

## **MAG – 062 – First Edition**

### **Content Warnings:**

- Hospitals
- Needles
- Murder
- Body horror and mutilation

**Discussions of:** Death, blood and gore

**Mentions of:** Parental death, trespassing, knives (scalpel)

**SFX:** low drone, high pitched tone

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

**JONATHAN SIMS**

Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode sixty-two. First Edition.

**[Tape clicks on.]**

**GERTRUDE**

Well?

**MARY**

No need to rush me, Gertrude. I'm sure we've got all the time in the world.

Besides, look at this dusty old thing; expect it needs time to warm up. You don't use it much anymore, do you?

**GERTRUDE**

Tea?

**MARY**

God, no, hate the stuff.

**GERTRUDE**

Why are you here?

**MARY**

To make my statement, of course. I know the Institute and me haven't always seen eye to eye, as it were, but I thought it was the least I could do.

**GERTRUDE**

Why now?

**MARY**

Why not? Big changes are coming, Gertrude, and I have to think about leaving something for posterity.

**GERTRUDE**

Fine. Subject is Mary Keay, recorded 3rd July 2008. What is it regarding?

**MARY**

What a question. I wonder. Plenty to choose from, I suppose.

**GERTRUDE**

Hm, take your time.

**MARY**

Did I ever tell you about my first Leitner? Of course, this was before he was collecting them, so back then it was just a strange book. Odd to think there was a time before he'd stamped them with his mark. I feel we must have called them something. Did we even know how many there were? Or did we just think of each as a thing all its own?

**GERTRUDE**

I don't recall.

**MARY**

I met him a few times, you know. Must have been about 15 years ago, not long before his library burned down. He wasn't all that impressive, to be honest. Shorter than I expected and slower somehow. I expected a whirlwind of intense energy, but he was gentle, methodical, perfectly pleasant to talk to. Jurgen Leitner bored me. Whenever he came to look through my stock, he'd spend almost a full minute on each book, just staring at it, examining the

pages, and half the time leave without buying anything. Good riddance, if you ask me.

**GERTRUDE**

I wouldn't know. I can't say we ever crossed paths.

**MARY**

I suppose not. You don't really go out and look for yourself, do you? Just wait here for the researcher's leftovers.

**GERTRUDE**

Hm, It's not that bad. Sometimes someone will insist on giving me a statement directly, though I rarely see the point.

**MARY**

Mm, well, they don't understand up there. They don't know what this place is. You do, though, don't you? We're on the same side really, even if Elias disagrees.

**GERTRUDE**

If you say so. I believe you were giving me an account of your first encounter with one of the books?

**MARY**

Of course. I was very young, but I still remember it clear as day. I was nine years old at the time, so it would have been 1955. It was shortly after my idiot father had gotten himself killed and my mother was still working for your Institute. We were living in Whitechapel back then, just off Turner Street. It wasn't much, just a couple of rooms and a stove, but it was enough for us.

My mother worked long hours, as even back then, the Institute didn't pay their researchers well, and she supplemented our meagre income by working late at a factory on Globe Road. It made dressing gowns. Most of the time I was left to my own devices. If she'd had any sense, my mother would have chucked your lot and gone to work at the factory full time. She would have earned a damn sight more. Still, she believed in the work and the one thing she was never neglectful of was what she called my 'true studies'. I am grateful to her, of course. I just wish that she'd got over her slavish devotion to you and your patron.

**GERTRUDE**

You make a lot of assumptions, Mary. And I thought we were supposed to be on the same side?

**MARY**

Mm, yeah, I suppose you're right. I just like to diversify my portfolio a bit, as it were. Often during my studies, my mother would talk to me of the amazing arcane relics that filled the Institute. I'm sure you can imagine my disappointment when I finally got a look at the collection of mediocrity that you call your 'Artefact Storage'. But long before that the idea of dark and fearful items of power had taken root in my young mind. I used to spend afternoons hunting through antique and junk shops. There were plenty to choose from back then, searching for anything strange, hunting for that thing that would call to me in a dark, secret voice. I never found it, of course, not back then. But when I saw Dr Margaret Tillerson moving in across the street, I knew immediately that there was something different about her.

She was tall and thin, with long, dark hair pulled into a severe bun. She wore a deep blue woollen dress and carried an old leather briefcase that seemed constantly on the verge of buckling, although she carried it with ease. I don't know what it was exactly about her that stuck out to me, but as soon as I saw her, I knew she was what my mother had always talked about. She was touched by powers like those that watched over our family.

She had a small GP practice on Nelson Street, not far from the Royal London Hospital. Back then, Whitechapel was a heavily Jewish neighbourhood and there weren't many gentile doctors around, so it didn't take Dr Tillerson long

to build up a healthy client list. I started to watch her. Whenever my mother was at work, I would sit myself on the steps opposite her practice and watch the steady stream of patients.

Over the weeks, I started to notice something. The first time an ambulance was called to take one of her patients to the hospital, I didn't think much of it. But when another one came the day afterwards, and another three days later, it started to occur to me that there was something more within those walls than I knew. I decided that I had to see for myself.

It had not gone unnoticed to me that many of Dr Tillerson's clients did not bother to knock on her front door, simply entering with a soft call to announce themselves. Leaving the front door of her practice unlocked was no doubt good for her clients, but also provided me with easy access when I finally overcame my trepidation.

I had paid great attention to how loud the door was and timed my entry to the passing of a butcher's truck, the roar of the engine covering the sound of the door. And then, just like that, I was inside. I cursed myself for not having spent more time trying to get a sense of the interior of the building, as I had not expected the waiting room to be so sparse. There were three uncomfortable looking wooden chairs, several bookshelves filled with worn looking

paperbacks and a dim bulb in a wire cage. There was only a single door leading further into the building, with a peeling coat of plain, white paint. My plan had been to find somewhere to hide, but it didn't look like there was anywhere actually to do so. I remember I was stood there, still wondering what to do, when I heard heavy footsteps approaching from behind the door.

I froze, looking around desperately for anywhere to hide myself as the steps drew closer. I had just made the decision to flee the way I had come, when the door opened. A short man with a bristling moustache walked out, clutching a slip of paper that looked to be a prescription. He nodded at me curtly as he walked past and left through the front door without saying a word. I breathed a sigh of relief and looked down the corridor he had come from.

It was darker than I expected. The lightbulb had either blown or been turned off and there didn't seem to be any windows to let in the faint glow of daylight. There was a staircase along one side, opposite a door labelled with Dr Tillerson's name, which I assumed to be her office. As I approached, I noticed a sizeable crack in the wood below the staircase, and looking closer, saw a small door to an under-stair storage area. Opening it as quietly as I could, I saw it was empty and, judging by the dust, didn't look like it was ever used. I crawled inside and closed the door behind me, delighted to find my suspicions had



been correct: through the crack in the wood I had a clear view of the doctor's door and, I hoped, what was behind it.

I didn't have to wait long to find out. A few minutes after I had settled in my hiding place, I saw the office door open and Dr Tillerson stepped out. She walked briskly into waiting room and, after a few seconds of muffled conversation, led an elderly man back into her office. She entered first, leaving her patient to close the door behind him. He did not, and I was treated to a good view of her workplace. It was tiled, clean and shining, with a large, brown leather examination table upon which the old man perched as she hovered around him, poking, measuring and asking questions I couldn't quite hear. There was a small, sparse desk in one corner, a cabinet affixed to the wall that I assumed contained her medicines and equipment, and on the floor, I could see a squat iron safe. I immediately knew that whatever fearful secrets drew me towards this doctor, they would be found within that safe.

I saw nothing of importance that day. Or the day after that, when I snuck back into the same space. I haunted the cramped shadows beneath that staircase for almost a week before it happened. I was always careful to be home when my mother would be there, but that wasn't difficult, and Dr Tillerson never seemed to lock the door to her practice. I remember it was a Sunday and the summer had made my hiding place almost intolerably hot. It must have been

almost as warm in the office, as the doctor took to leaving the door open almost all day, allowing whatever draft might come to flow through the building. I saw her inspect and treat almost a dozen strangers over the course of the morning, but still there was no hint of anything untoward. Then, shortly before she was due to close for the day, a short, matronly woman arrived. She had curly brown hair, seemed to be in perfect health and smiled like a fool as she made her way into Dr Tillerson's office.

The doctor greeted her pleasantly enough, but as the check-up began, I caught the quickest glimpse of something cruel in her eyes, a certain predatory look. About ten minutes into the appointment, Dr Tillerson walked over to her cabinet and retrieved a small syringe. She talked amiably to her patient as she sterilised the vein and pushed the needle inside. She kept chatting away as the plunger went down. She even kept talking in that low, friendly murmur as the woman with the curly brown hair began to convulse violently. Once. Twice. And then she was dead.

As I watched this, my heart was racing. I could lie and say what I saw made me afraid, but I think we both know the thrill of watching that murder inspired a very different feeling within me. A dark, vicious thing that to this day I can't fully name. But it was beautiful and strange, though what happened next was even stranger.

Dr Tillerson lifted the still warm body of her patient fully onto the table, before cutting through the fabric of the dress with a pair of shears, exposing an expanse of skin on the woman's back. Then she opened the safe. 24-18-3-15. And then the key. I only had to watch her do it once. Inside, I saw two books, one small and bound in leather, the other large and misshapen. As she retrieved the larger of the two, she brushed away what looked to be a small pile of animal bones and picked up a wickedly sharp looking fountain pen. She leaned over the still form on the table and began to write, not in the book, but on the flesh of the woman she had killed. I could see even from my hiding place that her handwriting was cramped and messy, leaving some of the blue ink flowing off her subject like blood.

After almost twenty minutes of hurried writing, she stepped back, apparently waiting for the ink to dry. She then retrieved a clean scalpel from her cabinet and, with a care she had not given the writing, she began to cut through the dead woman's back, peeling away the skin upon which she had written and leaving behind a small patch of flayed flesh. She hung it, still dripping, upon a hook that I hadn't noticed on the wall, then stepped over to the phone and made a call.

The ambulance arrived so quickly, I wondered if they had been waiting for her. Three men in the uniform of the London ambulance service entered. They

wore sullen, bitter expressions and exchanged no words with Dr Tillerson as they wrapped the woman in a body bag and took her outside. The doctor handed the oldest of them an envelope that I can only assume contained a large amount of money, and they left. I'm quite certain they never even went near the hospital.

It was now dark outside and I knew that my mother would be worried, but I could not leave unnoticed, nor did I want to while there was still a chance to watch more of this strange ritual. As the skin dried upon its hook, the doctor opened the large book and I saw its thick pages were roughly stitched to the spine with coarse thread. As she turned those pages, they flopped with an unmistakable softness.

She stopped at one page, seemingly at random, near the end of the book, and began to read aloud, her thin finger tracing the lines of text I could not see. As she spoke, I felt the air grow thick and heavy, a scent like wet dirt rolling through the building and settling in my chest. I don't know exactly when he appeared. In fact, even now I'm still not able to pinpoint the moment they arrive. Like falling asleep, it has simply happened already. The old man who now stood before Dr Tillerson was familiar to me, even though I didn't know his name. One of her patients, I remembered, who'd been taken away in an ambulance some three weeks before. There he stood, hunched and cowering.

He spoke in a cracked voice, begging her to release him, demanding to know what was happening. In return, she was questioning him about his will, about his bank details, or where he had hidden money.

I couldn't believe it. A power like this and she was using it to try and make money. It sickened me. It still does. I knew then that she didn't deserve the book. After she dismissed the old man, she collapsed into her desk chair, exhausted, and fell asleep.

I took my father's straight razor from my pocket. It was my most prized possession and all I had left of him after he used it to cut his own throat: the only sensible decision he ever made. I crawled from my hiding place so slowly, so quietly. She barely even stirred as the blade glided through her windpipe. I had never killed anyone before. I didn't particularly enjoy it. My inclinations, predictably, were more toward watching than doing the deed myself. Still, there was some satisfaction in the act.

I did try to bind her, but it didn't go quite right, and her page was a dreadful mess. I can't imagine she enjoys it there at all. It took a lot more practice to get it right, not to mention learning Sanskrit, but I got there in the end. After a lifetime, I know all its secrets, save one. And I have a pretty good idea about how to find that.

**GERTRUDE**

That does explain why you broke with the Institute. Who does the book come from?

**MARY**

The End, of course. I could never truly serve it. I just don't find death that interesting, but I've always found a singular devotion far too restrictive. Just ask Eric. Or what's left of him.

**GERTRUDE**

What about the other book? The smaller one?

**MARY**

Oh, just a bit of Vissera. Poems about dying animals, also in Sanskrit. Drops a lot of bones. I, I don't even think it has a real title. Pointless really. I eventually sold it to Leitner, though it came back to me after the attack.

**GERTRUDE**

I should really tell Elias about this.

**MARY**

By all means. He's not exactly big on action though, is he? He'll just be happy I gave a statement.

**GERTRUDE**

And do you have any proof of this? Your magic book.

**MARY**

Here.

**[Paper rustles.]**

You can keep this page. I made sure it was in English.

**GERTRUDE**

Oh, wh-who is it?

**MARY**

A surprise, dear. Just make sure you're alone when you read it. Goodbye, Gertrude.

**[The chair scrapes as she gets up.]**

Wish me luck.

**[The door closes.]**

**GERTRUDE**

Well, I, I don't really know what to add to that. If what she says is true, I should think carefully before reading this page aloud. I should probably destroy it.

**(Sigh)** I do rather hate the smell of burning skin. Anyway, that's a decision for another day.

**[A floorboard creaks.]**

I could rather do with a cup of tea, I think.

**[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on.]**

**ARCHIVIST**

There's a lot here. In many ways the context this gives Mary Keay's odd relationship with death is the least interesting part of it. I knew that her family was connected to Jonah Magnus and the Institute somehow, but I had no idea that Gertrude was involved, even if they didn't like each other. Maybe I should have known. Elias might not have killed her, but there is a lot he's not telling me. I'm afraid to ask though. The Magnus Institute is not what it appears to be and, until I know what it is and what it's for, there's no way I'm letting Elias know how much I'm aware of.



But in spite of all that, I'm strangely excited, because what sticks out to me more than anything else in that tape is the very distinctive floorboard at the end.

**[A floorboard creaks. It's the same one as in the recording.]**

One that hasn't changed in the eight years since this statement was given. There's never been any reason to look closely at a random section of floor. This bit wasn't even breached by any of the worms.

**[Floorboards are moved.]**

Because it had Gertrude's hidden compartment beneath it. Mmm. No strange skin page. But there is a laptop. And a key. I wonder what it opens?

End supplement.

**[Tape clicks off.]**

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

The Magnus Archives – Episode 062 – First Edition

It featured: Sue Sims as Gertrude Robinson, Carrie Cohen as Mary Keay and Jonathan Sims as The Archivist.