

MAG – 146 – Threshold

Content Warnings:

- Adverse mental health discussion

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode one hundred and forty-six. Threshold.

[Tape clicks on.]

ARCHIVIST

Statement of Marcus MacKenzie, regarding a series of unexplored entryways. Original statement given September 1st 2003. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, the Archivist.

Statement begins.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)

So, my dad tells me he's been bothering you with his nonsense? I just wanted to come over and set things straight, apologise for any of your time that he might have wasted. He's just a lonely old man looking for attention and trying to manipulate me into moving back in with him, even though I've told him so many times that that's just not going to happen. The doors thing isn't even his, you know? That's what he talked to you about, right? Some magically

appearing door? Yeah, well, he's just trying to send me a message, which has been received loud and clear.

I suppose I do probably owe you some sort of explanation. **(Sighs)** Right. I'd been living with my parents a while. I kept moving out, but it never seemed to stick. First was uni; fine, moving back in after a degree is normal. Then there was my divorce back in '93 – that landed me back in my old room for a while. Then my company went bust about four years ago and wiped out all my savings. All told, I must have spent most of my twenties, and not a small amount of my thirties, living in that house, with my mum and dad. It was alright, but each time the vibe was worse.

My mum was always happy to have me, but she wanted me to move on with my life. But Dad was weirdly protective of me, kept trying to keep me around, like he was terrified that the world outside was going to hurt me. I was quite depressed back then and his attitude put me in a really weird headspace. I think it comes back to the doors, you know? I think he always secretly thought that I had some deep-seated mental illness, even though they did so many tests and the doors were the only things that it ever was. Aside from the depression, obviously. But they were just specific, weird little hallucinations that have long-since stopped. Haven't had one in ... Well, it's not important. But my dad always thought it was a sign of something deeper, something that was ... something that was going to destroy me one day. So, whenever I was living at home, he smothered me, tried desperately to keep me around.

Don't you see? That's what this whole thing is all about. He's been so lonely since Mum died and he is trying to get me to move back in with him. He's pretending that *he* is starting to see the doors. He thinks if he pretends to share in my "madness", as he always called it, then I'll be worried about him,

I'll stick around. But I'm not mad and he's not seeing any doors. I'm sorry he's so lonely, truly I am. I try to see him as much as I can, but I have my own life and I can't be there all the time. And I don't like being manipulated. I don't like being lied to.

The first door I remember seeing that shouldn't have been there must have been when I was five or six. I had this skipping rope, bright green, old and ratty. I made my mum buy it for me at a car boot sale and I loved it. I could spend hours on the playground just stood there, jumping happily. We weren't really supposed to bring our own toys to school, but no-one stopped me. It was thicker, heavier than the one the other kids had, a proper rope that needed a good bit of strength to really swing. I was fiercely proud of it.

So, one night – it was in the Christmas holiday, so I must have been six – I wake up. There's a noise in my room, like something being dragged along the floor. Well, I look over and, in the weak orange glow of my nightlight, I can see the heavy wooden handle of my skipping rope moving slowly across the floorboards and out my bedroom door. I don't remember panicking. I'm not even sure I was scared, not at that point, but I didn't like anyone else except my friends touching my toys, so I got up and hurried to follow. I chased it sleepily out of my bedroom and down the hall, past the stairs and towards ... a doorway I didn't recognise. I was sure that when I'd gone to bed it had been a patch of wall with a painting of an old sailboat on it, but now it was an open doorway. A small amount of light leaked from around the edges of the door to my parents' room, behind me, but it didn't reach very far at all, and beyond the threshold it was completely dark. That was when I started to feel scared.

I could see the wooden handle of my skipping rope lying in the corridor, with its heavy green cord stretching out and into the door, until it disappeared in

the darkness. I realised I was shaking. I didn't want to go through that door. So, I picked up the handle and started to gently pull on the rope, trying to drag it back out again. Instead of moving, the line went taught. Something was holding the other end, and it was trying to pull me. For one awful moment, I found myself frozen in a tug-of-war with whatever was stood inside that door, clinging desperately to that rope as it stretched away and vanished into blackness. But I was six, and I felt myself starting to lose my footing and fall towards it, so I did the only thing I could. I let go and I watched my most treasured possession disappear forever as the door closed behind it, and I ran back to bed.

I told my parents, of course, but they didn't believe me. They just thought I'd lost it and was making up wild stories to cover it up. The wall was the wall again, and the picture of the old sailing boat was back where it should have been.

The next time, I was eleven, and that time the door wasn't really there. Well, it was, but it was covered in concrete. It was in this old alley about five minutes' walk from my house, and one of the buildings was this abandoned warehouse. At least, I think it was a warehouse. The wooden signs were rotted away and the windows had all been broken, and the main door had been covered in a layer of perfectly smooth, grey concrete. I passed it on the way home from school almost every day, and something about that blank grey space, where a door should have been, always gave me a slight shiver of unease.

Then one day, I was walking past, and the door that stole my skipping rope was there. The thing was, though, I couldn't see it, because it was still covered in that concrete. But I knew it was there. Before, there'd been nothing behind it, but now, I was certain. Now, in the centre of the concrete, were five clear

marks, as though someone had pressed their fingers into the mixture when it had still been wet.

I stood there, staring at it like I had all those years ago. It was playing with me again, but this time, it wasn't looking to play with a skipping rope. This time, it was a dare. It was daring me to put my own hand on that rough concrete, to fit my fingers into the hollow spaces it had made for me, and open it. It was a windy afternoon, but for that moment, the narrow street where I stood was completely still. I could feel the muscles in my arm tensing, preparing to stretch towards it, to accept the dare from a door that had hidden itself so sneakily under all that concrete. Then my friend Luke yelled at me from the end of the street. The fear was gone in a second, and I ran to catch up with him.

I did, however, make the mistake of telling my parents about it, and reminding them of the other time it had happened, when I was six. This time, they didn't dismiss it so quickly. First, they checked the alleyway and took some pictures of the solid, unmarked concrete of the covered entry. Then they began to make appointments and send me to specialists.

I was tested and poked and quizzed and prodded all through my teenage years. I never believed I was delusional, not like that, no matter what my father said. And neither, it seemed, did the doctors. At least, not in any way they could prove. Every test, every examination, seemed to reinforce the fact that there was nothing medically unusual about me or my mind. The only evidence to the contrary was the fact that I kept seeing the door.

When I was thirteen, it was underneath a railway bridge. It was huge and metal this time, with solid iron bolts sealing it shut and a thick chain stretched

across it. The warning stickers had long since peeled off, and someone had scrawled in chalk: 'Warning: Danger of death.' As I passed, something heavy began to bang on the other side, sending the chain dancing. It pounded again and again, and I didn't know if it was trying to force its way out, or politely knocking, hoping to be let in.

When I was fifteen, I pressed the doorbell to Sandra's house, picking her up for our first date, and I realised that it sounded wrong, like the doorbell was echoing through a hundred empty corridors, bouncing back and forth and lingering in the air. I looked again at their front door and realised it didn't lead to their house. I heard footsteps approaching on the other side from the far distance, fast and steady but getting closer. I turned and ran just as I heard the door open behind me.

When I was sixteen, I was stumbling home drunk from a house party and I found it lying open in the ground in front of me. It was wide, waiting, and I could see a long corridor stretching down and away, at a right angle to the world as I knew it, turning off into an angular labyrinth. I was trying so hard to walk carefully, to seem like I wasn't drunk, that I almost didn't notice it until it was too late. I stared into it for a long time, my eyes hazy from cheap vodka, and I saw a shape walking calmly along the vertical floor.

When I was eighteen, I was driving a group of friends to a concert in Leeds, when we pulled into a service station to get some lunch. They didn't hear the scream coming from the small stone structure just next to where all the coaches parked. They didn't see the drag marks that led across the tarmac and under the door. I didn't eat lunch that day.

The last time was the worst. It hadn't happened for almost fifteen years and when I saw it I almost wept. It was when I was living in Oxford, up Cowley way. A few streets over, there was an empty plot of land, just scrubby plants and junk. If there'd ever been a house there, it was long gone. A few of the older residents said it burned down in the seventies, but they were always real weird about it. I passed it whenever I was heading down to get a drink at the City Arms.

The last week before I had to move back in with my parents, I was at my lowest point. I was bankrupt in all but name, the work of almost half a decade flushed down the toilet, and all that remained of my worldly possessions were packed up for yet another return to childhood. And as I passed that empty space of grass, there it was: a pale-yellow door, stood all alone, like the entrance to a house that I just couldn't see. It had no frame around it, but I was sure that if I grasped its handle and twisted, it would still swing open, silent and inviting.

This wasn't like before. There was no playfulness here, none of that malicious joy that I had always felt coming off it. Now there was just a cold hunger, a deep anger, as though I had no right to just stand there looking at it. The street was silent, but I could feel it screaming at me to open it. I just about managed not to. I was just about able to walk away.

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to get so deep into my own issues. I'm not mad, I know that, it's just this door is something else, and my father knows that. It's why he used it as a cornerstone of his little story, but it's just pretend. He just wants me to move back in with him, and I can't. I just can't. Sometimes, you just have to leave, even if what's on the other side scares you.

ARCHIVIST

Statement ends.

So, it seems we did have Marcus MacKenzie's statement after all. I spent so long looking for it, back when I found his father's, and no luck, but now I decide to start looking properly into Hill Top Road, and all of a sudden, I'm drawn to rearrange a filing cabinet, and what do I find behind it.

I never thought I'd miss those days, when I could throw out some half-baked speculation about drug abuse or mental illness and, woosh, away all the statements went. There is nothing in the world more reassuring than ignorance which we can mistake for certainty. But no, almost every one of those statements, those people ... That poor old man. Like I can talk. Like I'm in any position to mourn the suffering of the innocent.

But there is one thing I know an awful lot better now than I did when I read his father's statement. I know an awful lot more about doors.

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on. Angry door knocking, followed by an opening creak.]

HELEN

You rang?

ARCHIVIST

Marcus MacKenzie. Why didn't you tell me?

HELEN

Is that name supposed to mean something to me?

ARCHIVIST

No, I suppose it wouldn't, would it? Just an old man and his son for you to terrorise and feast on.

HELEN

Ah, well, the son I was pursuing long before I was even Michael. And technically, I didn't eat the old man. He passed away from terror before I even got a chance to open properly.

ARCHIVIST

And his son? Marcus? He was fine when I found his father's statement two years ago, but now, suddenly, I can't get through to him.

HELEN

No, I imagine not. I decided it was time to finish that game a few months ago.

ARCHIVIST

You... Why?

HELEN

Not sure. I suppose Helen didn't have quite the same attachment to him as a project. I'm not quite as much for decades-long campaigns of subtle terror these days.

ARCHIVIST

That's horrible.

HELEN

Is it? We do what we need to do when it comes to feeding, don't we?

...

Don't we, Archivist?

ARCHIVIST

(Softly) Yes.

HELEN

It would be better if you embraced it.

ARCHIVIST

That's not... Look, why were you trying to lure him into Hill Top Road?

HELEN

That? Oh, well, that was just curiosity. I wanted to see what would happen.

ARCHIVIST

I don't understand.

HELEN

There is something wrong with Hill Top Road – you know it as well as I do – some strange scar in reality at the centre of whatever it is the spider is spinning. When young Mr MacKenzie passed, it seemed like a good opportunity for an experiment, to see what would happen if I lured him inside. But it seems I just don't have The Web's gift for manipulation or persuasion.

ARCHIVIST

Were you controlled?

HELEN

What a delightful thought. I don't believe so, no, but the Spider's strings are subtle, so I suppose it's not impossible. Why?

ARCHIVIST

I want to know. Can The Web control another avatar, one that serves a different power? Make them do things they don't want to. Make them find victims, feed.

(Helen laughs.)

HELEN

Perhaps. Perhaps not. Would that make life easier for you? Are you so sure you didn't want to?

(Helen laughs again.)

[The Archivist slams door. The tape clicks off. The tape clicks on.]

ARCHIVIST

Been a while since you've all come to see me together. I assume it's not good news.

DAISY

No.

MELANIE

What the hell have you been doing, John?

BASIRA

Martin left a tape for us.

[Basira throws the tape onto the table.]

ARCHIVIST

And what exactly is on this— Oh.

MELANIE

Yes.

BASIRA

How many?

ARCHIVIST

Basira, I—

BASIRA

How many?

ARCHIVIST

Four.

MELANIE

Jesus.

BASIRA

Including the one on the boat?

DAISY

What one on the boat?

ARCHIVIST

Including Floyd, five.

MELANIE

Jesus.

BASIRA

Do I even want to know?

MELANIE

I do.

ARCHIVIST

Jess Tirrell, the woman on the tape, she was the fourth. I'd just tried to... I was weak, ravenous. I didn't feel... The first was a supermarket cleaner, ended up lost for a week in an endless warehouse. I didn't even... I just went in for some shopping and he was there and I just... asked. The second was... It was after I got stabbed by Melanie.

MELANIE

You are not putting this on me.

ARCHIVIST

No, that's not what I meant. I was walking the streets; I thought I was trying to clear my head.

DAISY

But you were hunting.

ARCHIVIST

Apparently. And I found a woman who, every year on her birthday, wakes up in a fresh grave, just for her.

DAISY

And the third was after the coffin.

ARCHIVIST

A man rejected by all who knew him, searching ever darker places for love. When he told me his story, he started weeping maggots.

BASIRA

Enough.

ARCHIVIST

I hope so.

MELANIE

Why didn't you record them?

BASIRA

Why do you think? Because he was ashamed.

ARCHIVIST

No, I don't ... I mean, I don't record anything anymore, not really. I just assume they'll turn on if it's important.

BASIRA

Well, they didn't.

ARCHIVIST

No, I suppose not.

MELANIE

So, what do we do now?

ARCHIVIST

I don't know.

BASIRA

You're a danger, John, a monster. You're hurting innocent people.

ARCHIVIST

So did Daisy.

BASIRA

Shut up! It's not the same thing at all!

DAISY

Basira, he has a point.

BASIRA

You didn't know what you were doing, and since you did, you've spent every waking hour resisting. He knows exactly what he's doing.

ARCHIVIST

I don't ... It's not that simple. It feels ... I don't know if I can control it. I don't know if it's even me doing it.

BASIRA

So, you say you're being controlled?

ARCHIVIST

I don't know. Maybe. The Web...

BASIRA

What was the name you said before? Annabelle Cane?

ARCHIVIST

Yes. She's been watching us; I'm pretty sure of it.

DAISY

John, I'm not sure that it's actua—

BASIRA

No. No, if he is being controlled, we need to know, and we need to know now.
Do you know where she is?

ARCHIVIST

N-not properly. I think she has some connection to Hill Top Road?

BASIRA

Then we go, now. Unless anyone has any objections?

ARCHIVIST

Not from me.

BASIRA

You don't get a vote.

MELANIE

Okay, seriously, I'm going to have to be the one to point out that this is a terrible idea.

BASIRA

Daisy?

DAISY

Be better if we could prepare.

MELANIE

I just think that we shouldn't be exposing ourselves like this until we have a little bit more than a hunch.

ARCHIVIST

She does have a point.

MELANIE

I didn't ask you.

BASIRA

Okay, fine, I'll go then. I'll do some recon on my own and update you.

MELANIE

Wait, hang on.

DAISY

Basira.

BASIRA

I'll tell you all what I find. Don't let him eat anyone's brain while I'm gone.

ARCHIVIST

That's not what I do.

MELANIE

But, Basira, come, come on!

ARCHIVIST

Well, that was—

MELANIE / DAISY

Shut up.

ARCHIVIST

So, we're going with her?

DAISY

Come on, Mel, I'll see if I've got a stab vest in your size.

MELANIE

Yeah, sure.

[Tape clicks off.]

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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, Imogen Harris as Helen, Frank Voss as Basira Hussain, Lydia Nicholas as Melanie King and Fay Roberts as Daisy Tonner.