

MAG – 060 – Observer Effect

Content Warnings:

- Scopophobia
- Arguments

Discussions of: sibling death, cults, character death

Mentions of: insomnia, religion, parental death, murder

SFX: low drone, high pitched tone, shouting, distorted voices

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode sixty. Observer Effect.

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

[Tape clicks on.]

ARCHIVIST

Statement of Rosa Myer, concerning a persistent feeling of being watched.

Original statement given July 12th, 1972. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims,

Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Statement begins.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)

It's still there. Still watching me. There's nowhere I can go, no place I can hide that it doesn't keep looking at me. I don't know why. No idea what it wants from me, or if it ever had any plans beyond just staring from wherever it is hiding. I can't eat. I can't sleep. It's been months now and it's still there. You can't see it, I know. I can't see it either, but that doesn't matter because it can see me. That's what matters. I can feel its gaze burrowing into the back of my neck. Does it hate me? Does it just want me to keep living in fear? I don't know why this is happening to me.

At first, I thought it was a person, some stalker who just kept hiding. I had this thought that if I kept feeling something was watching me, then it must be a person doing it. There must be someone following me. It's not like I haven't had stalkers before. I started to scan the faces of everyone I passed, looking to see if I recognised them, if I'd seen them before anywhere. Did I recognise the man in the green overcoat from the bus this morning? Did that bike messenger loop around the road and pass me again? (**Sigh**) No, they never did. Never. No one was following me, but something was watching. It still is.

The strange thing is it's a feeling I should be used to. I've been watched by people for years. I present the 'Look East' segment for BBC news almost every day. Well, I used to. And on the other end of that camera there were tens of thousands of people. But I never felt it from them. Sometimes, as I kept my

eyes locked on that camera, reeling off the latest string of burglaries, I tried to feel it. Tried to imagine all the people seeing me, watching me. Even then, even when I was trying, it was never more than a dead, empty lens. Maybe it's just as well that I never felt it before. I lost my job within two weeks of this feeling coming over me. I couldn't concentrate. I couldn't look at the camera. I couldn't read the dead, empty words on the page. I ended up having something of an on-air breakdown. I guess it's lucky you're based in London so you couldn't have seen it.

I know the moment it started. Looking back, it all seems so arbitrary, like a switch suddenly being clicked on and all at once my life is destroyed. It was three months ago in April. I was doing inventory for some of my brother's estate. It was largely up to me to take care of it after his death. My parents were taking it very hard and weren't well enough themselves to make the journey down to his small house in Southampton to try and organise his meagre possessions. I suppose I wasn't in a good place to begin with. You're not meant to die of a stroke that young. I mean, he was only 38 and he wasn't exactly the healthiest, but it... it just seemed so unprovoked.

I've always been quite religious and believed that things happened for a reason. Blessings ultimately came to the virtuous and misfortune to the wicked, but now I don't know. Perhaps you could say that my curiosity was a

fault that brought this on me, but I didn't open the box because I was curious, I opened it because I had to in order to fully inventory my dead brother's possessions. I honestly don't think that's a transgression. It wasn't even marked as special. No oak chests or triple locked brass boxes, just another brown cardboard box like any other.

I don't think that anything about it struck me as special. Looking back, I feel like it marked itself, that it drew my eye, and I would stare at it for longer than the other boxes piled up around his house. The place was so quiet. A lonely testament to Christopher's isolation. He'd never married and there seemed to be nothing in that dingy home that said he had any friends to speak of. In a lot of ways, it reminded me of my own life. I have friends enough in Norwich, but no family except Christopher and my parents, though I do have my reasons. Still, looking through my late brother's things led to the sort of reflection that makes me uncomfortable, and I was drinking more than I normally would.

It was my second day down there when I opened the box. I'd been going through all his old document boxes and there were a lot. Christopher had worked for the history department at the University of Southampton. I don't know what he specialised in; we never really talked about his work. But based on what I found in his study, he'd written a few books on the subject of ancient myths and fetishes: those objects that were believed by various cultures to

have supernatural or religious power imbued within them. His first book was on the holy cross of Christianity and how it operates as a fetish within our culture. This offended me a little bit. I was worried he was trivialising a faith that, as far as I knew, he shared with me. Still, I tried to read a chapter of it (on the use of the cross in the vampire myth) but it was very dry and, quite frankly, a bit dull.

Most of the boxes were similar, full of notes and clippings and bits of research that meant absolutely nothing to me. I put these aside to check with Angus Cartwright, one of Christopher's colleagues who I had contacted to have a look at what papers of his I couldn't understand. Some of the boxes, however, contained what I can only assume was practical research: fetish objects and totems from all around the world, small animal figures carved from bones, strings of glass beads tied together in intricate knotted patterns, grotesque quasi-human statuettes made of wood and old leather. Some of them were more than a little bit unsettling, but only one managed to send me spiralling into the place I am now.

As I said, it was one of the last boxes I opened on the second day. It was late and I had already made my way through most of a bottle of wine. The more I think about it, the more I think that opening that box felt no different to any of the others. No odd feelings, no smells, nothing. It was just a box, empty of

everything except a single typewritten note and an old hand mirror. It lay inside, utterly innocuous. If it was a trap, there was no way to tell. I picked up the note first. The typing was neat, managed to be completely centred, even though the paper seemed to be a scrap that had been torn from a larger piece. It read, in all capitals, "BEHIND YOU".

I'm sure you don't need me to tell you how unsettling that was. I turned and looked almost before I fully understood what I had read. There was a window behind me, with a view of the street below my brother's study and the darkening sky above it. There was nothing there though. Nobody walking along the street, no cars driving down it, nothing that seemed in any way out of place. I looked back at the note, shrugged and reached down for the mirror. It was a bit heavier than I had expected and under a thick layer of tarnish. The frame seemed to be gold, or at least gold plated. The glass itself was a bit grimy, but still seemed to be intact. I have no idea how old it was or what period it might have been made and, though I searched the box thoroughly, I couldn't find anything that might explain where Christopher got it.

I looked in the mirror. I was a mess: hair unwashed, eyes red from crying, lips patchily stained a bruised purple from the wine. I hadn't really had any time to take care of or even look at myself since I got to Christopher's house and this ancient hand mirror really showed it. I sighed, shook my head, and prepared to

check the next box, when the angle on the mirror shifted in my hand slightly and I screamed. It now reflected the window behind me, and I could see a face staring in.

It was dark outside, and it was almost entirely in shadow, so I couldn't tell you much about the features, but it was huge, seeming to take up most of the window behind me. The only thing about it that I could see with any real clarity were the eyes. Bright, shining, bulging eyes, with pupils so dark it made me feel sick, drinking everything in, watching with a greedy intensity. I could feel its gaze burning into the back of my neck, feel its unblinking eyes. My muscles locked in sudden terror and the mirror tumbled out of my hand, spinning only once before it hit the floor and shattered into a thousand tiny shards.

Seven years bad luck, isn't it? Maybe that's it. Maybe I have to feel this horrid aching panic of the eyes I know are following me for seven years before they finally leave. I hope not, but maybe even that's wishful thinking. Maybe this is now my life forever and it will never, ever stop. I've tried to think whether I'd be able to go on if that was the case. I think I'd try, at least until my parents passed away. I couldn't stand for them to lose both children.

Obviously, that was when my real problems began. I could write the face off as a brief but horrid hallucination, but the feeling of being under constant

scrutiny and observation isn't something I can explain away so easily. I've considered the possibility that I'm just going insane. Being watched is not an uncommon symptom of psychosis or schizophrenia and I've been keeping an eye out for the other symptoms, but in all other ways I feel fine. It's true I'm finding it hard to concentrate, but that's only because I can't sleep because they're watching me, those unseen eyes that hover everywhere and won't let me rest. I'm, I'm not mad. I'm sure I'm not mad.

I still have what's left of the mirror. It's just a bent gold frame now. I tried to have new glass put in, but the only eyes it showed were mine. I did talk to Angus though. He seemed a little bit unnerved by the line of questioning I was pursuing, or maybe just by how intensely I was asking the questions, but he answered me. He didn't recognise the mirror, but a few years ago Christopher was looking into writing a book on the totems of what he called 'outer cults', small, organised groups of worshippers whose beliefs weren't simply deviations from paganism or other major religions, but seemed to focus on holy beings or concepts completely apart from what would be considered normal religious practise. Some seemed to have more in common with ancient shamanism than with organised hierarchical worship and all were highly secretive.

Christopher had apparently collected several artefacts considered holy by certain of these sects, though I could find no details among his documents. Angus couldn't be sure, but he believed that the mirror might have been one such object. Christopher had apparently abandoned the project about a year before his death, choosing instead to pursue a line of research into Inuit ceremonial carvings.

And here's where we finally come to why I'm here, because Angus told me that my brother wasn't researching alone. He had apparently logged several trips to London in order to consult with your Institute. I don't know why or what about and no one here seems to be able or willing to help me find out, but he was here. I'm not going to rest until I find out why. Not that I could rest anyway. Those eyes still haunt my dreams and follow me through the waking world. Even here. Especially here.

ARCHIVIST

Statement ends.

A bit of an odd one, this. The mid-late 20th century seems marginally better filed than most of the archives, so we haven't seen as many rogue statements cropping up from that period. Most of the details from Ms Myer's statement seem to check out. Sasha got a confirmation from the BBC that she had indeed

been one of the anchors for the 'Look East' evening news between 1970 and '72, until she suffered a nervous breakdown and damaged several cameras in their Norwich studio.

Martin's checking with the University of Southampton also seems to confirm the details of Christopher Myer's life and death. I even tried to read one or two of his books, but they were a bit dry even for me and didn't appear to have any particular relevance to the case. I've been unable to locate any evidence that he made use of the Institute's library or consultation services, but even these days those records aren't kept in as much detail as they really should be, so that doesn't necessarily mean he wasn't here.

What's most interesting is what Tim found out about the final two decades of Ms Myer's life, before she died in prison in 1993. Following this statement, she apparently spent almost 12 years working low level service jobs until both her mother and father passed away (of cancer and heart disease respectively).

There's nothing notable about this period in any official records, but on October 24th, 1984, she murdered a delivery van driver named Danilo Kostic. She unloaded the van's normal cargo of filing paper and envelopes, before filling it with several barrels of petrol. She was apprehended just south of Vauxhall bridge after she jumped a red light and collided with another car.

Luckily, the petrol did not ignite, and she was picked up by police as she tried to flee the scene.

Originally charged with reckless driving, it didn't take long for them to connect her to the murder of Mr Kostic, and she was given a sentence of 17 years in HMP Holloway. She died of pneumonia nine years later. A bizarre and apparently motiveless crime. The one detail that still nags at me is that the company that Danilo Kostic worked for, Paper Run Limited, is the same company that, at the time, supplied most of the stationary to the Magnus Institute. I have a nasty feeling about exactly where she was taking that petrol.

End recording.

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on.]

ARCHIVIST

You don't mind if I record this, I trust?

ELIAS

Well, to be honest–

TIM

That's kind of one of the things that we wanted to talk about.

MARTIN

This is an intervention.

[The Archivist stands up]

ARCHIVIST

Excuse me.

ELIAS

If you'd rather it was an official disciplinary hearing, John, we can arrange it.

ARCHIVIST

Fine, say your piece.

NOT!SASHA

We care about you, John. And you've been rather erratic since the Prentiss incident.

MARTIN

And we'd, we'd really like–

ELIAS

To not have to fire you.

MARTIN

To make sure that you're doing okay.

ARCHIVIST

Look, I understand I've been a bit distant recently.

TIM

You were watching my house.

NOT!SASHA

You followed me on my lunch break and searched my desk.

MARTIN

You said I was lying about a murder!

ARCHIVIST

I, uh, uh, that is to say, I—

NOT!SASHA

You think we killed Gertrude.

ARCHIVIST

No. It's... I... maybe. Maybe you did. I don't know.

ELIAS

John, this is absurd. This goes far beyond an unhealthy work environment. I'll admit it's partly my fault for letting it get this bad. I, I should have stepped in earlier.

TIM

You still don't believe us, do you?

ARCHIVIST

It's not that I don't believe you, it's just... I mean, you could have done it.

TIM

Seriously? Listen to yourself.

MARTIN

It's not right!

ARCHIVIST

We've gone a long way beyond right, Martin. There are monsters out there and I don't know who or where they are or if any of you... if you want me to trust you, then I'm sorry, but I need evidence.

ELIAS

(Sigh) Here.

ARCHIVIST

And this is?

ELIAS

A copy of all the CCTV from the week Gertrude disappeared. The police finally finished cleaning it up and examining it, and returned a copy.

ARCHIVIST

There aren't any cameras in the Archive.

ELIAS

But there are everywhere else, including all of the entrances into the Archive and across all of the feeds. It provides a remarkably detailed account of all of our movements over that week, even yours.

ARCHIVIST

And you think this gives everyone an alibi?

ELIAS

The police certainly do, but feel free to check it yourself.

ARCHIVIST

Thank you. I will.

NOT!SASHA

And let's have no more of this paranoia.

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on.]

ARCHIVIST

I've been examining the CCTV feeds Elias gave me. It... it does seem to provide everyone with a solid alibi and no one is seen entering or exiting the Archives except Gertrude, at least not before Elias goes down and discovers the blood. Gertrude's own movements are somewhat erratic, and she seems to be in and out of the Archives at all hours of the day and night, at some points looking rather dishevelled. That could stand closer scrutiny later, but for now I... I can't

quite figure out whether this exoneration of my colleagues is more of a relief or a frustration.

At the very least, it seems I have been... I have been rather unfair to them. I just hope they haven't entirely lost respect for me.

One thing that does nothing to ease my mind though is the renewed significance this puts on the tunnels beneath the Archive, as it seems more and more likely that whoever or whatever is living down there is the same thing that killed Gertrude.

End supplemental.

[Tape clicks off.]

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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, Ben Meredith as Elias Bouchard, Alexander J Newall as Martin Blackwood, Mike LeBeau as Tim Stoker and Evelyn Hewitt as Not!Sasha