

## MAG – 126 – Sculptor’s Tool

### Content Warnings:

- Body horror
- Emotional trauma
- Altered reality
- Human remains
- Emotional manipulation

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

**JONATHAN SIMS**

Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode one hundred and twenty-six. Sculptor’s Tool.

[Click. Rustling of papers accompanied by wincing]

**ARCHIVIST**

Statement of Deborah Madaki, regarding an adult art class she took in the spring of 2004 and her interactions with Gabriel, a fellow student. Original statement given 11th October 2009. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, the Archivist.

Statement begins.

**ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)**

So, there’s a community centre about five minutes’ walk from my house. Used to be they only ever hired the hall out for weddings, parties, occasional public

events, but about five, six years ago they got a new organiser in, Jenny. Lovely woman. Young. Very keen to make the community centre just that: the centre of the community. So, she put together this huge program of adult education classes. Mostly just the standard stuff – dance, life drawing, yoga, computer skills – but there were a few that were a bit more out there. They had a cheesemaking course that ended with us all bringing in our somewhat less-than-successful cheeses and trying to pair them with wines. Still amazed no-one got food poisoning from that one. And there was a fire-eating workshop once. I didn’t go to that one.

Anyway, I’d become great friends with Jenny through the church choir, and since George was off to university and Rosa was usually working evenings, I tended to be alone until about ten or eleven most days. So obviously I started going to as many classes as I could. It was a great way to meet friends, learn new skills and, as she always reminded me, spend a good portion of Rosa’s paycheque.

Now, about a year after Jenny had taken over, the workshop schedule started listing a bi-weekly sculpting class, which was great news, because I’d been telling Rosa just the day before that life drawing and watercolours were all very well, but I really like to get a bit more hands on with making art. Then Rosa made an off-colour joke about life drawing and getting ‘hands on’ and I forgot about it, but I still ended up going to the class.

There were only a few of us learning to sculpt, probably because the class had quite a high materials’ cost and was a bit earlier than the others. There was me, Mary, who works at the post office, Bill, who I knew from walking his dog, and Ray Quinton, who was actually teaching the class, though I didn’t know him outside of that. And then there was... him.

The man who introduced himself as “Gabriel” was short and squat, with knobbly, bare arms that seemed to reach down almost to his knees. He had dark hair he clearly kept short because he thought that nobody would notice how greasy it was, and his face jutted out like it was trying to escape his skull. Now, I’m not one to judge on appearances – I was the one who insisted Desmond still come to church after his operation – so please don’t think it was his ugliness that set me against that horrid little man. There was just something about the way he moved, as if he was always too close, right into your personal space, but then you’d look again and he wasn’t. When he walked up to me without warning and introduced himself, I only just managed to stop myself obviously recoiling. It was just a feeling.

So, our first lessons were very basic, all about how to properly move and shape the clay, how to use armatures and the different tools, and how they interacted with the material. We weren’t really doing much in terms of actual sculpting, just listening and watching Ray do his demonstrations. At least, me, Bill and Mary were all watching him. Gabriel seemed quite content to ignore our teacher entirely, focusing instead on the lump of clay in front of him. His rough, sausage-like fingers twisted and warped it with ease. I found it a difficult, heavy material to work with, never quite as wet as I needed it to be no matter how much water I added, but looking over at Gabriel, it was like it was alive in his hands, eagerly bending itself into whatever shape he wanted.

And those shapes were... odd. I remember one of our earlier projects was just to do a fish, just a rough shape of a fish, nice and simple. Ray had even premade some armatures for us. I mean, I still struggled, and Mary and Bill had a good old go at it, but over in the corner, Gabriel just began grabbing and moulding and twisting into a shape that was... well, it certainly wasn’t a fish. It

sort of almost started out like a fish, but it just kept going and going, looping back and into itself, as though it was swimming through its own body.

After a half hour, I’d almost completely forgotten my own work, instead just staring at this serpentine structure that the dreadful man was building. The most infuriating part was that whenever Ray would pass his table, he’d just nod gently to himself and trade a few words with Gabriel, as though whatever it was that he was trying to make was in any way similar to the practice we’d been assigned. I know, it was an amateur class and he was under no obligation to do exactly the work as instructed, but Ray was very clear with the rest of us that we were doing things in a specific order for a reason, and it was just a bit frustrating to see him nodding along to that awful man flagrantly disregarding what we were meant to be doing.

At one point, Gabriel must have noticed me staring. He looked back at me for the longest time, far longer than I was comfortable with, and then he picked up his nasty, spiralling clay fish, and walked over towards me. I could feel my hairs standing on end as he got closer and he held it towards my face. He asked me if I could help him, because he was having a bit of a creative block, and I remember thinking he had palest eyes I’d ever seen. Then my gaze focused back onto the thing in his hands, that dead, curling lump of clay, and I watched it move.

It coiled around, through its own face, and flailed its long, distorted fins in desperate, pained movements. It made a noise that sounded like a scream heard through water, and stretched out towards my mouth, which I’ll admit was hanging open in horror. If I hadn’t screamed and fallen backwards, I am sure the thing would have dived down my throat.

The others rushed over to me, making all the appropriate noises of surprise and concern, but I could only watch as Gabriel rushed back to his bench and started to furiously work on his sculpture again. He looked over at me and I heard him speak quite clearly, though no-one else reacted to it.

“What an excellent idea,” he said. “A very promising direction indeed.”

I quit the class after that. I emailed Ray to explain that I would no longer be attending and left it at that. Obviously, I didn’t tell him exactly what I’d seen, but I thought some general references to inappropriate behaviour from one of the other students would get my point across. And then I continued with my life and I didn’t give Gabriel another thought. At least, not until I went to my salsa class the following Thursday, and instead found myself walking into a room set up for sculpture.

I was obviously taken aback at what had to be a really significant scheduling issue, but having a quick check of the timetable of classes it looked very much like sculpting had always been on a Thursday, which didn’t make much sense to me, stood there in my dancing shoes and feeling like a fool. Gabriel gave me a sheepish smile and returned to whatever it was he was working on. Ray seemed absolutely delighted to see me and made such a big show of it that I didn’t really feel like I could just turn around and leave. I asked him if he’d got my email, and he nodded emphatically as he ushered me over to my table, but didn’t elaborate. Bill gave me a slightly pained smile, but when I asked if he was alright, he just shrugged and told me he couldn’t complain. There was no sign of Mary. They still haven’t found her.

So, I started to work. Ray told us the lesson was faces. I put my hand up to say that sculpting faces was probably a bit advanced for where we were in the

course, but he shook his head and said that we were a lot more talented than we thought. He said the key was that faces were twisted. All faces were twisted on the inside, and all you had to do was reach into the deepest part of yourself and put that twisted on the outside of the clay and, as soon as you can scream, you’ll have your own face staring back at you. I asked him to clarify and he nodded again. ‘Soon as you can scream,’ he said, glancing over nervously to Gabriel, who gave him a big thumbs up, like it was all some joke they were playing. It didn’t feel like a joke, let me tell you.

I did my best, prodding and shaping the clay, trying to do a face. And I think I actually made a pretty good stab at it, given how unhelpful our instructions had been. I mean, it had two eyes, a mouth and something that might charitably have been called hair. I asked Ray for his expertise, but he was just standing at the front of the room, smiling and nodding. The face Bill was working on looked like Mary, although he’d made her mouth much, much too wide. To be honest, it gave me quite a shock to see.

Then I heard that shuffling sound from the other side of the room and I knew Gabriel was walking towards me, no doubt holding some unpleasant new shape he’d formed just for me. He coughed gently and, well, I suppose it would have been rude not to look.

The structure he held in his hands made my eyes hurt. Thin, sharp lines angling off from each other in an incredibly intricate arrangement, although they never seemed to actually connect with each other. It shifted like the other one and I felt something jabbing at my skull like a migraine. Finally, the lines seemed to resolve into a clear shape: a door.

“Perfect!” Gabriel told me. “It looks just like him.”

I asked him if it was supposed to be a face, and he told me yes, it was a good friend of his. I asked him who, and he said they didn’t have a name. I told him everyone has a name, and he said his friend wasn’t like us, that having a name would only confuse them.

My head was pounding. I looked over at Ray, still nodding and smiling, and then over at Bill, who was steadily shovelling fistfuls of the clay Mary into his mouth. I don’t remember anything more of that lesson.

The last lesson was on Monday. It wasn’t watercolours, and never had been, according the schedule I had been obsessively checking so much that Rosa had started to get worried.

The room was larger than I remembered, although it didn’t need to be, because there weren’t any tables. Ray was there at the front, but he was singing something in a high tenor that I couldn’t make out. I tried to ask him what we were doing for the lesson, but he just sang louder.

Bill was there, but he was made of clay, his limbs being worked and twisted by Gabriel into strange, spiralling shapes, and occasionally joined into new and impossible positions. As soon as Gabriel spotted me, he hopped up and hurried over to me. He grabbed my hand in a firm, damp grip and started to thank me. I was the best assistant he could have asked for, he said, he’d improved so much because of me.

As he said this, the structure beneath his face shifted, pushing it further and further from where his skull should have been, and behind his teeth, at the edges of his eyes, I saw the dull red of shifting clay. His smile kept getting wider, and bending in on itself at the edges, and where his fingers touched the

back of my trembling hand, I could feel his spiralling fingerprints start to turn around and around. The marks won’t come off, no matter how hard I scrub.

That was when I ran. I suppose I could have run before then, but I wouldn’t have wanted to seem rude and it’s not like any of it could have been real, is it? It was just me losing it a bit. It has to have been. I mean, I’ve seen Ray and Bill around since. Certainly, they don’t like to make eye contact and Bill cries a lot in church, but they’re still here. They’re fine; so it didn’t happen. There’s no reason for me to stay away from the community centre. There’s no reason for me to sit inside all evening, trying not to look too closely at any of the doors.

I got a letter a week ago. It was from Gabriel. It said that he had found a new job, and he’d love it if I came up to assist him again. He’s working in a place called Sannikov Land. I looked it up. It doesn’t exist. And it sounds cold.

I don’t think I should go.

I’m not going to go.

#### ARCHIVIST

Statement ends.

The Worker-in-Clay, that’s what Michael called him in his statement. A Great Twisting, that Gertrude stopped at the cost of a single life.

I thought moving away from my humanity would have made that seem more acceptable, that sort of sacrifice, but it just makes me sad. I remembered Gertrude’s notebook. We found it alongside the plastic explosives, but it rather got lost among the business of... saving the world at the cost of two lives. It, it’s borderline incomprehensible, not because of any code or cipher, there’s

every chance I could read those, just simply because most of it is numbers or fragments of sentences that would no doubt mean something to her, but not to me. I've been staring at it for hours in the hope something from it would just come to me, and it worked well enough to point me towards this statement, which is useful background, and perhaps gives some insight into how Gertrude formulated her counter-rituals, but not much more.

I've been trying to check on Melanie's condition. She refuses to see me. Understandably, I, I suppose, and Basira has been looking after her. It hurt, of course, but... I really hope getting that bullet out of her helps, at least stops it from getting any worse.

I can't have been too late again.

**(Bitter chuckle)** There was a tape recorder waiting for me when I sat down. They're not even hiding it anymore. There weren't any tapes from when I was... away. I checked. Whatever they are, they are here for me. I suppose I should be worried, but I have so much to keep watch over. So, I've decided to let the tapes run. They've proved useful before, so...

I did do a small bit of follow-up on Deborah Madaki, just for my own curiosity. She didn't go to Sannikov Land in the end. I don't know, however, whether that was because she decided not to, or because shortly after this statement was given they found the body of one Mary Roundall in her basement, and she has spent the last nine years in Eastwood Park Prison, where she remains to this day. I can't find any evidence relating to the condition of the body, but I can imagine what a sculptor's apprentice might be capable of, even an unwilling one.

End recording.

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on. Martin types at a computer accompanied by the occasional soft sigh.]

**MARTIN**

Oh, hello. Haven’t seen you in a while.

[Continues working]

Really? I mean, it’s just admin. It’s not exactly thrilling listening.

...

Right, fine, whatever. You do you. Spool away, I guess. Just, you know, let me know if you need some more batteries or something.

It’s because he’s back, isn’t it?

(Deep sigh) He’s back so now you’re going to be... around again. Listening in.

Hmm, you missed him, didn’t you?

...

Yeah. Yeah, me too.

[Static squeal]

**PETER**

Which isn’t a great sign, if I’m being completely honest.

(Martin inhales in shock.)

You talked to him?

**MARTIN**

I-I-I tried not to... I-I-I didn’t mean to—

**PETER**

You talked to him. And that’s understandable, Martin, of course it is. Please don’t think I’m upset. It’s just... not ideal. Shows how much work we still have ahead of us.

**MARTIN**

If I keep avoiding him, people will get suspicious.

**PETER**

They’re already suspicious, Martin, that’s not the problem. I had hoped that all this time apart would have given you the space you needed, but...

**MARTIN**

You said he’d probably never wake up.

**PETER**

And he beat the odds. Which is good. But it does make things more complicated. It doesn’t actually change anything.

**MARTIN**

A-A simple hello isn’t going to make any difference to—

**PETER**

We’ve been over this. The sort of power you’re going to need relies on your—

**MARTIN**

Obedience.

**PETER**

—isolation. It needs to be you, Martin. You’re the only one who could possibly balance between the two.

**MARTIN**

But if I could just explain—

**PETER**

And how do you think John’s going to react to that explanation? Hmm? Do you think he’ll accept it calmly? Come through with a well-considered, rational response?

**MARTIN**

That’s not fair.

**PETER**

Or would he assume he knows better than you and do something rash?

**MARTIN**

I don’t like being manipulated.

**PETER**

That’s fair. But I’m not wrong.

**MARTIN**

No.

**PETER**

Martin, this isn’t how any of us wanted it to go, but here we are. And if we don’t pull this off, it’s over for everyone. John included.

**MARTIN**

Yeah, you said.

But if things are really so urgent, then why didn’t Elias say anything?

**PETER**

**(Chuckles)** Because behind all his bluster, Elias is just like all the rest. He’s so preoccupied playing the game, he doesn’t pay attention to the big picture. He managed to convince himself that he could get his ritual off first, which would have made all of this a bit moot, but that’s not really an option anymore. So it’s down to us, you and me, the dynamic duo.

**MARTIN**

And, so, what, that means I have to trust you?

**PETER**

It would make things a lot simpler.

**MARTIN**

**(Annoyed)** Yeah, well, things would also be a lot simpler if you weren’t so cryptic about everything!

**PETER**

Well, if your archives were a bit better organised, it wouldn’t have taken me almost three months to find the evidence you needed.

**MARTIN**

What?

**PETER**

I’m just saying, that we’d all be a lot better off if your Archivists actually knew how to archive.

**MARTIN**

(Sharply) Peter.

**PETER**

Yes, well, unless I’m mistaken, I believe I’ve unearthed a few of Dekker’s old statements. Of course, I still need to do a bit of verification, but I’m confident they should provide you with all the context you need.

**MARTIN**

Good.

**PETER**

Great.

**MARTIN**

...

When all this is over, I’m telling him everything, with or without your permission.

**PETER**

Martin, when it’s over, you won’t want to.

**MARTIN**

Hm.

**PETER**

But he will be safe. They all will.

**MARTIN**

Yeah.

**PETER**

...

Anyway, I’m very excited to see this rota you’ve put together.

**MARTIN**

Oh, oh... okay.

**PETER**

Never had much of a gift for administration myself, too many variables. Now, this box on the left, that’s the Library stuff, yes?

**MARTIN**

Wh—? No, no, that’s the— those are the dates. I—Look, are you sure you don’t want me to teach you? It’s, it’s a very simple programme.

**PETER**

No, no. Can’t stand computers. Besides, that’s why I have an assistant, isn’t it?

**MARTIN**

Yeah. I guess so.

**[Tape clicks off]**

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

The Magnus Archives is a podcast distributed by Rusty Quill and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Sharealike 4.0 International licence.

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

It featured: Jonathan Sims as the Archivist, Alexander J Newall as Martin Blackwood, and Alasdair Stuart as Peter Lukas.