

MAG – 024 – Strange Music

Content Warnings

- Clown dolls
- Body mutilation & suffocation
- Murder
- **Discussions of:** Family death, auditory hallucinations
- **Mentions of:** Funerals, breakup, breaking and entering

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill Presents The Magnus Archives Episode Twenty Four Strange Music

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro - Continues]

JONATHAN SIMS

Statement of Leanne Denikin, regarding an antique calliope organ she possessed briefly in August 2004. Original statement given January 17th 2005. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Statement begins.

JONATHAN SIMS

(Read aloud from the archived witness statement of Leanne Denikin)

Let me be clear: I'm not scared of clowns. I don't find them funny, either. Just a bit baffling, really. I've never understood why people would find grown men in stupid make-up and wigs funny. Or scary. It's the same with the dolls. People talk about their cold dead eyes, but they don't seem to have any problem with

statues. I suppose now I've got good reason to be scared of both. I just want you to understand, I wasn't seeing things out of fear. This happened.

It didn't come as a surprise when my grandfather died last August. I'd been living with him for almost two years at his home in Bootle, looking after him through his illness. My mother was having her own difficulties at the time and my good-for-nothing father wanted nothing to do with any of it, so looking after my grandpa came down to me. It wasn't so bad, really. My grandpa was a strange man at times. He'd been a carnie for most of his life, working with travelling circuses and freak shows all over Europe, and was something of a recluse in his later years. He could also swear a blue streak a mile wide. Get him behind the keys of a piano, though, and I don't know anyone who could play as beautifully as he could. Like I say, it wasn't a surprise when he finally died, but I still found it difficult. As you may have guessed, I don't have a great relationship with my parents and have always had some problems making friends, so... when he went it hit me hard.

I didn't go out that week. Or the next. I saw Joshua, my... partner, I suppose you'd have called him, but aside from that, I didn't see anybody between grandpa's death and the funeral. It was just me, Josh and my mother. Grandpa had never been a churchgoer, but my mother had a lot of faith, so paid for a Methodist funeral, such as it was. It was a hot, muggy day, and I remember wondering whether the stinging in my eyes was from the tears or the sweat. As it turned out, grandpa had left me his house. It didn't really sink in for a while – the house had been the most home I'd had for so long that I'd always felt it was mine in some ways.

Going through my grandpa's old papers and possessions was harder than I had expected. It was only reading some of his own letters that I discovered his birth

name was Nikolai – he'd always just gone by Nick. Eventually I sorted through everything. I had a small box of memories I wanted to keep, but... I just wasn't up throwing the rest away yet. I decided to store them in the loft. I knew the house had one, although I had never been inside. It had always been locked. It wasn't a mystery or anything, just that my grandpa hadn't needed to get anything from up there while I was living with him. At least, I thought so.

It was only then I realised I had never been inside it. More annoyingly, I quickly discovered that none of the keys I'd been given for the place were for the padlock. No luck searching for it around the rest of the house, either. In the end I had to cut the lock off with a pair of bolt cutters I found in the garage.

There was also a ladder in the garage, so getting up through the small, square hole wasn't a problem. I realised then that I didn't have a torch, and it was very dark. Despite it being the middle of summer, the loft was cool, almost cold. I considered heading back down to get a torch and a jacket, but as I reached out my hand, it brushed against something which felt like a pull-cord. I gave it a tug, and a small, weak bulb came to life, and I saw what was inside.

When I had first remembered about the loft, I'd been annoyed. I thought there'd be so much more stuff up there, days more sorting to go through. But when I turned on the light, I saw that it was almost completely empty. The only things there were an old steamer trunk, a small stool and a bright red calliope organ. The ceiling was higher than I expected as well. I could stand at my full height without stooping. I walked slowly towards the old steam organ. It was bright red and in excellent condition except for a thick layer of dust. There was a small brass plaque simply reading “The Calliaphone”. The brass pipes that stuck out from the top still shone faintly under the dust, and I noticed that

there was writing, carved onto the cover of the keyboard. It read: “Be still, for there is strange music”.

I went to the steamer trunk next, and was surprised to find it unlocked.

Opening it released a cloud of dust and I coughed a few times before I got the heavy lid up. Inside were dolls. Lots of them. They looked old, with ragged, limp cloth bodies topped with oversized round heads and large, painted eyes that stared up from their shadowed trunk. The hair on each was intricate and woollen, and while they certainly weren't the sort of dolls a ventriloquist would use, the heads had similar mouths, wooden blocks that would have opened and closed to simulate speech. At least, they should have had. Almost all of them had had their jaw block roughly torn off, leaving nothing but jagged splinters between their cheeks.

There were 23 dolls I counted in total, and only one of them still had its jaw intact. It was the oldest looking by far, and was a small clown doll. Its threadbare body was white and purple polka-dot, with three pompoms down the front and a ruff just below the head. It had no woollen hair left, but instead had a tall, pointed white cap on top. Its face was painted a pure white, and its eyes were shut, with black lines drawn across them. The only colour was a splash of red across the hinged jaw. A smile.

Like I said, I'm not scared of clowns and I'm not scared of dolls. The thing was ugly though. I was kind of relieved, actually, to have found some of my grandpa's old things that I would have no problem throwing away. Or maybe selling. They were definitely antiques, so they might have been worth something. In any case, I put the nasty-looking clown doll back in the box and closed the lid. I definitely closed the lid.

[Sound of a Door Opening]

JONATHAN SIMS

I went back over to the calliope. There was...

SASHA

I thought it was pronounced Ka-lee-o-pee?

JONATHAN SIMS

Sasha? You're... back early – I thought you were trying to get hold of those police reports for the Harold Silvana case?

SASHA

Tried and succeeded. They were actually quite helpful.

JONATHAN SIMS

Oh. well. Good work.

SASHA

So, do we know if it's pronounced “Ka-lee-o-pee” or “Kuh-ly-o-pee”?

JONATHAN SIMS

I have also heard it said as “Ka-lee-o-pe”.

SASHA

Seriously? By who?

JONATHAN SIMS

Americans.

SASHA

Ah.

JONATHAN SIMS

As far as I can tell there isn't a “correct” pronunciation. But they were originally named after the Greek muse Calliope, so...

SASHA

Are people going to understand that it's from Greek mythology?

JONATHAN SIMS

If they're working for the Magnus Institute, then I would hope so.

SASHA

I've just heard it more often as "ka-lee-o-pee".

[DOOR CLOSSES]

JONATHAN SIMS

Statement continues.

JONATHAN SIMS

(Read aloud from the archived witness statement of Leanne Denikin)

I went back to the calliope. There was no lock on the lid, or any switch that I could see on the outside. I opened it, and the keys inside shone as though they had just been polished. Now, at the time I didn't know how a calliope worked. I just thought it was like a weird pipe piano. I didn't know that there needed to be a blower working for the thing to play, and even if I had I wouldn't have known where to find one or how to use it. By rights, when I sat in front of it and pressed the first key down, nothing should have happened. The four tall rows of brass whistles should have remained silent. Instead, there came a loud, howling tone from one of the pipes and I almost fell off my seat in surprise. I remember once, hearing the sound of a steam organ could be heard from over a mile away, and when that shrill whistle sounded I could believe it.

I started to play a tune. My grandpa had had a piano once. It had broken years before and he'd never had the money to replace it, but he had taught me the basics. There was one tune that, when I was a child, I always insisted he play to me. He never told me its name, if it even had one. I always used to just call "Faster Faster", by way of a description. A cheery, upbeat circus melody that started out almost unbearably slow and gathered in tempo, getting faster and faster until my grandpa's fingers were a blur. He always indulged me when I asked him to play it, and now I played it for him. The wailing whistles were

almost deafening in that cramped space. I knew I'd probably be hearing from the neighbours about it, but I didn't care. I just played.

The tune got faster, more frantic, and I felt something building inside me. It was like final closure for the loss of my grandpa was just out of reach, and if I got faster, if I played with enough speed I could catch it. But my finger slipped and the music abruptly became a discordant cacophony. I never was as good as Grandpa Nick. I sat there in silence for a minute. When I turned to leave, though, I saw that the old steamer trunk was open, and the clown doll lay on top of the pile. Even though its painted eyes were still shut, I felt like it was looking at me. Its smile seemed slightly wider than before. I shut the trunk and climbed down the ladder.

I didn't really think about the weird things in the loft over the next week or so. I had too much else to do. It was only when Josh was next round, and asked me why the small hole into the attic was open, that I remembered. I told him I had something cool to show him, and got the ladder out. He was suitably impressed by the calliope, but freaked out a bit over the dolls. I didn't realise he was scared of them. He made me shut the steamer trunk almost as soon as he saw them, and kept looking over to make sure it was closed. I decided not to tell him about the first time it had popped open.

He asked if I could play anything on the ancient steam organ, and so I sat down and began to play my grandpa's old circus tune. Again I began to pick up speed, to play faster and faster as the whistles began to shriek. I felt a hand touch mine firmly, abruptly stopping the music. Josh stood there, shaking slightly, his face deathly pale. On impulse I looked over to the chest of dolls, but the lid was firmly shut. I asked him what was wrong and he said he didn't know. He

just wanted to leave. Now. So we did. Climbed back down out of the loft, and I lowered the wooden trapdoor behind us.

The next few weeks were... unpleasant. I don't want to go into detail. Let's just say I discovered that Josh was just another asshole after all. Our relationship was already going through a rocky patch. It didn't help that in those last weeks he became moody, short-tempered, constantly on edge. When I finally found out that he had... It doesn't matter. We broke up. It left me pretty much destroyed, coming so soon after my grandpa's death. I just tuned everything out again.

Eventually, it was tripping over a box that did it. One of the ones I'd put all my grandpa's stuff into, and never actually got round to putting in the loft. I decided to just get it over with. I guess I hoped a tidier house would give me more space to think. So for the third time, I got out that ladder and climbed into the loft. It didn't take as long to store all the boxes as I'd thought, and within an hour I was done. I had been so intent on packing away all my memories that I hadn't even looked at the old steamer trunk. As I went to climb down I glanced over, and I froze.

The lid was open again, and the clown doll was on top. It wasn't looking at me this time. Instead, it seemed to be facing a doll I hadn't seen before. This one still had its jaw as well, and I swear it looked just like Josh. Same tatty brown jacket, same old jeans. Its black, woollen hair even did that flicky thing he always spent so long getting right. It was lying against the side of the box, and I swear it looked like the clown was reaching for it. I slammed the box lid down and got the hell out of there. I bought a padlock the next day.

Now, I've brought a copy of the police report I gave, because you have to believe me that I did not play that calliope again. I had nothing to do with what

happened to Josh. I came home from the cinema about a week later to find that my grandpa— my house had been broken into. Here, it's all in the report on the burglary I gave to the police. The front door lock was shattered and it swung gently to and fro. At first I ran into my living room, my bedroom, but nothing had been taken. The electronics, my jewellery, it was untouched. I felt my stomach drop as I realised and ran towards the loft. Sure enough, it was open, the padlock torn from its hook. The calliope and the steamer trunk were gone.

They questioned my neighbours about it. None of them had seen anything except for Mrs. Harlow next door, who said she noticed two people taking out pieces of red sheet metal and brass pipes. She didn't remember any details, just said that they “looked legitimate” and she thought I was having some things moved. The police never found them.

I just need you to believe that. To know I didn't play the thing again. It wasn't my fault, what happened to Josh. God knows I hated him enough back then, but... I could never called anything like that upon him. Not like that. I don't suppose you need me to tell you how they found him. Four days later, dead in his room. His throat was crushed. And his jaw was torn clean off. The police never found it.

I wouldn't have thought of it, really. Wouldn't have... put it all together even then. Not if it hadn't been for the fact that, in the last days of our relationship, Josh had broken down. He told me that he still heard that calliope music. Far off, when he was alone. And it had been getting gradually closer. I mean, they say you can hear one from almost a mile away.

JONATHAN SIMS

Statement ends.

While I have what I would consider to be some natural reservations about a tale of murderous clown dolls, there are a few things that make me more inclined than usual to believe this statement. Firstly, as Ms. Denikin mentioned, she did provide a copy of the official police report into the burglary, which includes testimony from one Irene Harlow that appears to confirm Ms. Denikin did possess both a steamer trunk and calliope organ, so those at least existed.

The death of Joshua Drury is also at least as mysterious as she made it sound. In addition to his jaw being torn clean off his skull, residual evidence indicates that his throat was crushed with some sort of rope, apparently woven out of thick wool. There was no evidence of a struggle or of forced entry, no DNA evidence of anyone in the room aside from himself. No-one was ever arrested for the crime.

When discussing this case, Tim said it reminded him of some articles he'd read on travelling circuses in Russia and Poland during the early 20th century. On a whim, I hunted down a few of the volumes he mentioned in the Institute's library, and sure enough on page 43 of Gregory Petry's *Freaks and Followers: Circuses in the 1940s*, I found a reproduction of an old black-and-white photograph. It shows a small group of carnival workers: a contortionist, a fire-eater, two strong-men, a ringmaster and a organist sitting behind a calliope. The photograph is labelled as being from 1948 and taken in Minsk, Russia. Only the ringmaster and organist are named: Gregor Osinov and Nikolai Denikin. The name of the troupe was

(pronounced in Russian) Цирк дpyгoгo [**Phonetically: Tsirk druh-grova**] the Circus of the Other. The name rings a bell, but I can't find any other reference to it.

Ms. Denikin emigrated to South-East Asia two years ago, so was unavailable for any follow-up, but I'm sure there must be more on this somewhere in the Archives. Because I know for a fact that sitting in the Magnus Institute's Artefact Storage, is a bright red Calliophone steam organ. When I asked Elias, he just told me that the record of its acquisition was “probably in the archive somewhere” and no-one else knows anything beyond the fact that it was acquired somewhere in 2007. The keyboard cover is firmly locked, and scratched into the surface are the words: “Be still, for there is strange music”.

Recording ends.

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Outro]

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