

*THE
TWYFORD
CODE*

Also from Janice Hallett and Viper

The Appeal

The Mysterious Case of the Alperton Angels (2023)

*THE
TWYFORD
CODE*

Janice Hallett



First published in Great Britain in 2022 by
VIPER, part of Serpent's Tail,
an imprint of Profile Books Ltd
29 Cloth Fair
London
EC1A 7JQ
www.serpentstail.com

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Text design by Crow Books

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 1 78816 5310
Export ISBN 978 1 78816 5327
eISBN 978 1 78283 7060



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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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 must have left very early on (. . .) because she was 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 at 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

