

Episode 04:
STRANGER DANGER

By Alex Brown and Rebecca Mahoney

SCENE I.

INT - WATCHTOWER 10 - BROADCAST ROOM

NORA

What is a story, exactly? A lesson? An escape? A warning? Perhaps it's a light that shines through an endless expanse of darkness. A beacon of hope in times of need. Or, it could be exactly what it sounds like: something that's told purely for entertainment. Meant to run you through a gamut of emotions, to connect with someone else's experiences. Stories are empathy. A tool to share sadness, fear, joy, envy. A tool of *connection*.

But then again, sometimes they aren't. Sometimes they're the most dangerous kind of lie.

PERCY

Nice.

NORA

I try.

PERCY

(clears throat)

The sea has power. We've always felt that, haven't we? There's a reason you see so many stories with water as a conduit. Between worlds, and between lives. Even across death.

NORA

Enter Payne Manor. This vast structure on the shores of York, Maine was the lifelong dream of entrepreneur and amateur architect Joseph Payne, and it began its long life just over fifty years after the Fox sisters emerged onto the public scene with a ghost story and the start of a new religion. By the time Payne Manor completed its construction in the waning days of 1901, Spiritualism still flourished in the Western world. Good respectable

families turned their parlors into séance rooms, kept their talking boards next to their fine china. Not Joseph Payne, though. He famously didn't hold with that kind of nonsense.

Too bad for him, really. Joseph Payne died in the autumn of 1902, in a rocking chair on his porch overlooking the sea, not even a year after the completion of his dream home. The cause of his death was unknown. But the house still stood, even so. Its name remained. Even if he did not.

And that's when the real fun started.

PERCY

You're listening to The Bridge.

THEME MUSIC YEAH

NORA

In 1915, famous psychic Claudia Baker traveled to York, Maine to investigate poltergeist activity in a family of five. How'd that family fare? Who knows. Claudia got a little distracted by her lodgings. Payne Manor, of course. Then a luxury hotel.

PERCY

Claudia declared Payne Manor the most spiritually active location she had ever visited.

NORA

Something about the sea, I guess. All that living water crashing against the rocks below. Claudia always said that water connected the living and the dead.

PERCY

And throughout Spiritualism's heyday, Payne Manor held, perhaps, more séances than any structure in New England. Mediums raced to Maine's rocky shores to prove their chops. Grieving families and lovers traveled hundreds of miles, full of hope. And all

that time, Claudia held court, wealthy enough now to buy Payne Manor from the all-too-eager hoteliers.

NORA

That's not to say Claudia's reign wasn't troubled. Even in her prime, the more serious of the community viewed her with suspicion. Rumor has it that Harry Houdini himself attended one of her séances and exposed her tactics to everyone in the room. By the 1930's, Claudia's faithful were few and far between. She counted only skeptics and grieving, vengeful former customers among her visitors. By the 1940's, she had been found dead in her home, Payne Manor. In the rocking chair on that porch overlooking the sea.

PERCY

For years, Payne Manor fell into obscurity. Its owners lived long, satisfied lives in the house, as you usually do in a place like that, and the stories were counted as just that, stories. And across the years, those owners grew wealthier and wealthier. Its last living inhabitant, in fact, was wealthy enough to transplant the entire mansion to the brand new, recently built - Transcontinental Bridge.

NORA

Here's the funny thing, though. In all its years on the mainland, in all its years of calls to the dead, there was not one credible haunting within its walls. And within a week of its transportation to the Bridge, that wildly wealthy owner moved to a much-smaller mainland apartment, where he lived out the rest of his days. And then, only then, did Payne Manor's haunted reputation start to build.

And it built enough that the well-respected, famously skeptical paranormal investigator Yvette Breckenridge came all the way out here to investigate. She expected, of course, to find

nothing, just as her skeptical predecessors had years ago.

Yvette, as you may have heard, was never seen again.

PERCY

Who do you think it would be, though?

NORA

Hm?

PERCY

Haunting the manor. Claudia, or Joseph?

NORA

Assuming, of course, that these rumors have any truth? Could be either. Could be both. I'm partial to a third theory, though. That Payne Manor is haunted by the souls of the people were promised a reunion with their lost loved ones and were given nothing.

Stories can be any number of things. A lesson, an escape, a warning. A tool of connection. A beacon of hope.

And they can be a weapon. A wildfire, a quake that shifts the landscape of the earth. Hope, you see, is a dangerous thing to promise.

BEAT.

NORA

Ready to get to work?

PERCY

I thought you'd never ask.

SCENE II

INT - WATCHTOWER 10 - GALLEY/KITCHEN

BERTIE

...and that's why yellow roses mean 'friendship.'

ROGER

...that's great. I think. And that's why you're giving them to me?

BERTIE

(somewhat conspiratorially)

Depends. Did they brighten your day?

ROGER

Uhhh maybe a little.

BERTIE

On a scale of 1 - 10, how much would you---

ROGER

(interrupting, ready to GTFO and run far, far away)

Oh no. No, no, no.

FRANTIC FOOTSTEPS as ROGER TRIES TO ESCAPE.

BERTIE

Hey, where're you going?

ROGER

With any luck, somewhere none of you will be able to find me.

BERTIE

Aw, come on. Where's the fun in that?

THE DOOR SWINGS SHUT as ROGER HURRIES OUT.

BERTIE

Guess I'm gonna have to change tactics.

AN INTERCOM SOUND RINGS THROUGH THE ROOM. ETTA and KATE were listening in.

ETTA

...hmm, do you know what that sounded like, Kate?

KATE

It was reminiscent of someone losing a competition, I think.

ETTA

It truly is one of my favorite things.

BERTIE

I'm not out yet! He didn't give an official score!

ETTA

I don't know. I feel like you should have some points deducted---

KATE

---considering you already drove him away.

BERTIE

Whatever. Ten points for whoever finds him first.

ETTA

Godspeed, Bertrand.

BERTIE

What about our...uh, visitors? I don't want to wake them up if we're running around all night.

ETTA

They seemed pretty out of it when I showed them to their rooms.

KATE

Probably the backseat-driving-ghost.

ETTA

If that's even a thing that happened---

BERTIE

Oh, now you're the skeptic? Who's the one always going on and on about Aqua Land's alleged demonic starfish?

ETTA

(vague aside)

That really was a terrible idea.

KATE

(interceding before they both jump on the tangent train)

Right. So our visitors are asleep, and shall remain asleep, as long as we don't go through Level 2.

BERTIE

What if that's exactly where Roger's hiding?

KATE

I don't think he'd risk waking them. This would be... kind of odd to explain.

ETTA

She SNORTS.

Can you imagine it? Him trying to talk to them about it?

MIMICKING ROGER.

Here's a written description of why everyone in this watchtower is determined to make me smile. It's a game they play every year, because I'm so grumpy all the time. Winner gets... well, I don't know what the winner gets. Bertie! What does the winner get?

BERTIE

Bragging rights, sir. And the feeling one gets when they realize they've accomplished the impossible.

BEAT. THEY ALL LAUGH.

KATE

All right, we've waited long enough. First one to find him gets an extra ten points.

SCENE III.

INT - WATCHTOWER 10 - BROADCAST ROOM

PERCY

Wait, where'd he go?

TYPING as NORA SEARCHES FOR HIM.

NORA

It looks like he's somewhere on Level 1.

PERCY

You sure?

NORA

Unless there's some other life form hanging out there.

PERCY

It could be---

NORA

(sharply)

The heat signature isn't large enough. And do you really think they'd keep it above the water?

PERCY

I guess not.

BEAT.

Should we try to look for our target while they're searching?

NORA

No. Let's not ruin the illusion that we're asleep. We can do more if we keep monitoring them. Figure out any weaknesses they might have.

PERCY

Always with the weaknesses.

NORA

As opposed to winning them over with our charming wit?

PERCY

We have three days at most to acquire both targets.

NORA

Glad to know you're paying attention.

PERCY

I meant that we can't afford to be sitting around watching them play some sort of weird game---

NORA

Shhhh! They found him.

SCENE IV

INT - WATCHTOWER 10 - LEVEL 1 - GAME ROOM

ROGER

(very forced)

I'm happy. See? I'm smiling.

KATE

(skeptical)

Riiiiiiiiight.

SHE TURNS TO THE DOOR ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE ROOM.

KATE (CONT'D)

(shouting, the sound is slightly distant)

Now, Etta!

THE DOOR OPENS AS ETTA HURRIES IN, SITS NEXT TO THE PIANO.

Yes, there's a piano here. I don't know why.

ETTA

You're going to love this! I've been practicing!

ROGER

Oh no. No no no no. You don't have to---

ETTA BEGINS TO PLAY ROW, ROW, ROW YOUR BOAT, CUTTING HIM OFF.

ETTA

(plays terribly; sings even worse)

Row, row, row your boat---

ROGER

(talking over her singing/playing)

Okay, this really isn't necessary. It's a normal day, just like any other day, and really, are there ever any winners when we do this?

BERTIE

I won last year.

KATE

Only because I wasn't here yet!

ETTA
DREEEEEEEAM.

SOMEONE SLOW CLAPS.

ETTA (CONT'D)
Well? How would you rate---

ROGER
Negative five.

ETTA
But the lowest it goes is---

ROGER
(sharply)
Negative five.

ETTA
Ouch.

ROGER WRENCHES FREE OF KATE'S GRASP, MAKES A RUN FOR IT.

BERTIE
(sighing)
There he goes again.

ETTA
Guess you're up, Kate.

KATE
Get ready to lose, dweebs.

SCENE V

INT - WATCHTOWER 10 - BROADCAST ROOM

PERCY

... I still don't understand them.

NORA

Luckily you don't have to understand them to take the girl.

PERCY

Well it certainly would be easier to form a plan if we had more time to learn their habits and schedules.

NORA

She TYPES.

You can't always get what you want, I guess. Speaking of, I found him again!

PERCY

(hell-bent on telling a terrible joke)
Waldo? I always wondered where he was hiding!

NORA

She SIGHS.

I should've seen that one coming.

SCENE VI

EXT - WATCHTOWER 10 - BALCONY

KATE

For someone who doesn't want to be found, you sure go to the most obvious places.

ROGER

I'm not very creative.

KATE

(as dead-pan as possible)

I'm shocked. This is my shocked face.

ROGER

Where're the others?

KATE

Game room. They're waiting for us there.

ROGER

(groans)

I don't want to go back in there just yet.

KATE

You don't have to. I got them to see reason.

ROGER

...which means?

KATE

Sometimes they get a little too caught up in their dastardly plans. They forget that not everyone's built the same way.

ROGER

(laughs to himself)

I'm glad you got here when you did. The last Bridge Travel Agent, she---

HE STOPS, CATCHING HIMSELF.

ROGER (CONT'D)

(changing that subject as abruptly as he can)

So what're you going to do to try to cheer me up?
Not another song, I hope.

KATE

Nope. The obligatory song and dance thing is all
Etta.

BEAT.

KATE (CONT'D)

I did find something... interesting, though.

ROGER

(under his breath)

Haven't heard that one before.

KATE

No, you really haven't.

SHE PUSHES PLAY ON A TAPE RECORDER. HERE WE GOOOOOO!

SCENE VII

INT/EXT - PAYNE MANOR - SOMEWHERE ON THE BRIDGE

RECORDER TURNS ON.

And so we begin a series of recordings by a (now infamously missing) paranormal debunker named Yvette. At the time of this recording, she is 100% done with anything "claiming" to be paranormal. This is her 200th or so site, and nothing has wound up being the real thing. She approaches her investigations with the same tired cynicism as any Noir detective.

SHE TAKES A DEEP BREATH, THEN BEGINS.

YVETTE

Okay. This is, uh, Yvette. Again. I'm standing outside of Payne Manor - that's spelled P-A-Y-N-E, and yes, I'm aware that the name also bears a close rhyming resemblance to a certain superhero's house. I don't name these places, people. I just investigate them.

Anyway, Payne Manor is older than the Bridge. Another thing carried over from the Mainland after they'd finished their first wave of construction. The house --- well, house doesn't seem like an adequate word to describe this thing --- had no records of hauntings before it was transplanted out here, near Watchtower 4.

And thaaaaat's enough backstory for now. Time to live in the present --- or whatever that saying is. I'm staring right at the front door. There's a brass knocker. It's a lion, which seems a little cliché. Though I guess if you think about it, me walking into a haunted mansion in the middle of nowhere, completely isolated from the outside world, is... well. You get it.

THE DOOR CREAKS AS SHE ENTERS. SOME FOOTSTEPS AS SHE SURVEYS THE LOBBY.

YVETTE

(makes a grossed-out sound)

Cobwebs everywhere. I don't know why this surprises me every time I go into an abandoned building, but---

OLD TIMEY MUSIC PLAYS, CUTTING THAT THOUGHT OFF.

YVETTE

... okay. Well. Gotta love a haunted house with good PR. Let's go turn that off, whatever it is.

FOOTSTEPS AS YVETTE BEGINS MOVING THROUGH THE BUILDING. THE MUSIC GROWS A LITTLE LOUDER.

YVETTE

And now for the architectural stylings of Joseph Payne. For those of you who don't spend your time following in the footsteps of eccentric entrepreneurs - there but for the grace of God go you, by the way - our friend Joe never trained with anyone, but drew up the majority of the blueprints himself. That said, there's a bit of ingenuity to be found here. Like this switchback staircase, for example: seven flights, each stair about two inches high. It only goes up about nine feet.

According to the Spiritualist movement, it's a portal between worlds, calling out to the dead with its alien geometry. But in reality - an easier way for Joseph to climb the stairs on his arthritic legs.

I know, I know. I'm tons of fun at parties.

MUSIC GROWS LOUDER.

YVETTE (CONT'D)

Buuuut on the bright side, I'm about two seconds from turning off that music, so don't say I never bring you anywhere nice. Should be just around this...

YVETTE GASPS. SHE'S QUIET FOR A BEAT, AS THE MUSIC CONTINUES TO PLAY.

YVETTE (CONT'D)

(amidst an exhale)

This... this is new. I'm in the dining room, and there's a full MEAL laid out. Food, cutlery, the works. It's not impossible that someone would hold an event here, but there's not a single light on in this entire place. The lengths people will go to throw me off...

THE MUSIC SWITCHES OFF.

YVETTE

There. That's done. It's the simple things in life you-

KNOCK.

SILENCE. YVETTE lets out a low laugh, but when she speaks next, there's a new tension to her voice.

YVETTE

... sorry about that, everyone. Wind's picking up. Waves are coming in on the side of the-

RUSTLE. THIS TIME, A LOW FEMALE VOICE IS AUDIBLE.

YVETTE

(losing conviction)

More... more sound effects. This would be why I asked Watchtower 4 to keep my visit quiet, so that I wouldn't have every idiot with a fairy tale and a sound system roll down here to prove me-

YVETTE GOES COMPLETELY STILL. THE ONLY SOUND AUDIBLE IS THE BARELY AUDIBLE SOUND OF A WOMAN'S VOICE.

YVETTE

(whispering)

There's someone out there. She's not doing anything, she's just... standing over by the wall. I can't see who she's talking to. I don't know if she's talking to anyone.

YVETTE'S VOICE SPIKES WITH A SUDDEN REALIZATION.

YVETTE

I... don't think she's here for me. I don't think she knows that I'm here.

DEEP BREATH.

YVETTE

Okay. Okay, she turned the corner. I'm getting to the stairs, I'm getting-

THE DOOR OPENS, AND THE RECORDING CUTS OUT WITH A BURST OF STATIC. THERE IS A STRETCH OF DISTORTED AUDIO. WHEN THE RECORDING BEGINS AGAIN, YVETTE IS WHISPERING INTO THE RECORDER.

YVETTE

This is Yvette Breckenridge. I'm in Payne Manor, P-A-Y-N-E. If you're listening to this, please, tell them to-

AUDIBLE SOUNDS OF A STRUGGLE - A MUFFLED YELL FROM YVETTE CAN BE HEARD. THE SOUNDS TRAIL OFF INTO SILENCE.

MYSTERIOUS VOICE

There, now. That's enough of that.

SCENE VIII

EXT - WATCHTOWER 10 - BALCONY

TAPE RECORDER CLICKS OFF.

ROGER

This is supposed to cheer me up...how?

KATE

Uhhh it's spooky?

ROGER

HE SIGHS.

I hate to say it, but we should go inside.

KATE

(skeptical)

Really.

ROGER

Yeah. I don't... I don't think I want to be out here anymore. We can start making breakfast before our guests wake up.

KATE

(moar skeptical)

Someone's hospitable all of a sudden.

ROGER

The quicker we can get them out, the better. You go with Bertie and do what you can with that car.

KATE

...the car that plunged into the ocean? I don't think we can fix that.

ROGER

Just get them out of there as soon as you can.

KATE

Yessir. Stranger danger, and all that.

ROGER

The longer they stay here, the higher the risk that they figure out what's in Submare 3.

KATE

I know, I know. I'll go get Bertie.

SCENE IX

INT - WATCHTOWER 10 - BROADCAST ROOM

A DOOR OPENS as ETTA ENTERS.

ETTA

Sorry, everyone. I didn't get a chance to share a story with you tonight. I guess we got a little carried away with... ah, well, the details aren't important. From Watchtower 10, this is Etta, signing off---

THE PHONE RINGS BEFORE SHE CAN LEAVE. SHE SIGHS, ANSWERING IT against her better judgment.

ETTA (CONT'D)

(quite harsh)

What?

FRANK

Whoa, whoa, whoa. Is that any way to treat a friend of the show?

ETTA

For the millionth time, Frank, we're not friends.

FRANK

You don't mean that.

ETTA

While I've been alive, I've never meant anything more than what I just said.

FRANK

Oh, come on. There was that whole thing about finding your missing mom and---

ETTA

(you son of a---)

Is there something you wanted, Frank? Or did you just call in to revisit my childhood trauma?

FRANK

I'd never do anything of the sort. I was going to ask you if you'd gotten new co-hosts.

ETTA

What?

FRANK

(slower this time)

Did...you...get...new...co...hosts...?

ETTA

...no.

FRANK

But there were two people in there earlier. I heard their voices, plain as day.

ETTA

You mean Kate, Bertie, and Roger?

FRANK

That's three voices. I said there were two.

ETTA

I know what you meant.

FRANK

Three and two aren't equal. That's not how math works---

ETTA

Frank! Who were the voices?

FRANK

It wasn't anyone I'd heard before. These two were new.

ETTA

What'd they say?

FRANK

Some story about a ghost hunter who disappeared. Or maybe she was a debunker, or something? I wasn't listening, we were having a meeting so I had to leave before they were finished.

ETTA

But they told you a story? On my frequency? Maybe it just got hacked---

FRANK

(pompously; probably laughing)

No one's going to take the time to hack into your frequency just to tell us a story. I'm pretty sure they were in your room. Hence my question about new co-hosts.

ETTA

Did they say anything else? After the ghost hunter thing, I mean.

FRANK

Nope. Just that. Whoever they are, they don't know how to turn something off properly. I've been listening to static for the last twenty minutes.

ETTA

(well, damn)

Uhhh thanks for the info, Frank. No new co-hosts here. And I'll fix that sound issue at some point.

BEAT.

I've... I've gotta go. Roger's probably looking for me.

FRANK

Wait, but---

She HANGS UP before he can say anything else. She SIGHS.

ETTA

Great.

End of recording.

CREDITS

Thank you so much for listening to The Bridge! This episode was written by Alex Brown and Rebecca Mahoney. It features, in order of appearance, Danielle Wood as NORA, James Turner as PERCY, David Picarello as BERITE, Chris Martin as ROGER, Alex Brown as ETTA, and Liz Hull as Kate. We're very excited to welcome back Stephanie Whigham as our doomed paranormal debunker, YVETTE, and are thrilled to introduce Rebecca Mahoney as the MYSTERIOUS VOICE and Salim Razawi as FRANK.

The ever-fitting pieces of music that accompanied tonight's sordid story were composed by the greatest person ever, Sara Fairchild. Our superb theme song and the haunting 1930's-ish accompaniment in Yvette's scene were composed by the equally superb (but probably not as haunting) Jake Hull. This episode was edited and mixed by Alex Brown. This sound effect [insert sound] was provided by Dead Signals, creators of the Archive 81 podcast. Looking for more ridiculously cool podcasts? We recommend Greater Boston and The Tunnels Podcast!

Want to know what Percy and Nora are up to? Same! Unfortunately, we can't tell you that just yet. But you can visit our website at thebridgepod.com. You can also find us on Twitter @bridge_podcast. And on Facebook and Tumblr.

Please rate and review us on iTunes, and feel free to email us at watchtower10reports@gmail.com. It's kind of a long address, but if you go to our website and click on the little mail icon, it'll lead you right to it. Thank you, once again, for listening to The Bridge! In honor of her recent birthday, we have an outtake from the amazing Jen Ellision.