

MAG – 061 – Hard Shoulder

Content warnings:

- Abduction
- Physical violence
- Police brutality

Discussions of: interrogation, threats

Mentions of: alcohol, fire, burns, car accidents

SFX: low drone, high pitched tone

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode sixty-one. Hard Shoulder.

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro *Continued.*]

[Tape clicks on.]

ARCHIVIST

You don't mind if I record this, do you?

DAISY

Knock yourself out.

ARCHIVIST

Right.

DAISY

Course, if anyone else ever hears it...

ARCHIVIST

You'll arrest me.

DAISY

No.

ARCHIVIST

R-right... um, so you came to deliver one of the tapes?

(Daisy doesn't reply.)

ARCHIVIST

From Basira?

(Daisy doesn't reply.)

ARCHIVIST

The, uh, the audio tapes.

(Daisy doesn't reply.)

ARCHIVIST

So... can I have it? Please?

DAISY

I'm thinking.

ARCHIVIST

Um, right, I thought you needed me to check them?

DAISY

You don't get it, do you?

ARCHIVIST

I'm not sure I follow.

DAISY

The tapes. Why she was giving them to you.

ARCHIVIST

She, uh... she wanted my help.

(Daisy laughs.)

ARCHIVIST

You, you didn't have a tape player at your station.

DAISY

She thought you did it.

ARCHIVIST

What?

DAISY

We both did.

ARCHIVIST

Wait, you thought I killed Gertrude?

DAISY

Yes.

ARCHIVIST

W-Why?

DAISY

(Sigh) Look at you. You're obsessed with it, jumpy as hell and you're the only person who benefited from her death.

ARCHIVIST

I, I mean. I didn't.

DAISY

Yeah, I know.

(Sigh) Finally got IT to clean up the CCTV for the week she disappeared. No cameras in the Archive, but we got plenty of footage of you. Watched your movements that whole week. You didn't kill her.

ARCHIVIST

I don't... what does this have to do with the tapes?

DAISY

Didn't have enough to hold you. Basira was worried you were going to run.

ARCHIVIST

W- so, what, you fed me a couple of tapes to keep me around?

DAISY

Yeah.

ARCHIVIST

And now you know I am innocent...?

DAISY

Hm. I reckon we should cut you off. But Basira's soft. She likes you. No idea why. Maybe she keeps feeding you tapes – doesn't involve me. I don't plan on seeing or hearing anything about it.

ARCHIVIST

Um, well, thank you, Detective Tonner.

DAISY

Daisy.

ARCHIVIST

Thank you, Daisy.

DAISY

Sure.

ARCHIVIST

If you don't mind me asking, how long have you been sectioned now?

DAISY

I do mind. Fourteen years.

ARCHIVIST

I don't suppose you'd like to make a statement?

DAISY

About what?

ARCHIVIST

Whatever you like. Fourteen years – you must have seen any number of paranormal things.

DAISY

And you want me to tell you about them.

ARCHIVIST

I, I...

(Pause.)

DAISY

Okay.

ARCHIVIST

What?

DAISY

Okay. I'll give you a statement, about how I got my Section 31. You look surprised.

ARCHIVIST

I mean, I was largely asking as a formality. Basira didn't give the impression you were the sharing sort.

DAISY

Maybe you caught me in a good mood.

ARCHIVIST

Right, well, good. Do you need me to go over our non-disclosure policies?

DAISY

Not as long you understand my policy. If it gets out, I'll break every bone in your body.

ARCHIVIST

(Muttering) There are worse things that could happen to them.

DAISY

What?

ARCHIVIST

Nothing. Statement of Detective Alice 'Daisy' Tonner of the London Metropolitan Police. What's the subject?

DAISY

Traffic stop of a delivery van on the M6 near Preston, afternoon of... 24th July 2002.

ARCHIVIST

Recorded live from subject, 1st December 2016. Statement begins.

DAISY (STATEMENT)

This was a long time ago. I'd been police for two years. Wasn't even with the Met back then. I was based up in Lancashire with the Road Policing Unit. This was before the Highways Agency took most of the grunt work, so there was plenty to do. None of it much fun, but it needed doing. Booking drink drivers was my favourite. I always hoped they'd refuse the breathalyser, maybe even take a swing at me. Nothing funnier than a drunk arsehole trying to avoid being arrested.

I usually rode with Isaac Masters. He'd been working with the RPU a lot longer than I had and was even harsher than me. I know why though. You try to be a good police, give everyone a fair shot, but you see a lot of accidents. Not much worse in the world than a really bad car crash. It gets to you. You get hard with people who don't respect the road and there are plenty of them out there.

It was raining that night. That heavy, thumping rain that means you can't hear a damn thing. It crashes onto the roof like someone's jumping on it. Me and Zac were sitting in a lay-by watching traffic and trying to drink coffee. We'd picked it up from a service station a few miles back, but it was one of those open-topped styrofoam cups. By the time we'd got back to the car, the rain had got in and left us with two cups of cold sludge. So we were both in a pretty bad mood. It was maybe one in the afternoon, but you wouldn't have known it. The clouds weren't letting any sun through and everything looked grey, wet

and lifeless. We couldn't even talk over the sound of rain on the roof, so we just sat there in silence, drinking lukewarm sludge.

The motorway was quieter than normal. A Wednesday afternoon doesn't see a lot of traffic, but the rain usually brings out more cars. That day it was pretty empty. Everyone seemed to be driving careful on account of the rain, which was also not normal, and I was torn. Part of me wanted to spot some idiot who I could take my bad mood out on, when the other part of me didn't want to get any wetter than I already was. It looked like I wasn't going to get a choice anyway. At least, not until I saw the van.

It was a beaten-up old Citroën C15. There was some writing on the side, but I couldn't see it clearly through the rain. It was either very dirty or painted a nasty shade of off-white. Most importantly, it was driving about 25 miles an hour. The limit is 70. There's technically no minimum speed on a motorway, but the van didn't show any signs of speeding up and it was kind of strange. We had enough cause to stop it if we wanted. I wasn't sure whether to let it go or not, but Zac had clearly made his decision already. He was in the driving seat, and fired up the lights as we drove up behind it. The van glided to a stop on the hard shoulder at the side of the road and sat there. The headlights, which had been turned on for the rain, died. Then it just waited.

Zac was out first. The rain was so thick that he had to take his torch to see properly. The light passed over the van and I could see rust creeping around the edges of the panelling. We walked up to the driver's side. I could see dark shapes from inside, but they weren't moving. Up close, I could read the name on the side, 'Breekon and Hope Deliveries'. It was covered in a thick layer of dirt that the rain couldn't quite wash off.

Zac knocked on the door and it opened. The man who got out looked normal. So normal that these days I can't really picture his face. Said his name was Tom. I wasn't the one looking over his driving licence, so I don't know about second names. From the other side, two men climbed out. They were huge. Hard faces, like a pair of old stone statues, dressed in overalls and flat caps. They asked what was going on, speaking back and forth in Cockney accents so broad and fake sounding that I thought they were putting them on for a laugh. I was about to lay into them for it when a sound cut me short. Zac had been talking to 'Tom', who was making some bland explanation for this slow driving: caution, heavy rain, empty road, all that crap. But they heard it too, and he stopped mid-sentence to look at me. From the back of the van, there was a sound of moaning.

It sounded like... kind of like a moan of pain, but long and drawn out. It went on for almost a full minute and was almost... I don't know, kind of musical? I

looked at Tom and the fake Cockney passengers, but their faces were unreadable. Zac gripped Tom firmly by the arm and led him to the rear doors of the van, demanding that he open it. He didn't resist, just nodded and got out a set of keys. He put one of them in the door, turned it, and the van opened. I saw that the two big guys had walked up next to us, so I was getting ready for trouble, but there's no way I would have guessed what was in there.

It was a coffin: an old, wooden coffin, rough, unvarnished. I could see splinters where the nails had been hammered in badly. Wrapped all around it was a thick metal chain, ending in a heavy padlock. That weird moaning was coming from inside it. It was the only sound that cut through pounding rain.

I tensed up, reaching my baton. If these people were kidnappers or worse, we would be in big trouble. I was ready for a fight, but they just stood there, not moving, staring at us. Everything about the situation felt wrong. I looked over at Zac and he seemed to be thinking the same thing. He looked over at the two men in overalls and told them to take it out, then looked over to Tom, asking if he had a key to the padlock. Reaching into his jacket, the man who called himself Tom pulled out a large iron key and handed it to my partner. It didn't look like the other keys. I wanted to head back to the car and call in some back-up, but Zac was a senior officer and if he thought we should open it first, I was going to back his play.

Zac took the key and walked towards the coffin, which now lay on the wet tarmac, lit only by the headlights of our car. The moaning was louder now, almost drowning out the sound of the hammering rain. Water had begun to flow off the wood, but everything else about it was still. As he got closer, I could see the words “Do Not Open” scratched into the surface of the wood. It didn’t look like my partner was paying them any attention though. He gently placed the key into the lock, wincing slightly as he touched the metal, and turned it.

The chains snapped off like they were spring-loaded. They whipped around violently and Zac jumped back, slipping and falling on his back. I brought my baton up just in case the strangers made a move, but they were motionless. The moaning had stopped. The only sound was the creaking of hinges, as the lid of the coffin began to move. It was slow, the gap appearing first as just a crack, before finally opening completely. It was too dark to see what was inside at first, but when I shone my torch inside, I heard Zac gasp. I think I did as well.

Inside of that wooden coffin, there was a staircase. It went down, apparently into the ground below, and seemed to go on as deep as I could see. They were steep, carved out of what looked like solid stone, and the rock that made up the walls didn’t match the wet tarmac around us, or the earth that would have been underneath it. It was completely impossible.

I tried to ask Tom or his companions about it. I yelled at them to explain what the hell was going on, but they just stood there, staring at it. So I hit one of them with my baton. It was one of the larger men in overalls; I'm not sure which one. It was like hitting solid wood, and the blow jarred my arm badly, making me drop the only weapon I had. Even then, he just stood there, staring at the casket.

There was the sound of movement from behind me. I turned to see Zac walking into the coffin, his torch shining into the hollow below. He had already disappeared up to his waist and there was this look on his face that I had never seen before: relaxed, like he was asleep. I shouted for him, started to run, but I felt a huge hand grip my shoulder. I grabbed it with my good arm, tried to escape it, but the grip was too strong. The texture of the flesh was like hard rubber. All I could do was watch as my partner kept walking into the earth on stairs that couldn't be there. After a few seconds, he was completely out of sight.

I expected to hear something, shouting, a scream, something. But it was still just the rain. The lid closed very slowly, and then he was gone. Just a coffin sitting on the hard shoulder of the M6. The hand released my shoulder as the two men in overalls began to walk over and calmly wrap the chains back around it. I felt a sudden burst of anger and picked up my baton. I lunged at

them, but the one closest to me moved quicker than I would have thought possible. His fist slammed into my chest like a cannonball and I felt a couple of ribs break. I collapsed to the floor, just lay there, as Tom and the two men locked the coffin back up, loaded it into the van and drove off. I never saw Isaac Masters again.

When I called it in, I was expecting a manhunt, an investigation, some kind of justice. It wasn't like we didn't have plenty of leads. Instead, I was handed a form I didn't recognise, told to sign it and then reassigned to the Met. Since then, it's been one spook story after another.

ARCHIVIST

Right. Thank you. Um... are you quite all right?

DAISY

No. I never told that story to anyone except my old Sergeant.

ARCHIVIST

I-I'm not sure I...

[Daisy stands.]

DAISY

I should go.

ARCHIVIST

Yes, of course. I'll see you out. There is one other thing. I've been meaning to ask Basira, but you might know better–

DAISY

I'm done.

ARCHIVIST

Oh, yes, it's just... do you know anything about vampires?

(Pause.)

DAISY

Yeah.

ARCHIVIST

Oh, it's just that we–

DAISY

A while back there were some problems: arrest irregularities around a few missing person cases; suspects being released without proper interrogation. Recordings of the interviews showed the subject wouldn't say a word, but the officers doing the interview would let them go anyway. I don't know the details of the investigation, but there's an operating procedure now.

ARCHIVIST

Which would be?

DAISY

Cases matching certain parameters have to be monitored by another officer outside the room via video. In the very specific circumstance where the suspect says nothing, but the interrogating officer acts as though they have, they're immediately removed from the room. Then they call me.

ARCHIVIST

Just you?

DAISY

There are a few others around who do it, but I take care of a dozen or so precincts. I cuff the suspect's hands and legs, drive them out into the middle of

Epping Forest and burn them to ashes. There's never enough left to be a problem.

(The Archivist sighs)

DAISY

I don't know if they're vampires, exactly, but that's what we call them.

ARCHIVIST

Good Lord. H-how many have you... taken care of?

DAISY

Five in the last nine years.

ARCHIVIST

I see.

DAISY

Don't tell Basira. She doesn't know about that procedure. I'm not sure how much she'd understand. She, she's not cut out for that kind of work.

ARCHIVIST

Of course. I, I won't.

DAISY

Don't tell her any of this, okay? I was never here. If she wants to get you more tapes, that's her business, but you keep this visit to yourself. Got that?

ARCHIVIST

O-of course.

DAISY

Good.

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on.]

ARCHIVIST

Supplemental.

That was... an interesting interview. It seems we're not done with sinister coffins just yet. And the contents were... surprising, to say the least, but don't give any real clues as to its origin, purpose, or even its relationship with Breekon and Hope. Are they simply couriers? Guardians? Hostages? At least I also have confirmation that the vampires Trevor Herbert described are not purely figments of a drug-addled mind. I probably shouldn't be too pleased to

discover that there are even more violent hunters stalking us through the night, but there it is.

I'll admit to feeling a bit hurt by Basira's true motivations. I suppose it's hardly surprising. I've not been the most... stable over these last few months. Either way, I'll not be bringing it up. Even if I wasn't genuinely somewhat afraid of Detective Tonner, such a revelation would only harm our relationship, and I need those tapes. I can't afford to have Gertrude's time at the Institute disappear back into obscurity. I'll check the one I have and then wait to hear from Basira. Or perhaps I should try to make contact? I should really have gotten a number or something. Well, that's a matter for later. I need to go home, try to get some sleep. I just wish it wasn't raining.

End supplemental.

[Tape clicks off.]

The Magnus Archives is a podcast distributed by Rusty Quill and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Sharealike 4.0 International licence.

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

The Magnus Archives – Episode 061 – Hard Shoulder

It featured: Jonathan Sims as The Archivist and Fay Roberts as Alice ‘Daisy’ Tonner.