

March 8th, 1941. 1340

“Which one of you sodding twits had the audacity to drink my damn Cappuccino?!” A voice demanded through the otherwise silent and still offices of the compound known colloquially as Hut 3. It was a voice all the denizens of this small, cigarette smoke filled box were familiar with and one they mockingly dreaded. Like a pomeranian, it had bark but always lacked the bite.

“Oh shut it Saunders,” Replied another cooler and more levelled voice. It was that of Humpherys, their senior liaison officer with the RAF and local ‘hero’ whenever Saunders, their ‘commanding’ officer, had such an outburst.

“It was you wasn’t it?” Saunders shot back as he walked up to Humpherys, pointing an accusatory finger at the brown-haired man who sat leisurely in a chair puffing away on a pipe.

“No it wasn’t, who would want to drink that goat piss anyway? You’re literally the only dimwit I can think of.”

Saunders’ face turned red, his expressions contorting further to the point where it made him look as if he was made of clay.

“I-I will not be treated like this!! Do you have any idea who I bloody am?! YOU WILL NOT treat YOUR SUPERIOR OFFICER like some bloody first-year intern that YOU CAN JUST BULLY!!! I will have you decommissioned and court-martialed for insubordination!”

Humphreys just scoffed at the threat whilst everyone else gawked on like a murder of crows, waiting for the eventual blows that will never come.

“Go ahead, I’d very well like to see you bloody try.”

His voice turned low and dangerous as he stood to his feet, towering a few inches over Saunders. In comparison to the otherwise short and chubby navy man who worked as a desk-jockey for his entire career, Humphreys was tall and muscular, no doubt a result of a life spent as an active duty pilot within the RAF. He was handsome too, unlike Saunders who despite the metaphors of his personality, did genuinely look like a mutt. Still, this difference never stopped Saunders from attempting to assert his authority over Humphery and the rest of Hut 3. He always felt the need to remind everyone of how far he has come, despite not really coming that far in comparison to many others, and to pull rank whenever things didn’t go his way. The classic Napoleon complex, though this also meant he was incredibly easy to antagonise.

Humphreys always struggled with authority. Even as a pilot, he feuded constantly with his squadron leader. Thus it came as a surprise when he was promoted to the same exact rank, though things soon became apparent when he was carted off to Bletchely to act as senior liaison for the RAF. He had a mind of his own and being a brilliant linguist, he had the capital to assert himself over Saunders, who in comparison wasn’t as gifted with languages as he was. Perhaps that was the root cause of their differences, this innate sense of unspoken jealousy felt by Saunders for his subordinate and the lack of respect Humpherys had for his superior. A whirlpool of negative sentiments that could send even the bestest friends into this level of petty, school-yard game of insults and threats.

Saunders backed off when Humpherys stood, clearly intimidated though he still simmered with rage both at himself for allowing such tricks to work and at Humphrey for doing such a thing. He sulked off to his desk, no doubt to

begin penning a formal letter of complaint to the RAF. One he ultimately will never send and even if he did, would reach as far as the wastebin of a secretary.

The office froze during these brief moments of confrontation, eyes from every corner glued intently to the display of dysfunctionality that defined their leadership's interpersonal relations. Fascinating for some, grotesque for others, but equally tantalising for all as they watched them clash in the most childish imaginable. Among them was a young woman, sitting several desks away from the battlegrounds but close enough to listen to the symphony that was their brief exchange of artillery. She had shoulder length brown hair, curled neatly near the ends to form a subtle French bob. Dark brown eyes and uniformed, quite attractive to the right pair of eyes.

She always found it amusing how dysfunctional these two were in comparison to any other individuals within Bletchley Park. Like schoolboys, all they knew was how to fight. Yet despite these setbacks, Hut 3 always managed to accomplish their tasks, though maybe not from the direct influence of their own two Napoleons. It was the background clerks, translators, and linguists who preferred working over insults. The stalwart anti-fascists who worked diligently under the guidance of their teacher F. L. Lucas to rid the world of such tyranny that did most of the legwork. They formed the backbone of Hut 3's intelligence apparatus, the darling mamas and papas of SIS's Ultra.

"I bet you five quid it was Camfield who drank his Cappuccino." A low whisper came from next to the girl as she sat slouched over her desk, writing Chinese characters with a fountain pen to pass the time.

"Camfield? Really?" She asked as her head slowly panned towards the right, her brown pupils meeting a pair of youthful, green eyes. It was Curtis, perhaps the only other individual closer to her age in this box of ageing historians than anybody else. He naturally took a liking towards her, even if he was quite immature in comparison to Llewellyn.

"Why yes, you don't believe that drunken fool would do anything to cure his hangover?"

"Yes but... he wouldn't be so daft as to drink \*Saunders'\* Cappuccino? I mean, he knows how he'll react and Saunders could actually do something to him unlike the rest of us."

"You give him too much credit." The man scoffed before rolling back to his desk, "But if you think he didn't, then why not take the bet? Easiest five quid you'll make in your life."

"I- Stop it! I don't gamble!"

"Your loss," Curtis shrugged as he rolled elsewhere to peddle his addiction.

She sighed, returning her attention back to the piece of paper filled with incoherent scribbles in front of her. He was annoying but there were days where he meant well.

They were supposed to be getting a new interception from six today, but as for when it will arrive, that was entirely up to the varying personalities in that other little box. She has never been there personally herself, but she has met several of their personnel, including one husk of a man that made it a habit to deliver the interceptions in person-- or was it at the request of Lucas? She didn't know. He was brilliant though, at least from what she heard, so she couldn't really fault him for his eccentricities. SOE themselves hired homosexuals, criminals, and women like her to do things a father would never imagine his daughter doing in a million years. During times of crises, it was better to have eccentricities than to dwell within the jail cell of strict orthodoxy.

“Has that man Anstruther arrived yet?” A voice with true authority rang out, cutting the soft whispers in the background into nothing but attentive silence. It was Frank Lucas, or Peter as he was known, the unofficial leader behind all of Hut 3 and the man who assembled the team.

“No not yet,” Humphreys replied, “You know how he is.”

“Poor chap, I heard he went on leave to Royal Edinburgh right after Dunkirk.” Saunders remarked, having calmed down from his previous outburst.

“Mmm maybe we should send someone.” Humphreys added, “What if he fell on his way over?”

“No.” Peter stated firmly, “He’ll make it. We will just have to be patient.”

His eyes then fell on the young woman, who continued her idle task of doodling boxes to formulate a written language at her desk.

“Miss Llewellyn. Why don’t you receive Anstruther with us? You’ll be the one writing the report after all... and you too Curtis, it’s best the War Office is represented.”

Diligently, the two exchanged glances and stood up before approaching where Peter was. It was unusual for Llewellyn to be given such a privilege, though perhaps that could simply mean she was finally moving up in this strange world of codebreakers. She joined Bletchley Park through SOE and SOE through her connection with Phyllis Bingham at the FANY’s Corp Commander’s office. She spent the vast majority of 1940 and 41 in France, but was reassigned to this desk job just three months ago. Apparently, they needed another individual who can speak fluent German. She did earn a name for herself in France, but that was only known in Baker street. In Bletchley, she was practically a nobody. Just another feminine face that sat behind a desk with a unique quirk, analysing things on paper. Most, save for top-men like Peter, Humphreys, and Saunders, didn’t even know her connection to Churchill’s secret army.

“You should send Miss Llewellyn if he doesn’t show up anytime soon sir. I’m sure it’ll be good motivation,” Curtis smirked as he folded his hands behind his back.

“Shut it!” She nudged him, he was being annoying again.

“She’ll remain where she is.” Peter chided.

The other two by this point had stood up as well, the four men forming a line as they waited for the vaunted Elliot Anstruther. Saunders looked impatient, Humphreys looked like he didn’t care, Peter remained the icon of patience, and Curtis stole glances at the young Miss Llewellyn. She acted as if she hadn’t noticed, but she did and these glances were beginning to drive her up the wall. Little did young Curtis know, she could snap his neck in fifty different ways, not that she would ever do such a thing.

Eventually, after what felt like a sordid eternity, that husk of a man burst onto the scene with a sudden apology. Saunders looked guilty, Humphreys looked concerned, Peter looked sympathetic, and Curtis finally stopped staring at Llewellyn.

“No need to apologise,” Peter was the first to speak, taking the intercept offered to him by Elliot.

“Yes, yes, you’ve done quite well, good man.” Saunders was next to profess his pity.

"I know some chaps in London that may be able to help. That is, of course, if you still require it." Humphreys offered, though he was only being polite.

"I think I had a cousin who suffered from a similar ailment," Curtis commented, attempting to find common ground though he was dreadfully wrong in all aspects.

"Miss Llewellyn. Why don't you grab our guest a chair and some tea, hm?" Peter commanded as he unfurled the paper with the intercept, bringing out a pair of spectacles from his coat pocket so he may read its contents.

She nodded and soon returned with an office chair under her arm. For someone so small, she could carry quite a lot of weight. She placed it next to Elliot, before filling a cup of tea from a nearby kettle on one of the desks, offering him the beverage with an added dish. Llewellyn was conflicted with how she felt about this Anstruther and it showed on her face. There was pity of course, like the rest. He had visibly thinned and there was a noticeable limp to his walk not to mention often how he shook. Yet despite all that, she knew an individual like him, with an already accomplished career in mathematics and codebreaking, would spurn such sentiments from his colleagues. It was something completely out of his control and it might have made him lesser in the eyes of equals, a concept she too was familiar with herself. Thus she just frowned, remaining stone-faced in an attempt to appear as if his condition did little to bother her, even if it did. Once Elliot had accepted or denied the offered tea, she would return to standing next to the other uniformed officers, her hands folded over her abdomen.

"My word!" Peter finally exclaimed, his free hand pinching the hinge of his spectacles as he lowered the piece of paper.

"What is it?" Saunders quickly shot up to Hoover behind his superior, though the German seemed to have eluded him this day as he drew nothing but a blank.

He wasn't given a chance to recover however as Peter quickly handed the transcript off to Llewellyn, who briskly turned away from the rest of the group to stare at it herself. Her face visibly paled as a soft gasp escaped her lips, her hand instinctively covering her mouth.

"Is it that bad?" Curtis asked, sceptical as he attempted to take a peak himself. He failed of course, Llewellyn was far nimbler than him. "Oh come on Gwen, let me see!"

"Shut it already you muppet!" She nudged him away again before shoving the piece of paper into her pocket. Her attention then panned to Peter, who stared back with sympathetic eyes. "If you will excuse me sir, I should get to writing my analysis." There was a level of hurt behind her voice, but it was far too subtle for an untrained ear to pick up. She hid it quite well.

He gave nothing but a nod and that was enough. Soon, her heels clicked away as she returned to her desk, followed by the subtle tapping of a typewriter.

"Well Mister Anstruther. We're always happy to have you as a guest, but please, don't let us keep you any further from important tasks back in six. I'm sure they eagerly await your gallant return." With a nod from Peter and the other three men, the crowd dispersed and returned to their designated work stations, continuing on whatever piece of intelligence they had been delegated. During times when they actually worked instead of arguing, there was a quiet serenity to be felt in Hut 3. Like a well conducted orchestra, it certainly had its charm despite the clashes between their dysfunctional personnel, beset by jealousy and commanded by inflated egos.