

MAG – 130 – Meat

Content Warnings

- Body horror
- Dismembered human remains
- Dismembered animal remains
- Emotional trauma
- Death and dying
- Sleep disorders

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode one hundred and thirty.
Meat.

[Tape clicks on]

GERTRUDE

Do you mind?

LUCIA

What? Oh, um, no.

GERTRUDE

Excellent.

LUCIA

Why a tape recorder? Why not digital?

GERTRUDE

There's nothing wrong with tape. A bit old fashioned, but I suppose, so am I.

LUCIA

Right. Yes. Th-that's fine. It's all fine.

GERTRUDE

Are you quite ready?

LUCIA

Um, will it help?

GERTRUDE

I'm sorry?

LUCIA

Telling my story. To you. W-will it help, with the nightmares?

GERTRUDE

If that's your primary goal, my dear, I would suggest you speak to a qualified counsellor. We can suggest one if you like? That said, I do believe most people find the process of giving a statement to be rather... cathartic. And whatever nightmares your experience has left you with, I'm sure they won't be bothering you much longer.

LUCIA

Ok, then. So... what do I do?

GERTRUDE

Let's start with your name.

LUCIA

Oh. **(Laughing nervously)** Lucia, Lucia Wright.

GERTRUDE

And what is your statement regarding?

LUCIA

Just, um, a hole. A hole filled with... with meat.

GERTRUDE

Gertrude Robinson recording, December 19th, 2008.

In your own time.

LUCIA (STATEMENT)

Right, okay, so... Um, I was on holiday, actually. Well, meant to be, at least. No, no, I, I was. Whatever happened later it was technically a holiday. Sorry, I'm rambling.

I like to travel when I can. I'm not one of those people who can take months and months and go swimming with dolphins or climb Machu Picchu; my job is very high-pressure. Well, it was. The point is, I used to take a lot of city breaks, spending a long weekend flying off to anywhere with decent flights and seeing the sights. I'd generally try to take in an art gallery, a few of the best

restaurants the guidebooks recommend, and somewhere with a decent view of the whole city. And, of course, a couple of churches.

I've always had an odd relationship with churches. I suppose I was raised Church of England, but my parents were never very involved with it, and when I told them that I wanted to stop going when I was fourteen, they didn't make a fuss. I had a few years as an angry atheist, but when I was about twenty, I swung back the other way a bit and became pretty fascinated with religion – not in a belief sense, but I found it all really interesting, especially early Christianity and the church. So much politics over what it means to be good, to be holy. So many heresies about the Trinity, about how human Jesus was, about how many nails they used to crucify Him. But more than that, I loved churches. These big, quiet, echoing spaces of peace and beauty designed to quiet the soul and prepare it for communion with the divine. Even if I didn't actually believe in the God they were supposed to house, I always found them... meditative, and whenever I went on one of my breaks, I'd always try to find a local church, hopefully not too full of other tourists like me, and spend an hour or two in quiet contemplation.

I'd listen to the shuffling footsteps of the other people and breathe in the lingering smell of incense, before lighting a candle to my grandmother. She had always been very religious, although since most of the churches I visited were picked for their design, they tended to be Catholic or Orthodox, and I'm not sure how happy she'd have been about my lighting a candle for her in them. Still, at the end of the day, I did it for me, not for her. She's gone. There isn't anything but us.

Anyway, when a deal came up in the middle of October for five days in Istanbul, I jumped on it. I'd heard a lot of lovely things about the city itself, but

more importantly, I'd just been reading a brilliant series of articles on early schisms in the church, specifically the various gnostic sects that started springing up around the 4th Century, many located in what was then Constantinople and is now Istanbul. Do you know about Gnosticism? It's a sort of dualism that places the purity and goodness of the spiritual world in opposition to the baseness and corruption of the material world. Some gnostic movements even go so far as to posit the existence of the demiurge, a counterpoint to the God of the spiritual world, who created material existence as a warped, imperfect imitation of its purity. Everything that is base, corrupt and vile in the physical world comes from them. If God, as Gnostics see him, is the God of the soul, then the demiurge could easily be called the god of the flesh. Of bone and blood. Of meat.

I had read about an old gnostic temple some miles outside of Istanbul, and decided to make a short trip out to see it. When I got there though, it was nothing but a disappointment. What the artfully lit photos had shown as stark and ancient, were in person just empty and old. Whatever decoration there might once have been had long since worn away, and only the occasional plastic tourist signs indicated it had ever been a place of worship. Whatever peace I was looking for, I wasn't going to find it there. It was barely more than a ruin. More than that, I seemed to be almost entirely alone. There'd been an old woman coming out of it when I arrived, but I hadn't seen anyone apart from her, not even at the ticketing booth. As I wandered the small building, I became more and more aware of the quiet, and of the wind that blew gently through the empty windows.

I did my best to shrug off the growing feeling of unease that had settled over me and walked back outside. The taxi that had taken me had long since

departed and the temple stood alone, some distance from any other inhabited building. The afternoon was wearing on, and I didn't fancy trying to walk all the way back to my hotel, but my initial plan of asking a staff member to call me another taxi was somewhat scuppered by their absence. As I was considering my options, I heard the roar of an engine, and looked over to see a heavy-looking truck slowly rolling down the street towards me. It had no obvious markings and the back of it was covered with a grey tarp. For some reason, it filled me with the most intense dread I've ever felt, and I found myself stepping back, behind a pillar, desperately hoping I was out of sight.

The truck pulled around the side of the building, and I heard the engine stop. I crept forward, still not sure why I had such an instinctive terror of what seemed on the surface to be a perfectly normal vehicle, but as three men climbed out of the front and started to walk back towards the covered load, I started to realise I could smell something – damp, slightly sour, with the faintest hint of iron. I realised what it was, a moment before the tarpaulin fell and revealed the huge pile of pink and white and brown. At first, I thought the bodies were all human, that perhaps I had somehow stumbled upon some sort of gang, disposing of a massacre's worth of corpses. But then some of them started to move. Squirming limbs were dragging, rising, extracting themselves from this mound of flesh and making their way down to join their companions on the ground, one by one. Most of them could still be mistaken for human at a distance; a few even wore clothes. No-one said a word.

After a minute or so, it looked like everything that was going to climb down off the truck had done so. The pile of meat still rose several metres up from the back of the truck, and as much as I wanted to look away, I couldn't. Most of it was just unidentifiable chunks, but a lot of it was clearly animal: chickens,

lambs ... I even saw a whole pig head. Some of it was human. I could see a man's torso near the top of the pile and an arm jutted out near the base, the hand splayed out at the end. I had the weirdest impulse to wave to it. The driver, or the one I assume was the driver, then started to reach up onto the pile. He took a handful of any meat he could reach and turned to whoever, or whatever, was nearest to him. He passed it on to them, and then they would turn and head towards the back of the temple, towards an unmarked door I had assumed was staff only. Now it was open, and they went in one at a time. They didn't come back out.

All this time, I had just been watching from my hiding spot, totally frozen in confusion and fear. As I said, the temple stood apart from any other buildings, and if I tried to leave, the chances were high that I would be spotted. I thought I could maybe just wait, just stay where I was until these people had finished doing whatever it was they were doing. Then they would drive away, and I would leave and spend the rest of my life pretending I had never seen anything, that I had gone to an art gallery instead.

This plan lasted right up until the driver saw me. It was my own fault. My leg was starting to cramp up, so I tried to shift position, but I didn't realise just how painful it would be to move, and I let out a cry before I had a chance to stifle it. The driver's head snapped up and focused on me. He was rail thin, dressed in rough overalls, with shaggy black hair and pale skin. He was East Asian, Chinese, maybe, but he called me over in a crisp British accent. His tone was firm, but unhurried, and to my ears, not immediately threatening. So, I did as he asked. I walked slowly but deliberately over to him, hands out to my side, doing my best to show him I wasn't a threat. I made the decision that,

whatever was happening, my best chance to make it out was to just keep doing as I was asked.

By the time I reached the truck, the smell was so thick I could taste it. I stood there, legs shaking, muttering a prayer to a god I didn't even believe in. He stared at me for what felt like hours, but it can't have been longer than a few seconds. Then he shrugged, turned to the truck, and picked up what looked like the back half of a goat. He held it out to me expectantly. Honestly, I was so surprised that I just took it on instinct. The driver nodded to himself, like he'd made the right decision, and I turned and started to walk towards the door, afraid that any hesitation might make him reconsider, might mark me out as something other than whatever he had decided I was. I don't eat much meat, and rarely ever cook it myself, but I held that cold haunch to me like a talisman, as if it might ward away whatever awful thing waited inside that door.

As I got closer, I saw one of the others, a tall, gangly woman with arms that bent backwards, leaving the entrance. She had to stoop to get through, but as she raised back up to her full height, I felt her eyes rest on me for a second. I didn't slow my pace or meet her gaze. She walked past me quickly, on the way back to the truck for her next load. I stepped through the entrance, moving carefully down what looked to be a rough-hewn stone stairway. It went deeper and deeper, far below where any normal basement might have been, so narrow at points that I had trouble fitting. My mind kept trying to imagine meeting one of the less human-looking things coming back up the other way, but I didn't let it. Finally, I reached the bottom and stepped out into a scene I still see every time I close my eyes.

I don't know how big the room would have been to begin with. Only one side had anything that might have once been considered an interior wall. The others were rough rock and stone, clearly hollowed out and extended until the place must have been almost forty yards across. In the middle of the floor, taking up almost the entirety of this strange vault, was a pit. No, not a pit, not exactly. The others stood around the edge throwing their burdens down into it one piece at a time. And there, at the bottom, was another pile, one that dwarfed the truck outside. One that would have dwarfed a hundred trucks, because I couldn't actually see the bottom. For all I know, it could have gone down forever, an endless pillar of flesh. But then it moved, and I realised in a second what it actually was I was looking at: not a pit, a mouth.

I feel a strange, deep pride that I didn't scream. I didn't panic, though my mind felt like it was trying to shut down at the repulsive sight. Instead, I forced myself to take my place, there at the edge, and hurl my offering down into it. It accepted it greedily.

I wish I could say I ran, then, or that I found a clever trick to escape. But I didn't. When I returned to the surface, I was handed more meat before I had a chance to even consider getting away. So I decided I would keep up the ruse until the truck was empty, in the hopes I'd have a chance later. But as we unloaded the last of the grim cargo, and I carried a heavy, red tongue down into the vault, I saw another truck pull up, almost identical to the first. Then another. Then another. There was no end to them.

Day turned into night, turned into day again, and still I carried meat and threw it into the hole. My back was screaming, my legs were weak, and my mind was numb from terror, but I was spurred on by one thing. The woman with the backwards arms had fallen sometime in the night, and her companions had

showed no hesitation. They had gripped her shoulders, hoisted her up, and hurled her straight into the gaping maw. I swore it wouldn't happen to me.

All through this, the mouth got closer and closer to the edge of the pit. The pile of flesh within it grew larger and larger, sat there in an awful, half-solid slurry. Chewed and crushed together, it was impossible to tell what had once been animal and what might once have been us. It was all just meat. And as the mouth got closer, the smell got stronger. The air became thick and the walls began to sweat a pinkish liquid, like cutting into a steak. More of those workers had been thrown in, replaced by others brought in the endless procession of meat trucks. I didn't know what was going to happen when it finally reached the top, but I knew it would be something bad. Something unspeakable. And I would have helped make it happen.

When the explosion came, it was a blessed relief. A deep rumble passed through the structure of the building, a deafening cry of rage and dismay that came from below, as the roof collapsed downwards, burying it under a torrent of rubble and stone. I was lucky. At that moment, I had been stood in the bottom of the stairwell, and as the world collapsed around me, I began to sprint up the stairs, but I barely made it halfway up before that toppled as well, and I felt the foundations of the temple above fall down around me. I thought I was dead. I wish I had been.

I don't know how long I lay trapped there before Turkish rescue workers found me, certainly long enough that the scent of rot began to waft up from far below. I was delirious, barely conscious. I tried to warn them, to tell them to finish the job, but all that did was convince them there might be other survivors. They haven't told me what they found down there. They paid for my

flight home, but they haven't told me anything. I don't know anything. I just want to sleep.

That's it. That's all I have. That's what happened.

GERTRUDE

And do you feel any better?

LUCIA

No.

GERTRUDE

Well, that's a shame. Hang on, let me see if I can find you the number for that counselling service. They're actually quite good.

LUCIA

If you say so.

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on]

GERTRUDE

Well, that is a relief. When I heard there had been survivors of the Last Feast, I was rather concerned that one of them might be able to positively identify me, which could land me in all sorts of trouble. But she doesn't seem to remember me at all. Tom Haan might be a bit more of a problem, as it looks like he also survived, but I'm hopeful he has been weakened enough by this failure to not be an issue in the near future. Hopefully he'll fade away or burn out, as they tend to when robbed of their purpose. Still, I should keep a watch on him in

case of any erratic behaviour that might lead to complications. Also worth watching out for any additional esoteric fallout from the ritual attempt, like that Carlisle boy down in Wandsworth.

Dekker really came through with the explosives. It almost felt like cheating. Sad about the loss of history, but Ms. Wright didn't seem to think the old gnostic church got many visitors anyway. I'm honestly impressed she had the strength to get through it, even if she does seem to have been deeply affected by it. Shame about the dreams. I would avoid them if I could.

At least we know for sure that these grand rituals can be disrupted by conventional means, though a more nuanced approach will be needed for some of them, I'm sure. Also, I can't rely on having this much lead time. I've had ten years' tracking supplicants drawn by the siren call of flesh, watching them gradually stockpiling meat. Very useful in terms of preparation time for derailing the final push, but in future I think I need to get a little bit more ... proactive.

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on]

ARCHIVIST

I found this tape tucked in a corner of my desk drawer, covered in cobwebs. I suppose subtlety has gone out the window a bit, and the question is now simply how much I trust the Spider to have my best interests at heart. Hm. I suspect my assuming it has a heart might be a clue I'm looking at this the wrong way. Even so, and leaving aside the matter of Gertrude's actions for a moment, what is it trying to tell me with this? Is it about rituals? About getting Daisy back? About... about an anchor... What was it she said, "The siren call of

flesh?” Hm. It’s possible, I suppose. It would hurt, but... Well, what’s another scar?

It’s been two weeks since I heard from Basira. I’m not waiting any longer. I’m getting Daisy back.

End recording.

[Tape clicks off]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

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Today’s episode was written by Jonathan Sims and directed by Alexander J Newall.

It featured: Jonathan Sims as the Archivist, Sue Sims as Gertrude Robinson, and Beth Eyre as Lucia Wright.