

***THE
TWYFORD
CODE***

Janice Hallett



Friend, on reflection
May you be rain
On torrid heaths,
Even rocky byways.
Remote, intangible,
And now . . .

19 November 2021

Dear Professor Mansfield,

I am investigating a mysterious case and suspect you may be able to help. Let me explain.

An iPhone 4 is among a number of items belonging to a recently reported missing person. It is not associated with any mobile network and at first appeared to be blank, with no call records, music, emails, texts or photographs. Upon closer examination it was found to contain a series of deleted audio files: voice recordings in various encrypted formats, with dates that span eleven weeks in 2019. We recovered these files and deciphered them.

There are 200 files in total. We utilised specialist software and processed them in batches to speed up the transcription process. A key to this follows, along with the text. You will notice the transcription is phonetic, so spelling and grammar are quirky to say the least. On a number of occasions the software 'mishears' or simply approximates words and phrases, especially when speech is in the vernacular. For instance, the phrase 'must have' is frequently transcribed as 'mustard'. 'Going to' becomes 'gun a' and the town of Bournemouth is referred to variously as 'bore mouth', 'Bormuth', 'bore moth' and 'boar mouth'. You will soon become accustomed to this and it should not interfere with your understanding of the material.

I've sent these files to you, Professor, in the strictest confidence. Quite apart from any personal connection you may have to the subject, your expert opinion on their contents would be very much appreciated. Call me when you've read to the end and we'll speak then.

Yours sincerely,

Inspector Waliso

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Foreign language identification***

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Key

()	indecipherable verbal content, either unheard or unclear.
(.)	a small pause in speech, e.g. one-tenth of a second.
(. . .)	a longer pause in speech, e.g. three-tenths of a second.
=	overspeak, the speaker is interrupted by another.
Y:::es	prolongation. The number of colons denotes length of prolongation.
LOUDER	capitalisation, louder speech (may also denote emphasis).
<i>Quieter</i>	italic text, quieter or whispered speech.
.hhhhh	inbreath detected. Relative to length of breath.
hhhhh	outbreath detected. Relative to length of breath.
(perhaps)	indecipherable verbal content, with suggested word based on audible sentence.
s[EXPLICIT]t	offensive or vulgar word, in Clean mode only.
[background noise]	verbal or non-verbal background noise detected. May or may not obscure speech.
(00:01:00)	longer, timed period of silence or non-verbal background noise (hrs:mins:secs).
[time ref 0000]	time reference detected. Automatic diary sync with paid-for upgrades only.
[language: French]	foreign language detected. Automatic translation with paid-for upgrades only.

Audio Files Batch 1

[Start Transcript]

Audio File 1

Date: 12.04.19 14:20

Audio quality: Poor

.hhhhh Ready? This is to show Maxine I meant what I said.

Audio File 2

Date: 12.04.19 14:24

Audio quality: Good

That's better. So. I'm speaking into my son's old phone and will explain why in a little bit. I'm not used to it, so (. . .) When he first gave it to me I was convinced I'd never use it for anything other than speaking to Maxine and calling in sick. But that night I sat up till two o'clock [*DecipherIt™ time ref 52781277-0988837*]

I've played every record in his iTunes. His idea. It was only the second time we'd met. He didn't grow up with me, see. I never knew he existed till an acquaintance mentioned his mum'd had a nipper. I put two and two together and made nine months. He would a been ten then. There's so much to say, but I look at him across that table in Costa, his hair about to turn grey at the edges and tiny lines on his forehead. I think: how could my boy be so grown up? Everything slides clean out me loaf and we sit there in silence.

Finally, I mention how much I'm looking forward to meeting his missus and nippers, seeing his house in Surrey and the posh university where he works. That's when he gets a panicked look and bursts out he doesn't want us to meet again. Perhaps the odd phone

call. Keep in touch but not (. . .) So, he goes quiet and says we can face time instead. I says isn't this face time? He asks to see the phone they gave me on release and when I show him he laughs and says it's a burner, can't do much with that. I say yeah, that's the idea. He thinks for a bit and says have my old one. He gets it out his car and in a few minutes his old phone was my new phone.

Audio File 3

Date: 12.04.19 15:04

Audio quality: Good

If I wanted to carry on as I had, there are lots of people I could have gone to. Even now, after all that went on, with the old crowd dead or inside, if I put the word out, I could be set up somewhere, doing something, in no time. But I won't. Those days are over. Trouble is, on this side a the fence I don't know a soul. Only Maxine and (. . .) only you, Maxine. A lot changed for me in the last few years. And do you know what triggered it? I learned to read.

Two youngsters come in. A boy and a girl. Just in their twenties. Claimed to have a whole new way to teach adults with literacy problems. Not easy. Most in that place had so many problems literacy was the least of em. But these youngsters were so enthusiastic you couldn't help but get carried along. Even the tough old fellows. And the young fellows who thought they were tough.

They took our chairs away. Made us move round the room. Not like being slumped in front of a teacher, staring, trying to listen. They got us to play with big alphabet letters. It was nothing but strange at first. Big gnarly old fellows playing like kids. Then a change happened. Words appeared. I could link them to sounds, meanings, in a way I never had at school. It was like I'd cracked a secret code.

We all made progress thanks to them youngsters. I say progress, Kos of course, ignorance is bliss. Spanners realised one of his oldest tattoos was spelt wrong. Smelly Bob finally understood the graffiti on his cell nameplate. But for me it opened a door where there'd always been a wall (. . .) That sounds like I escaped, but (. . .) suppose I did

escape, in my head. Suddenly the library trolley weren't just where I bought me contra. It were stacked with treasure waiting to be found.

I read sentence after sentence. Couldn't get enough of words. Well, I had a lot of time to make up for. Before long I read a whole book from start to finish. Lord of the Flies. I was on top of the world. It meant I could read. Finally. I was. I could suddenly (. . .) That's when I started thinking I'd do THIS when I got out. And it got me through the last few years.

All them kids running around wild on that island. Took me back, I suppose. Something nagged at me about missiles and what happened all those years ago. I read Animal Farm too, but it was all talking animals. Didn't get to me like piggy and Ralph. Afterwards I still had that feeling. I've got it now. It's always there. Nagging. Unfinished.

Audio File 4

Date: 12.04.19 18:44

Audio quality: Good

It's a nuisance I don't know how to listen back to these recordings after I've done em. Maybe they can help at the library (. . . .) So I can read now much better, but writing is still tricky. When I discovered I can record my voice on my son's old phone, just like the old dictating machines but no need for little cassettes, I decided I'd dictate this. What is it? Diary? Project? Investigation? For Maxine. Something for me to do when I finish work at the end of the day. Keep me busy. Out of trouble.

I want to make clear that although I couldn't read, I weren't as illiterate as some of em in there. Some wouldn't know their own name if it were up in ten-foot flashing lights. Not me. I could recognise important words. Steven Smith. Toilets. Gents. Men. Tickets. Exit. I'd pick out the shapes of the words rather than individual letters.

We learn from the knowledge of others and reading is a big part of that for most people. So if you can't do it, there's an assumption you must be stupid. Now, I may not be well read, but I know about the

world. I've lived. I've had experiences and watched a lot of very interesting documentaries, especially over the last few years. I'd also like to say that I consider myself an articulate person. Verbally that is. I listen to what's said. Not just hear. Listen. I've heard just as many words as you've read, Maxine. And if you've heard a word once, you can use it yourself as often as you like from then on.

For all those years I didn't miss what I'd never had. Didn't feel the need to read sentences. I could wing it. If I got caught out I'd say, oh I've lost my glasses, could you read it for me? It has its plus side too. Think about it. If you need to remember something, you write it down. I couldn't – and still can't – but it means I remember things. My memory is much better than yours, I'll bet. That's why missiles plays on my mind, because there's so much of that time I CAN'T remember. Or forgotten. Can't remember. Forgotten. Or never knew.

Audio File 5

Date: 13.04.19 19:09

Audio quality: Good

Been listening to my son's playlist called CAR. None of the songs are about cars, so he must put this music on when he's in his car. I think of him on that journey from Surrey to Uxbridge every day. Back again in the evening. I keep going to record my next bit but stop. I'll do it now.

I'll start at the beginning but skip some bits you don't want to (. . .) So I'll say I was born in London on the very last day of 1968. It never felt right to say I was born in 68 because the year was all but over, and 69 would be wrong because it wasn't begun. I still explain it to this day. Funny. Similar thing. At school when they asked where do you live I said Girton House and they'd assume we lived high in the sky. I'd have to say no: we live on the ground floor. We lived on the ground floor of a tower block. See, some answers are (. .) sometimes the truth is misleading.

I'm sure at one time there must have been both my parents, my brother and I in the flat, but I don't remember it. When you're that much a nipper, the home is scenery, I suppose, the heart. Everything

safe, trusted and right tricky to recall years later (. . .) Mum mustard left very early on (. .) because she were hardly ever mentioned. Even now it feels funny saying the word out loud.

When I said it just then, I got a feeling. Of being lifted up from under me arms. Like whoever had hold a me would never let me go. Warm. Sweet .hhhhh (. . .) I've had the feeling before. It comes in a flash, most often when I get a whiff of certain old-fashioned perfumes. Talcum powder mixed with something else. Is that her? Is there a memory of her in me chest after all? Or am I just feeling the (. . .) emptiness (. . .)

We never had a camera so there were no photos of her. And seeing as they never got married, there were no wedding pictures either. Only once did I get me nerve up to ask Dad where Mum was. He said she'd run off with a fella just after I were born. She got a big house now, he said, happy she ain't got you pair on her hands. He meant Colin and me. Then he smashed a bottle in the sink, slammed his way out the flat and disappeared for two days. I never mentioned it again.

Don't remember the exact day Dad left for good. He'd come and go at the best a times. But it were after the Silver Jubilee and before the bin strikes. He met a nice bird down the boozer, Colin shrugged as he told me. Can't blame him, Steve, you can be a proper little s[EXPLICIT]t sometimes and she's got a nice clean flat up north.

From then on, Colin looked after me. I say that. He took washing to the launderette and stuck a pot a beans on the cooker every now and then, but he didn't talk much. Eleven years older than me. When I think of him I remember the 70s. And vice versa.

Flares. Long hair. The Boomtown Rats on top of the pops. He'd watch telly in the chair by the electric fire. In his nylon shirt and tank top. If we could've afforded more than one bar he'd have gone up like a rocket. Browns, oranges, yellows, greens all clashing like mad. He was still in the same clothes well into the 80s. Eventually he got a job at a metalwork factory and would come home covered in blobs of solder.

It sounds bad now. As if I didn't have any upbringing. But I didn't know any different. I don't even think of my trouble as starting back then. It was the summer of 83 that was when (. . .) missiles (. . .)

Audio File 6

Date: 14.04.19 12:29

Audio quality: Good

I'll tell you it all now and not stop start. 1983 was a hot summer in London. I remember a lot of lightness. Pale-coloured clothes. Girls in dusty pink, blue and white. I was 14 so I noticed what the girls were wearing. It was June or July.

I were still going to school then. And still worried about being late for registration. I was late that day. Couldn't run, though. Stifling hot for that time of morning. I was in a hurry because the boy I usually walked with had already gone. It crossed my mind I could get a bus and at that very moment, would you believe it, a big green bus swung into the kerb and stopped right in front of me. Well, I thought how lucky I was and jumped on.

Now, you'll know double-decker London buses back then had an open platform at the back for passengers to get on and off whenever they liked. You'll also know that London buses are red, not green. They were most certainly red where we lived. You had to go all the way out to the suburbs to find a green bus. It's something I've thought about a lot lately. That green bus.

So, I leapt on the bus and haired it up the stairs to sit at the front of the top deck. Funny. I don't remember anyone else being on it. No passengers and no conductor. Is that my memory playing tricks? So I reached the top deck and hurray it's empty too. Just as I headed for the front seat, something stopped me and I decided to sit at the very back instead. On that cosy little seat tucked away, quite special. What was it made me do that? Could I see it?

I stopped in my tracks. There it was. Placed neatly on the chequered cushion. A book.

Now, to me, back then, a book was a book. All books were the same. Except they had different covers. This one had a pencil drawing of a boy in a red jumper, watching a model plane in the sky. That I remember clearly. I had to pick it up to sit down, so I did. The moment I touched that book, the bus set off and I settled down with it on my lap, nothing much more in my mind than getting to school.

I don't claim to be an angel. Then or now. No one seemed to own the book, so taking it couldn't be stealing. But I had enough of a conscience to know I should hand it to the driver. So as the bus trundled nearer the school, I waited on the open deck, glanced over. Couldn't quite see him for the back of his seat and the blind half up, half down. I would have had to run round and bang on the window of his cab. I dismissed that thought pretty quickly because the possibility of selling the book had taken up residence in my head. Into my school bag it went.

The next thing I remember is being in are E. Now. I should go back and explain this. Are E doesn't stand for religious education as you might expect, but remedial English. It weren't a year prior to this that my form teacher made me stand up in class and read something out loud. After a moment or two, a thoughtful look on her face, she said, quite matter of fact, oh you're dyslexic. Oh, you're dyslexic. It was hardly a scientific diagnosis and didn't seem a big deal to anyone, except I had to attend are E instead of English with the rest of the class.

There were five of us in are E at that time. I remember them all. Nathan, Michelle, Donna, Paul and me. Five kids who found two of the most basic human skills, reading and writing, difficult to impossible. All shuffled aside into a tiny classroom to struggle with what everyone else had mastered easily a decade earlier. No wonder we (. .) I wonder if the others still think of it, too.

Audio File 7

Date: 14.04.19 13:15

Audio quality: Good

So I slunk off up the stairs to are E, to that little classroom at the end of the top floor. I wasn't in the habit of listening, so don't remember what the lesson was about. With nothing else to occupy it, my mind wandered to the book in my bag. If I sold it at the right price, I could buy chips on the way home. I slid it out under the desk, had a flick through. The words were meaningless to me but I took in the pencil drawings and occasional colour illustration. In truth I was looking for

any selling points that would help me fence it to the swotty kids at break.

STEVEN SMITH. She'd spotted me. What are you doing? Reading a book, miss. You and your stories, she gasps. What have I told you? Don't make things up.

There she was. Missiles. Standing over me, hands on hips. Eyebrows raised. Finger beckoning me to give her whatever I had under the desk.

I held out the book. It was a temporary hitch. She'd give it back at the end of class. Her eyes dropped to it and I will never forget the surprised tone of her, OH, it IS a book. The way her eyebrows disappeared under her fringe when she saw the cover. Where did you get this?

A stream of potential answers circled round my mind, none of them the truth. A bookshop. Missiles drifted back to her desk, turned the book over in her hands. She laughed to herself as if remembering something pleasant from long ago.

Now I might have found reading difficult but I weren't slow.

It's for sale, miss. She pretended not to hear.

I read this when I was younger than you. It was my favourite, she says, all wistful. At that I added a nought to my asking price and a battered sausage to the big bag of chips in my mind.

She suddenly snapped out of that dreamy look and gave me a hard stare. You shouldn't have this, Steven. Not here. Not now. Not in this school.

Why not, miss? It's mine. I bought it.

Because it's BANNED. Her hushed tone sent a little shiver down my spine.

Well, till now the other kids had been slumped in the heat, watching with what I can only say was gratitude the class had been interrupted, and glee it weren't them in the firing line. But at this news their ears pricked up.

Mine did too, but with a creeping sense of horror. Banned? None of the illustrations had borne any resemblance to the shredded nudey mags I'd occasionally seen in the park. Ripped pages half trodden into the mud. No expert, had I missed a sexual element to

the childish drawings? Did missiles think I'd been w[EXPLICIT] g under the desk? I swallowed, mortified.

Why's it banned? Paul was an unpredictable kid. Moody. Brooding. Got into fights like an alley cat. Kids and adults alike wondered aloud why he was like he was. No one linked it to the fact his father hung himself in his garage a few years previous. Those were the days.

Is it rude? Michelle, or Shell, looked like Jay from Bucks Fizz. Big blonde hair, ear-rings, make-up. As young kids we knocked about together on the estate. She were turned out the flat when her ma had a customer, so she'd tap on me window and we'd sit on the swings in the dark. She didn't have a dad and I didn't have a (. . .) *mum*. But that were then. By 1983 Shell were a long way out a my league.

Missiles perched on her desk. Legs crossed, she properly examined the book, eyes devouring every page. Finally she looked up. Sighed.

Why IS it banned? You tell me.

Then she read it to us.

Now, she can't have read the whole book out loud. But she read quite a bit. I admit I was riveted. I remember bits of it to this day. A bunch of kids with flowery names go camping and spot some dodgy movements at an abandoned airfield. The class went so quiet while she read. Something hypnotic in the rhythm of the words. Remember we were kids who couldn't read for ourselves, so I think in those moments we had a taste a what we were missing. That's me saying that now, though. Me, an old man who thinks he understands a bit better.

What's that bleeping noise? Oh, it's.

Audio File 8

Date: 14.04.19 14:03

Audio quality: Good

It was only Maxine on the line. Where was I?

So missiles had silence while she read. The story raced along until she turned a page and stopped. She was frozen to the spot, captivated by something in the book. A slip of paper. She turned it over in her fingers, examined it, peered closer as if it were tricky to see. Then she frowned as if faced with the most extraordinary puzzle.

She dropped the slip of paper back between the pages. Slowly checked her watch. Closed the book. We were still, silent, as we watched her. The odd glance between us. Then something momentous occurred.

What happens in the end? Nathan didn't speak. He just didn't. Back then, when a kid didn't speak – and I mean AT ALL – they were just the kid who didn't speak.

All heads turned to look at him. Hood up, even in this heat. He surely couldn't see much out of it. The only black kid in the class.

Do they find out who the stranger is? Donna had short hair like a boy. Unusual for those days.

Why's it banned, miss? Paul wasn't letting that one go.

Nothing. Finally, the bell rung missiles out of her thoughts. She looked up at us, five little faces all waiting for an answer, rapt with attention for the very first time. A bunch of rejects who got nothing out of school on a good day (. . .) yeah, she could see she was on to something.

I'll read the rest next lesson and we'll talk about it then, she said, to our collective sigh of resignation. Meanwhile I hadn't forgotten my battered sausage and chips. As the other kids picked up their bags and skulked out, I approached the desk.

Sorry, miss, but I need the book back OR it's yours for ten pounds. She gave me a look.

Steven, this book is a distraction. It is my job to prevent it ruining your education. Anyway, there's something I need to look into.

But, miss, I (. . .) I need to (. . .) It's er (. . .) Did she know I'd taken it? Was she going to trace its legal owner? In a panic I couldn't think quickly enough.

Where did you really find it? She had the book open, held against her chest, out of my reach.

I swallowed hard. How did she know I'd found it? Have to front this up. I shrugged, can't remember.

With a sharp CLAP she snapped the book shut and out wafted the slip of paper. She caught it. Gave me another look, a strange glinty stare this time.

What's this? She said it as if she'd never seen that slip of paper before. I glanced at it, recovered my wits.

Bookmark, miss. Should be an extra pound, but for ten pound fifty, you can have it for free.

A good few looks crossed missiles face.

See. Here. She thrust the slip of paper momentarily under my nose. A line of type danced before my eyes as unintelligible as ever, before it was snatched out of my sight for good.

It says deliver to Alice isles. This book is mine, Smithy. She glared. It's meant for ME.

Audio File 9

Date: 14.04.19 14:53

Audio quality: Good

Did it really say that? Doesn't make sense that it would. I only found the book by chance, didn't I? She knew full well I couldn't read what was on that slip. But bearing in mind what happened next, I'm not so sure. I know I left that classroom with a feeling I'd been conned. I felt so – what? – unnerved I decided there and then I'd never be conned again, never be caught on the hop, always be one step ahead of anyone else. And yes, looking back, those moments on my own with missiles probably were the last time I was lost for words. But it was just the beginning of this story.

[End Transcript]

Audio Files Batch 2

[Start Transcript]

Audio File 10

Date: 15.04.19 18:37

Audio quality: Good

I've done plenty I'm not proud of. After the missiles thing I went off the rails. No (. . .) mum or dad telling me what to do. Colin at work or slumped silent in front of the telly. If I'm gun a cut a long story short then yes, in hindsight, I fell in with the wrong crowd.

Speaking to the young guns who fell in with one of today's wrong crowds, it was relatively innocent. At first. Hooky goods. Sounds old-fashioned but (. .) More of a market for designer clothes, fresh cuts a meat and kiddies' toys on the estates than for Persian back then. Different story now. It changed quickly. You know what I mean by Persian, Maxine. Persian rugs (. . .) yeah.

They started you off young. You ran errands, messages, little packages. The guys looked after you while you learned the ropes and as you got older you were given more responsibility. Chance to prove your loyalty. There were power struggles all the time. But I weren't ambitious. Just wanted to be part a something. Make enough to live on. I knew who the boss was and if I did as he told me, I couldn't go far wrong.

Looking back I often think I was lucky to fall in with the Harrisons. They'd run their patch since before the Second World War. They had a sense of responsibility and fairness you don't get now, not from what I heard inside, anyway.

In those early days, fencing was our bread and butter. Every once in a while a bank or post office, maybe a jewellers. Anything tasty that might come up. But everything went wrong in the 90s. The

docks, where we'd got most of our gear, had all but gone, and it was harder to get merchandise through at the airports. At the same time banks got CCTV, electronic security. That weren't the easy money it once were. We started with Persian to make up for the shortfall. In the blink of an eye, Persian (. . .) drugs took over. And there we were, in bed with international hard cases who'd slot their own grandma if she didn't slot them first.

A good few of the old faces got out then. Escaped to Spain or Essex. I should've too but didn't have the cash. Had to stay put. And the Bill were on to me. From the mid 90s I was in and out more times than a screw's lunchbox. Then I got handed a long stretch and that did for me. Never again. It was hard that last time.

They moved me out to the sticks. Place where they run group talking sessions, art classes. As if that makes it easier (. . .) I felt every day of it. It was my age, see. Went from being one a the young lads running the gaff, to an old-timer. Tolerated, ignored or laughed at. The young guns look at you different. You're not one a them no more. Maybe bird weren't what it used to be. Maybe I'd changed. All I know is, just as I was looking for something else, those young guns come in with their large alphabet letters and well. I've told you already.

Audio File 11

Date: 16.04.19 09:59

Audio quality: Moderate

I want to tell you the rest about missiles and not go off on a story about the past whenever I reach something I don't want to face. That's what Maxine says anyway. So I've got my son's phone with me in the booth. I'll record a little bit here and there between checking the lorries in and out. I hope the noise don't (). That was a big one.

So, missiles confiscated my book, left me battered sausage free and chip-less. I suppose I was angry, but at 14 you soon forget, don't you? I know I'd forgotten by the next RE class, so imagine my surprise when the first thing missiles did was pull my book from her

bag. I could see clearly what she'd done. She'd put that many extra leaves of paper between the pages the book was twice as thick. I could see pen writing on them. As if she'd scribbled down notes about every word.

Missiles opened the book, sat on her desk and took up the story where she'd left off. I tried to listen but I was more intrigued by what she'd been doing.

So she got to the end, snapped the book shut, hugged it to herself, still deep in thought.

That's an old story.

Because Nathan never spoke, when he did, we all jumped a mile.

Yes, Nathan. It was published 44 years ago, in 1939. It was the first of a series. The Super Six. Three girls and three boys are sent to stay with their bad-tempered aunt in the country every summer. There's not much to do there, so they solve mysteries that have been puzzling the local community.

Why's it banned? Paul.

It's banned, says missiles, because it's zen or phobic (. .) That's a word we didn't hear often in South London in the 1980s, let me tell you that. But she wasn't done. It's sexist, racist, patronising and simplistic. If the school board knew I'd been reading this to you, she pauses, her eyes bore into each of us in turn, so we don't doubt the severity of her words. They would sack me on the spot.

We were impressed. Not by the school's commitment to political correctness, but to missiles spirit of rebellion.

Now I have to be honest and say I hadn't noticed any of those qualities in the story missiles read to us. Then again, I wasn't black or a girl, so racism and sexism passed me by. I had no idea what patronising meant, let alone zen or phobic, and if something was simplistic I would've said that were a good thing. Still, the look in missiles eyes didn't beg questions. At. All.

What's them pages you've put in the book? I wasn't one to read a situation back then.

Nothing. She quickly slid the book behind her on the desk, out of our sight.

If you're not allowed to read it to us, miss, why did you? Donna always seemed smarter than the rest of us in are E.

Yeah, we could tell on you, I says, bit of menace in my voice. I'm no grass but I were still smarting from the fact missiles had conned me out of my book.

Because. Everyone in this room is clever enough to understand that this book belongs to another world. A different time and place. Then she gets a flourish in her voice and says: the past is a foreign country. They do things differently there. Who said that? She looked at us all expectant.

You just did, miss. I knew how to make her laugh.

She tells us the name of whoever said it, but blow me I can't remember now. I do recall she retrieves my aeroplane book, runs her hands over its cover. Like painting her aura round the lines, earnest, yearning. Perhaps it was the way she said it, the way she used the word *WE* that drew us in and allied us with her, or perhaps because she'd described us as clever when no one else in our lives ever had (. . .) or would again in my case. But her next words ring through my ears to this day. She held the book up, looked round at us.

We can *all* see through this, this apparently simple story, with its archetypal characters and stereotypical baddies, to what it's *really* about.

Now, of course, I only wish I could.

Audio File 12

Date: 16.04.19 11:18

Audio quality: Good

This is where my memories stop and jump ahead. Days? Weeks? Not months because when we all piled in to the school minibus for our trip to the south coast it was still summer and still 1983. I was so pleased to be out of school for a day. Didn't care where we were going. Or why. Or that it wasn't quite. It wasn't legit. It can't have been, can it?

This is it, see. We all went together to the south coast. A day trip that should've been nice. Missiles was (. . .) She (. . . .) We were all together one moment, and then the next (. . .)What did she do? Who did she see? Because I don't remember what happened. Or I've forgotten. Or I never knew. But we all went out in the minibus that day and missiles never came back.

Audio File 13

Date: 16.04.19 11:57

Audio quality: Good

When school started again in September, I stayed away. If Colin noticed he didn't mention anything. If a school inspector came round I never heard about it. What made me go from a kid who hated school, but was conscientious enough to worry about being late, to a kid who would never set foot in a classroom again? Something had got to me, that's for sure.

One benefit of learning to read is the internet and social media. It's a gateway to everything, so they told us at community college. Maxine arranged for me to go and they helped us set up an email address, use Google™ and register on Facebook™. With a few false starts and a bit of swearing I managed to get my profile page up on my son's phone. It's a hell of a lot smaller, though. Takes me longer to type things in than most people. As I said before, putting words in from scratch is much harder than reading things already written. Easier when I can get the voice button to work. Lucky I've got all day, especially like now, when it's quiet in the booth.

Been putting it off a fair bit, but if I'm gun a do this like I promised Maxine, then I have to find the others. Nathan, Shell, Donna and Paul. Find them and see what they remember about missiles. About that trip to bore mouth. Part of me doesn't want to. Why's that? It's not like I have much else to do. And it can't be that bad, can it?

Audio File 14

Date: 19.04.19 17:25

Audio quality: Moderate

Voice 1: See ear, Steve, flashing lines means it's picking up your voice.

Voice 2: Will it record both of us?

Voice 1: Looks like.

Voice 2: I'll put it between us on the table.

Voice 1: What's this for?

Voice 2: I'm looking back over our school days. Might write a memoir or=

Voice 1: Which bit? Which thing?

Voice 2: Oh, er. Everything. London kids, inner cities. How it's changed.

Voice 1: ()

Voice 2: I'm talking to Paul Clacken (. . .) I'm saying that into the recorder, Paul mate. So I know who it is when I find out how to play these files back (. . .) Paul went to the same school. We (. . .) we were matey. We played football together=

Voice 1: That were middle school. Do you mean high school?

Voice 2: If=

Voice 1: I don't remember it.

Voice 2: None of it?

Voice 1: Nothing=

Voice 2: You remember the are E class. Missiles? Donna, Nathan and Shell, going to the seaside=

Voice 1: Not me. I didn't go. Do us a favour, mate. Switch that off.

Audio File 15

Date: 19.04.19 17:40

Audio quality: Moderate

I found him easily on Facebook™. Paul. He lives across the common in one of the old blocks on acre road. He's barely gone a mile since we were kids. That's rich coming from me. I haven't gone far myself.

He's a mobile car mechanic just like his old man. Kept his head down over the years. Still knows some of the old faces. Surely can't be married. Scruffy and dirty. Stained fingers from the fags. Pocky red nose from the demon drink.

I'm sat here in the boozier trying to look like he didn't storm out under a cloud. Very useful this. I can pretend to talk on the phone when I'm really speaking into the recorder. He was friendly enough until he realised what I wanted to talk about. Why is that?

Oh, come on, Smithy, don't read too much into it. He was a troubled kid. It was in the family. It doesn't mean he's hiding anything, does it? People round here are cagey. It's second nature. I know Kos I am one of em. But if there were nothing out of the ordinary about that day, why was he so reluctant to talk about it? To me. Who was there myself.

Because the thing is, I know for sure Paul came with us. I can see him now. He jumped into that van like we all did, excited for a day out of school. We got in the back and Missiles hauled herself up into the driver's seat. She turned the key over and over. Engine coughed and died each time. We fell silent, our spirits sinking fast, when Paul leaned between the seats, squinted at the dashboard. He'd helped his dad in the garage since a nipper. After a sharp intake of breath, he told her to wait for a light to go out, then try again. She did what he said, the engine chugged to life and we were off. Yeah, Paul showed her how to get the minibus going. I've remembered that all these years Kos it seemed to me no one at the school knew she was taking it out, or they'd have shown her how to start it.

I'll have to go. Finished my drink and there are some faces round here I'd frankly rather not see.

Audio File 16

Date: 20.04.19 10:12

Audio quality: Good

Michelle Madden. Must be her married name because that's her. Shell. The stunning girl from are E. Found her on a list of people who confirmed they were going to a school reunion ten years ago. That

profile picture. She's in a cocktail dress, glass of bubbly. A line-up of women. Identical hair and clothes. But her eyes stand out a mile to me. If I'm gun a do this. I have to do it. Why do I feel ()? There. Request sent.

Audio File 17

Date: 20.04.19 22:36

Audio quality: Good

SHE'S ACCEPTED. Spent the whole day checking every few minutes. No message, but yes, I can see her page now. Seems she likes a glamorous cruise or three. And staying in a big hotel with a pool, immaculate gardens. Villa Kappa™ on some island in Greece. Lots of friends. Dogs. Small, white curly dogs. Lives north of the river. High Barnet. Well off my manor. Two grown-up sons. Husband has had some plastic surgery, so he could be an old face or a grass on the run. But something hasn't changed. I'm looking her right in the eye. Is it there? I swear I can see something.

Got a get some sleep now. Picking up a new car from Maxine's neighbour tomorrow.

Audio File 18

Date: 21.04.19 16:02

Audio quality: Good

I don't *f[EXPLICIT]ing* believe it. That posh place on Facebook™ is HER HOUSE. I thought it was a *f[EXPLICIT]ing* hotel. *F[EXPLICIT]k* me. Huge gates. The sort of place we'd rob blind back in the day. Got a park this rusty *c[EXPLICIT]t* out of sight. She can't see me arrive in this.

Audio File 19

Date: 21.04.19 16:11

Audio quality: Good

Round the corner from Shell's house. Big f[EXPLICIT]k-off gates at the front and zero security round the back. Perfect daylight job. I'd have been over that wall in a flash. Still could now I bet.

I'll be honest. Had to pluck up all me courage to type a proper message to Shell. She was out a my league then and I'm just as tongue-tied now. Turns out I needn't have worried. Soon as I mention meeting up she replies with YEAH, drop in whenever you're passing, have a catch-up, be good to see you. So I type back GREAT, see you in an hour (. . .) She takes a while to reply then. Probably busy putting the Hoover™ round and given the size of the place, that ain't the work of a moment. But I got a do it. Got a find out. For Maxine. So here I am (. . .) Feel like a kid outside the head master's office. Right.

Audio File 20

Date: 21.04.19 16:27

Audio quality: Good

Voice 1: It's lap sang sue shong. *Posh tea.*

Voice 2: Mmmm (. . .) lovely. I'll put it down, though.

Voice 1: All that's irrelevant now, Steven. I don't think about it.

Voice 2: What (. . .) .hhhhh. *Aftertaste.* What is? Irrelevant.

Voice 1: School. Childhood. Over and done with. Nothing about it defines me in any way (. . .) Do you remember playing in the park at NIGHT?

Voice 2: Yeah, yeah=

Voice 1: Unimaginable now. You told me your mum wanted you to live with her so badly she kept a clean knife, fork and plate specially for you in her kitchen. Only you couldn't leave your dad because he needed you to get him home from the pub. Funny now=

Voice 2: Can't believe you live in a place like this, Shell. It's a palace.

Voice 1: Thank you. What have you been doing, Steven?

Voice 2: Why? What have you heard?

Voice 1: Nothing. You look like you've worked hard these last forty years.

Voice 2: Do I? Thanks. You. You're. You too. I've been in business. Import export. Driving. Logistics. Nightclubs. Most recently, though, I've been in security.

Voice 1: What's your book about?

Voice 2: My? Oh yeah. YEAH. It's about inner-city kids.

Voice 1: Like we were. What about them?

Voice 2: How poor kids get out the rut. Break the cycle of disadvantage.

Voice 1: Education and hard work. It's not a mystery.

Voice 2: I want to show how they can help themselves. Make a life against the odds. Defy the system. The expectations of society. Do alright for themselves (. . . .)

Voice 1: What's it really about? (. . .)

Voice 2: Missiles and our trip to bore moth that day. Sorry I can't drink any more of that.

Voice 1: Leave it. Why that day?

Voice 2: You were there, Shell. You remember it.

Voice 1: I remember it clearly, Steven.

Voice 2: Can you tell me? Everything you know. Everything you remember.

Voice 1: I (. . .) hhhhhh remember you started it. You brought a book in. A very old book by Edith Twyford. Goodness knows where you got it from. Missiles read it to us. It's one I read to my boys when they were little. Missiles loved that book. She'd talk about Edith Twyford in every class. It was like we were studying HER books, not reading and writing to catch up with our peers. She organised a trip to Bournemouth because that's where Twyford lived (. .) Steven? Are you alright?

Voice 2: Do you remember what happened in the end?

Voice 1: .hhhhh We came home. Later than planned. The minibus kept over-heating or something. We drove back in the dark.

Otherwise, it was a very pleasant day out of school. I don't think any of us escaped the city often. I have nothing but fond memories. (.)

Voice 2: Are you SURE, Shell?

Voice 1: I focus on positive things, Steven. That's how to move on. I haven't a clue why you want to write a book about that day. But, the fact YOU, a child who struggled with literacy all those years ago, are writing a book [*background noise*] proves education is the key. Oh, ZANDER. This is Steven, from my old high school. Steven. My husband Zander.

Voice 3: Hello. Good to meet you. Michelle, you've given him that godawful. Can I get you some proper tea? Pass me his cup, darling.

Voice 2: Oh yes please, governor.

Voice 3: I'll be in the kitchen [*background noise*] dogs going mad (.)

Voice 1: Steven, things were difficult at home for you. I understand. It's no surprise you can't recall details from that time. The mind forgets. It's a safety mechanism. Survival. Write your book about something else.

Voice 2: hhhhhhh Yes. You're right, Shell. I will. Just reading too much into it. Easily done.

Voice 1: See. Your. It has the. Are you RECORDING this?

Voice 2: Only. Just so as I=

Voice 1: DELETE IT. NOW. And it's Michelle. I'm MICHELLE now [*background noise*]

Audio File 21

Date: 21.04.19 17:19

Audio quality: Good

That went well, as people say now when things go badly. Hard enough driving again after so long, let alone in this state. Have to sit in the car for a bit. Don't know if that came out. Or if she got to it

before I snatched the phone back. I can see the (. . .) But when I tap it you must upgrade eye oh S to play this file. Just like the others.

I tapped the recording button as she got the tea. That was a moment, let me tell you. Tasted like the bottom of an ashtray. Worse than anything they dish up in the scrubs. In fact, serve that up inside and fellas would be banging bin lids on the roof before it had chance to go cold.

She looks just like she did in are E. Cool. Haughty. But she tries to speak like one a them. Doesn't fool me.

Education and hard work she reckons is the way out of poverty. But not her way. She married well, as they say in costume dramas on a Sunday night. In all fairness, her old man was solid gold. Turns out he's not on the run at all – he's a plastic surgeon. She was a nurse. That's how they met. One a their sons is a doctor and the other in finance. You should a seen their faces when I told them my son works with numbers too. He teaches maths at Brunel University. They didn't expect THAT. Not with me as his (. . .) not with me as (. . .)

Why did she think I had a difficult time at home? No more than she did. Or other kids back then, in that school. I had a roof over my head. I had Colin. Cheeky mare.

But missiles. She was very quick to dismiss that. My eyes don't easily see words like yours do, Maxine. Type, print, handwriting, none of it. But they see things you don't. It's partly a professional skill. Spotted her Bulgari ring, Chopard necklace and Tiffany bracelet with barely a glance. Could live magnificent for a month on the contents of a jewellery box like that. Back in the day, I mean.

It's partly something else I can't quite explain. Like Shell's eyes as she assured me I were wrong. Like the lines around her mouth. Like her hands and feet and how her body changed shape as she spoke. The tone of her voice and air of relief when I pretended to believe her lie. The way she quickly changed the subject to some light, airy chat about their holiday villa that won't sell. Too isolated, too basic, needs too much work. Yeah, a big f[EXPLICIT]king problem.

I can hardly accuse her of lying, when I told her I'm writing a book. But at least I know a bit more about (). So missiles talked a lot about

Edith Twyford Kos of the book I found. Well, I never listened in class, didn't concentrate, couldn't have cared less, so no wonder I don't remember it. Edith Twyford. The name rings a bell.

[End Transcript]

Audio Files Batch 3

[Start Transcript]

Audio File 22

Date: 25.04.19 13:45

Audio quality: Good

So far, no luck tracing Nathan or Donna. Messaged a few from school so let's see. But in the meantime, been forging ahead with my investigation. Got chatting to the new librarian. She apologised for the library having no Edith Twyford books at all and to make up for it, helped me register on eBay. We searched on there and I spotted the cover right away. That boy in his red jumper. It's called Six on Goldtop Hill, book one of the Super Six series. Dead cheap. It arrived here by post yesterday. Propped it up on the table, so I can see that kid with his toy plane wherever I am in the room. Keep looking at him. As for reading it, well, have to work my way up to that. I'll start Monday when the booth goes quiet.

I've googled an expert on Edith Twyford. A stroke of luck. She's based on Gower Street up town. Spent all afternoon crafting an email to her. Proper sweated over it. She pings back straight away agreeing to be interviewed for this book I'm not writing. Turns out, if you're writing a book, people are more willing to talk than if you just want peace a mind for yourself. My appointment is at two. I've to find the English department and ask for her at reception. Her name's Rosemary Wintle. I've got her picture up on the phone. Big glasses, grey Bob, mid 60s. That's exactly how I imagined her when I read the name. Funny that.

Audio File 23