

WBUR'S
THE MIDNIGHT REBELLION
CHAPTER 3 - INTO THE MACHINE
Written by Dean Russell

[MUX]

NARRATOR: You're listening to The Midnight Rebellion.

Chapter 3, "Into the Machine"

[MUX]

[SFX: HEARTBEAT.]

NARRATOR: Joule should not be doing this. Any of this. She should not have left the house at night, in a storm ...

[SFX: FADE in STORM]

NARRATOR: She shouldn't have entered the lab against her dad's wishes ...

[SFX: MIX in JOULE and HART BREAKING WINDOW, ENTERING]

NARRATOR: She shouldn't have gone off alone, shouldn't have started poking around. And she definitely, absolutely should not be getting into this ... this ...

JOULE: (to self, awed) ... machine ...

[SFX: MACHINE NOISE WOOSHES IN.]

INT. SECOND FLOOR, LAB - NIGHT (PRESENT-DAY, STORM)

NARRATOR: This *machine* is dangerous, no question. It shakes and steams and spurts. It screams at Joule. And yet, as she gazes inside, where her mother's antique pocket watch almost taunts her, that phrase "*I should not*" ceases to exist.

JOULE: (to self, determined) I should. I can ... I *have to*.

NARRATOR: Why is the watch there? What does it mean about her mother? Joule steps up onto the ramp, toward the red light ...

JOULE: [deep breath]

NARRATOR: ... and climbs into the machine.

[SFX: Footsteps into machine.]

INT. THE MACHINE, LAB - CONT'D

JOULE: (to self) There. That wasn't so bad.

NARRATOR: The inside is cramped, barely bigger than a laundry dryer. The walls are dented and scratched. Her shoes squeak on the damp grating and dismembered fish. Quickly, she kneels and untangles the tarnished gold watch ~~chain~~. She rubs her thumb over the molded cover. It clicks open. The cracked clock face glows. But the hands sit motionless.

JOULE: Hm. Broken. Probably clogged with fish guts.

[SFX: Pssshhhh-BUM.]

JOULE: Uh. What was that?

NARRATOR: *That* was the door slamming shut behind her.

JOULE: No, no, no. Hey! Open up. Open up!

NARRATOR: The machine only rattles more violently.

JOULE: (to self, a little worried) Okay, c'mon. I said, *open*.

[SFX: Joule tries handle. Bangs on door.]

NARRATOR: And then all of a sudden her skin goes white hot. Her breathing quickens.

MACHINE (ROBOTIC): Warning. Bio-synchronization initialized. Ten, nine, eight ...

JOULE: [banging fists, hyperventilating] Hart? Is this a prank? Hart! HART!

NARRATOR: She peers out of the porthole. No one is there.

[SFX: MACHINE surges, ready to ... EXPLODE?]

MACHINE (ROBOTIC): ... six, five ...

NARRATOR: All at once, her stomach drops, she feels heavy and small. An iridescent fluid seems to ooze out of her pores, forming a shimmery film around her body. Something begins to squeeze the life out of her. Then she knows ...

JOULE: (to self, terrible epiphany) I *shouldn't* be in here.

MACHINE (ROBOTIC): ...two, one.

NARRATOR: And the machine disappears.

[SFX: MACHINE IMPLODES, as if tearing the fabric of spacetime. Then SILENCE.]

INT. MACHINE, WHO-KNOWS-WHERE - MOMENTS LATER

[SFX: SHARP CUT IN - MACHINE NOISE and JOULE'S SCREAM]

JOULE: (like falling) AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!

[SFX: MACHINE JERKS]

JOULE: OOF! [ad-lib more grunts]

[SFX: An extended audio image - the MACHINE LURCHES and BANGS! JOULE'S SLAMS against walls! BING! ZIP! Then FALLS AGAIN... HALTS, rocking gently, as if sinking into water.]

JOULE: Ow.

NARRATOR: Joule sits, bruised, thoughts smeared like a bad painting. Lights dim. The machine bobs, then gentles to a stop.

[SFX: Muted thud, as if underwater]

JOULE: [sighs] Is it over?

NARRATOR: The view through the porthole is black as oil. The room is gone. Her fingers find a gap in the wall. Curious, she works her nails and pulls off a panel.

JOULE: A control board. That would have been helpful to know.

NARRATOR: The buttons of the control panel glare back at her. She presses the big, green one marked simply, "Open."

[SFX: Pneumatic HISS.]

MACHINE (ROBOTIC): Warning. Warning. Warning. (repeats) ~~Door~~ opening.

[SFX: TIME SLOWS - WATER SPRAYS into the machine.]

NARRATOR: The door cracks, and time slows. Wet spray strikes her skin. Salt stings her tongue. And she realizes: this machine is underwater. ... It is about to flood. She is going to drown.

[SFX: TIME SPEEDS - WOOOOOSH HHHHHHHHHHHH! Water rushes in, JOULE SCREAMS underwater, underwater scene FADES OUT.]

NARRATOR: This seems like a good spot to pause. We'll be right back after the break.

[MUX]

[*MIDROLL***]**

[MUX]

EXT. ABANDONED TIDAL CITY STREET, LOW TIDE - MORNING (2100s)

[SFX: Distant ocean roar, one lone seagull (juvenile great black-backed gull).]

JOULE: [groans awake]

NARRATOR: Joule wakes on a nest of spaghetti. At least, that's what it feels like: steamy and slick. She stretches, limbs entwined. If this is a dream, it is weird but lovely.

JOULE: [yawns]

NARRATOR: Her eyelids split and moody, gray daylight streams in. She wipes grit from her face, and as her hand sharpens into view, she sees her slender fingers tangled in not-spaghetti.

JOULE: (suddenly alert) Ugh! Gross!

NARRATOR: She flings away a slimy, bile-colored rope of seaweed. Her body is swaddled in thick mats of it. She shoots up and staggers. Something gooey licks the toes of her left foot.

JOULE: Ah, lost a shoe. I knew I should have double-knotted.

NARRATOR: Her white sweater is sodden and stained red. She tugs at the collar, revealing a nasty gash in one shoulder ...

JOULE: (calling out) ~~Hart! Dad!~~ (beat, to self) Where am I?

NARRATOR: She's tempted to believe this is really a dream because thick fog creeps around her. Other than the seaweed carpet, the ground is largely flat rock layered with sand. Dead trees sway nearby and the remnants of wooden structures moulder.

SEAGULL [FIN]: SQUAWK!

NARRATOR: Joule turns. A scrawny seagull perches on a pilling. Dangling from the bird's cherry-tipped beak is a gold timepiece.

JOULE: (scolding) Hey! Give that back.

NARRATOR: The cluster of mottled brown feathers flaps, seeming very proud of its bounty.

JOULE: That's mine! That's not yours! Give it back!

SEAGULL [FIN]: SQUAWK!

NARRATOR: She lunges after the seagull. It drops the jewelry and takes off, tantruming.

[SFX: Seagull TAKES FLIGHT and SQUAWKS dramatically.]

JOULE: Good riddance. (calling out) Thief!

NARRATOR: Joule fastens the thick chain around her neck and rubs the watch with her thumb. She clicks open the case.

[SFX: Ticking.]

JOULE: Hey, I thought you were broken. (kidding) Hm. Maybe that machine was just a fancy watch fixer.

NARRATOR: The thought turns her insides cold. Because speaking its name ...

JOULE: The machine ...

NARRATOR: ... her memory comes back.

[SFX: FADE IN water rushing into machine.]

FLASHBACK - INT. MACHINE, UNDERWATER - NIGHT

NARRATOR: The door had started to open, the water streamed in...

JOULE: (getting splash) Help! Help!

NARRATOR: And then the force of it slammed her back and filled the machine. It swept her away, out into the deep, rushing darkness.

JOULE: [*ad-lib struggling underwater, freaking out*]

NARRATOR: And the machine drifted away.

[SFX: Joule's panicked underwater screams ECHO BACK TO...]

EXT. ABANDONED TIDAL CITY STREET, LOW TIDE - MORNING (2100s)

JOULE: (to self) This is not good.

[MUX]

[SFX: Joule rushing, slipping over street and seaweed.]

JOULE: (rushing, to self) Okay. Don't panic. That's what Mom would tell you. You're alive. That's good. You're only bleeding a little bit. And sure, you have no idea where that machine thing went but you know you're at the beach?—Wait. (beat) No, not the beach. The rock looks like a street, and those wooden poles seem like... (slowing down) they used to be ... *houses*.

NARRATOR: Joule tears away seaweed in huge clumps down to the rock. This is a street. Next she sees a sewer grate, rusted, but clearly imprinted with the words:

JOULE: "Drains to Boston Harbor." Boston. This is Boston? How?

NARRATOR: The wind blows, cleaving the fog where a set of pilings remains.

JOULE: (to self) Those look ... familiar.

NARRATOR: She edges closer. She brushes away dark brown silt from the ground. She recognizes A concrete walkway ... and two handprints.

JOULE: "H + J." Hart and Joule. (beat) This is my home.

[MUX]

EXT. ABANDONED INTERTIDAL CITY STREET - DAY

NARRATOR: Joule considers what she knows: The machine is missing. She is in Boston, on her street. Her house is destroyed.

Her first thought is that all of this is somehow her doing, like the machine was a kind of bomb that leveled the neighborhood.

JOULE: But that doesn't make sense. It wouldn't look like this. Unless it was a seaweed bomb. No, that's not a thing.

NARRATOR: She is hungry and the air is hot and her bare foot is sore. She wends her way through the fog, searching for ... what? The machine? Hart? Once she thinks she hears her brother cough, but decides it's just distant waves.

[SFX: Distant waves]

NARRATOR: In time, the breaking water seems to inch closer. The street gets slightly wetter. Then her toes are underwater, her ankles. Then water is sweeping over the weeds and asphalt.

JOULE: (realizing) The water's rising. It's a tide.

NARRATOR: Her mom had told her about tides. Twice a day, the ocean rises and falls...

(FLASHBACK) MOM: ...like the water is breathing, in and out, in and out. Tides are forever, you know? Your great-gran used to say "A tide never ebbs without flowing back in." But one day, if the Earth keeps warming, its glaciers will melt, and the tides will rise higher than cities.

NARRATOR: Her mom had a map of Boston in the coming years. It gave Joule nightmares. At high tide, half the city would be submerged.

JOULE: ... including my neighborhood. (excited problem solving) That's why the street is filling up with water. That's why my house is gone. The ocean is higher and that means this is the future! ... (slowing) a really, really bad future.

NARRATOR: Her eyes well with tears. She wants to be in her bed. To be listening to Hart blabber about his K-9000 dog robot, or whatever. To be home.

JOULE: The machine. I need the machine. It got me here. It can get me back. I just have to find it. But how?

[SFX: Distant BUZZING.]

JOULE: What is that?

NARRATOR: Joule peers out in the direction of the noise. High in the air, the fog blinks electric blue, like a beacon.

JOULE: I'm not alone. Great. I'm not alone! (calling) Hey! Hello!

NARRATOR: In a flash, Joule is careering down the slowly flooding street, waving her arms overhead, shouting. Hunks of asphalt and concrete tear at her bare foot, but she does not stop.

JOULE: Help! Help!

NARRATOR: The street inclines, and soon she's on dry ground, running toward the *strangest* flying object. A tiny helicopter. Foot-long blades spin on a ball-point axle inside a spherical cage. Eight lighted arms extend from the orb, writhing like tentacles.

[SFX: Buzzing gets close. BLEEPS, BLOOPS. Joule stops running.]

NARRATOR: Joule stops short, below the hovering mini copter.

JOULE: (shouting) Uh. Hello? Can you hear me?

[SFX: BLEEPS, BLOOPS.]

JOULE: (unsure) Okay? (shouting) My name is Joule Watts-Green. I'm lost. And I need your help. Please.

[SFX: Lots of BLEEPs, BLOOPs. It seems excited.]

NARRATOR: The copter gyrates, excited. It drifts down closer. The tentacles trail like strands of hair.

COPTER [TIN 3] (ROBOTIC): Help. [plays recording of Joule's voice saying "Joule Watts-Green"] Need Help.

JOULE: Yeah. Yeah! Can you take me to someone? A grown-up?

NARRATOR: It rises, arms spinning, and the blue lights flare orange. Hope washes over Joule.

[SFX: Electronic beacon BELL.]

NARRATOR: Until a flying rock slams into the copter.

[SFX: Rock hits metal. COPTER makes bad warning sounds. Hissing and crackling.]

JOULE: No. What just happened?

NARRATOR: The little helicopter starts to contort in the air. Joule glances left. Standing there is a puny kid wearing rags, huge goggles, and an enormous grin.

KID: HAHA! Take that you rusty TIN-SKIN!

NARRATOR: He pumps a fist.

JOULE: Hey! What'd you do that for?!

KID: [chuckles] Time to run!

NARRATOR: The kid bolts left. The copter veers right. They both disappear into the fog. And Joule is left standing alone.

JOULE: Oh no. What do I do now?

[MUX]

NARRATOR: What *will* Joule do now? That's up to you. She could run after the mangy rock-thrower. If you like that option, select Chapter 4, "Chase the Kid." Or if she should go after the mini helicopter to find help, go to Chapter 7, "Get to the Copter."

Chapter 4, "Chase the Kid."

Chapter 7, "Get to the Copter."

Choose wisely. This is *The Midnight Rebellion*.

[CODA – TMR TIPS]

JOULE: Hey, it's Joule. Here's something to think about: In this future I've stumbled into, streets have become tidal zones. But even *in your time*, as the planet warms and glaciers melt, cities like Boston, Miami, and New Orleans already have what's called, "sunny day flooding" – when extra high tides push seawater over the streets.

But the future isn't fixed. Just like my leap into the machine changed my story, your actions alter yours. Ask your school if they've joined a climate or energy-saving challenge. If not, ask them to start. You can find ideas at wbur.org/midnight.

And keep listening for more tips ... and more seaweed. Up next: *Chapter 4, "Chase the Kid,"* Or *Chapter 7, "Get to the Copter."*

[CREDITS]

NARRATOR: *The Midnight Rebellion* is a production of WBUR in Boston. It was created by Ben Brock Johnson and Dean Russell.

The series was written and produced by Dean Russell.

Directing by Emily Jankowski and Dean Russell.

Mix and sound design for this episode by Paul Vaitkus.

Supporting mix and sound by Mumble Media.

This episode is starring:

Basma Ayatte as Joule,

Erika Henningson as Dr. Elizabeth Green,

and Erik Ransom as the narrator.

Additional performances by Jett Dinh, Giselle Fernandez, Sarah Jiang, and Cadden McArthur.

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Production manager: Paul Vaitkus.

Executive producer: Ben Brock Johnson.

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See the full list of cast and crew at
wbur.org/themidnightrebellion.