

MAG – 101 – Another Twist

Content Warnings:

- Body horror
- Kidnapping
- Betrayal

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

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Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode one hundred and one.
Another Twist.

[Tape clicks on. The voices echo slightly. There's a strange background hum.]

ORSINOV

(Sing song) Oh, it does work! What have you been recording? Anything
spooky?

(The Archivist is gagged. He makes a muffled noise in response.)

ORSINOV

Is it... your Elias who listens? Hello!

(Another gagged response from the Archivist.)

ORSINOV

He's mine now, and you can't have him back.

(The Archivist makes a gagged sound that sounds like a question.)

ORSINOV

Oh, don't worry, it's not for you. You won't even need a coffin – we're going to use every piece of you.

(The Archivist makes a noise of exclamation.)

ORSINOV

Now could you two please move that thing somewhere far, far away?

BREEKON

Not really.

HOPE

Needs to be near us.

ORSINOV

Well, just... just move yourselves away, and take it with you.

BREEKON

Gotcha

HOPE

Right you are.

[They pick up the coffin and leave. The background hum is replaced by the sound of rain.]

ORSINOV

Right. Where were we?

(The Archivist makes a noise of indignation.)

ORSINOV

Oh, of course! So, Elias, can I call you Elias? Let me set the scene, as I know you can't actually see this. He's tied to a chair – Sarah wanted to use nails, but I talked her out of it because I'm a good friend. You're welcome. And he is absolutely surrounded with waxworks. Not... good waxworks, though. Weird ones. Wax faces where you feel like you almost recognise who it's meant to be, but, then instead... ah, it's downright uncanny!

(The Archivist makes more noises of indignation.)

ORSINOV

Excuse me! I'm talking to your boss, and I would thank you not to interrupt.

(The Archivist continues to make muffled protests)

You know, I must say Elias, can I call you Elias? You have not raised this one very well.

(More muffled noises from The Archivist.)

ORSINOV

He is rude. And he just will not stop asking questions. Ooh, but now, I can ask the questions! How are you feeling?

(More muffled noises from The Archivist.)

ORSINOV

Oh wonderful. Now, about the whole skin thing... You see, originally, I was just planning to have you followed, in case you found that ancient relic one. I mean, my goodness, it is very powerful. And if you didn't come through, well, you're quite powerful yourself, and more than that, you are... symbolically appropriate (**chuckles**) so I thought you'd make a lovely frock!

(The Archivist's muffled noises sounds more panicked.)

ORSINOV

Exactly! And, well, I was going to wait, but... y'know, have you ever had one of those backup plans that, when you think about it, they're, they're just more fun? So I thought, out with the old, in with... well, in with the you!

(More panicked noises from the Archivist.)

ORSINOV

Oh, no, I'm afraid he can't See you, can you Elias, can I call you Elias? What's the point of having a secret place of power if you can't hide it from a big, stupid eye? Anyway, you sit tight. Lots to do! Ooh, also, do you have preferred brand of lotion? Because you have not been taking care of your skin, and we really do need it in better shape before we peel you.

(The Archivist makes an indignant noise through the gag.)

ORSINOV

Alright, I'll just ask them to pick up a selection.

[Footsteps. A door closes]

(The Archivist takes several deep breaths.)

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on. It's still raining.]

(The Archivist's breathing is still audible.)

[There is a strange laughter. A different door opens.]

MICHAEL

Oh... Oh.... Oh, Archivist. What have you done now? It's almost sad to see you like this.

(The Archivist groans.)

MICHAEL

Almost. I've come to a decision, Archivist. I'm going to kill you.

(The Archivist makes a noise of frustration.)

MICHAEL

It's earlier than I had hoped, but that's life... I suppose. Your life. [Giggles] Before I do, however, I want you to understand... even if it does go against my nature. So.

(The Archivist gasps as the gag is taken off.)

MICHAEL

(Slowly, deliberately.) Ask your questions.

ARCHIVIST

What?

MICHAEL

Ask me.

ARCHIVIST

H-How did you find me?

MICHAEL

(Laughs) The Eye watches, and the Stranger conceals, but me... I lie, Archivist. I am the throat of delusion incarnate. They can't hide you from me.

ARCHIVIST

What do you have to do with the Unknowing?

MICHAEL

Nothing. (Laughs) Nothing whatsoever. Except perhaps that I would like it to fail.

ARCHIVIST

So... wh— Why are you here?

MICHAEL

I already said. To kill you.

ARCHIVIST

But-But why?

MICHAEL

Because I don't want the Circus to win. And I don't want the Archives to either.
Killing you myself... it's the best of both. And of course there's revenge.

ARCHIVIST

Revenge? I still don't even know who you are!

MICHAEL

I am Michael. I was not always Michael. I do not want to be Michael. Being Michael stole the only purpose I have ever known.

ARCHIVIST

You were Gertrude's assistant, weren't you?

MICHAEL

No.

ARCHIVIST

But, but the tape— I heard you.

MICHAEL

(Slowly.) No. You heard Michael.

ARCHIVIST

I... What the hell are you talking about?!

MICHAEL

Quiet, Archivist. The cramped casket sings loud, but not loud enough to drown out screaming. The Michael on that tape was not me. When that person was Michael, I was something else, and now I am Michael and that person is gone.

ARCHIVIST

So, what... You... you became him?

MICHAEL

No more than he became me. It is rare that someone I take finds their way into being me, but it does happen. And Michael had help.

ARCHIVIST

What happened?

MICHAEL

Hm... Ahhh, a statement. Of course. Is your recorder running? Yes. Say it, Archivist.

ARCHIVIST

Statement of... Michael. Taken from subject. Date...

MICHAEL

The last day of the Archivist's life.

ARCHIVIST

Statement begins.

MICHAEL (STATEMENT)

How far back should it go? To the beginning of me? Centuries? Millennia? How you define the start of your being when in some ways you have always been? Time is difficult to form. Michael Shelley, though, he is easier to keep track of. He was born. He was pointless. And he should have died. But before that could happen, he went to work for the Magnus Institute – that ivory tower, keeping its prisoners ignorant in pursuit of... knowledge. **(Laughs)** A dungeon full of idiot watchers. And Michael Shelley was no exception.

When he was in school, he lost a friend to something like me. His friend was named Ryan, but those in power simply called him schizophrenic. I don't know if he was, but it doesn't matter. He was so dreadfully afraid his world wasn't real that to make it so was almost nothing. Michael was there when he taken; he never got over what he saw. Or didn't see. After much searching and despair, it drove him into the waiting arms of the Institute, where he met Gertrude Robinson. The Archivist.

Even being what I am, I have rarely seen anyone so adept at distorting the truth as Gertrude Robinson. Michael was protective of the frail old woman he believed her to be. So... so delicate, so forgetful, yet gently wise. He cared for her. He trusted her. And she fed him to me. She made him me to destroy our transcendence. And she did not hesitate.

Poor Michael. He had been on trips for the Institute before. Conferences, investigations, Gertrude had made sure that all her assistants were ready. That none of them would be suspicious if they were told they were going abroad for work. So, there was no doubt in his mind, no concern, when she told him that they were travelling to Russia. Perhaps if he'd have stopped to look up their destination, he might have discovered there was no such place as Zemlya

Sannikova, but he did not. He trusted her.

Even when they arrived in Dikson, at the edge of the Kara Sea, and they were picked up by a quiet sea captain called Peter Lukas... Even then he trusted her. They travelled north, through cold far more bitter than any Michael had even conceived possible. And do you know what he worried about? **(Laughs)** He... worried about Gertrude Robinson. About how this poor old woman might cope with the chill. But now she was like iron, and walked with a purpose that Michael had never before seen in her. The water turned to ice as the Arctic approached, and Gertrude's eyes turned cold.

Then, at last, he began to be afraid. He asked her where they were going and was told again: Zemlya Sannikova. Sannikov Land. There was a great evil, she said, and Michael was going to help her fight it. Am I evil, Archivist? Is a thing evil when it simply obeys its own nature? When it embodies its nature? When that nature is created by those which revile it? Perhaps Gertrude believed so. Michael certainly did. He believed everything she told him.

And it was me they sought to stop. Me and the others of It-Is-Not-What-It-Is. Our Great Twisting. The-Worker-of-Clay had laboured for decades on that contorted, impossible edifice of doors... and stairs... and falsehoods... and smiles. A thousand staring morsels stood, and not one of them believed themselves sane to look upon it. And in the centre, the door that would open to all the places that were never there, was me. I use the word 'apotheosis' not because it is correct, but because I can only show you its truth when we are within the passages themselves.

And this is what Michael and Gertrude found when they set foot on Sannikov Land, which does not exist and never has. It was warm, and feeling its

reassurance beneath his feet was the last time poor, doomed Michael knew comfort. They walked through the green jungle of that forever-elusive polar island, and up the gentle mountains that can never have a name. And at the top, they found us through our spiralling laughter. And they saw us in all of our glory.

Michael did not go mad, though no words you could have said would have convinced him otherwise. The mind does not shatter, Archivist. It is soft and malleable. It bends and twists and returns to what it was, though what you see and feel may leave their mark upon it. If Michael thought he had lost his mind, it was only because what he saw with crystal clarity was simply not something that could be real.

But Gertrude Robinson did not waver. She did not... hesitate. She gave no indication that she saw anything more or less than was expected. Hers was not a mind that left room for doubt. She stared into us carefully, her eyes scanning for something that was my heart. Looking for my door. And she found it.

Perhaps I should have realised what was happening; seen those two lonely figures approaching me, but I cannot tell you the existential joys of truly... becoming. Of an entireness finally crossing the threshold into your self. So ecstatic was my completeness, I did not even hear my own door creak open. Because Gertrude had told Michael how he could stop us. She told him to walk through a door. And even then, with so much of his mind shut down in panic and terror, he trusted her. And he went inside, closing the door behind him.

But Gertrude Robinson had given poor, disposable Michael one more thing before sending him to me. She had given him a map. I couldn't say how she would have gotten such a thing, or if she somehow made it. And yet it was a

map. A map to me. It made no sense, lines overlapping and inverting, but once within, Michael knew which turns to make, which doors to open, which mirrors to shatter. Until he became me.

Even sharper than the joy of becoming is the agony of being opened and remade. To have your who torn bloody from your what, and another crudely lashed into its place. To become Michael.

And to do so at such a crucial point in our Twisting, in our becoming, well of course it destroyed it. The impossible altar collapsed. The-Worker-of-Clay tore out his veins to dissolve himself in crimson mud. The others of us were cast to all the places that aren't; some have still not found their way out again. And somehow Gertrude Robinson was back on that boat before Sannikov Land once again never existed.

And all that was left was me. Michael. **(Laughs)** My very existence tied to my pointlessness.

Wearing my failure as the very fabric of my being. Reduced once again to feeding on the unsuspecting and confused. That is who I am.

ARCHIVIST

(Intake of breath) But you... You never tried to take revenge on Gertrude?

MICHAEL

She knew how to protect herself. She knew what she was creating. And killing her was not as important. She wasn't as good an Archivist as you are.

ARCHIVIST

So why not kill me before?

MICHAEL

I had hoped that you would stop the Unknowing first, destroy the workings of I-Do-Not-Know You. But instead you are here, and may bring it about faster. So better your death happens now.

ARCHIVIST

I— Is there anything I can do to stop you from killing me?

MICHAEL

(Laughs) If you scream loud enough the Circus may take notice of me, but... I promise you will die far more pleasantly with me than with them.

(Laughs) Ah...

ARCHIVIST

Okay

MICHAEL

Good. Right this way.

[A door creaks]

Open it. Open it and this will all be over.

[The sound of a handle turning, but the door doesn't open.]

ARCHIVIST

Er, it's...

[The handle is tried twice more]

MICHAEL

What?

ARCHIVIST

It's locked.

MICHAEL

It's not. (Laughs)

ARCHIVIST

Why is it locked?

MICHAEL

It can't be!

ARCHIVIST

Well, you try it!

[The handle is tried again, more frantically. The door doesn't open.]

MICHAEL

(Concerned) Th-Tha-That-That's... not—

Oh. Oh no.

(Michael screams for a long time, before it fades into nothing.)

[The door creaks open.]

HELEN

Do you want to come in?

ARCHIVIST

Wh... Helen? H-Helen Richardson? But... But y— Michael...

HELEN

Michael isn't me. Not now.

ARCHIVIST

What happened?

HELEN

He got... distracted. Let feelings that shouldn't have been his overwhelm me.
Lost my way.

ARCHIVIST

And now? Y— You're Helen?

HELEN

I don't know. I never know, not really. Do I need a name?

ARCHIVIST

Ah... No, I s-suppose not.

HELEN

Helen is... better than Michael.

ARCHIVIST

But she's gone.

HELEN

Yes. As is Michael. There's only me.

ARCHIVIST

I... Okay.

HELEN

Do you still want to leave here?

ARCHIVIST

A-are you still going to kill me?

HELEN

No. That was Michael's desire, not mine.

ARCHIVIST

So... S-So what do you want?

HELEN

I don't know. Helen liked you so... there's a lot to consider. But I will help you leave.

ARCHIVIST

Wait, is this... Mic— Y-You're the Distortion, the, the, the Liar. How do I know this isn't... a, a trick?

HELEN

And if it was, what would you do about it?

ARCHIVIST

...Right. Right...

How long have I... b-been here? There's no... It was hard to keep track—

HELEN

Time is hard, Archivist. It's difficult to follow without a proper mind, especially here. A while.

ARCHIVIST

Right.

HELEN

The door is open if you're ready?

ARCHIVIST

No, not, not really, but...

(The Archivist sighs.)

[Static. The tape clicks off.]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

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