

EPISODE 8: GONE

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 daring hostess: Sybil McIntyre!

SYBIL:

Well, that's a new one! Hello. Hello, everyone! I hope your night has been as wonderful as I think you are. So much of our love is conditional; I'm no different from anyone in that respect. I always loved my brothers until they broke my toys, or mocked my hair, or tore my dresses. James used to make fun of my hats. Well, I happen to like hats, and I don't care much whether anyone thinks I have too - oh, I'm getting off topic, aren't I. We love moment to moment. We're not always in control of the conditions, or the love they produce. We may wish for conditions other than the ones we have. There are loves we strive for and can't find, loves we regret. I try to give this one piece of unconditional love.

I don't talk about James much, do I?

James is... James was. James is difficult for me to talk about. I'm sure you all understand why. We've all lost people. Everyone in town lost someone during the war. But there's always a last moment with someone. You never know when that's going to be. You fear it, when they're going to war. You lie awake, thinking about the most recent letter, wondering if those will be the last words.

And then they are. And it's like everything you ever said to them was the last words. Every

thought of them hurt.

When we got the letter, I... Pop went into his room without a word and locked the door. I didn't know what to do, so I went to Mrs. Phillips. Jenny's mother. I visited her a lot, especially then. She sort of took me under her wing, back when Jenny and I were first close – she said she was glad to take the weight off of Pop, that I needed a mother of some kind.

She's gone now, I suppose. They all are.

But she had such a soft spot for oddballs, and I was certainly that. You might be entertained to know that I was too quiet as a child. I didn't make friends easily. Coming from overseas, I think she felt like an odd duck in Dawn Arbor, where everyone had been here for generations. Dawn Arbor was never home for her. Not all places can be home to all people. She used to say it felt too shallow – she was too nostalgic for the feeling of the past, for living somewhere with thousands of years of her history soaked into it. This town was too young, was someone else's.

That was when I really fell in love with Dawn Arbor's history. I'd always been interested, but during the war, when the two of us were so lonely and I would go over to her house every day for the company, I started really digging. I wanted to help her feel anchored, now that no one was around to anchor her.

So I looked for history, here. Little histories, personal histories. And I presented them to Mrs. Phillips, like gifts. And they all felt just as big and important to me as stories about kings and wars and empires did. We're all just as real as they were, aren't we? The ghosts of kings get more attention than ours. More things in heaven and earth. I think that we're the more things, we people with the small stories.

I told her that James had died. Maybe I didn't tell her. Maybe I couldn't. Maybe I walked in and she knew that it was someone, from the look

in my eyes and the way I couldn't speak. I know that she held me, and she sat me down, and she made me a drink.

Sometimes we lose things, she told me. People and places and things and histories. In the bombings during what she still called The Great War, much of that material history she loved and missed had been lost. Buildings and artworks and places erased from the surface of the earth. But that didn't remove the history that had been in things, she said. She had left England, but she still carried her past with her. Even if markers and objects were gone, the people still knew and felt the history. We can only be separated from the physical manifestations of our pasts. And James was now a part of my past. Something I held inside me, something indelibly marked on me.

Memories. We hold the things we lose in memories, and we pass them on in stories, so that they'll outlive our individual selves. We make our pasts and our loved ones into ghost stories. All stories of things that are gone are ghost stories.

I don't know why it's so hard for me to talk about James, even now. Maybe there's a part of me that feels that if I let those stories and memories of him out, I'll lose them. They're all I have left of him. But I know that's not true. I've told all of you the story, now, and that little piece of him is inside all of you. You'll all carry him through the world a little while longer. Is it any wonder I love you all?

SCENE TWO: ADVERTISEMENT

ANNOUNCER:

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

PRESENTER:

When your skin is rough and dry,
Or oily as can be,
Or red and freckled all with spots,
An awful sight to see!

Don't worry for your youthful looks,
Your lustrous beauty fair,
Just wash your face with HALO SOAP,
And you'll be the most beautiful anywhere!

HALO. A cake of beautifully perfumed, gentle toilet soap recommended by nine out of ten doctors to restore your skin to youthful, fresh, bright beauty. Try HALO soap today, and never use another beauty product again.

SCENE THREE: LETTER INTRO

SYBIL:

Amelia's sent us another letter! It occurs to me I have no way of knowing whether the audience enjoys these as much as I do. I think I'm going to be selfish, just this once. Oh, that's thrilling. It feels like being a troublesome little girl all over again. I can't only reread my own stories forever. Amelia has reached out to share her stories, to become a part of ours. A part of mine. And that has... changed everything.

SOUND: THE LETTER BEING OPENED.

SCENE FOUR: LETTER

Dear Sybil,

Alright! I think I understand. Please accept my apology if that last letter bothered you at all. I don't know what came over me. I think that, as friends, it's important that we can tell each other anything we need to. Right?

You definitely don't have to worry about me. I'm honestly doing pretty well! I actually told Patricia about our little correspondence – at first she definitely didn't believe that I'd written more than forty letters back and forth with such an important local celebrity, but once I convinced her, she was so excited. She's a pretty big fan of yours, apparently – everyone down at the Dawn Arbor Historical Society is. As it turns out, you're one of the best sources

anyone has for this town's history! You remembered all kinds of things no one else did. You gave them a more beautiful past.

I wish that we could actually make the past all beautiful. I wish the past was only good things, for you and me both. But I know I understand my past better now than I did when I sent you my first letter. And I feel like maybe you do, too? I'm glad that I finally got to hear your story instead of Dawn Arbor's, anyway. You're right. The stories of people's lives are much more interesting and beautiful and important. People are so beautiful and so important.

You know, the night I left Dawn Arbor I was more scared and angry and excited than I had ever been in my life before. Standing at the bus stop in the middle of the night, one black eye, a ticket in my pocket, all my worldly possessions in an old carpet bag, and for the first time in my life, the whole world at my feet. I genuinely never thought I'd get out. There was no planning at all. Twenty-five minutes earlier everything had been different, and then I was gone. And it changed everything, Sybil. I only went to freakin' Chicago and I could still feel myself changing into a different person! A better person, I think. I've been thinking, lately, about what a difference that made to me. I think I'd like to do it again, and go further this time. France, maybe, or Peru, or anywhere. And then come back.

Because if I've learned anything from coming back to Dawn Arbor, it's that you don't really understand how a place or a person or a radio station has shaped you until you've left it for a while. Till you've given it a chance to haunt you.

I wish you could come. I think you'd love it. The heavy thrill in the pit of your stomach when you step on the bus and it pulls away. The sky looks different when you're leaving somewhere. And you love people and history – Sybil, there's so much history out there! I bet you'd love the

museums in Chicago. The closest thing here is the Historical Society, but that's a whole different kettle of fish. A museum is like a temple to ghosts, Sybil — a place where we make our love of the past tangible.

I took a really cute girl on a museum date once. I think she expected an art museum, but we went to look at taxidermy animals instead. There was not a second date. I was okay with that. She called me Amy. Not a huge fan.

But I like the history museums, because they're full of people's stories from places I've never been. I like to go there and think about those people, about how they thought. I think about thinking a lot. How other people think. How I think. I guess that's why I went off to study psychology. I mean, plenty of those museums are wildly unethical. That's probably important. They've got their own pasts, and a lot of those aren't great. But it helps me to appreciate things, to go there.

By the time I got off that bus, I'd managed to call a friend in Chicago. Someone I'd actually never met in person before, if you can believe it. They gave me a place to stay while I got back on my feet. I got a job and an apartment, I got into college, I started a life in a whole different world, and I learned I was someone else.

Maybe I'd take you to the space museum, the Planetarium. I bet you'd like that. I'd like that. To show you the stars.

If you could go anywhere, Sybil, where would you like to go? Is there somewhere that ever sounded interesting or beautiful to you? Maybe somewhere that some of your friends went? Paris, maybe, like Jenny did. Maybe I'll go some of those places one day and send you a postcard. But I'd miss you if I did.

I'll write again soon. Until then,

Love,

Amelia

SCENE FIVE: RESPONSE

SYBIL:

Oh. Oh, Amelia, that sounds wonderful.

Temples to ghosts. I like that. Let us build monuments to ghosts. If I had my way, gravestones would all be like books. Let people record their stories, let the people who loved them record their stories. You're right, I've never been to a museum, but it – it sounds nice. The history museum, and the –

SOUND: PAPER RUSTLES AS SHE CHECKS THE WORD SHE HAS FORGOTTEN.

– the “Planetarium.” Amelia, does a star museum look like an art museum, or a history museum? Does it tell you the personal histories of the planets, or frame the constellations on gallery walls? It seems like the kind of place that would exist in my dreams. My younger self, reading Amazing Stories and... well. No. My grown self, I think, still reading adventure stories tucked inside of more serious covers. The space stories only got better after the war, you know. Everyone started dreaming upwards.

Where would I like to go?

I don't think I've ever thought about that before. It always seemed too... too far away to see with any kind of detail, the idea of being anywhere but here. It was easier not to think about it. Well. Well, maybe now is as good a time as any. What do all of you think? Where should I go, if I traveled?

Jenny went to Paris. That was mostly incidental, I think. Where she really went was the war, because that was a sort of destination of its own. You could go east or west and still arrive at the war, still die there. Jenny went to the war, and when it ended, the space around her

resolved back into France, and she went and spent three months in Paris. She sent us postcards. Postcards from Paris. What a romantic phrase that is. I imagine it like the Gene Kelly film. Maybe with less dancing, I always was a terrible dancer. Someone would have to teach me.

Jenny sent us letters and photos and postcards and then came back to us in her same old dress but full of stories of everything she'd done at the front, everyone she'd met, and she did seem somehow different. Maybe that's how you looked to people who used to know you when you came back, Amelia. Who do you think I would become, if I went somewhere? Who would I want to become? Where could I go to be that person?

Who do I want to be?

I like the idea of going to a museum with you, Amelia. Going – going with someone, to learn about other people, other places, other stories. I'd like to be able to open myself up to more of the world, not just to see it. I love Dawn Arbor, I really and truly do, but I know that – if I've found so much love and so much history in this tiny town, then there has to be so much more out in the world that I never had the chance to know. And... going to all of those other places seems too far away still, I think. I'm not quite there yet. Chicago wouldn't be too far to go.

Even so, I think that would be too far for me right now. Wouldn't it. After all, I have to be here nightly to host this show, don't I! But it's... it's lovely to think about. It's a beautiful dream.

Sometimes dreams are just all that you –

It's getting late, my friends. It's the time for dreams, and not for any more of my stories. Time, that is, for us to part. But don't worry. It won't be long before we're together again.

ANNOUNCER:

Thanks for coming to us for another night of the Martlet Radio Hour with Sybil McIntyre! And don't leave us to go anywhere – remember to tune in tomorrow night to Martlet Radio! And remember, for the most beautiful complexion any girl could want, try HALO SOAP.

THEME CLOSSES THE EPISODE.

CREDITS.