

Episode 01:
BEDTIME STORIES

By
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INT WATCHTOWER 10 - BROADCAST ROOM - SOMETIME BETWEEN LUNCH AND DINNER

BEGIN RECORDING.

A CHEERY THEME OF SOME SORT PLAYS.

WELCOME BRIGADE

Congratulations on beginning your journey across the Transcontinental Bridge! Before you get started, we'd like to point out a few things that are sure to make your vehicular excursion of over 3,500 miles into an expedition that's fun for the whole family! Gone are the days of old where you crammed into those awful airborne death-traps with 200 of your closest friends. Now you can settle in for a peaceful voyage from ports like Boston, New York City, and Miami, all the way over to the other side of the ocean! Be sure to check out our newest port, Camaret-sur-Mer (home of the Golden Tower)!

For your convenience, we've provided many hotels along the route. We recommend the lush, elegant, (and, dare we say it?) monstrously regal Transcontinental Hotel. Our expertly-trained staff will stop at nothing to ensure that your every need is met.

If you only plan to linger in one particular place for a few hours, we have plenty of Bridge-side towns that feature fine dining and hourly entertainment. Any thrill-seekers out there should check out Aqua Land, an amusement park with the world's first (and fastest!) immersive ocean experience roller coaster.

For your safety, we've strategically placed watchtowers throughout the Bridge. Be sure to tune into 815 AM to get the quickest, crispest updates about traffic, weather, and any other difficulties you may encounter. We want you to

have the safest time possible as you cross the Atlantic -- so be sure to call into our watchtowers in case of anything suspicious. Or an emergency. Whichever comes first.

We hope you're ready for quite the adventure on the Transcontinental Bridge!

ETTA SIGHS as she HITS the RECORDING MACHINE.

ETTA

I'm sorry everyone. That recording's been around longer than I've been alive and it's still---

WELCOME BRIGADE

Congratulations on beginning your journey across the ---

ETTA hits it again.

ETTA

Aw, come on. Every time. Hold on a sec.

ETTA TYPES, muttering as the WELCOME BRIGADE drones on.

WELCOME BRIGADE

...fun for the whole family! Gone are the days of old where ---

ETTA

Yeah, yeah.

SILENCE as the other recording stops.

ETTA (CONT'D)

(triumphant)

Ah. That's one of the best sounds in the world, isn't it? Silence.

Now. Where were we?

MUSIC BEGINS.

ETTA

There's nothing uncommon about seeing abandoned things along the Bridge. It's not unlike the mainland, in that way. How many times have you seen forests cleared out to make room for strip malls no one will ever use? How many times have you driven past the pristine, identical houses of a gated community in the middle of nowhere, and wondered if anyone ever lived there at all?

The distinction between lived-in and deserted - where whispers on the wind can carry welcomes or warnings - seems to be a pretty common theme out here. When night sets in, you can't tell if that ship on the horizon harbors a single living soul - or if the silver glint bouncing off of its sails is more than just moonlight.

But that's not what I'd like to talk about today. What happened at the Transcontinental Hotel isn't exactly that kind of story.

This is a success story. They built it, and people *did* come.

We've been getting some calls, lately. Or, one call, to be exact. So Frank, just for you, here are the facts: the Transcontinental Hotel was a mainstay of Checkpoint 8 for ten years. And it was *beautiful*. Five floors of spacious suites. A three Michelin star restaurant, featuring the freshest fish you've ever tasted. Twenty-four hour, world-class concierge service. And a ballroom outfitted with twelve crystal clear, floor-to-ceiling windows. When you danced, it was like you were dancing in the sea.

Here's another fact: the Transcontinental Hotel closed, without notice or fanfare, the day after its tenth anniversary.

I said this was a success story. I didn't say for how long.

BEAT. BOB GROWLS.

ETTA (CONT'D)

You're listening to: The Bridge.

THEME SONG.

ETTA (CONT'D)

Welcome to episode number---

A PAUSE as she catches herself.

ETTA (CONT'D)

(hastily)

Well, the episode number doesn't really matter anyway. As you know, there are long stretches of time where I...have nothing else to do but provide you with the best quality bridge folklore that my paycheck can buy. When there aren't any storms on the horizon, ye olde watchtower doesn't really need a lot of upkeep...and there's no one on the road, so there go my traffic reports.

A few days ago, fueled by boredom and a little *too much* caffeine, I stumbled upon a few things in Watchtower 10's archives.

(low, aside)

Don't tell my boss.

ETTA (CONT'D)

These documents - ledgers, paystubs, pictures - chronicle the events that led up to that one fateful night in the Transcontinental Hotel. After the disappearances, they were thought to be lost. Just one more thing eroded away by time.

Luckily for you, that wasn't the case.

BEAT.

ETTA (CONT'D)

Now. If you're listening with young children - or if, like Frank, you're allergic to whimsy - you might want to change the station for the next five minutes.

Is everyone else ready for the rest of our little bedtime story?

Good.

The party, they say, wasn't for the Transcontinental Hotel's tenth anniversary. That would have gone against their one unshakable tenet: "Everything for the guest." It's likely that none of the party's guests ever knew the hotel, too, was celebrating that night.

So really, there were two parties. In the ballroom, the fabulously wealthy guests laughed and twirled within those floor-to-ceiling windows. But in the very back of the kitchen, the Transcontinental's overnight staff quietly toasted themselves with a cheap bottle of champagne. There were eight of them that evening. The overnight concierge. The chef, the sous chef, and the line cook. Three members of the waitstaff. And the concierge's nine-year-old daughter, there to watch the rich people dance across the sea. She toasted with sparkling apple juice.

The other party, though? That's the one people still talk about. And yet no one seems to know what, exactly, they were celebrating. No one has ever come forward to say that they knew someone in that ballroom.

If you were hoping for a place to stay that night, you were out of luck. Those passing the Transcontinental Hotel reported locked doors and a single sign: *Private event.*

Drivers also reported an unusually windy night along Checkpoint 8. Transcripts of that evening's traffic reports describe gusts that carried the seagulls' cries this way and that down the Bridge. Cries that sounded, to many, like people.

And the next morning, every adult who spent the night in the Transcontinental Hotel was gone. Or so they say. All we know for sure is, drivers passing by the next night found a very different sign on the front door: *Permanently closed*.

There are theories, of course. As you'll recall, whenever anything unfortunate occurs on the Bridge, there are always whispers of an uninvited guest from deep within the ocean, far deeper than we could hope to chart. But many believe this guest was much more welcome in that ballroom than we'd like to think. Many believe it was, in fact, the guest of honor.

... well, now I'm sorry that I told Frank to stop listening, because I've got one more fact for all of you. If you happen to pass the Transcontinental Hotel, if you hop the fence and slip through the unlocked door past the gardens, you can still see what's become of it. Every one of those floor-to-ceiling windows in the ballroom has been shattered. And on the wall of the opposite hallway, one word has been carved. *Return*.

But depending on when you time your visit, you may see something else, too. Every year, right around that time the Transcontinental Hotel closed its doors for one final night, things turn up around Checkpoint 8. In the middle of the road. By the weigh stations. Places people are sure to find them. Watches, scarves, locket, a purse strap. Each one nothing special, on its own. And each one positively

identified by the families of the missing as a belonging of their lost loved one. A belonging that they're sure must have been in their possession when they vanished.

For all this talk of the party, the guest of honor, the windows, the word - whenever this story's told, there are seven people you never hear about. The concierge. The chef, the sous chef, the line cook. And the three waitstaff. It was their celebration - their disappearance - too. But like they always said. "Everything for the guest."

Maybe that's why their belongings have never shown up.

You'll notice I said seven. And you'll notice, earlier, that I said every 'adult.' Because no one really knows what happened to the concierge's daughter. There are rumors that she was discovered a few days after the disappearances, disoriented but alive. Perhaps she woke up in the abandoned hotel and walked along the Bridge, searching for help.

But she's never come forward. When those families of the missing descend Checkpoint 8 once a year, combing the streets for their loved ones' tchotchkes, she's never been among them, not once. So these days, the prevailing theories are, unfortunately, quite macabre. They say either she vanished along with the adults, or she died.

It's been said that if you stand in the hallway where the employees' quarters were located, you can hear a child crying. The sound is faint. But only for a moment. The longer you stay in the hotel, it seems, the louder her cries become.

We never learned her name. The only thing we have left to go off of are a set of initials: H.P. So, that's all I've got for you. Twelve broken windows, one word, and one nine-year-old girl.

As I've been pointing out for quite some time, there've been other strange stories about the Bridge. And more than one instance of the word 'Return' being etched somewhere close by. So, H.P., if you're not a ghost and wouldn't mind calling in to talk about what happened, it'd be appreciated. We'd love to know---

THE INTERCOM RINGS, interrupting her. ROGER, her boss who has about as much patience as a polar bear standing on a melting ice cap, is really excited to make this call.

ROGER

Did you leave the chocolate fountain running again?

ROGER approaches this question with the weariness of someone who's asked a child to stop trying to stick their hand into a flame...every day for the past five years.

ETTA

Rooooooger! How quick we are to place the blame! Tell me, how is the weather out on the high road? Still holier-than-thou, or...?

ROGER

Stop deflecting and answer the question. Did you, in your infinite wisdom, leave the chocolate fountain ---

An ALARM SOUNDS, answering the question before ROGER can repeat it.

ETTA

Hey, that's not... entirely my fault! Breaking out the old fondue maker was Bertie's idea. He

wanted to do something... special to pass the time until dinner.

ROGER

It was your idea to build that thing in the first place. And you promised you'd be careful with it. And now there's chocolate all over the kitchen floor and----

The ALARM SOUNDS again. Roger is 100% done. "There's unexpected chocolate in the kitchen."

ETTA

...unidentified chocolate? That's a new one.

BEAT.

ROGER

Do you know what happens when too much chocolate is poured into that... that Frankenstein's monster version of a machine that you and Bertie built? It keeps running anyway, and when all that melted chocolate isn't being heated anymore, it doesn't just sit there. No, it molds around whatever it can find. Half of our appliances are edible now.

ETTA

(with the gusto of a heckled stand-up comedian)

So what you're really saying is that now we have an all-you-can-eat chocolate bar? Get it? Because the bar is chocolate? No?

ROGER

(dismissively)

Not likely. Kate's trying to shut that thing off now, but what I want to know is: what were you doing that was more important than making sure our toaster wasn't a marshmallow and graham cracker away from becoming a s'more?

ETTA

I was...umm...reading a bedtime story.

ROGER

To who?

ETTA

...to...whoever's listening. And Frank. Though I don't think he's listening anymore. That might've been my fault.

BEAT.

ROGER

You could just give the traffic report. You know, since that's your job. Or do I need to get you to read your job description again?

ETTA

(hastily)

No, no. Once a week is really enough.

ROGER

Good.

BEAT. ETTA waits for ROGER to hang up. ROGER, however, is fine with staying put. It's a dance these two have about every other day.

ROGER

Can you do your job without me calling in every five seconds?

ETTA

(muttering)

I certainly can't do it *with* you waiting around to correct me. Or muttering your woe-is-me thoughts on life under your breath.

ROGER

What was that?

ETTA

Nothing, nothing.

She CLEARS HER THROAT, approaching her new task with the same enthusiasm as one might have watching paint dry. The paint is one of those awful vomit-green-ish colors, which is absolutely no fun for anyone. She lowers her voice a bit, in an attempt to sound more like a cheesy Radio DJ.

ETTA (CONT'D)

It's another Tuesday here on Watchtower 10.
Here's your hourly traffic report...

BEAT. TRAFFIC THEME.

ETTA (CONT'D)

Well, it looks like there's nothing happening on the Transcontinental Bridge because there's no one on the road tonight. Or ever.

It's funny really. This thing has only been open for fifty years, and it's already falling apart. People put all kinds of time and resources into building this thing and then they just toss it aside when they get bored. I mean, *come on*, this bridge spans the entire Atlantic Ocean! How cool is that?

ROGER GROANS in the background, wondering for the billionth time today how, exactly, they wound up in this wretched place. Are they dead? Doomed to live out the remainder of forever in this saltwater-filled circle of hell?

ETTA (CONT'D)

Anyway, there's still nothing going on. I know, I know, I'm just as shocked as you are. The skies are as dark and clear as ever. I've taken to renaming the constellations, 'cause there's not much else to do. There's a squiggly one up to my right named 'Roger's Angry Face,' and another one that I like to call -

ROGER

Really, do you have to do this every time?

ETTA

IGNORING her boss.

Looking out on the horizon, it's easy to see that - oh. Oh my god, what's going on?

BOB GROWLS.

(frantically)

Something's coming. It's... it's a car? That's a first. I haven't seen a car on this road since
—

Hold on, its blinkers are going. I think it's signaling something. It's... it's pulling a to stop on the shoulder. Okay, maybe I should signal back. Let them know someone can see them
—

SOME KIND OF A ROAR.

ETTA (CONT'D)

What the --- something just reached out of the water. It looked like...like a giant tentacle!

ROGER

(oh, no way in hell...)

What?

Realizing she's acting, he also knows he can't stop the story train. She continues---

ETTA

If you're listening to this, stay as far away from Watchtower 10 as you can. Get off the bridge, there's something --- oh God, another tentacle! When will this end? When will—

ROGER

Etta.

ETTA

(as if she was caught with her hand in the proverbial cookie jar)

Ah, I was uh... just having some fun.

ROGER

Fun?

ETTA

Yeah. You know, that thing you stopped having when you grew up?

ROGER

You see that piece of paper on your desk?

ETTA

Uhhh there are lots of pieces of paper on my---

ROGER

The one to the left of the microphone.

(exasperated)

You folded it into a swan on your first day.

ETTA

My job description?

ROGER

Right. Where, exactly, does it list "fun" as a requirement or qualification?

ETTA

She SIGHS.

Nowhere.

ROGER

Then get back to work. No more fake accidents.

ETTA

No more fake accidents.

BEAT. COM PINGS as ROGER LEAVES.

ETTA (CONT'D)

Sorry about that everyone. I got a little... carried away. No Lovecraftian monsters here, on this bridge in the middle of nowhere. Nope. None at all. Just me.

So, the traffic report.

As usual, the clouds are ramming into each other as they all race to cover up the moon. God forbid we have any source of light that isn't fluorescent—

DOOR OPENS. In comes KATE, the resident BRIDGE TRAVEL AGENT. She's only been living at Watchtower 10 for a year (the newest edition to the site), and has a knack for creating mischief, but an obligation to end it before things go too far.

KATE

Okay, next time you decide to turn me into Willy Wonka, give me a heads-up first.

ETTA

...was it that bad?

KATE

Roger and I agreed that it's now your job to make dinner for everyone. You'll have quite the task ahead of you. There aren't many ingredients left. And don't get me started on what happened to the stove.

ETTA

Hey, I didn't hear you complaining when I managed to make that fruit salad work ---without any fruit!

KATE

That was just a salad, Etta.

ETTA

But was it a good salad?

KATE

...yes.

ETTA

See? And yet you still seem a little skeptical of my culinary skills.

KATE

She SIGHS.

Do you know where Bertie went?

ETTA

Nope. Thought he'd be in the kitchen, but ---

ALARM SOUNDS GO OFF.

ALARM

There is unexpected chocolate in the kitchen.

ETTA (CONT'D)

Kaaaaaaate. I thought the chocolate was under control?

KATE

(100% done with everything)

It was... I have to go.

PAUSE as the DOOR CLOSES and KATE EXITS.

ETTA (CONT'D)

Well, now that my unexpected visit is over, we'll get back to it. The traffic report for today is-

PHONE RINGS.

You've gotta be kidding me.

(she answers in her pleasant radio voice)

You're on speaker!

ROGER

Do you think this is funny?

ETTA

Sorry, what?

ROGER

What exactly are you trying to pull, here?

ETTA

Uh, right now I'm trying to pull an answer out of you.

ROGER

Look out the window. There's something in the water.

ETTA

What?

ROGER

Do I need to repeat myself?

ETTA

I don't see anything.

POWER FLICKERS. Some CREEPY WEIRD INTERFERENCE HAPPENS.

ETTA

...I hate to ask the obvious questions here, but what was that?

BEAT.

ETTA (CONT'D)

Bertie?

ROGER

You said Bertie was in the kitchen.

ETTA

No, I think I said he was *supposed* to be in the kitchen.

ROGER

What?

ETTA

Semantics.

BEAT.

Nevermind.

ROGER

Where the hell did he go?

ETTA

Hold on, let me consult the handy dandy tracker I placed on him this morning.

ROGER

I hope you're kidding.

ETTA

My seriousness regarding the matter shall remain a mystery.

BEAT.

Is that...thing still in the water?

ROGER

No. I don't see it anymore. It's gone.

ETTA

And the weird interference?

ROGER

He SIGHS.

I'll keep looking for Bertie. If you find him before I do, tell him to report to my office. We've got things to discuss... if he's in good condition.

ETTA

If you're planning world domination, you *might* have to be a little less suspicious.

ROGER HANGS UP.

ETTA (CONT'D)

Ouch.

One day I'd like to have a conversation that doesn't result in hurt feelings.

INTERCOM GOES OFF as BERTIE CALLS IN.

BERTIE is the groundskeeper and very fond of plants. He tends to them like someone might care for a kitten... or a child. The others have learned not to ask what the difference is.

BERTIE

You traitor!

ETTA

You're not dead! And traitor's a little harsh, isn't it? You're the one who left the kitchen. We had a deal, Bertrand.

BERTIE

Of course I'm not dead! What gave you that idea?

ETTA

Roger and I picked up some weird interference when we were talking earlier. Thought it might be you, but whatever was on the other end didn't sound very... alive.

BERTIE

(as agitated/all-in-one-breath as possible)

I... I didn't hear it. I went to check on the hydrangeas, and I had every intention of going back to make sure the chocolate didn't overflow and create a river in the kitchen, but then I had to go into Submare Level 3 to make sure---

ETTA

(quickly interrupting him)

Whoa, there. Fountains overflowing with melted chocolaty goodness take priority over everything else. It's like you've learned nothing these past three years.

BERTIE

(flustered)

This isn't a joking matter! It isn't pretty down there. There's something wrong with---

ETTA

(somewhat harsh)

Why're you just telling me about this now?

BERTIE

Communication is down at that level. I found you as soon as I could. I thought you'd be in

the kitchen, but --- wait. What were you doing over there, anyway?

ETTA

According to Roger, my job.

BERTIE

That is disappointing.

ETTA

Tell me about it. All I wanted to do was give 'em a good story.

BOB GROWLS.

ETTA (CONT'D)

Uh, Bertie? When you...went down to Submare 3 did you---

BERTIE

Of course I did! You think I would just leave the door wide open?

BOB GROWLS.

BERTIE (CONT'D)

...maybe I should go check.

ETTA

Yeah. I'll come with you.. For...emotional support.

BEAT.

Okay, okay. I just don't want to be here alone. Let's get Kate before we go.

BERTIE

What about Roger?

ETTA

Unless we're planning on reading my job description aloud down there, I think Roger can keep an eye on things up here. Just in case...well, in case we have any emergencies while the rest of us are underwater.

BERTIE

Are you still broadcasting?

ETTA

Yeah, but no one's listening.

BERTIE

Turn it off before you leave. I'll go get Kate.

ALARM GOES OFF once more. Both of them groan.

BERTIE (CONT'D)

I'll go check that now.

INTERCOM PINGS.

ETTA

She SIGHS.

Well everyone, it looks like I've got to go deal with...something.

BEAT. The music from earlier starts playing, but there's something different about it this time.

ETTA (CONT'D)

I'd like to leave you with a small story, before I go. When I was a kid, Mom used to read to me every night. The books... I only remember a few of them. Some of them had to do with the Bridge, but then there were other things, too. Long-forgotten towns. Memories lost to time itself.

My mother... the last thing I remember... she's putting me to sleep. I wasn't in the mood for stories that night so I interrupted her every chance I got. My head... my head felt funny. Like there was something heavy sitting on it. My eyes didn't want to stay open, even though I wanted them to. I begged them to just stay open --- but it didn't work. She took me away from the party early, even though I tried to stay awake.

We didn't go back to our normal room. Instead, she led me down the hallway. I remember the path. Left, right, down the stairs, through a set of doors I'd been forbidden to go to. And then---

And then I slept. For three days, that's all I did. Nothing could wake me up. Nothing *did* wake me up.

I didn't know it at the time, but my mother... she must've known something was going to happen that night, because she hid me in a place that only the staff knew about - and it saved my life.

I told you earlier that the little girl never returned to Checkpoint 8. Instead, she kept a record of every item that's turned up on over the years, carefully cataloging them as she waited for a sign that her loved one moved on. A simple, but beautiful necklace. A canvas bag that could store all of her snacks (and a few of her toys). The book she read to me the night she vanished.

When I woke up I was in a ship's cargo hold. I stumbled up the steps, and a very startled captain asked me where my mother was. I had no idea what to tell him. That was fifteen years ago, and the answer to that question still hasn't changed.

Yet.

My name...my *real* name...is Henrietta. Henrietta Perrault.

My mother was the Transcontinental Hotel's lead concierge. She was taken from me on the same night the rest of her staff and all those guests disappeared.

I know she's still out there. And I will go
through every story about this bridge --- I
will search every drop of water in this ocean
--- until I find her.

BOB GROWLS.

END OF RECORDING.

Credits:

We'd like to thank you for listening to our first ever episode! This episode of The Bridge was written by Alex Brown and Rebecca Mahoney. It features, in order of appearance, Sarah Grover as THE WELCOME BRIGADE, Alex Brown as ETTA, Chris Martin as ROGER, Liz Hull as Kate, Rebecca Mahoney as THE WEIRD INTERFERENCE, and David Picarello as BERTIE.

The two fantastic pieces of music that accompanied tonight's Transcontinental Hotel folktale, as well as the opening chime and the traffic report theme, were composed by the inimitable Sara Fairchild. Our amazing Main Theme was composed by Jake Hull. This episode was edited and mixed by Alex Brown and Ian Heflin. The static sound effects were provided by Dead Signals, creators of the Archive 81 podcast. We'd also like to thank our friends at Wolf 359 and The Bright Sessions for their advice and moral support! If you're not already listening to them, check 'em out!

Want to learn more about the Transcontinental Bridge? Visit our website at thebridgepod.com. You can also find us on Twitter @bridge_podcast. 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! As a special treat, we present an outtake from our very own Chris Martin!