

MAG – 153 – Love Bombing

Content Warnings:

- Cult activity
- Physical violence
- Starvation

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

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Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode one hundred and fifty-three.
Love Bombing.

ARCHIVIST

Statement of Barbara Mullen-Jones, regarding her nine months spent with the Divine Chain cult. Original statement given on 2nd April, 2012. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, the Archivist.

Statement begins.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)

Everyone thinks they're too smart to get involved in a cult. I'm sure you do.

You think that, of the first mention of aliens, or the end of the world, or the lost book of the Bible where Jesus buried his holy staff in the foothills of the Himalayas, you'd go running.

Trouble is, that misunderstands how it works. I mean, when I was with the Divine Chain, some of the smartest people there were also the most committed.

Intelligence doesn't make you less prone to taking on bad ideas, it just makes you better at defending them to other people and to yourself. Smart people can believe some truly ridiculous things, and then deploy all the reason and logic at their disposal to justify them, because a belief doesn't begin in your mind. It begins in your feelings. Cults are very good at finding you when you're at your lowest point, when you're your most emotionally vulnerable. And when you're at that point it's astounding what can crawl into your heart and start to fester there.

I hit my lowest point when I turned 41. That's when my life came crashing down, at least on the inside. From the outside I'm sure everything looked pretty much okay. I was getting gigs, I had a job, I had plenty of friends and a supportive family. But that was when I started to properly look at my life, and I really didn't like what was looking back. I was a stand-up comedian you see, and a really good one. That's not boasting, that's just the truth. And I'd always assumed that that was enough to eventually have real success, and for the first 10 years it seemed like I was right. I worked my way up, performed for basically nothing basically every night and got to be pretty successful.

And then I stayed that way for the next 10 years. Trouble is - do you know how much a "pretty successful" comedian makes? Let's just say I had a full-time office job and was still barely making rent. But between working full-time and gigging full-time I just kept putting off everything else in my life, always so sure the big time was just around the corner. This is the TV spot that gets me noticed, this is

the sell-out fringe show that makes me mainstream, this is the deal that actually goes somewhere.

I made it through turning 40 with my self-image intact, but for some reason at 41, I just cracked. I realized I've spent most of my life with nothing to show for it, but a few awards no one cares about, a string of awful comedian exes who broke up with me for being funnier than them, and a dreadful office job I was going to be working until I died because I'd never bothered to build a stable career. I was never going to own a home, I was never going to have kids, never going to have the life I'd spent my entire youth sacrificing for. And yes, I know that 41 isn't *actually* too late for most of that, but try telling that to someone who'd just decided they've wasted their life. I felt like I couldn't talk to anyone about it. My friends were all comedians who really didn't want to hear it, my family were blandly supportive to the point of uselessness. Oh, they had plenty of soothing platitudes, but platitudes wouldn't get me back 20 years. I was in a really bad place.

Then a friend recommended a meditation course to me. I thought I'd give it a shot. Obviously the meditation course didn't mention anything about the organization behind it. I had no idea it was anything other than a standard evening class, and it had exactly the right level of pseudo-mystical nonsense to it to get me comfortable. A little bit of tarot imagery here, some misinterpretation of chakras there, a touch of sweet-smelling incense to tie it all together and you have a meditation class that is exactly my level. I mean, let's put it like this - I don't believe in the power of crystals but I still have plenty dotted around my bedroom. I don't believe in astrology but I do have my birth chart on my wall, and

like to check my horoscope, sun sign and ascendant every day. Just for fun, of course.

Anyway, the meditation part of it was actually really good. I'd never had much luck silencing my mind, but Joyce - the lady running it - was really good at bringing you to that space. It was surprisingly freeing. I started attending regularly. One thing she insisted on was the start of each session, we would all sit in a circle and tell the others what we liked about each other. Only compliments, only truth. The first few sessions, no one really knew the others well enough to offer anything more than general niceties, but as it went on and we became closer the affirmations became more personal. More meaningful. And it felt really good just to have all that positivity, that affection uncritically directed at you. I thought it would be cheesy, but it was just this incredible feeling of being wanted and appreciated.

You know, every comedian goes on about how they love the business, how great everyone is. Every one of them is lying. It's horrible and everyone in it is horrible, and being there, having people be genuinely lovely to me, I didn't know what to do with those feelings. Apparently in organizations that monitor cults, this method is called love bombing. I think I'd even heard of it somewhere before, but that didn't make it any less effective.

I went to the meditation group for about three months, before Joyce mentioned a spiritual retreat she wanted us all to go on. It was in America, a small community out in rural Arkansas, and all our expenses would be taken care of. That should have sent alarm bells ringing, but by that point I trusted her

so implicitly that I was just excited I wouldn't have to buy my own ticket. I won't bore you with the details of the rest of my indoctrination, once I got to the Divine Chains community - or compound, to use the classic term, though there weren't any fences or watchtowers. Suffice to say that there was more friendliness, support, meditation, and you know what? Really good food. I'm told that Arnold used to be a chef before they recruited him and well very much helped their cause.

I also met the leader of the organization, Claude Vilakazi, and he was so *nice*. People talk about charismatic dictators or cults of personality, but honestly you don't even know what charisma is until you meet someone like Claude. Everything you say is valid and important, you are always worthy of his time, and you know what? Deep down, you just think the same way. I mean, even now, after everything I still miss listening to him talk.

The Divine Chains philosophy was pretty simple. Throughout history there have been ten great links, holy figures of divine wisdom who were the manifested will of humanity to understand and better itself. All the heavy hitters you'd expect on the list: Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, Ramakrishna - you get the idea. They weren't reincarnations, per se, but the same divine impulse for human elevation manifested in different people. Claude Vilakazi was *definitely not* claiming to be the Eleventh Link, oh no. But he had had a vision that the Eleventh was soon to be born, and that he was to be their herald and guardian. The actual practices were a grab bag of all sorts of occultism, exactly what you'd expect from a group who laid claim to basically every major religion.

Honestly I don't know how much I actually believed any of it, but I felt like I belonged there. I sold what little I had in order to fully earn my place in the community and I stayed. I had shelter, food, all the companionship I could ask for. I spent my days working in the field. We actually produced one of the only American rounds of rice-wine, which was how the cult made most of its money. And it felt good to be working with my hands. When the whole thing collapsed the papers made all sorts of awful claims about the place, but I don't know if they were wholly made-up, or if they happened the whole time and I just didn't notice. Or if they came about after things started to change. Started to go rotten.

I wasn't there when they found the dog. Maybe if I had been, things would have been different. It was actually Joyce and a few others who stumbled across it while working the fields. The way they told it, it was thin and emaciated, barely able to walk and clearly suffering from some sort of sickness, but there was something in it that drew them closer. (*static builds*) As Joyce put it, we couldn't help but love it. They took it to Claude, who was just as taken with the thing, and decided to adopt it. He named the dog Agape in front of everyone and took it into his private room to be cared for. That was the last I saw of the thing and... honestly, I kind of forgot about it for the next few weeks. But that was the moment when things started to get really weird.

Claude announced at evening meal a few days later that he had been dreaming of the Eleventh, and there were going to be some changes to help spiritually prepare us for their arrival. We needed to achieve a state of pure love. And to begin with, what that meant was that whenever we would meet one another or pass each other in the corridor or fields, we were to tell each other that we loved them.

And, Claude said solemnly, you have to *mean* it. At the time it didn't seem so sinister and we all began to do it without question, until a week later when I bumped into Mary outside the showers.

I told her I loved her and began to walk on, when her arm shot out and grabbed me by the shoulder. She spun me to face her and looked me dead in the eye.

"I don't believe you," she said.

I mean, she was right. She and I had never really got on, just two different personalities, but in that moment I was suddenly terrified of what might happen if she thought I was lying about it. So I said it again, and I tried very hard to mean it. Her eyes bored into me and I noticed that they were yellow and sickly, like she had really bad jaundice. And she nodded once, turned, and left.

It was about that time that the rice wine started to go bad. Every batch we brewed came out cloudy and undrinkable. We couldn't figure out what was going on. I spent so long cleaning every piece of equipment over and over again, but it just kept happening. When we raised it with Claude or any of the others in the inner circle they would nod understandingly, then tell us it didn't matter, that it was no longer our concern now that the Eleventh was so close. All the others seemed to accept this without question, and I didn't feel I could press the matter without drawing negative attention, something I was desperate to avoid doing. So I just sat there as it grew bitter, cloudy, and rancid. Nobody bothered to get rid of the wine and the smell gradually began to permeate through the building.

Those closest to Claude began to change as well. Everyone in the community had always been very touchy-feely, but now it seemed like they were always touching

each other, or holding hands or in some way, pressing their skin to each other even at mealtimes or in situations where it seemed really awkward. A few times they touched me, hugged me or shook my hand, and each time I could feel myself struggling not to recoil. They'd stare at me with their yellowing eyes and their skin was dry and somehow sticky when I pressed it. It yielded ever so slightly like there wasn't anything solid inside. Even then, I didn't think to leave. I couldn't figure out what was going on but I trusted Claude so completely I couldn't imagine it was truly harmful.

Then came the day when he announced that the Eleventh had arrived. I expected cheers, excitement, but instead there were just murmurings of resolve and determination as though a difficult task lay ahead. Claude asked who was going to be the first to meet them. Everyone went quiet, awed by the sudden opportunity for divine benediction. He walked up and gently touched Joyce on the cheek, and she smiled with a happiness more pure than I'd ever seen on a human face.

We formed into a long line, a chain holding hands with Joyce at the very end of it. It stretched from one end of the building to the other. I was at the other end so didn't see what happened when she walked to Claude's private chambers, but as she did, something passed down the line. I don't know how to describe it really. Did you ever do that experiment in science class, where you held hands in a line and the teacher passed a very gentle electric shock down through the students, feeling of a charge going through you? It was like that but what passed through us was warm and slick, and seemed to flow through my body like oil and out into the ground. Everyone felt it. Their blissful smiles made me feel even more nauseated than the sensation itself. I never saw Joyce again.

Each day after evening meal, Claude chose someone else to meet the Eleventh. Each time, the same process, the same daisy-chaining of hands, at the end the same sick feeling sliding through me. Another member of the community gone, the line getting shorter. A fear fell over the others and at first I thought it was the same fear that I had, but when I heard them talk of it, what they feared was that they *wouldn't* get chosen. That somehow this chance for pure, divine love would pass them by. And I suddenly came to the realization that perhaps I didn't belong here like I thought I did.

So one night I decided to see for myself. I waited until after lights-out and slipped from the dormitory through the empty corridors towards Claude's private rooms. The moon was bright through the window, casting everything in stark pale shadow. As I got close, I began to smell it. It wasn't rancid, not like the wine, but sweet like overripe fruit or sugar that's cooked too long. I found myself standing in front of the understated wooden door that I'd now seen almost a dozen people disappear into. My hand reached slowly for the handle, when I heard someone moving behind it.

No, it wasn't someone moving. It was many people, I'm sure of it. The sounds of dozens of limbs moving and stepping and shuffling in unison. Then laughter. Then weeping. Then movement again. I looked down at my shaking hand, and saw that seeping under the door was something slick and colorless, a greasy residue that smelled overpoweringly of that sickly sweet odor.

I took a step back, suddenly nauseated and almost fell into the arms of Claude, who had silently come up behind me. He held me for a moment,

looking with such intensity that I felt like he was weighing my soul, his expression unreadable. Then he sighed and shook his head.

“You do not belong here. You are not worthy of its love. Leave.”

Even after everything I’d seen I can’t tell you how deeply those words hurt me. I turned and I ran out of the building, out of the compound, out into the night. I ran until I reached a road, then sat there shaking until a passing car took pity on me and took me down to the local sheriff’s office. Eventually my case got passed up the line; apparently a few different government agencies were interested in the Divine Chain, mainly for possible tax fraud, and my testimony was pretty much exactly what they needed to go in there and check it out. They didn’t tell me what they found until after I’d had a few sessions with a psychiatrist who specialized in cult deprogramming, and I’m sure it wouldn’t be hard to find out most of the details online. I’m pretty sure it made national news.

There is one thing, however, that I think they lied about. The reports detailed a mass grave in the rooms of Claude Vilakazi with bodies mutilated and mixed together, some who’d been dead for weeks, but I don’t believe that. Whatever was in that room, I am absolutely sure that when the authorities arrived it was still alive. I just don’t know what alive means when it comes to something like that. It doesn’t matter though. The compound was destroyed in an ‘accidental generator explosion’, and everything was gone.

There’s a part of me that’s glad, a sick little part that’s happy, that whatever love was there, whatever I couldn’t be a part of, is gone from the world. And no one else gets it either.

ARCHIVIST

Statement ends.

I swear, I almost find the cult dedicated to the dark powers of fear easier to understand in the more mundane sort. At least they have some consistency.

(inhale) This, well... the Corruption at work if I had to guess, though with unsettling echoes of uh, Fleshliness.

I suppose, uh -

[Static rises.]

Wait.

Oh, uh. **(clears throat)**

[A phone rings.]

ARCHIVIST (Cont.)

(Heavy breathing) Yeah, I think, um - I think you should probably get down he--

[A loud thud.]

TREVOR

Hello, lad.

JULIA

You miss us?

[The Archivist makes a noise of protest.]

JULIA

Sit. Down.

TREVOR

Or we check if you're still human enough to bleed.

(Julia laughs.)

JULIA

You've got something of ours.

TREVOR

Someone.

JULIA

Took him right from under our noses.

TREVOR

In our own house.

JULIA

I call that rude, don't you?

ARCHIVIST

Gerry wasn't yours. You had no right --

TREVOR

(Mockingly) You hear that, Julia? "Gerry"!

JULIA

Sounds like you've got pretty chummy. **(Threateningly)** Where is he?

ARCHIVIST

Gone.

JULIA

What do you mean, *gone*?

TREVOR

Not gonna ask you again, son.

ARCHIVIST

I burned the page. Released him.

(Pause.)

TREVOR

Aren't that right noble of you?

JULIA

Proper humanitarian.

TREVOR

So. Let me get this straight. We take you in, protect you from the thing that's huntin' you -

JULIA

Spare your life even though you're no help -

TREVOR

- *help* you, give you access to one of our most valuable resources, and you steal it from us, piss off back to England, and then burn it? That's just inconsiderate.

ARCHIVIST

He asked me to.

JULIA

Oh really? You always do what evil books tell you to, do you?

TREVOR

Gotta say I'm disappointed. Genuinely thought you were different... but you're just another monster. Not even worth the chase.

JULIA

You want the honors, old man?

TREVOR

Don't mind if I do.

(Trevor and Julia laugh.)

DAISY

Get away from him.

TREVOR

Oh, who's this? You got yourself a watchdog?

JULIA

More of a lapdog. Scrawny, isn't she?

DAISY

I said get back.

TREVOR

Malnourished, I'd say. How long since you last tasted blood?

JULIA

You think you can take us both?

DAISY

I'd enjoy it. I'll start with you, old bastard, he's slower and doesn't guard his neck.
And you worry about him too much, don't you? I go for him, you get sloppy.
Predictable.

JULIA

Sure. Or I slit your little bookworm's throat.

DAISY

Do it. It'll give me a chance to finish off your dad.

TREVOR

I'm not her father.

ARCHIVIST

(Winded) Not by blood maybe.

JULIA

Shut it.

(A long silence. Trevor takes a deep breath.)

TREVOR

Come on, Julia.

JULIA

What??

TREVOR

There's no rush. (**Chuckling**) We've got all the time in the world. Besides, this place is just full of monsters. She can't guard 'em all.

JULIA

(Angered, labored breathing) Fine.

(Daisy lets out a growl.)

[The door slams. Several moments of silence.]

ARCHIVIST

...thank you. I don't know - Daisy? (**Daisy groans**) Are you alright?

DAISY

Don't touch me.

ARCHIVIST

Christ, he was right, I didn't - didn't - when did you get so thin?

DAISY

I'm not, it's fine.

ARCHIVIST

It's the Hunt, isn't it? Without it-

DAISY

I'm *fine*. Just haven't been hungry. I'm strong enough.

ARCHIVIST

Clearly.

DAISY

They're not gone yet. We could still get them -

ARCHIVIST

Daisy, no. It's like you say. Don't listen to the blood.

DAISY

Listen to the quiet.

ARCHIVIST

Even so, if it's having this much of an effect -

DAISY

I'm not going back. I can't let it in again.

ARCHIVIST

But it... what if it kills you?

DAISY

Heh. Always said I was dedicated to justice.

ARCHIVIST

(Concerned) Daisy. It's not - you can't think like that.

DAISY

John. Do you have any idea how much damage you can do if you're a police officer who wants to hurt people? How much the system will protect you?

I managed to keep most of it from Basira, but-

ARCHIVIST

It wasn't you. That was the Hunt.

DAISY

We were the same.

ARCHIVIST

You'd never known anything different.

DAISY

Because I never wanted to. All that time trapped was good for one thing.

Thinking. And I did a lot of it. I've made my choice.

ARCHIVIST

Okay. So what do we do when they come back?

DAISY

I don't know.

ARCHIVIST

Come on. We'd better tell Basira.

[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, Ian Hayles as Trevor Herbert, Francesca Renée Reid as Julia Montauk and Fay Roberts as Alice 'Daisy' Tonner.