

Episode 308

Broken

Josie: When I broke the code that revealed the raid on Hawthorne, General Montgomery is who the report went to. It was the first time I ever spoke with him. With any general at all, really. There were dozens of us working on the machines, and we didn't rate attention from the higher-ups. Except for the times when Turing himself would wander down to look things over, we might as well have been factory workers. A secret intelligence assembly line.

But when I told Sergeant Waverly what I had found, it was only half an hour or so before I was summoned to the general's office. It was in the manor house, where I almost never went. The code-breaking is done in these large outbuildings called "huts." I was in Hut 6, which is all German air and army. After the dim stuffy air in the hut, the house itself felt like a palace. I sat in an oak chair in a dark paneled hall with a thick patterned carpet while I waited for General Montgomery to call me in. I couldn't understand what he wanted, not then. He asked me to confirm what I had found, and then said he was very impressed, although he didn't sound it. Then he crushed out his cigarette and sent me back to the hut.

Three days later, I saw it in the newspaper. Hawthorne had been hit, and hit hard. I remember my vision blurring as I caught snatches of the article: "heavy civilian casualties," "German atrocities," "no warning beforehand." I remember struggling against arms trying to hold me down, and shouting something, screaming until I felt my throat tear.

And then I was in front of the General again. The same office, the same patterned carpet under my feet, the same smell of tobacco. Two soldiers stood behind me, one holding each of my arms which were pulled behind my back.

“Miss Waters,” the general said. “The stress of your work seems to be taking an unfortunate toll.”

My throat hurt from screaming. I could feel my make-up caked across my face from the tears. I said, “I told you. We knew.”

And he smiled at me. Like I was a child, like he pitied my naivete.

“We have much bigger nets to cast,” he said. “There are larger troop movements and more strategic targets.”

“They’re all dead,” I said. And against all my will I started crying again.

The general actually patted my cheek. “We can’t tip our hand, you see?”

I tried to step forward, but the soldiers at my back tightened their grip. The general said, “I’m sorry you won’t be able to continue with us.”

And then he nodded to the soldiers and I found myself unceremoniously removed from Bletchley Park.

Sergeant Waverly oversaw me packing my things. It was him who suggested I should “keep an eye out” once I got to London, and told me they may check in from time to time to see if I’d found anything. It was busy work, but it was also a message. They would know if I talked.

So I don’t talk. To anyone. Not even them. I don’t intend to tell them about Whateley-Campbell, and I don’t intend to tell them about what’s going to happen. Because things have changed considerably in the three days since my last letter. I’ve spent a lot of time with Whateley-Campbell’s book.

I’ve broken the code. Not only do I know what’s in the book, I know what it means. And I’ll tell *you* because if you ever see this it’ll be too late anyway. But beyond that it’s going to stay my secret.

I don't want to tip my hand, you see.

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[Theme music; opening credits]

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Josie: As I suspected, it was one of the sections in English that eventually led to the first breakthrough. There was a section near the end that had a nonsense phrase in English: “lived raw as i dog.” I was sitting at my vanity table before bed two nights ago, and the book was laying open in front of me, randomly open to that page. I leaned forward grab to my hairbrush and I caught a glimpse of the phrase in the mirror.

The phrase isn't written in mirrored text, but something about seeing it reflected made me look closer. Perhaps it was the realization that “dog” was “god” reversed. I picked up the book, and read the five words backwards.

“God is a war devil.”

I'm still shaky on the meaning of that particular phrase, though it makes a little more sense once the rest of the book falls into place. The main thing was that it brought a shift in perspective—a simple shift that I should have seen much earlier. The entire book was backwards, more or less, at least in terms of most Western writing. It began at what I had thought was the back cover, and moved right to left. The words I had mistaken for an encoded title eventually revealed themselves to me as “Thus it ends.” The last page, not the first.

I don't know what the most appropriate word is for what the book appears to be. The colors indicate different content. The black ink appears to be something like philosophy, although some of it reads more like scripture. A sample from an early page:

When beset by iniquity, they together sanctified the blood before its

release, and thus the Oldest rose from the summer isle and laid all to ruin.

There's a lot like that. Lots of sanctifying and iniquity. Lots of blood. It does, thankfully appear to be translated into a code from English, even though a lot of the phrasing is antiquated. There are several words that repeat at various places that are not English, or at least they aren't words I've ever seen before. Context suggests they may be names, but they're unpronounceable, all consonants and apostrophes. I tried saying the first one out loud, and it made me feel...uneasy somehow. It sounded like the taste of bile. I'm not comfortable writing them here.

Most of these references rely on other words in place of the names, though. Descriptors or clarifying phrases. It reminded me of old stories of the Christian devil, who was called Old Scratch or Splitfoot or a dozen other names to avoid saying his true one. Because saying his name was sometimes thought to summon him.

I don't think I'm too far off base with the association, either. The other parts of Whateley-Campbell's code book, the parts written in that dark brownish-red ink, are spells. I don't know what else to call them. They are written out like recipes, with descriptions of hand positions, lists of necessary ingredients, and words written like poetry—incantations.

Here's an example. The first and I suppose simplest is called "Defensive Summoning." It says "spill the blood of the blameless, raise your fist on high, speak and your enemies shall be as dust." It's followed by an incantation, that's what it means by "speak," I assume. There's a lots of these spells, and they get more and more elaborate the deeper you go in the book. I still have fifteen pages left to translate, but I can already see that the last several pages appear to be one long spell.

Whateley-Campbell phoned today to ask how I was getting on. My life seems suddenly

filled with men wondering how I'm getting on. But I was able to tell him that I thought I'd have something for him soon. I still don't know what I'm going to do. I'm far from convinced this isn't all just misplaced religious fervor. If not for the ghosts I wouldn't even be entertaining any other possibilities.

I will stop writing for now. I have to get back to it. I've barely slept since I first began teasing out the meaning in the book, but I can't rest now. I'm nearly done.

I don't have much time. So many things have happened since I put down my pen—what was it?—only three hours ago. It feels like a lifetime has passed since then. I shall try to record things as they happened. My hand is shaking so badly I fear you'll never be able to make out the words.

I went upstairs to continue decoding on the book. The work went quickly, and I soon had the bulk of it done. The long final section in red is a spell to summon something, a thing that the book calls "The Oldest." It has a name, and the final spell declares it in the incantation. I won't write it here. The word looks wrong on the page, sending a wave of nausea over me when I look at it, like I'm sea sick. Or no, not like that. Like the reverse. Like when you've been on a boat for a long time and you step back onto land. The feeling that the ground beneath you is shifting in slow undulations, like something underneath is waking from a long sleep. Yeats suggests a rough beast slouches towards us all. I think that beast's name is in Whateley-Campbell's book.

I know this final spell is why they want the book. I don't know what botched version they've already tried, but *something* was moving in the Tube tunnels at Mark Lane Station while we waited through the night. And something has brought the ghosts of the London dead thronging around me like a cloud of flies. And this spell is not for the faint of heart. It

involves...well, there are a number of legal and moral boundaries it would cross. And if it actually worked...

I'm thinking again of my Cornell acquaintance and his theory of fabric between the worlds. This spell is the rubbing away of the final membrane. Whateley-Campbell says it would end the war. But it's not just the war. It's everything.

So I was sitting with the book, wondering what to do. I lit a cigarette and stared out the window. I was considering burning it, just throwing the book into the fireplace, and then getting a plane or ship back to America. Running from both Whateley-Campbell's cult and the British government.

But then I heard it again.

"Mother, help me."

Plaintive, thin, but clearly spoken in the still air of my sitting room. I froze where I was.

"Mother, I can't find you."

And for a moment, I couldn't breathe. And then I heard a pounding on the front door, followed by several men shouting.

I grabbed the book and ran to the top of the stairs. Mrs. Irving emerged from her room at the same time as me. Mrs. Bowen was in the foyer, trying to prevent two men from forcing their way into the house. Neither of the men were the one who had threatened me before, but they were cut from the same cloth. Close-cropped hair, nondescript suits under nondescript overcoats. Clearly government agents. And they had guns drawn.

I was halfway down the stairs when I realized I did not have my service revolver with me. Both of the men saw me and shouted my name, calling for me to "stand down" in the name of the Prime Minister. Then Mrs. Irving screamed from behind me, and both guns went off.

I don't believe they were aiming for her. I know they were aiming for me. One of the bullets exploded in the plaster just above the stair railing by my hand. The other one hit Mrs. Bowen in the head, nearly point blank, and she went down in a spray of blood and bone. Mrs. Irving screamed louder, and the men stopped, uncertain for a moment. Killing Mrs. Bowen was clearly not in their plan, but there she was, laying in a spreading pool of blood on the hardwood floor of the foyer.

Again, I'm going to write exactly what happened. I need to document this, especially since the memory is already growing hazy. I'm afraid if I wait until later I won't be able to give the details. I don't know why I did what I did. I suppose the hours immersed in Whateley-Campbell's book had more of an effect on me than I realized.

I lifted the book and opened it to the first page—it was the “Defense Summoning” spell. I raised my fist toward the ceiling, and I read the incantation.

I won't write it here. It makes my head swim to even remember saying the words. But I said them, with my fist raised, standing near the spilled blood of my blameless landlord. The air in the room seemed to thicken, like an approaching thunderstorm, and then something was in the room with us.

None of the words I might use are the right ones. I know three languages fluently, and have a smattering of two others. I don't think there are words for what I saw. Not even adjectives that capture individual elements. Words like “teeth” and “tentacle” aren't necessarily wrong, I suppose, but you can't construct the thing from ideas like that. It came out of the walls and floor, seeping like oil. It was huge, taller than the room it stood in, and even there I'm trying to say something that I don't have language for. Crazy, the thought that kept running through my head was of an illustration from a copy of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* from when I was a child,

the one of the Jabberwock. That picture kept me from sleeping for weeks when I was seven or eight. And the fear I felt was the same childlike terror, simple and all-consuming.

The men felt it too. They looked at the thing towering over them, and they made a feeble attempt to run. Clearly nothing in their training had prepared them for this. They stumbled toward the door, their guns forgotten, thinking of nothing but getting out and away. The thing watched them—I think those were eyes, I don't know what else to call them—and then it fell on them.

The spell had said “your enemies shall be as dust,” but that was just poetic hyperbole. It certainly didn't give any indication of the visceral way the men were dispatched. The slow and bloody unfolding of their bodies. The sounds of their undoing. It seemed to go on a long time.

And then it was done. There was nothing in the foyer but Mrs. Bowen's body and the crumpled carpet runner, caught under the half-open door.

Mrs. Irving had fainted. She lay at the top of the stairs. I hadn't moved since I cast the spell. I lowered my hand. I had squeezed my fist so tightly my fingernails had carved little half-moons into my palm. The book was oddly warm in my hand, but it was cooling, like a spent firework.

I closed the door, being careful not to step in the congealing pool around Mrs. Bowen's corpse. Then I got Mrs. Irving to her bed and told her to keep the door locked. She looked afraid but weirdly composed. I don't doubt she'll do as I've asked.

So now I've written it all down. I'm going to call Whateley-Campbell. I don't know what I'm going to say, or what's going to happen next. But I needed to get this on paper. Everything has changed now.

It's not you, is it? It's not you speaking into my ear when no one is there? It can't be. Oh

my darling, why can't you find me?

I feel like it's all closing in on me. I have to go. I'll write more soon.

I remain, as much as it matters,

your Josie

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[End credits; theme music]

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