

EPISODE 2: RADIO

**SCENE ONE: OPENING**

**THE MARTLET RADIO HOUR'S INSTRUMENTAL INTRO MUSIC PLAYS.**

THE ANNOUNCER:

Welcome once again, ladies and gentlemen, to Dawn Arbor's very favorite nightly radio program, presented by Martlet Radio! Martlet Radio: always on the air!

And now, as ever, your poetic hostess: Sybil McIntyre!

SYBIL:

Hello, everyone. Each and every one of you, somewhere out there in Dawn Arbor, or maybe one of our neighboring towns – Newmarket or Bankhead or somewhere outside of town, out in Fischer County. All of you, sitting by your radios. Think about that – all of us, however far apart, performing the same action. We're acting together. We are together.

What are you all doing on this wonderful autumn night? If I can recommend a favorite pastime of my younger days, then maybe the bravest among you would like to venture out from the safety and warmth and companionship of your homes, into the dark. Yes, it's that adventurousness coming out again, but there's something genuinely magical about an autumn night. Our town is safe enough; there's no worry of wild animals or dangerous people, whatever my brother insists. And it's liberating, wandering through the edges of a familiar place made strange by darkness, getting to know it through senses other than sight – the sound of the Slate River rushing past the docks, the trees rustling above you, the wind in the grass. At this time of year, it's just cool enough after sunset to be pleasant, and give you a few shivers. Take a jacket with you, but don't worry about the cold. We're not in the city here; we can see the stars, in all their uncountable glory. We, here, in Dawn Arbor, are a part of the greater universe.

And who knows? Maybe if you decide to take my advice, you won't be the only one. Maybe you'll be just one of many moving invisibly past you in the dark. Take comfort in that. In knowing that as a town, even in the dark, we move together. You're not alone.

A town is a group of people who have come together into a community. And you and I, listeners, are a community too – most of us united by our hometown, but all of us united by my voice.

I've always treasured the way in which Dawn Arbor is such a closely knit community. The times I grew up in were hard ones for all of us. But when the banks went under, our town did better than almost anyone. Of course, it helped when Minnie Shoemaker set up her new distillery at the first opportunity. Not that she'd ever stopped distilling! But the very first jobs there went to the people whom everyone in town knew needed it most. The Parkers, for instance – since old Tom Parker had gotten sick, his sons had been desperate to find work to support their siblings and their grandmother. It was through Margaret Parker that the family had stayed afloat: her grandsons had that kind of stupid pride in not accepting help that fellas insist on somehow, but Peggy was smart and practical enough to take the food and clothes and spare cash that half of the wives in town were slipping her. When George and Ethan Martel got a job with the government planting trees, they gave my pop and brother's names to the boss at the first opportunity. They were always welcome to dinner at our house after that. That was the way it was: we didn't have much, but in this town, we shared it.

They weren't easy years, but we made it through them here – by hard work, yes, by tightening our belts, but most of all by looking after one another. By being a community, by reaching out. If anyone fell down hard, other people were there to catch them and lift them up. That was the Dawn Arbor I grew up in, and I took that

lesson to heart. I've always wanted to reach out to others. And although I've ended up doing it here, speaking into this one-way microphone, I know that I can feel you reaching back. So tonight, let's remember to lift one another up.

## **SCENE TWO: ADVERTISEMENT**

ANNOUNCER:

The Martlet Radio Hour will be back after this short message.

PRESENTER:

Modern life is stressful. Our world, our cars, our work days are speeding up. Sometimes, you need to take a moment to relax and take it slow. And in those moments, there's nothing better than the smooth, rich taste of a CINNABAR cigarette. And just why is CINNABAR superior to other brands? Why, it's higher quality, tastes better, and lasts longer – and you can rely on that! Every CINNABAR is just as flavorful and mild as the one before. That's the CINNABAR quality guarantee.

So the next time you want to take a moment out of the rat race, reach for a CINNABAR – the brand you can rely on to be good.

## **SCENE THREE: LETTER INTRO**

SYBIL:

Earlier I mentioned feeling all of you reaching back. Well, someone's sent us a very real sign that you are! That's right – we've received another letter. I can't be sure yet whether it's the same sender or whether they inspired another one of you to write. It does look like it's been addressed in the same way. Well, this is exciting!

**SOUND: TEARING OPEN OF THE LETTER.**

**(SYBIL CLEARS HER THROAT AND READS.)**

**SCENE FOUR: LETTER**

Dear Sybil,

Well, I think the first thing I'm going to have to do is say thank you for answering my last letter. Yes, hi, it's me again, the person who wrote you that cryptic, bizarre message. I'm sure that was a terrible first impression to give to my childhood idol. I promise, I usually make much more sense. So... hello.

This feels like a dream, to be honest. I still don't really understand how this is happening, or what is happening, because I sure wrote that first letter, and I sure mailed it, but only if dropping it in a mailbox with no address on it counts as mailing. They say that you're a dream, and there's definitely nobody who talks about listening to you, so maybe only I even heard what I think I heard. But I still feel like I should apologize for how nuts that letter was. I was kind of having a breakdown, which I guess is why I wrote it at all.

Next cliché: I absolutely love your show and I have for as long as I can remember. That's why it's so embarrassing to admit that you and I don't feel the same way about Dawn Arbor. Not even close. It doesn't make sense, right? After all, this is the show where you talk about how much you love this town. But I always knew as a kid that as soon as I could, I was gonna get out of here. Even now, I can barely stand to go outside or to look around. It's like this place is frozen in time, just like it was then – just like it's always been, probably. Same mean old woman at the same corner grocery place, same kitschy old hardware store and general store, same cloying vintage Americana bull little town. I didn't have friends, wasn't liked by the adults – I even always hated the stupid river. Then my mom gave me the hard boot out the door and that was that. Went to Chicago, studied psychology. Got a job, dated a few people, had a life. I don't think I've been happy, exactly, but how would I even know if I was? Just what is happy, outside of Hallmark Channel movies? I'm obviously familiar with the concept, but

I've never been sure whether I have the right standard of experience to judge it by.

You see, that's why I grew up listening to your show as often as I could. Stealing the portable radio from the kitchen late at night, hiding under the blankets so nobody would hear, fiddling with the dials. I was always so sure that I found you more often than anyone else. It was because hearing you always made me feel so much less alone. That whole town full of people that I was shut out from - none of them mattered, because you never shut me out. You let me in to your Dawn Arbor. You could make the town sound beautiful. Like it was a place full of as much love as you always poured into it.

Dawn Arbor never loved me, especially not like it loves you. There was no Jenny for me. But I had you and the Martlet Radio Hour, and listening to you, I felt like I knew you. Like you were my friend. I got to live, for a little while, in a world where the past seemed like a better version of my present. It sounds silly, but you made me feel so much less alone, and I really needed that. And I need it now, because I feel more alone here than ever. So, thank you, for your wonderful reply to my letter. Dawn Arbor is lucky to have you. And so am I.

Sincerely yours,

One apologetic listener

#### **SCENE FIVE: RESPONSE**

SYBIL:

Well, dear, there's no need to apologize for anything, I promise. It's good to hear from you again.

Hmm... I think - I think, if I may, that I'd like to tell you a story. And I hope you'll understand what I mean by telling it to you.

I grew up with the radio, of course, just like

you must have. News reports from Europe, chats with the president – things that frightened and things that reassured. And the serials, of course. It seemed like the radio was always on at home. Pop and Eric and James and I gathering in the evenings in the kitchen, all listening together. When I was young it seemed like magic, like the radio brought invisible people or intangible musicians into the room. Radio isn't like a book, where you have to do all of the work yourself, or like the pictures, where the right to invention is taken away from you entirely. All you had to do was close your eyes and imagine, and you were somewhere else, with the owners of those wonderful voices right there with you.

I forgot about that magic when I got a little older. Childhood gets more serious, and the joy of our first years fades under the weight of the discovery that the world is not so simple, or so kind.

But still, the radio was always there, in the background – especially when we got our own local station!

Nothing much changed until the war. In – oh, it must have been forty-two, forty-three? – well, my father was working double shifts, Fred and my brothers had enlisted at the first opportunity, and without even Jenny around, I was going stir-crazy.

At one point I thought I might go off to school somewhere, but of course there was no question of that. So, the only reasonable thing seemed to be to follow in everyone else's footsteps and make myself useful for the war effort. I hadn't been sleeping well and Mrs. Phillips knew that the Martlet Radio station was looking for someone to do the late-night announcements – you know, in case of attacks for blackouts and drills and just to fill time. And she said,

(SYBIL ATTEMPTS AN UPPER-CLASS BRITISH ACCENT.)

"Sybil daaaahling, you've always had such a lovely voice. I'm sure they'd love to have you." She'd met Jenny's father during the first war and came back over here with him, and she always did take the whole thing with much more... poise than all the rest of us. None of it was anything new to her.

At any rate, I went out to the studio, and two days later, I had a job! I did start off just on the nighttime announcements, but soon after that I was filling in on the late news and ads, and, well - it sounds conceited to say it out loud. But it was after that that people started coming up to me in the streets. At first it was nothing - friends, family, of course, wanting to chat about how they'd heard me on the radio. Then other people in town, and finally - finally those I knew by name, by reputation (it's such a small town), but not personally, began to talk to me. As though they knew me. As though we were already good friends.

It was Minnie Shoemaker who did it, finally. She walked right up to me on the street and thanked me for making her feel so much less alone in that big house with her sons in the army and her daughter married out west. She thanked me for being a friend.

I remembered then, all that time I'd spent in the parlor with my eyes screwed shut, pretending that I was where the voices on the radio were. And I realized that to all those people - people I knew well, people I didn't know at all - it was as though I had been speaking to them alone. What a beautiful thing, I thought. What an opportunity, what a responsibility.

And that was how I pitched the Martlet Radio Hour! It's always been our stated mission here. A time to be comforted, to be connected, to be a community. I can't express what it was like to read this letter and feel again the way I felt on that day, to feel again like I'm helping my friends, my neighbors. I think it's one of those things that have made an imperfect life

worthwhile. And isn't that the magic of radio? To reach out across space, and maybe even time, with just our voices?

If you're listening now, my mysterious letter-writer, I encourage you to do what I did once. Wherever you are, close your eyes. I'm here with you! I am. I was with you all these years and I'm with you now, too. And I can whisper in your ear even if I can't take your hand. I feel – and I hope you do, too – this connection between us. We're walking in the dark together.

Thank you for writing again, anonymous friend. Now, for the time being – and, I hope, only until we hear from you or any other listener again – it's time for us to part. But don't worry. It won't be long before we're together again.

ANNOUNCER:

And we here at the studio are so glad that you've all come together tonight and tuned into another episode of the Martlet Radio Hour with Sybil McIntyre! Don't forget to tune in tomorrow night to Martlet Radio, and don't forget that the next time you crave a cigarette, the taste you can rely on is CINNABAR!

**THEME CLOSES THE EPISODE.**

**CREDITS.**