

Episode Four

Tower

Josie: I wish I had something I could call you in these letters, some affectionate term that you would recognize. Some tether between us. I wish I knew your name.

I could invent one, of course. I could just decide to call you John, or Edward, or I don't know, Clark. Like Clark Gable. But I'd know it was just an invention. I had a chance to give you a name, fourteen years ago, and I didn't take it. And that was the right choice.

It does make it a little awkward writing these letters—unable to even say who I'm writing to. "Son" seems like an imposition after all this time. If you could hear me, maybe you could know just a piece of how much I hope for you. Maybe it would be in my voice.

But you don't have my voice, and I don't have your name. We just have these words, and really, even "we" is an act of optimism. I fold these letters away and hide them in my attaché like a decoded defense strategy.

I should probably say I'm not writing this from my usual place in the basement of Mrs. Bowen's house. I'm in a bomb shelter in a Tube station near St. Paul's, along with a couple dozen others. I got caught out. I was wandering too late on the streets, and I wasn't anywhere near home when the sirens began.

Well, perhaps "wandering" isn't the right word. I wasn't being aimless. I had a purpose, even if I didn't know where I was headed. I was following Ramsey Whateley-Campbell.

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[Theme music; opening credits]

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Josie: I did end up letting Mrs. Irving do a Tarot reading on me in the basement night before last. I don't completely understand how it's all supposed to work. She didn't have me ask a question or anything. She simply shuffled the large stiff deck, and laid out a spray of three cards on the little linen tablecloth and turned them over one by one. She named each card as she turned it over, and then told me what it meant. I've seen her book on palm-reading, so I assume somewhere she has a book on the Tarot that teaches how to interpret the cards. Or she could just be making it all up.

She turned over a card she called "The Hanged Man," which showed a man upside down, tethered to a wooden post like a rough crucifix. She told me this indicated sacrifice or deprivation, but wouldn't say what that meant.

The second card showed a huge batwinged beast with a broad savage face, squatting on top of a pedestal. It had the torso of a man, and the legs and horns of a black goat. One of its hands held a torch pointed at the ground. A naked man and woman were chained to the pedestal, as if the beast was controlling or enslaving them. They had tails and horns too, and they looked deeply unhappy. It was an ominous image, and I didn't need the inverted pentagram on the beast's forehead to know what it was.

"The Devil," Mrs. Irving intoned. "Which means entrapment."

"I'm going to be trapped?" I asked.

"It is likely symbolic," she said, straight-faced. "It may mean you feel trapped, or that you will find yourself in a situation where escape feels beyond you."

"I don't think I like this game," I said, laughing.

She did not laugh, and neither did she answer me. She turned over the third card, the final one I supposed, and she gasped when she saw it. It showed a tall tower atop a rocky pinnacle.

Lightning was striking the tower, and flames could be seen curling from several windows. Two people, a man and a woman were falling through the air past the sheer tower walls. Whether having jumped or been thrown it was impossible to tell, but clearly things weren't going well for either of them. I can't explain why, but this card seemed even more ominous to me than the Devil.

I asked, "What is it?" because Mrs. Irving continued to sit silent and wide-eyed.

"The Tower," she said, "means everything changes. Violent upheaval." She looked shocked, and a little scared.

"Mrs. Irving," I said, "I think you may be taking this a little too seriously." I looked at the cards in front of us. "Upheaval? Sacrifice? Feeling trapped? I'm afraid we don't need your cards to predict that. We can just look out the window." As if to underline my words, a bomb fell in the distance. We could hear the scream and fall, the explosion of masonry and dust. Violent upheaval.

She put her hands on top of mine and squeezed them. "Do be careful, dear," she said.

I admit a small feeling of nervousness following her reading. The cards feel to me a bit like breaking a code: you're faced with something that on the surface is incomprehensible, but which can be deciphered, with the proper training, to reveal its true meaning. Except Mrs. Irving isn't deciphering so much as projecting.

The final code I worked on at Bletchley Park had a clear meaning, an objective meaning that needed, I thought, no explication. It was a fact. But I was wrong there too, and what I thought was a discernible truth was open to interpretation, from some quarters, at least.

This is shaky ground for me. I know the world has ambiguity and areas of grey. But I build my life around the parts that are clear—where even if it looks confusing or contradictory, a

sharp mind can see the truth. Someone may have scribbled over the map, but the truth shows through. But in my darkest moments I worry about this. I look at the clear path, but there is a darkness that dances around the edge of my vision, taunting me with the idea that it's all made up. That what feels like the truth is just a pattern we've invented to make sense of the chaos. That we're not code-breakers, we're no better than some ancient diviner reading omens in the stars. Lost and dying.

This is why I shouldn't let Mrs. Irving do readings.

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The next day I called the number on Ramsey Whateley-Campbell's card. I was surprised when the phone picked up and I heard his voice. I had expected a secretary or some other intermediary, but it was the man himself.

He said he was happy to hear from me, and that he had a lot to tell me. But he wouldn't do so over the phone for fear it would be overheard.

"You know as well as I do that our government can't be trusted," is how he put it, and I wondered again what he knew about me.

We set a meeting for the next afternoon at a bar near the Tower Bridge. I hung up the phone and went shopping.

I bought a new dress and an overcoat with a fur collar. I also got new shoes, shiny and black and not at all like the flat sensible shoes I wear around London. And finally I bought a pair of dark sunglasses.

These people clearly know who I am and what I look like. Whateley-Campbell has been following me, and however they're doing their magic tricks with the living dead, they know to target me. My plan then was to be someone else.

I wasn't trained as a spy. But I know how to change the way I look. I had no intention of meeting Ramsey Whateley-Campbell, but I did intend to keep the appointment.

I arrived early and took a seat at the bar. I had spent an hour on my hair, rolling curls in the back and smooth finger waves across the front. The new dress was black and close-fitting, and the setting sun through the big glass windows made it plausible for me to keep my shades on as I settled onto a barstool. I was wearing a bright red lipstick, very unlike my normal darker shade, and I had rouged my cheeks to make my face a little more hollow. I carried a black clutch handbag, just big enough to hold my service revolver.

I had tried to leave the house without being seen, but Mrs. Bowen caught me just as I reached the door. She lit up like a candle—I'm sure she's convinced I finally found a beau. Maybe she'll leave me alone now.

I ordered a martini and waited. The bar was mercifully fairly crowded. A man sat on the stool next to me, and for once I was happy for it.

Ramsey Whateley-Campbell arrived ten minutes later, still five minutes before we had scheduled our meeting. He took a table on the corner which gave him an unimpeded view of the door. He looked the same as before: overcoat, which he threw over a chair, dark suit, a crisp trilby he tossed on the table as he sat. He ordered a pint from the waitress and watched the door for me. I sipped my martini and watched him.

After a moment he pulled a small book out of his inside pocket and opened it on the table in front of him. It was a strange, leatherbound book thick yellowed pages, about half the size of a normal novel. I wasn't close enough to read it, obviously, but I could tell there were two different colors of ink—black and red. He ran his finger down a column of writing and turned over a page, his brow creased. Then he put the book away and looked at his watch. By his

estimation I was ten minutes late.

I ordered another martini. I kept a cigarette in my hand, just in case Whateley-Campbell looked toward me. Ten minutes later, after glancing at his watch twice more, he started scanning the room. I leaned towards the man sitting next to me and asked for a light, smiling.

“Sure thing, doll,” he said. He smelled strongly of fish, but I allowed him to lean in close and hold a match to my Lucky Strike. I inhaled and thanked him. He stayed uncomfortably close to my face, and I let him, watching Whateley-Campbell out of the corner of my eye. My cigarette lighter was saying something about the war, connected somehow to the color my eyes. I was grateful for his large shaggy head to hide behind.

Whateley-Campbell finished scanning the room and stood up, shrugging into his overcoat and grabbing his hat. He tossed a few pounds on the table and left the bar, his beer untouched. I stood and followed him, ignoring the protests from my fishy man at the bar.

Outside the sun was bleeding orange and gold across the river. The bar was tucked in a little corner by the bridge, backing on the Thames, and the breeze off the water was cold and cutting. I pulled my coat closer and followed Whateley-Campbell, who had set off in the opposite direction, toward the Tower. I trailed at a discreet distance, trying to be as quiet as possible on my clicking spike heels. I was more anxious than ever to find out more about this man and his organization. I didn't know exactly what the book was he had consulted in the bar, but I know a code-book when I see one.

I had just begun to curse my choice of footwear when my quarry turned abruptly into an alley. We were nearly alongside the Tower now, and the battlements cast a long shadow across the street. I slowed, and crept to the edge of the alleyway, my hand reaching in my purse for the revolver. I stood against the wall of the building at the corner, and peered around into the alley.

Whateley-Campbell was about halfway down the alley, and he was not alone. There were three other people with him. One was a man, youngish looking, dressed like a sailor or dockworker. The other two were women, middle-aged, dressed like any housewife you'd see at the market. I couldn't imagine what this incongruous crew were doing hanging around this alleyway. He hadn't stopped to call anyone. So assumedly they were there all along, waiting? Had he planned to bring me here? Or to report to these people after meeting me?

Whateley-Campbell was talking in a low voice. He sounded agitated, and at one point he pulled out the strange little book and held it up, like it proved something. One of the women put her hand on his arm. The sailor-looking man put his hands in his pockets and looked at the sky, uncomfortable.

And then I had a brief, uncomfortable moment when I thought I was misinterpreting everything I was seeing. The same four people were in the alley in front of me, but I became convinced that they were something else entirely. Their faces seemed to fit wrongly on their heads, like a child's Halloween mask. There were blurry places in the alley beyond them, and I had a sudden sick certainty that something else was in the alley with them.

I retreated to a doorway across the street and down a little way. I could hear the ravens at the Tower croaking. I had imagined whatever I thought I had seen—the growing darkness, the shadows in the alley, and the two martinis I had drunk too quickly at the bar had conspired to muddle me. I took a series of deep breaths and waited.

In a short while, maybe ten minutes, Whateley-Campbell emerged from the alley and walked quickly away, heading west toward the City. He moved with purpose, looking neither left nor right. He passed me on the other side of the street and disappeared around the corner.

I waited a few more minutes, but no one came out of the alley. Eventually I edged my

way to the corner and looked around. The alley was empty. There were several possible escape routes, and it was impossible to know to where they had all scattered.

I had given up then, and was headed back to the Underground when the sirens began. I took shelter here, in Mark Lane station, with a few dozen others.

I don't know what to make of it yet. Clearly, there is a secret network that has members drawn from all walks of life, and they are targeting me. The only reason anyone could be interested in me is because of my connection to Bletchley Park.

I know should report this back to Sergeant Waverly. But I want more information. I'm going to dig deeper. Tomorrow I'll call Whateley-Campbell and tell him I was held up today. Set up another meeting. Ask more questions. If I'm lucky, I'll meet some of the others, and maybe get insight into what their objective is.

This is a puzzle I can solve. I feel useful again for the first time since they sent me away. I'll write again tomorrow, and I expect to have much more to tell you.

yours,

Josie

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p.s. Things are moving faster than I expected. I have just realized that one of the women Whateley-Campbell met with, the older one who wears her hair in a kerchief, is actually here in the shelter with me. She must have found herself caught out, just like me. She's sitting by herself near the stairs, knitting, with a paper shopping bag at her feet. I'm going to talk to her, to make friends. She'll certainly not know who I am. I'm going over there now. Wish me luck.

J.

[End music; credits]