

MAG – 048 – Lost in The Crowd

Content Warnings

- Temporal distortion
- Altered reality
- **Discussions of:** Claustrophobia, loss of identity
- **Mentions of:** Scopophobia, isolation
- **SFX:** Low drone, high pitched tone

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill Presents The Magnus Archives Episode Fourty Eight Lost in The Crowd

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro - Continues]

JONATHAN SIMS

Statement of Andrea Nunis, regarding a series of encounters in the streets of Genoa, Italy. Original statement given 25th March, 2010. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Statement begins.

JONATHAN SIMS

(Read aloud from the archived witness statement of Andrea Nunis)

Travel has always been my passion. I remember as a kid my parents used to take us on trips to this small cabin in Wales. I was very young at the time, maybe four or five, and the cabin wasn't anything special, just cheap self-catering. It was all the holiday that my parents could afford and I had to share

a bunkbed with my brat of an older brother, but I remember that every time we drove across that huge bridge from England into Wales, I got this rush of discovery, of exploration. Seeing new places; going further; travelling. I've never looked back since.

As I said, my parents didn't have much money, so the first chance I really had to go beyond the UK was when I took a gap year. I'd saved for years to afford that trip, helped by an inheritance from a distant grandmother, and I bought a bunch of Interrail train tickets and spent almost four months rolling across Europe, never staying more than a few days in any one place and heading on as soon as I got bored. There were nights that I was unable to find a hostel and ended up having to sleep on the streets and I even slept in a graveyard once. I'd pick up travelling companions for a few days here and there, but for the most part I would spend weeks without speaking my own language. I had adventures and saw wonders and got into more than a bit of trouble on occasion. It was the happiest I'd ever been.

Since then, travel has always been my main joy in life. I got out of university with a good maths degree and got a job as a programmer. It's a life of well-paid drudgery, but I don't care, because it means once or twice a year I can drop everything for a month and disappear somewhere new: the Grand Canyon, the Forbidden City, the Great Barrier Reef. That's my life. Everything in between is just the intermission. I suppose that's one of the reasons I've always had such trouble with romance, or even close friendships. I can never take them seriously, because they aren't a part of my real life. And in my real life, I travel alone.

I know it's a lot more dangerous and people always tell me how lonely it must be, but it really isn't. There's a purity to being alone when you travel. You can absorb the places you find yourself in so much better, take in the sites and the smells and the vibrations of a place in a way you just can't if you have to be mindful of another person's presence. It isn't that I don't like other people, I do. I just can't travel properly if I'm with them.

For my twenty-fifth birthday last year, I decided to treat myself to another go at Europe. Obviously I couldn't do another four months, but I figured that just the one would let me re-visit my favourite spots in the south: Slovenia, Switzerland, Bavaria, Italy, maybe Monaco or bits of southern France. I'm lucky, as a September birthday makes it pretty much the perfect time for European travel, and for the first weeks I was having a wonderful time.

Heading down into Italy and re-visiting Venice, Rome and the beautiful views of San Marino. I avoided going as far south as Naples, which I recall as being a horrible place, full of ugly smells and rude people, and instead began travelling north again via Florence. It was in a Florence hostel that I met Ethan Taylor.

Ethan was every inch the Australian traveller. Tall and tan, with slightly curly, dirty blonde hair and a carefree attitude. I'd met literally hundreds just like him in every hostel across the globe, but for some reason I really hit it off with Ethan in a way I hadn't with any of the others of his kind. I think it's because when he talked about travelling, he talked about it the same way I did. He wasn't going around for fun, or because that's what every Australian does

when they reach that age; he travelled because he had to. And like me, he said, he always travelled alone. We spent a few nights together in the hostel, much to the irritation of the other guests, but as much as I enjoyed his company, I didn't have any interest in travelling with him for long, and it seemed he felt the same way.

It was with a sort of mutual unspoken discomfort that we found ourselves ending up on the same train heading north. It seemed like it would have been rude not to at least acknowledge each other, so we sat in the same compartment and stared out the window. It was alright actually. Each lost in our thoughts as the Italian countryside rolled past.

We'd been travelling for about two hours when Ethan looked over and asked me if I was planning to stop in Genoa. I said no, it wasn't a place I'd really considered visiting and Ethan began to tell me about it. He'd been there a few years before, he said, and the coastline was beautiful, all clear blue ocean and narrow, winding lanes. I didn't have any other plans, so I said, 'Sure'. And you know what? He was right. It was beautiful: the colourful houses climbing up the steep streets from the coast and the paths beside the sea. That first day we stepped off the train, I fell a little bit in love with Genoa.

We checked into a hostel and, for once, decided to get a private room, and dropped our backpacks from tired shoulders. We didn't need to say anything to know we'd be exploring the city on our own. Ethan would be re-visiting cherished memories and I would be discovering new ones, but neither of us

wanted to do so in company. Most of our time together was spent at night: dining, talking or otherwise engaged.

The first morning, I went for a long walk along the coast. The sea air was invigorating and when the salt-tinged air sent cool fingers running through my hair, I felt so alive I nearly wept. I put all thoughts of returning to my dull, English life from my mind and relished my freedom. There were a few others walking near me, but Italian is one of the few languages I have never managed to pick up even a small amount of, so their conversation was alien to me and did not intrude on my precious isolation.

As Ethan and I talked that night, I tried to put it into words, but without any real success. Even here, with the time to compose it properly, I'm still not sure I've caught the essence of what I felt. Ethan, for his part, had told me of his explorations of the backstreets of Genoa. He had found himself in a small section of town that seemed older than the rest, he said, and unlike the rest of it, it was bustling. He suspected there might have been an out of the way street market there and was hoping to find it again tomorrow. Then we went to bed and I got what may have been my last restful night.

The next day, I decided to find a nice, local cafe and spend some time reading. It wasn't difficult to do, as if there's one thing it's easy to find in Italy, it's coffee. This one was well hidden and warmer than outside, even though the day was very hot for the time of year. I took a seat and ordered a coffee. I tried

to read, but it was so warm that even with the strong coffee in my hand, I found it hard to keep my eyes open and kept nodding off.

It was after one such accidental nap that I saw him. He was pale, scrawny almost and looked utterly out of place. His loose, bright shirt was in stark contrast to his long black hair and he was staring at me in a way I found quite uncomfortable. I mean, I know I'm not unattractive and I'm used to creepy guys staring at me sometimes, but this was different. He was staring at me with an air of concentration, like he was trying to read something written very small on my forehead. After about a minute of this, he got up and walked over to me.

He took the seat opposite and sat down. He was still staring at me and it became clear that I was going to have to start the conversation, so I asked him who the hell he was and what the hell he wanted. He ignored the first question completely and said, in English, that what he wanted was to have a nice holiday in peace. He said it in a really accusatory way, like I was ruining his holiday somehow, and I said so. He sighed and said that he wasn't in the business of "helping strays".

Now I didn't know what help he was offering and I certainly didn't ask for it, so I got up to leave. He apologised grudgingly and said that, as he was here, he felt he should at least let me know that I was "marked". He didn't know what by, but that it was close. Was I married? Did I have a fiancé? Partner? Friends? I told him no, not really, and was just about sick of his stupid questions, but he

sounded oddly desperate. Siblings? No. Mother? Of course I had a mother. Were we close? Did I love her? I gave him a look and he again asked if we were close. I said yes, we were very close, and then I got up to leave. As I left, I heard him call him after me, telling me to remember my mother, to keep her face in my mind. I didn't reply.

Ethan didn't return to the hostel that night. At first, I assumed he was simply out drinking late, but as evening turned into night and as night turned into morning, I started to get a little worried. It was none of my business, of course, but Genoa wasn't an all-night party sort of town. I would have assumed he'd maybe just headed on without me, but his backpack was still in our room, untouched. I wanted to dismiss it as paranoia, but my encounter with the weirdo in the cafe had left me a bit rattled. When the sun came up on the third day in Genoa without any sign of Ethan, I decided to go out and look for him.

My first move was to try and locate that street market he'd mentioned. Perhaps it wasn't just hidden away; perhaps it had been actually illegal and he'd got caught up in something he shouldn't have. He had given me a good idea of the rough area in Genoa it had been, so I started my search there. I found nothing. Asking around just yielded a barrage of confused Italian from passers-by who I couldn't talk to. So I just kept walking. Morning turned into afternoon and the previously sunny day became overcast and oppressive. I would occasionally half-heartedly shout out Ethan's name, though I don't know what I was expecting. At first, this got me annoyed shouts from nearby windows, then glares and eventually they got no response at all. The streets I was walking were narrower and narrower and the houses and buildings next to

me seemed to get taller with each turning I made, their previously vibrant colours muted under the cloudy sky. The afternoon was completely silent.

I began to think. How long had it been since I saw another person? Twenty minutes? An hour? Two hours? I hadn't checked my watch and my mind was foggy. It was hard to think in all the humidity. I went to take a drink from my water bottle to find it empty. Had I finished it? I couldn't have been searching that long. Then I heard it from up ahead, the dull murmuring of a crowd of people, that rolling babble of incomprehensible noise that only comes from dozens of voices talking at once. Relief washed over me and I headed towards the noise.

The street I was heading towards was wider than those that I had just been walking and seemed better lit somehow. Best of all, I could see a constant flow of people travelling down it in both directions. Perhaps this was the street market Ethan had mentioned? I stumbled out into it and began to look around. I couldn't see any stalls, or shops, or anything that might explain the presence of so many people, but I didn't have time to really think about it before they started bumping into me. It didn't seem deliberate, but there were so many people, far more than I had thought at first, and they couldn't move without jostling or pushing me.

The flow of people dragged me this way and that. I was surrounded that by that noise, that mumbling noise of the crowd. Now I was inside it though, I realised it wasn't Italian being spoken, or English, or any other language I

recognised. The more I listened, the more I realised it, it wasn't a language. There were no words, it was just noise. Just a noise being made by the people around me. Then I started to focus on those people and that's when I began to scream.

Their faces were a blur, each and every one of them. It was like someone had recorded them screaming or having a seizure and then played it back at a hundred times the speed on their face. None of them had hair, or any distinguishing marks, and though their clothes were different, they were all different versions of the same clothes. I, I tried to talk to them or to shout, to scream at them, but there was no reaction. I tried to push, to punch, or kick them, but they were pressed in too tight and I couldn't do anything except get buffeted this way and that by them. This crowd of people, they weren't people. It was just a crowd. A crowd without any people in it and I was still completely alone.

It was then, as I felt my grip begin to slide, and I worried that I would lose myself to the crowd forever, that the words of that strange man in the coffee shop came to my mind. Think of your mother. And I did. I thought of her face, the smell of her perfume, the long rambling phone calls made whenever we got the chance. I closed my eyes and remembered in as much detail, and with as much love as I could muster in my despair.

I didn't notice when the bodies around me stopped pushing or when the droning sound of the crowd stopped. Eventually I opened my eyes again. It was

night and I was on a street I didn't recognise, with an old Italian couple staring at me like I had gone mad. It took me another hour to find my way back to the hostel, and I made sure I was always in sight of at least one other person.

I didn't search for Ethan any further. I had as much of an answer as I was going to get and left his backpack in the hostel, in case he ever made it back to collect. I doubt he did. I cut my travels short after that, came back home by as direct a route as I could and spent some time at my mother's house. I haven't been travelling since, but I have some time off coming up and would like to head out again. I might see if I can find a friend to go with me though. I think it might be a while before I'm ready to travel on my own again.

JONATHAN SIMS

Statement ends.

An interesting encounter, though difficult to follow up, given its location. Sasha arranged a supplementary interview with Ms Nunis, who reports she has recently started travelling alone again and has not had any further problems. Martin has confirmed that over the last decade there have been several travellers reported missing in Genoa, but averaged out, no more than is normal for a city of its size. I don't quite know whether this means few travellers go missing in Genoa, or that a lot of travellers go missing everywhere else.

I'm curious about this coffee shop stranger Ms Nunis met. His description puts me in mind of Gerard Keay, though there isn't much to it. If it is him, then he must have taken this trip shortly after he was acquitted of his mother's murder. Fleeing the country for a while, perhaps? Maybe there were rumours

of a Leitner in Genoa? Maybe he was genuinely on holiday? No way to tell without more detail.

I am sure of the accuracy of this statement in one area, however. Tim managed to get in contact with the Manena Hostel in Genoa and they confirmed that, just over six years ago, they had a backpack logged in the lost and found under the name E Taylor. It was never claimed.

End recording

[CLICK]

[CLICK]

Supplemental.

Michael's visit last week has been playing on my mind. What struggle is he talking about? And if there is one, what's his stake in it? What even is he? Listening back over his visit, I am also struck by something that, in the confusion of his arrival, completely passed me by the first time. His words were a warning that I cannot trust Sasha, that she was lying about something. Of course, it is becoming rapidly apparent in my investigation that I can trust nobody, but of all of them, Sasha seemed the least suspicious.

I can't find any evidence she ever even met Gertrude and her working here seems the natural progression of a lifelong interest in the paranormal. She's been doing her work with the same diligence as before the Prentiss incident and indeed, of all of them, seems to have been the least affected. That said, she did lose the tape documenting her experience. Or is she lying about her meeting with Michael? Leaving things out? Or is Michael simply messing with my head, as indeed seemed to be the entire purpose of his visit.

On another note, I need to be subtler in my enquiries. Here follows a recording I managed to make of a short meeting Elias requested.

[CLICK]

ELIAS

I don't enjoy having to have these meetings, John, you know I don't.

JONATHAN SIMS

(Sarcastically) Well, I'm sorry you're compelled to. I assume you've had another complaint?

ELIAS

Yes.

JONATHAN SIMS

Who from this time? Was Dr Elliott offended I declined to take his apple? Was I too rude to Michael?

ELIAS

Who's Michael?

No, it's from your team.

JONATHAN SIMS

What?

ELIAS

Martin and Tim have both approached me. Apparently, you've been spying on them.

JONATHAN SIMS

Spying on them? Of course not. No, it's just I've been... worried about their mental health following Prentiss' attack. So I've been keeping a closer eye on them than usual.

ELIAS

Tim says you were watching his house.

JONATHAN SIMS

Well, that's just not true.

ELIAS

Well, what matters is that your team thinks that it could be. Look, I... I know finding Gertrude's body hit you hard. I understand, but you need to leave this alone. It isn't their mental health that's under scrutiny right now.

JONATHAN SIMS

Fine, fine... is that all?

ELIAS

Yes.

[CLICK]

JONATHAN SIMS

I need to be more careful about the others noticing my investigations, especially if I've further cause to watch their homes. More importantly though, I think Elias just moved to the top of my suspect list. I wonder what he's hiding?

End supplement.

[CLICK]

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Outro]

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