

MAG 194 — Parting

Content Warnings

- Arguments
- Body horror (including flesh & gore SFX)
- Self-inflicted wounds & body modification (including SFX)
- Explicit language
- Panic & emotional distress
- Mentions of: alcohol, knives, death, funerals, mass suffering, suicidal ideation, emotional abuse, second person POV, scopophobia, breathing difficulties SFX, physical violence, gaslighting, tumours/cancer

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents... *The Magnus Archives*. Episode one hundred and ninety-four: "Parting."

[Theme finishes]

[Tape clicks on]

[The tower stairs: cameras iris movements and faint whispers are audible; a faint pulsing tone permeates the background; and distant muffled helicopter and drone sounds]

[Footsteps descend the tower stairs hastily; the Archivist doing so more rapidly than Martin]

(Martin breaths heavily)

MARTIN

John, wai— Hey, just wait!

[The Archivist's footsteps pause as Martin catches up]

MARTIN

W— Will you please talk to me?

ARCHIVIST

I just— I-I need some air.

MARTIN

In the tunnels?

ARCHIVIST

Yes! N-no! I, I don't know, just somewhere! Anywhere, without that... thing droning horrors, and Rosie staring at us like we're gonna bite her. I just— I need to think.

MARTIN

Alright.

Alright, we'll, we'll go back to the tunnels and, regroup, figure out what our next move is. See what other options there are.

(Beat)

ARCHIVIST

Yeah. **(quiet)** Yeah.

MARTIN

John?...

(Warning) John?

ARCHIVIST

I just need a moment. To, to properly consider things.

MARTIN

“Consider” what exactly?

(Beat)

ARCHIVIST

(Quietly) It-It might be our only option.

MARTIN

(Vehemently) What are you talking about?! H-how is it an “option”? Okay, setting aside the fact that it’s a suicidal idea, it’s just completely stupid! What actual good would it do? Right now, as far as I can see, we’d just be swapping one self-important, floating, hollowed-out terror zombie for another!

ARCHIVIST

It’s not like that.

MARTIN

Really? Then please enlighten me. Go on, I’m all ears!

ARCHIVIST

(Quiet) Look. **(normal)** Right well when I said I would ‘replace’ Jonah in there, that’s not— er— That place, the centre of The Eye, i-it’s... It wasn’t made for him. That’s why he’s like that, it’s too much, it’s overwhelmed him, his whole being, just destroyed.

MARTIN

(Sarcastic) Oh yeah? But let me guess, it was made for you?

ARCHIVIST

Yes.

MARTIN

(Petulantly) Of course it is. Of course it is! Because how could this journey possibly end with anything less than the final, **supreme** destiny of the Archivist, plugged into the great fear machine for all eternity and, and abandoning humanity.

Breaking his promise.

ARCHIVIST

(Snapping) That’s not fair!

MARTIN

Isn't it?

ARCHIVIST

Would you just listen? Please?

I think... I **think** that I, I could control it, to a degree. I could, I could channel the energies, remake things — like I've been doing on our journey, but, but on a grand scale.

MARTIN

And how's that going to help? You've always said you can't make less fear in the world. You'd, you'd just be moving it around.

ARCHIVIST

But that might still help. I-I could, I could rebalance things. Destroy the avatars, make it so that the people suffering most were the ones who, who *deserve* it.

MARTIN

(Scoffing) And what? Replace them with new avatars from the people who don't want to?

ARCHIVIST

I mean, that has to be better than those that chose it right? Sure I can't make it "go away", but I could at least make it fairer.

(Martin scoffs at this justification)

The Eye doesn't care, as long as it gets its fear, it's happy either way.

MARTIN

(Incredulous) Christ, can you hear yourself? "Make it fairer!" It's not enough that you're the 'all-powerful Archivist', you also have to appoint yourself the **literal** judge of everyone as well?

ARCHIVIST

Don't.

MARTIN

I know what it's like to be powerless. A-and I know you do too. And I also know what it's like once you get a taste of— wh-when you're finally able to—

ARCHIVIST

That's not what this is!

MARTIN

I've been out there with you. I saw the kick you got out of making **them** scream for once.

ARCHIVIST

(Snarky) What happened to "Kill Bill"?

MARTIN

You weren't meant to enjoy it this much!

ARCHIVIST

Why won't you believe me when I say that this **isn't** something I **want** to do?

MARTIN

Because I saw your face when we walked into that room!

(Despondent) That wasn't fear, it, it wasn't even anger. It was envy.

And it scared me more than anything else I've seen.

(Beat)

ARCHIVIST

Martin...

MARTIN

We're here to stop this. Not, not take it over.

ARCHIVIST

What other choice do we have?

MARTIN

I-I don't know, alright! I do— But there is one.

Because there has to be.

ARCHIVIST

But what if there isn't? How long are we going to wander around hopelessly searching before we end up back here anyway?

MARTIN

You were the one that wanted to take some time to think things over.

ARCHIVIST

We can't just dismiss this. It might be our only option.

(Beat)

MARTIN

No.

ARCHIVIST

No?

MARTIN

No. I forbid it.

ARCHIVIST

(Incredulous) You forbid it?

MARTIN

Don't laugh at me.

ARCHIVIST

Why not? You're being ridiculous.

MARTIN

I refuse to accept that this—

ARCHIVIST

(Firm) Tough! The world **doesn't** care what you accept. It just... is!

It just is.

(Beat)

I'm going out. Ou-ou-outside. I-I'll... I'll see you back in the tunnels.

[Quick footsteps as the Archivist speeds off down the stairs]

(Beat)

MARTIN

Stupid... Stupid, arrogant...

(Calling) John?

[The Archivist's footsteps are now just faint echoes]

MARTIN

J—

...Shit!

[Martin starts heading down the stairs]

[Tape clicks off]

[Tape clicks on]

[The sounds of London outdoors: helicopters, drones, camera iris movements]

[Footsteps on pavement as the Archivist walks]

ARCHIVIST

Get out of here. All of you.

[The Archivist stops and turns]

[Hissing static starts]

(Attempted compulsion) I said leave me alone!

(Beat)

[Hissing static ends]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Of course.

[He resumes walking]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

(The Archivist sighs)

What do you want? No, I, I know what you want.

But maybe you're right.

...No, that's— Martin's right.

[The Archivist stops walking]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

It's not worth it.

Why am I even talking to you? You don't even have a mind, not really. That's what you want, isn't it? Something to be your focus, your will. Keeping you fed and placated and content!

(Beat)

You got something to say?

Then say it.

[Hissing static starts]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Of course.

[Outdoor London sounds fade out; replaced by a humming fridge
and the muffled sounds of street noise]

[Clink of spoon stirring in a cup, then put down, followed by
drinking sounds]

[Hissing static ends]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The old man was dead. The old man was dead, and Malcolm could feel nothing but ice-cold relief washing over him. Every step he took seemed lighter.

[A few footsteps]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Every breath seemed cleaner, as though he were walking through a bracing autumn evening. He knew he should be devastated, should be shattered by the loss of what had been the one constant in his life for as long as he could remember, but when his eyes passed over the stained and sagging armchair where the old man had sat, unmoving, for the last decade, the absence of that angular, judging face brought a smile to his lips. A smile of freedom.

[Sounds of sitting down; continued drink sipping]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

At last he could do what he liked. No prying questions when he walked in the door. No more knowing sneers, demanding to be told where he had been. No more tiptoeing around his home in a desperate, futile attempt to avoid the sight of someone who, despite never seeming to move from that spot, seemed all too aware of Malcolm's every private thought, his every dark impulse.

What was the old man's name again? Malcolm could barely recall. It didn't matter, though, no more than it mattered whether he had been a father, grandfather, elderly friend, or even some sort of landlord. What mattered was that for as long as he could remember — how long *was* that? — the old man had sat on his threadbare throne, and held court over Malcolm's life. And now he was dead. The morticians had taken the body away — or at least, someone had — and he had been the only one at the sad, overcast funeral. Now he was free to live his life.

To live his life. What did that even mean anymore? What was there for him that wasn't simply avoiding the cruel barbs and snide judgements of the old man? Perhaps... love?

[Sounds of getting up and walking]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Yes, perhaps now, without the wrinkled threat that chuckled from his armchair at any thought of his happiness, perhaps now he could find someone to spend his life with.

[Old computer button noise, crackling monitor, then mouse and keyboard use]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Malcolm fired up his old computer, which groaned to life with a sputter, the monitor cracked and broken, and the keyboard stiff to the touch. For a terrifying moment it seemed as though it might not work at all, but finally the screen lit up in a dull, sickly green. Malcolm clicked through until he found what he was looking for. A dating site.

The name of the website was distorted beyond recognition, but he seemed to still be logged in from all those years ago, and he began to click through profiles. Mary, she seemed nice, but somehow too long. Jenny seemed to have a good sense of humour, but... half of her was backwards. Hannah didn't seem to have anything wrong with her at first glance, but her profile smelt of rotten meat. Then he found Antonia, and he gasped. Her smile was so wide and so open that all at once he felt a wave of warm infatuation pass down and over his body, permeating everywhere... Except for his right shoulder, which remained ice cold.

[Fabric movement sounds]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Something was wrong. Malcolm moved his fingers across and over the area, feeling the space between his neck and arm. There was a lump there. Hard and round and smooth to the touch. He pressed it gently, and winced as pain radiated through him. Gingerly, he unbuttoned his shirt, sliding the rough fabric down his torso, and examined the shining protrusion. Some sort of callous, maybe? A tumour? Malcolm's mind began running frantically through all the worst-case possibilities. And then, it opened.

[Fleshy wet sound of opening]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The iris was dull grey, surrounded by yellowed, bloodshot tissue, and the pupil was dull, almost cloudy, but the eye that stared out from his shoulder seemed to focus well enough.

[Watery sounds of vitreous sans humour]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

It swivelled wildly, looking all around the room as Malcolm desperately tried to hold back a scream. Then it settled on the dull glow of the computer monitor. On Antonia. And the icy shock of bitter disapproval shot through his veins like lightning. His hand lunged out almost on reflex, snatching the power cable from the computer and pulling it free.

[**Sounds of computer cables sliding and monitor turning off; watery eye sounds continue]**

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The screen went dark with a small pop, and Malcolm was left sitting there, shaking. The eye turned once towards his pale and terrified face, then closed in satisfaction.

[**A sliding door opens and the sounds transition to that of a waiting room with a distant phone ringing]**

[**Footsteps, then sounds of sitting down]**

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The waiting room was almost empty when he got to Accident & Emergency. The nurse sat at the desk gave him a weird look and told him to take a seat. He tried to settle down on one of the smooth, orange chairs, bolted to a long iron bar to form a crude bench, but he couldn't get comfortable. From underneath his coat, he could hear it; the tiny, whispering mouth that had opened up on the long Tube-ride over.

[**Wet eye noises restart along with a strange, muffled internal body sound]**

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

"They're going to laugh at you," it hissed.

"No, they won't."

"They're going to tell you, you're a freak, a deviant. They're going to put you away."

"They're going to cut you out of me."

"So you can kill me again?"

"I didn't kill you."

"You might as well have. With your insolence. With your disrespect."

"Shut up!"

"I'll tell them. I'll tell them all the horrible thoughts you keep deep inside."

Malcolm's leg wouldn't stop shaking. Somewhere, from deeper within the hospital, a laugh echoed—

[Distant laugh]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

—cold and tinged with a judgemental cruelty that he recognised so keenly. He pulled his coat tighter and got up, stepping out through the automatic doors and out into the cold night.

[Sliding doors open and the waiting room is replaced with camera iris movements, and distant helicopters and drones]

[Footsteps on pavement]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

He was going to have to do it himself. That was all there was to it. If a professional, medical option wasn't on the cards then what other choice did he have?

[Footsteps pause, then pivot and continued walking]

**[Automatic doors slide open, followed by supermarket sounds;
distorted unpleasant muzak, checkout beeps, camera iris
movements]**

[Strange, muffled internal body sound restarts]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

He hurried into the supermarket, the dull throb of his shoulder causing his right arm to hang stiffly by his side. There were no trolleys left, nor any baskets, so he grabbed what he could, and held them to his chest, dreading the possibility they all might fall tumbling to the ground at any moment. Kitchen knife, paper towels, disinfectant, vodka, ibuprofen.

[Sounds of pickup up grocery items]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

As he walked through the huge aisles, that seemed so much longer than he remembered, he tried to ignore the looks of curiosity and disgust he saw on the faces of the other shoppers. By now his shoulder was clearly swollen, lumpy and bulging under his coat. One woman simply stood there, and pointed silently as Malcolm felt the tiny, stick-thin arm creep out from under his collar, trying to push the thick coat out of the way.

[Strong fabric rustles]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

“Let me see, Malcolm. Let me see!”

Malcolm ran out of the store, dropping his items as he went. All except the kitchen knife.

[Running, with items tumbling; supermarket transitions to outdoors London again; running continues]

[Keys being used in a lock, followed by door creaking open; gasps of breath]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

The flat was dark and silent when Malcolm flung the door open, and fell inside in a heap. The pain in his shoulder was now unbearable as he clawed his way over the grimy, matted carpet, hands sticky from the decades of unnoticed dirt. The only light in the room spilled out from the static of the old television screen, casting his agonies in a pale and washed out cathode-ray glow.

[Gasps of breath continue, strong fabric rustles of a fight; the muffled internal body sounds and wet noises intensify]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

His coat and the shirt beneath it were rags now, torn by the sharp, flailing fingers that reached out from his shoulder. Malcolm tried to breath, to concentrate or centre himself, to find any way to carve out a moment in the chaos and think. But there was none. He pulled off the remaining slivers of

material, exposing the tiny, half-formed face and limbs to the open air. And he raised the knife.

[Knife clinks]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

“Do it, you coward!”

[Visceral sounds of bone and flesh cracking and contorting]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

As Malcolm plunged the blade into his shoulder, he felt it split. Skin, muscle and bone torn apart, opening up like an earthquake fissure, a red and gore-streaked chasm into himself. The sound he made could technically be called a scream, but the agonies he cried out through a gurgling throatful of blood were beyond any noise he could have conceived himself making.

[Wet gurgling throat noises are heard as fleshy noises continue]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

From the wound came first a hand, then slowly, inch by inch, the arm followed, wrapping itself around his neck for purchase, and pulling out a shoulder, a neck, a face. A sneering, familiar face.

It took ten minutes for the bloody form to emerge in its entirety, and another twenty for it to writhe and crawl its way over and up onto the old armchair.

[Dreadful visceral sounds; then an armchair springs squeak as something sits; fleshy movement stop]

[A wheezing breath from elderly lungs starts drawing air, joining the gurgling throat noise]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Through all this time, Malcolm lay there, quietly bleeding, tears streaming down his cheek, and soaking into the carpet. The pain was nothing to him, not anymore. What he hated most, what he truly feared, was what stared down at him from that chair, that once again regarded him with sneering, bitter judgement. He could feel the old man's eyes on him, and he knew that he would never be rid of them.

[Hissing static starts]

[The sounds transition to that of London outdoors: helicopters,
drones, camera iris movements]

[Hissing static ends]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Not exactly subtle. But then you never were, were you? Not really.

Well. If that's the most compelling argument you have...

(Smiles) I'm going to go and apologise to my boyfriend.

[He starts walking]

[Tape clicks off]

[Tape clicks on]

[In the tunnels, the Archivist opens the door to Leitner's room,
where Melanie's comfy chair is; he walks in]

ARCHIVIST

Martin?

[Door shuts]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Martin I'm, I'm sorry. You're right, I—

[A chair scrapes on the floor]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Oh.

(The Archivist coughs nervously)

Sorry. Thought you were someone else.

CELIA

It's okay. I-I was actually looking for you.

ARCHIVIST

Why? What's— Sorry, um, do you know where Marti— the, the man I-I was with, do you know where he is?

CELIA

That's what I wanted to check! I saw him a while ago, up near one of the trapdoors. I... I didn't recognise the woman with him, so I wanted to check if you were expecting anyone else before I woke the prophets.

ARCHIVIST

(Suspicious) What, what woman?

CELIA

I don't know.

ARCHIVIST

(Concerned) What did she look like?

CELIA

Uh... Youngish, Black, dressed... normal, I suppose. She had a thing on her head, like a... I don't know.

(Concerned breath from the Archivist)

Like a, a woolly hat? But... I-I don't know, it looked a bit weird.

ARCHIVIST

A-Annabelle, oh—

CELIA

Oh, I didn't catch her name—

ARCHIVIST

Shh-shh-shh! I— Please, I, I need to concentrate.

[Hissing static starts]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

(Very quietly) Where are you, Martin? Come on, come on, come on; don't do this to me. Not now... Argh! Oh god. Okay, okay, um...

[Hissing static ends]

CELIA

Are you alright?

ARCHIVIST

We, uh— I need to talk to the ah, the, th-the prophets.

CELIA

What's going on?

ARCHIVIST

(Snarling) Now!

[Tape clicks off]

[Tape clicks on]

[In the tunnels, the Archivist opens the door to Leitner's room, stepping in once more]

MELANIE

Any luck?

ARCHIVIST

(Frustrated) Nothing. Is-is Georgie back yet?

MELANIE

Not yet. But then she actually needs to go places to look at them. She can't just pop up top and check 'the big picture'.

ARCHIVIST

Melanie, please, not now.

MELANIE

...Sorry.

(Melanie sighs)

[The Archivist closes the door]

MELANIE (CONT'D)

So, you, you didn't see them at all with your, y'know...?

ARCHIVIST

Nothing. They're hidden. Annabelle must have taken the camera.

MELANIE

The camera?

ARCHIVIST

Ah, from Salesa's.

MELANIE

O-oh. So does that mean he's...?

ARCHIVIST

(Quiet) Dead.

MELANIE

Right.

ARCHIVIST

Yes. I, I checked. I guess she liked him enough to do that for him before she stole it.

MELANIE

Remind me not to get on her good side.

ARCHIVIST

No, i-it's what he wanted. W-what he *said* he wanted.

[The Archivist starts pacing]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

But... it-it-it it means there's, there's *no way* I can find them!

MELANIE

Hey, hey, hey!

ARCHIVIST

And I—

[He stops pacing]

MELANIE

Keep it together. Okay. Georgie might have better luck. She's actually looking in person, and from what you said...

ARCHIVIST

Yeah. No. I, I mean that, that *could* work. But... But if she finds them alone!
Wh... (**stuttering**) I mean, if anything were to happen!

MELANIE

They can handle themselves. Right?

ARCHIVIST

You're right. You're, you're right.

[Melanie clutches her folded cane]

MELANIE

It's, it's fine. I'm worried too.

ARCHIVIST

This is my fault.

MELANIE

What?

ARCHIVIST

We... We had an argument. I said some things I shouldn't have. I-if I hadn't we would've come back here together, and I, I-I'd have been there to stop her taking him.

MELANIE

You don't know that's what happened.

ARCHIVIST

I mean, he wouldn't have gone willingly!

Would he?

MELANIE

You tell me. You *said* there was no sign of a struggle.

ARCHIVIST

But if it happened in the tunnel, I can't *Know* that!

MELANIE

But we'd have heard. Stuff echoes down here.

ARCHIVIST

I suppose.

What, so you think he *chose* to leave with her?

MELANIE

Does it matter right now?

ARCHIVIST

I mean, if they left together willingly, they could already be miles away.

MELANIE

(Heavy sigh) Yeah. And you can't— I, I don't know, see where your blind spot is? If you know what I mean.

ARCHIVIST

Not unless I'm right next to it.

MELANIE

Right. Fine. So... we do this the old-fashioned way.

ARCHIVIST

What?

MELANIE

Why would she take him? Uh, do they have any history?

ARCHIVIST

Not really.

MELANIE

So what other reason might she want him?

ARCHIVIST

To get to me? To turn him against us, or, or make him an offer or... I don't know, she serves The Web, so it's-it's probably some bullshit domino cause-and-effect **thing** we can't even begin to guess.

MELANIE

Okay, probably, okay, probably; but it doesn't do us much good to worry about that now! Uh, okay. Let's say, she wanted to use him as bait, to lure you somewhere.

ARCHIVIST

Well then why would she hide?

MELANIE

To get a headstart, maybe? Ah, so she can set up a trap. Either way, where would she go?

ARCHIVIST

(Exasperated) Aaa... How am I supposed to know? I, I can't *See* anything down here!

[Melanie grips her folded cane]

MELANIE

For god's sake! Pull your head out of your arse, stop trying to use it as a bloody antenna, and actually try thinking!

ARCHIVIST

Just listen Melanie. I—

[The Archivist is struck, not with a revelation but Melanie's cane]

ARCHIVIST

Argh! Ow!

MELANIE

Think!

[Melanie refolds her cane]

ARCHIVIST

Ow... I don't know! Somewhere she'd be strong! A, a place of power, a, a Web domain...

MELANIE

Yeah... I, I don't think there's anywhere like that in London.

ARCHIVIST

No, i-it's all Eye, one way or another.

MELANIE

So, what about nearby? Hmm?

John?

ARCHIVIST

(Realising) Oh god...

MELANIE

What?

ARCHIVIST

They're going to Hill Top Road.

[Tape clicks off]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

JONATHAN SIMS

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