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SF PERUSALS

BREAKING THE CODE

A Play

by Hugh Whitemore

Based on the book *Alan Turing, the Enigma*
by Andrew Hodges

SAMUEL FRENCH

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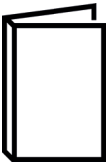
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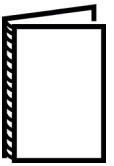
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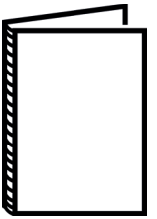
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hugh Whitemore was born in 1936. He studied for the stage at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art where he later became a member of the Council. He began his writing career in British television (contributing to *The Wednesday Play*, *Armchair Theatre* and *Play for Today*) and twice received Writers' Guild Awards. He has also written for American television, receiving Emmy nominations for *Concealed Enemies* (a mini-series about the Alger Hiss espionage case) and *The Final Days* (a dramatisation of the Bob Woodward/Carl Bernstein book about the downfall of President Nixon). *The Gathering Storm*, a film about Churchill in the 1930s, with Albert Finney and Vanessa Redgrave, which won the 2002 Emmy Award for outstanding writing and the Writers Guild of America Award. His latest film about Churchill, *Into the Storm*, starring Brendan Gleeson and Janet McTeer, was shown by HBO and BBC in 2009 and nominated for Best Miniseries or Motion Picture Made for Television by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association.

Movie credits include *The Return of the Soldier* (an adaptation of the novel by Rebecca West), Mel Brooks' production of *84 Charing Cross Road*, *Utz*, (an adaptation of Bruce Chatwin's novel) and Franco Zeffirelli's *Jane Eyre*.

His stage plays include *Sand in the Sandwiches*, *Stevie*, *Pack of Lies*, *Breaking the Code*, *The Best of Friends*, *It's Ralph*, *A Letter of Resignation*, *Disposing of the Body*, *God Only Knows* and a new version of Pirandello's *As You Desire Me*. These plays have been translated into many languages and produced throughout the world. He co-wrote the stage play of *The Last Cigarette* with Simon Gray, based on Simon's diaries.

Hugh Whitemore's work has twice been named Best Single TV drama by the UK Broadcasting Press Guild, he has received the Scripter Award in Hollywood (for *84 Charing Cross Road*), the Script Prize at the 1998 Monte Carlo Festival (for his adaptation of *A Dance to the Music of Time*) and a special Communications Award from the American Mathematical Society (for *Breaking the Code*). He was the 2003-4 News International Visiting Professor in broadcast media at Oxford University. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and an Honorary Fellow of King's College, London.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Alan Turing, The Enigma
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BREAKING THE CODE

First presented by Michael Redington in association with Duncan C. Weldon and Jerome Minskoff at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford, on 15th September, 1986, and subsequently at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, London, on 21st October, 1986, with the following cast:

ALAN TURING	Derek Jacobi
MICK ROSS	Dave Hill
CHRISTOPHER MORCOM	Richard Stirling
SARA TURING	Isobel Dean
RON MILLER	Paul Slack
JOHN SMITH	Michael Malnick
DILLWYN KNOX	Michael Gough
PAT GREEN	Joanna David
NIKOS	Dean Winters

Directed by Clifford Williams
Designed by Liz da Costa

The New York première, on which this acting edition is based, was produced by Jerome Minskoff, Duncan C. Weldon, James M. Nederlander, The Kennedy Center/ A.N.T.A. by arrangement with Triumph Theatre Productions Ltd and Michael Redington. It opened on Broadway at the Neil Simon Theatre on 15th November, 1987, with the following cast:

ALAN TURING	Derek Jacobi
MICK ROSS	Colm Meaney
CHRISTOPHER MORCOM	Robert Sean Leonard
SARA TURING	Rachel Gurney
RON MILLER	Micheal Dolan
JOHN SMITH	Richard Clark
DILLWYN KNOX	Michael Gough
PAT GREEN	Jenny Agutter
NIKOS	Andreas Manolikakis

Directed by Clifford Williams
Designed by Liz da Costa

CHARACTERS

MICK ROSS
ALAN TURING
CHRISTOPHER MORCOM
SARA TURING
RON MILLER
JOHN SMITH
DILLWYN KNOX
PAT GREEN
NIKOS

The play is in two Acts

ACT I

Scene One

A winter afternoon.

ALAN TURING *enters with* **MICK ROSS**. **TURING** *is about forty: untidily dressed, unkempt appearance, an occasional stammer.* **ROSS** *is carrying a file; he is a Detective Sergeant.*

ROSS Sorry to keep you waiting, sir. Sit down.

TURING *sits;* **ROSS** *sits facing him.*

Make yourself comfortable. *(He opens the file.)* Well now let's get the basic facts sorted out. We're talking about a burglary that occurred on January the twenty-third and you are Mr Spurling.

TURING No—Turing.

ROSS I beg your pardon?

TURING My name is Turing not Spurling.

ROSS Sorry, sir, beg your pardon. Bloody illiterate, some of our young constables. *(He displays a sheet of paper)* Just look at this atrocious writing. It could be Spurling, Spilling, Tilling.

TURING Well, it's Turing. *(Spelling it out)* T-U-R-I-N-G.

ROSS *(writing)* Alan Mathison Turing. Is that right?

TURING Yes.

ROSS Right. Mick Ross. Detective Sergeant.

TURING How do you do.

ROSS How do you do, sir. *(He looks at the file of papers)* You live at Hollymeade, Adlington Road, Wilmslow?

TURING Yes.

ROSS And you work at Manchester University?

TURING Yes.

ROSS So it's Professor Turing?

TURING Mr Turing is perfectly adequate.

ROSS Right. *(He glances at* **TURING***)* Not a native north-countryman?

TURING No.

ROSS No, I thought not. How long have you been here?

TURING Four years; since nineteen forty-eight.

ROSS *(as he writes)* It's an unusual name, Turing. Don't think I've come across it before.

TURING Scottish.

ROSS Ah. Whereabouts?

TURING I'm sorry...?

ROSS Whereabouts in Scotland do you come from?

TURING No, I, um—the Turings are of Scottish descent—

ROSS I see.

TURING —they came to England some time ago.

ROSS Before you were born?

TURING In the seventeenth century, I think.

ROSS Ah—right. *(A grin; then he looks at the file)* Now, sir, this burglary: can you tell me exactly what happened?

TURING Well, as I explained to the police constable, I got back home on Wednesday evening and found that the house had been broken into.

Pause.

ROSS Yes...?

TURING I telephoned the police and then I made a list of what was missing—of what seemed to be missing.

ROSS *(showing a sheet of paper to* **TURING***)* Is this your list?

TURING Yes.

ROSS A shirt, five fish-knives, a pair of tweed trousers, three pairs of shoes, a compass, an electric shaver, and a half-empty bottle of sherry. Not much of a haul.

TURING No, I don't, uh...

ROSS Yes, sir?

TURING I live very simply. Possessions, *per se*, mean very little to me.

ROSS Possessions what, sir?

TURING What?

ROSS I didn't hear what you said.

TURING Possessions *per se*; for their own sake.

ROSS Ah yes. *(He refers to the report)* Now you said—you said to the constable—you told him that you had some idea who might've committed the crime. Is that so?

TURING Well, yes.

Brief pause; **ROSS** *waits.*

I think his name is George.

ROSS George...?

TURING Yes.

ROSS George what?

TURING I don't know.

ROSS Who is this man? Do you know him?

TURING No.

ROSS Can you describe him?

TURING No, I've never seen him.

ROSS But you know his name?

TURING Well yes, somebody told me.

ROSS Told you what, sir?

TURING That this man George might be a burglar.

ROSS Who told you?

TURING Well, um—a young man came to the door. He was selling something. Brushes or something. He told me to be careful because, uh…he'd heard somebody talking about a burglary. They were planning a burglary, you see. He overheard them.

ROSS *(eyebrows raised)* He heard this man George making some sort of plan to burgle your house?

TURING Not my house specifically, no. A house in my neighbourhood. Or so I gather. That's what I was told. This young man—the brush salesman—he said he knew the person who was talking. George. He recognized him, do you see. And, um…well, that's all, really.

ROSS Where did this conversation take place?

TURING What conversation?

ROSS The conversation this young man overheard.

TURING In a pub, I think.

ROSS In a pub?

TURING I think so, yes.

ROSS *frowns.*

ROSS I'm puzzled, Mr Turing. How did the subject come up? Why did this brush salesman decide to tell you about a conversation he'd overheard in a pub?

TURING Well, I suppose...to warn me, I suppose.

ROSS It's very curious, don't you think?

TURING Curious...?

ROSS It's an odd thing to have happened.

TURING Is it?

ROSS I'd have thought so. Why didn't you inform the police at the time?

TURING It never occurred to me to do so. I mean, it was only a casual remark. He just said be careful, keep your eyes open. I didn't pay much attention, really.

ROSS Mmm. *(A moment of reflection)* When did he come to your house?

TURING Three or four weeks ago.

ROSS Who did he work for, do you remember?

TURING I've no idea.

ROSS What sort of brushes was he selling?

TURING It may not have been brushes. I forget.

ROSS It'd be useful if you could remember.

TURING Yes, I'll try.

ROSS Please do.

The telephone rings

Excuse me, sir. *(He lifts the receiver)* Hello, Ross. ...Yes? ...When? ...Right. *(He replaces the receiver and picks up the file)* Sorry, sir—bit of a problem. *(He rises to his feet)* We'll be in touch, OK? One of the lads will show you out.

ROSS *exits.*

The lights change: a summer afternoon.

Scene Two

CHRISTOPHER MORCOM *enters, wearing school uniform; he is about seventeen.*

CHRIS He should never have lied; that was the real mistake. I have some very definite ideas of right and wrong, and it's always wrong to lie.

TURING Perhaps he was afraid.

CHRIS Of course he was afraid. He'd cheated during the Latin exam; he knew he'd be found out, he knew he'd be punished. But lying made everything a hundred times worse.

SARA*'s voice is heard.*

SARA *(offstage)* Alan! Alan!

TURING Oh, Lord—that's my mother.

SARA *enters; she wears clothes appropriate for the late nineteen twenties.*

SARA Ah, here you are. Do forgive me. I thought I heard the doorbell, but I wasn't sure, I was out in the garden, you see. Do forgive me.

A brief rather awkward silence.

Alan, dear, won't you introduce your friend?

TURING *(gracelessly)* Oh, sorry—this is Christopher Morcom.

SARA How do you do, Christopher.

CHRIS How do you do, Mrs Turing.

SARA I am delighted to meet you at long last. Alan has talked so much about you, and I kept saying to him, "Do invite Christopher down for a weekend"—never expecting for a moment that he would. No matter what we say, he always endeavours to keep his schoolfriends to himself. I think perhaps he's ashamed of us.

TURING *squirms:* **CHRIS** *responds with a shy smile.*

Did you have a comfortable journey?

CHRIS Yes, thank you. The train was almost empty.

SARA Oh good. *(She smiles at him)* Do sit down, won't you? Sit over here, by me.

CHRIS Thank you.

SARA *and* **CHRIS** *sit by the table.*

SARA Alan tells me that your family has a place in town.

CHRIS Well, it's only very small; near Victoria Station, actually. My mother uses it as a studio.

SARA A studio?

CHRIS For her sculpture. She makes sculptures and so on.

SARA How exciting.

CHRIS Well, not really.

SARA Isn't it? I would've thought it would be rather exciting to have a mother who is an artist.

CHRIS It's only a hobby, really. She spends most of her time looking after the goats.

SARA What goats?

CHRIS We have a goat farm at home.

SARA Near Victoria Station?

CHRIS No, in the country. Our real home is in Worcestershire.

SARA I love Worcestershire: the garden of England.

TURING That's Kent, Mother.

SARA *(ignoring this)* I often wish we'd been able to spend more time in this country, but of course that wasn't possible. Has Alan told you about our travels?

CHRIS No.

SARA Ah, well—my husband was in the Indian Civil Service. He's retired now. Ill health. But for years we roamed around India: Bezwada, Madras, Kurnool, Chatrapur. Alan was very nearly born in Chatrapur.

TURING How can you be nearly born somewhere? It doesn't make sense.

SARA *(irritated)* Oh, Alan—please.

TURING Look at it logically.

SARA I do wish you wouldn't say things like that.

TURING Like what?

SARA You know how much it annoys me. *(To* **CHRIS***)* Alan has such an unruly streak in his nature. I'm sure you're much more level-headed.

CHRIS Well, I—

SARA *(not waiting)* Anyway, I'm glad that you've become such firm friends. Without a steadying influence it's all too easy for a clever boy to grow into a mere intellectual crank.

TURING *(tartly)* Thank you, Mother.

SARA I don't mean that unkindly; it's a very real danger. *(To* **CHRIS***)* How long have you been at Sherborne?

CHRIS A year longer than Turing. *(Correcting himself)* Alan.

SARA Are you enjoying it?

CHRIS Very much.

SARA Choosing the right school is so tremendously important, don't you think? —and I'm very impressed with Sherborne.

TURING It's not that wonderful.

SARA Of course it is. *(Glancing sharply)* What's wrong with it?

TURING Well, for one thing, they don't treat mathematics as a serious subject.

SARA I can't believe that.

TURING It's true. Do you know what our form-master said the other day? "This room stinks of mathematics," he said, looking straight at me, "go out and get a disinfectant spray."

CHRIS *laughs.*

SARA He was joking.

TURING *(ignoring this)* He hates anything to do with mathematics or science. He once said—and he meant it—he said the Germans lost the Great War because they thought science was more important than religion.

SARA The teaching of mathematics is not the only way to judge the quality of a school.

TURING It is as far as I'm concerned.

SARA Oh, Alan. *(To* **CHRIS***)* I gather you share this enthusiasm for sums and science?

CHRIS Oh yes, very much so. And it's wonderful having someone like Alan to work with. Has he told you about our experiments?

SARA A little. Wasn't there something to do with iodine?

TURING Iodates and sulphites.

CHRIS We were trying to examine the time delay in the recombination of ions.

SARA Yes, it was all far beyond my grasp, I'm afraid. Fascinating, but beyond my grasp. It was the same with that theory Alan was telling me about *(to* **TURING***)* —what was it? —you know, the man with the Jewish name.

TURING Einstein.

SARA Einstein, yes: I didn't understand a word of it—not one word. I only wish I did. Does your family understand these things?

CHRIS Well, yes—up to a point.

TURING Morcom's brother is a scientist. They've got their own laboratory at home.

SARA Really?

TURING And he's got his own telescope.

SARA Really?—how splendid.

CHRIS It's tremendous, Mrs Turing—absolutely terrific. The other night *(to* **TURING***)* —did I tell you? —the other night I actually saw one of Jupiter's satellites coming out from eclipse. It was amazing.

TURING Gosh!

CHRIS It was a wonderfully clear night. Absolutely cloudless. I felt I was wandering through the universe. Jupiter, Sirius, Betelgeuse, the Andromeda nebula. It was quite overwhelming. The hugeness of creation.

TURING How terrific.

SARA Yes, it all sounds very thrilling, I must say. But I do hope you don't frighten your family the way Alan does.

TURING *sighs with irritation.*

CHRIS Frighten them how?

SARA He got up at three o'clock in the morning last Thursday—I can't imagine why—I woke up and heard footsteps on the stairs. I was convinced that we had burglars in the house, and my husband was on the point of telephoning the police when we realized that it was only Alan.

TURING I was mapping the constellations of the fixed stars.

SARA I sometimes wish he was interested in stamp collecting or model trains, like his brother.

TURING *snorts with displeasure;* **SARA** *rises to her feet;* **CHRIS** *follows suit.*

Let's have some tea, shall we? *(To* **TURING***)* Do wash your hands, they're covered in ink. *(To* **CHRIS***)* Did Alan tell you about my grandfather's cousin? He was a scientist. He invented the electron.

TURING He didn't invent it, Mother; electrons exist, you can't invent them.

SARA Well, he found them, or discovered them, or something like that. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society. Very distinguished. *(To* **TURING** *as she exits)* Do wash your hands.

SARA *exits.*

TURING *grimaces to* **CHRIS.**

TURING Sorry, Morcom—one can't choose one's own mother.

CHRIS *(a grin)* She's all right.

TURING *takes a step towards* **CHRIS.**

TURING Do you know what I wish.

CHRIS What?

TURING I wish this was my house. My own house. Then we could live here, you and I. We could have our own rooms, our own laboratories. We could work together. Share everything. What a wonderful life that would be.

CHRIS *looks at* **TURING.**

CHRIS Yes. Yes, it would.

SARA *(offstage)* Come along, Christopher!

CHRIS I'd better go.

TURING Chris.

CHRIS *pauses.*

Thank you for coming to see me.

CHRIS *smiles.*

CHRIS Don't forget to wash your hands.

CHRIS *exits.*

The lights change: a winter evening.

Scene Three

TURING *sits at a table.*

RON MILLER *enters; he is about twenty, north-country, working-class; he is holding a mug of beer. He looks at* **TURING**, *hesitates for a moment, then strolls to the table.*

RON Anyone sitting here?

TURING No.

RON *sits, drinks some beer; looks around.*

RON Quiet tonight.

TURING Yes. Very.

RON All the pubs are the same. I've just been down *The King's Head*. Same as this place. Nobody around.

TURING Perhaps it's the weather.

RON Yeh. Bloody cold.

TURING Real Christmas weather.

RON Bloody Christmas. *(He drinks)* Christmas in Manchester: the bleedin' bitter end.

TURING *smiles.*

TURING I saw you in here last week.

RON Yeh, could be. Yeh—I often come in here. God knows why. Quiet as the bloody grave. *(He drinks)* I should've stayed at *The King's Head*. They've got a juke-box down there. That livens it up a bit. All the latest hits, Johnnie Ray, Guy Mitchell, Frankie Laine. *(Pause)* Still, it's handy here.

TURING Handy for work?

RON No, no—just—you know—handy.

TURING Where do you work?

RON I don't. Not at the moment. I had a job making spectacle frames. Then the bloody government starts making cuts. No more free teeth and glasses on the National Health. Bang goes the job. Bye-bye, they said—piss off.

TURING That's bad luck.

RON You're telling me. So I'm stuck at home. Not much fun in that. *(He drinks)* What about you?

TURING I've got my own place.

RON I meant your job.

TURING I'm at the University.

RON Bit old for that, aren't you?

TURING I'm on the staff.

RON A teacher?

TURING Not exactly. I do, um…well, research work.

RON What sort?

TURING Scientific. Mathematics. Actually, we're trying to build a special sort of machine. What people call the Electronic Brain.

RON *(staring at* **TURING***)* Bloody hell, that sounds a bit…

TURING A bit what?

RON Sounds like that film.

TURING What film?

RON Michael Rennie. I saw it when I was down in London. Michael Rennie and some sort of robot. *(Remembering) The Day the Earth Stood Still.* Did you see it?

TURING No.

RON Bloody good. *(He drinks)* So what's it do, this thing you're making?

TURING You give it problems—mathematical problems—and it solves them very quickly.

RON How quickly?

TURING Very, very quickly. Far more quickly than a man could.

RON Like an adding machine?

TURING No, it's more than that. We're trying to make a machine that can learn things and eventually think for itself.

RON Think for itself...?

TURING Why not?

RON Bloody hell.

TURING It's not a robot—and it's not really a brain. Not like the human brain, anyway. It's what we call a digital computer.

RON *is impressed.*

RON You thought this up, did you?

TURING Sort of.

RON Must be interesting, a job like that.

TURING It is.

RON Good money, too, I bet.

TURING Not bad.

RON *drinks.*

RON I once fancied being a chemist. Must've been about fourteen. Don't know why. Just fancied the idea of it somehow.

TURING Did you do anything about it?

RON Bought myself a chemistry set. Blew the bloody windows out. That was the end of that.

TURING *smiles.* **RON** *drinks.*

TURING Look, um...would you like something to eat? There's a café across the road.

RON No, I can't really, not now I—

TURING *(quickly, not wishing to be snubbed)* Right.

Brief pause. **RON** *glances at* **TURING.**

RON How about some other time?

TURING Yes, all right. When?

RON Don't mind.

TURING This weekend?

RON If you like.

TURING What about Friday evening?

RON OK.

TURING Come to my house.

RON *(a brief hesitation)* OK.

TURING *takes a scrap of paper from his pocket and writes his address.*

TURING This is the address. Come to my house. *(He gives the note to* **RON***)* Do you know where it is?

RON I can find it.

TURING Come about seven. I'll cook you a meal.

RON Good cook, are you?

TURING Not bad. *(He smiles)* What's your name?

RON Ron.

TURING Alan.

RON *finishes his beer; he stands up.*

RON OK, Alan—I'll see you Friday.

TURING About seven.

RON About seven.

TURING Don't change your mind.

RON *(a grin)* I'll be there.

RON *exits.*

The lights change: a winter morning.

Scene Four

ROSS *enters.*

ROSS We're having a bit of a problem with regard to this brush salesman you were telling us about.

TURING Oh?

ROSS We spoke to some of your neighbours. No-one seems to have seen him but you. I don't understand it.

TURING Perhaps they were out when he called.

ROSS All of them?

TURING It's possible.

ROSS And we checked with the local domestic appliance firms. None of them have had a salesman working in your area.

TURING Well, as I said, I might've been mistaken.

ROSS What about?

TURING What he was doing, what he was selling.

ROSS I can't believe you'd make a mistake like that, sir. You must've been talking to him for several minutes. At least. Weren't you?

TURING As I recall, I was rather preoccupied. I was working, you see, and, uh...well, to be honest, I don't remember much about him.

ROSS What did he look like? You must remember what he looked like.

TURING Not really. Youngish. Ordinary. I really didn't take much notice of him.

ROSS You didn't, did you, sir?

TURING Well, no.

ROSS Why not?

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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