go.

Beat.

FAWLKES

You haven't gone.

PERCH

Won't you come too?

FAWLKES

Naw. One of us had better stay. After all, we are the Outermost Opposition to the Enemies of the Empire, with Orders to Outlast, Ongoingly. OEEEE000. (That's that out the way). Got to keep up appearances.

STRIDEFORTH

Well?



PERCH

We can't just leave him.

FAWLKES

Look! There's something on the horizon! Finally! The barbarians are coming to brighten our day by murdering us.

PERCH

No. No it looks more like a witch being dragged along in a wheelie bin by a skeleton.

STRIDEFORTH

AA! Witches! Skeletons! I knew it!

PERCH

Here they come! You'd better talk to them.

STRIDEFORTH

Ah, yes. I see, a repeating formula. Hey! You there! Witch and Skeleton!

Joey SFX: Footsteps.

James SFX: Wheels.

YAGCEK

Witch?! How dare you! I am no a witch! I am a respectable gypsy nomad woman with numerous colourful scarves and a traditional pointy hat and broom. How could you mistake me for a witch? And he is not a skeleton he's just skinny.

KENT

I have a fast metabolism!

STRIDEFORTH

Ah. I see. And you haven't, by any chance, encountered a barbarian horde on your travels?

YAGCEK

We have seen many things as we have roamed this desert.

KENT

This is no ordinary desert! Oh no!

YAGCEK

This is an endless expanse that stretches between worlds. Death and insanity are its compass points. Ghosts and demons, it's populace. Stray no further, foolish mortals, into this netherworld. We are doomed to wander this forsaken land, but it is not a fate that any should seek out!

STRIDEFORTH

Well if you're fated to wander this landscape. It's full of Roman Legions, Barbarian Hordes, Zombies, Witches and Skeletons.

PERCH

You must be hungry. Here. Share some of this pathetic radish.

YAGCEK

Oh! Thank you! If I were a witch, which I am not, I would certainly reward you for your kindness.

All SFX: Munching radish.

KENT

Goodbye! Good luck with your barbarians.

Joey SFX: Footsteps.

James SFX: Wheels.

STRIDEFORTH

Right! That's it. We're clearly in some sort of horrible limbo desert. I'm hanging myself. Boost me up so I can reach last resort musical guest James Carney.

PERCH

Oh, alright. Here. Hrg!

-- Musical Interlude --

STRIDEFORTH

So. Here we are. Bold, erudite Strideforth, gazing out at-

PERCH

You!

STRIDEFORTH

You!

PERCH

I thought you hanged yourself.

STRIDEFORTH

The musical guest snapped. Look.

PERCH

I see. Well. Here we are again.

STRIDEFORTH

Predictably enough. Nothing to be done. So it goes, and other fashionably stoic glib wisdom.

PERCH

It looks like it wants to rain.

STRIDEFORTH

Ah, yes. Good idea. Let's repeat the things we said earlier to make them seem more significant.

Beat.

PERCH

I can't remember what we said.

STRIDEFORTH

Neither can I.

FAWLKES

Hullo! It's me again! Come to complete the tableau! I have found another set of sandals, but now my helmet is too big.

STRIDEFORTH

Do you think the barbarians will come today?

PERCH

Maybe we've missed them.

FAWLKES

Look! There on the horizon! It's them! It's the barbarian horde!

PERCH

Finally!

STRIDEFORTH

Yes. Yes, that could be a barbarian horde. How gratifying. Here they come.

FAWLKES

You talk to them.

STRIDEFORTH

I know the drill. Hey there! Barbarians! What's your game?

GRICK

Hello. I am the Warlord Grick, and this is my barbarian horde, Featherstone.

FEATHERSTONE

Wotcher!

GRICK

I suppose you'll want us to... ahem... put you to the sword.

STRIDEFORTH

Actually we're not so terribly keen. We don't feel particularly invested in our Empire's jingoism.

GRICK

Ah, yes. It's understandable. After millennia of scourging this infinite desert we too have rather lost our taste for blood.

STRIDEFORTH

I'm sorry, millennia?

FEATHERSTONE

Yep! As the damned spirits of the perpetrators of unspeakable violence we, just like you, are condemned to this insufferable underworld in perpetuity.

STRIDEFORTH

We're... dead?

GRICK

Alas yes. And having lived lives of cruelty we find ourselves locked into an eternal punishment meted out by some unknown authority.

FEATHERSTONE  
If only we hadn't been such  
bastards when we was alive!

STRIDEFORTH  
Yes. You were clearly villainous  
heathens. But we had God on our  
side! We were doing what's right!

Beat.

GRICK & FEATHERSTONE  
AHAHAHAHA! Hahaha.

GRICK  
Yes. Haha. Very good. God. Ahaha!  
I needed that.

James & Joey SFX: Footsteps receding.

FEATHERSTONE  
You're a hoot, you lot! Bye now.

GRICK  
Good luck in hell. Cheerio.

Music: At Last Embracing...

STRIDEFORTH  
Well. That wasn't very tolerant of  
our religious beliefs. Did you see  
that?

FAWLKES  
I did, yes.

STRIDEFORTH  
Did you see?

PERCH  
Yes. Quite rude, really.

FAWLKES  
At least they didn't murder us.

PERCH  
Yes, at least they didn't do that.

STRIDEFORTH  
Yes.

Beat.

STRIDEFORTH (CONT'D)  
Shall we go?

FAWLKES

Yeah, let's go.

PERCH

Let's go.

THE END

NARRATOR

And the three remain. Standing under a louring sky. By a tree with a broken limb. Waiting. Forever. And you too, dear listeners, must wait, but not forever. Only until it's time for you to join us once again: only until The Unseen Hour.

Music.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

We hope that you are still with us at the end of The Unseen Hour - Episode 26: Waiting For... The Unseen Hour is recorded live on the first Wednesday of every month at The Rosemary Branch Theatre in London, courtesy of Unattended Items. This episode was performed, patiently, by Brice Stratford, Joey Timmins and James Carney and featured a monologue written by Sid Singh and performed by Laura-Jane Romer-Ormiston, the musical guest was James Carney. Theme music by The Unrecorded. The Unseen Hour is an Unseen Things production created, written and produced by James Carney and the podcast is produced, all in good time, by Andy Goddard. If my calculations are correct, there is a live Unseen Hour performance on the day this episode is scheduled for release! It's at VAULT Festival in Waterloo, London. Today! Go now! Get to Waterloo! Quick! It's at six o'clock! Leake Street! Go! You can check tickets at VAULTFestival.com. Search Unseen Hour! And, as ever, we all look forward to seeing you again, here, at the Unseen Hour.