

MAG – 092 – Nothing Beside Remains

Content Warning for:

- Isolation
- Police Brutality
- Gun Violence

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

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Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode ninety-two. Nothing Beside Remains.

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro – Continued]

[Tape clicks on. Someone dials three numbers on a phone. The phone line rings.]

OPERATOR

999, what's your emergency?

ELIAS

Police, please.

OFFICER

Hello.

ELIAS

Yes, I'm calling to report a crime in progress.

OFFICER

Sir, are you in any immediate personal danger?

ELIAS

Ah, y-yes, not immediately, but I will be shortly.

OFFICER

Sir, where are you calling from? I need –

ELIAS

Could I speak to your Chief Inspector, please? Tell her Elias Bouchard is calling.

Of the Magnus Institute.

OFFICER

Oh, er... Sure.

ELIAS

Thank you.

CHIEF

Chief Inspector Kaugery.

ELIAS

Ah, yes, er, good afternoon. Er, sorry to bother you. I believe you're looking for Detective Alice Tonner?

CHIEF

Do you know where she is?

ELIAS

I do, yes. Er, she should be here in about fifteen minutes.

CHIEF

I'll send some officers over immediately

ELIAS

That would be wonderful. Much appreciated.

[The call is hung up.]

Statement of Barnabas Bennett, as given in a short letter to Jonah Magnus.

April 9th, 1824.

ELIAS (STATEMENT)

My dear Jonah,

You must help me. If anyone is still here, it is you. I know your work brings you into contact with all sorts of fantastical terrors, so perhaps you might have it within your power to save me from this place. And it was you who warned me not to cross Mordechai Lukas. Advice that I have, I'm afraid, disregarded.

It was a small enough thing, as I believed. A trifling debt I fell behind on. And when he met me in that garden, quiet as it always is with him, he demanded repayment. Well, I took it poorly, and laughed at his insistence. "Bring it before the courts," I told him. After all, what judge would find in his favour over mine? He simply regarded me silently for many minutes, staring with such a cast to his face that I could feel my resolution beginning to falter. "You shall pay me," he said at last, "in kind." Then he walked away.

Let me tell you, Jonah, I believed myself profoundly lucky that day as my hansom deposited me on the steps of my townhouse, a mood only slightly shaken by the impression that, as the cab pulled away, it seemed to have no driver that I could discern.

I am lucky, Jonah, but only insofar as that I never married. Never fathered children. Never let anyone get closer than my brother. The pangs of loneliness I feel are no more acute than my general longing for the company of my fellow man. I have no-one whose absence truly pains me.

And yet here, in this empty world, I cannot but spend these nights, these dreadful, silent nights, huddled and frozen in some terrible fear I find myself unable to name. I almost think I hear the mocking joy of my friends, but there is nobody here, and never shall be again. I try to read, to lose myself in something that is not the absence of humanity. How is it that the books speak to me of my isolation more acutely than the silence? For every treatise I read on this world and its workings, the more I know I am to spend my time left in it without comfort or reprieve. With every tale of love or society I feel more keenly the absence of both.

I went to Egypt once with the Royal Society, to the temple of Ramses the Second in Abu Simbel. The place was remarkable, of course, but what sticks so keenly in my mind is the journey. Two days earlier, on the road from Aswan, I found myself separated from my fellow travellers. I do not know how it happened, but I spent two hours alone there, under the blazing sun, staring across the vast empty expanses of that ancient country. I revelled in the silence, then, embraced the loneliness like an old friend. But now that friend has devoured me, and I shall not emerge from its jaws. Not without your help.

And you must help me, Jonah. If anyone knows of what might break me from this dreadful place, it is you. I know that what is done by those I cannot see might be felt here – I have found glasses broken and pages torn that were not so the night before. It is my hope that if I leave a letter here, in your institute, you might find it, you might be able to save me. I have no other hope.

Please, Jonah, if you have any compassion within your heart, you will not leave me in this place.

Your loyal servant,

Barnabas.

ELIAS

Jonah Magnus did leave him in that place, John. He got the letter, oh yes, and was on good terms with Mordechai Lukas. He could have interceded, perhaps even saved him, but he did not. And it was not out of malice, or because he lacked affection for Barnabas Bennett: he retrieved those bones sadly enough when the time came. Bones that you can still find in my office, if you know where to look. No, it was because he was curious. Because he had to know, to watch and see it all.

That's what this place is, John, never forget it. You may believe yourself to have friends, to have confidantes, but in the end, all they are is something for you to watch, to know, and ultimately to discard. *This*, at least, Gertrude understood.

Let us begin.

MARTIN

Uh, sorry to interrupt, er, J-John's here! And he's – well he's – He seems – He seems angry. Um, I actually think he's brought a coup-

DAISY

Bouchard.

BASIRA

Easy.

ARCHIVIST

Hello, Elias.

ELIAS

Goodness, John. Whatever happened to your hand? And your neck?

DAISY

That one was me.

ELIAS

You look a mess.

ARCHIVIST

(Laughs) I've had a hell of a week.

ELIAS

Martin, would you be so good as to fetch Melanie and Tim. I think it would be worth their time to be here.

MARTIN

Er. R-Right. Okay. I'll just... what, go then?

[The door closes.]

DAISY

Okay. Let's do this.

BASIRA

Er, John? Do you... You want to get this on tape?

ELIAS

No need, Basira. I've already got one running.

Now, you have something to ask me?

BASIRA

Go for it.

DAISY

Before I strangle the grinning bastard.

ARCHIVIST

Elias. Did you kill Gertrude Robinson? And Leitner?

ELIAS

(Sighs, like he's enjoying himself) That's... That's quite nice, actually. Tingly... but sort of freeing. (Laughs) You know, even Gertrude never properly tried to compel me. I always wondered –

BASIRA

Just answer the question.

DAISY

Or don't.

ELIAS

Oh, no need to worry about that. I just feel it's only fair to wait for your colleagues, John. They'll want to hear this too. Uh, it's also very important to me, in a personal capacity, that you understand I'm answering you of my own free will.

ARCHIVIST

I don't care!

ELIAS

I know, but I do. There's so much of this place, of ourselves, twisted by forces far beyond us. I just wanted you to know –

[The door opens again]

MARTIN

Uh, okay, okay, so I've got everyone, but I'm honestly kind of lost as to what's happening.

TIM

Yeah, I... Oh, Christ, what is it now?

MELANIE

Er, yeah, same question, please.

ARCHIVIST

Elias here is about to confess his crimes.

TIM

What?

MELANIE

Oh. Good?

MARTIN

Is, is that like, er...

ELIAS

Yes, I was just saying to John. It's very important to me you understand that no action I have taken has been controlled. I have done everything because I wished to.

DAISY

Get to the point.

ELIAS

(Sighs) Of course, Detective. So. For the avoidance of any doubt. I killed Gertrude Robinson because she intended to destroy the Archives. And I killed Jurgen Leitner because he was... an unnecessary complication. Likely to tell John too much, too early.

MELANIE

Bloody hell!

TIM

Oh, no.

MARTIN

So-So-S-Sorry, that guy was Jurgen Leitner?

ELIAS

It was.

BASIRA

Daisy, where do I know that name from?

DAISY

Oh, the Yousuf case. An Introduction to Higher Anatomy.

BASIRA

Ah... Oh, god! And you killed him? You sure we shouldn't be giving him a medal?

ARCHIVIST

Very sure.

MARTIN

And Sasha? Did you kill her too?

ARCHIVIST

Sasha died almost a year ago, Martin.

MARTIN

Wh-What?

TIM

Oh, god.

ARCHIVIST

When Prentiss attacked, something else, it... it... it replaced her. I still don't know how, but –

TIM

Goddamn it! This is...

MARTIN

It wasn't... Sasha?

ELIAS

He's right, Martin. The thing you remember as Sasha was nothing like her. It toyed with your memory. If I showed you a picture of the real Sasha now, you'd have no idea who it was.

MARTIN

So that thing we saw...?

ELIAS

Precisely. It finally tried to kill John. Then Leitner killed it. Then I killed Leitner. And I believe that brings us up to date. More or less.

ARCHIVIST

What about Michael?

ELIAS

What about him? An irritant. Interfering because he's bored, and he resents us. He has no purpose –

DAISY

Right. That's enough for me. Even got it on tape.

Everyone get back.

[Daisy pulls out her gun.]

MARTIN

What?

BASIRA

Daisy, wait.

DAISY

Out the way.

MELANIE

Now hang, hang on, I thought you were about to arrest him.

DAISY

Get out the way!

MARTIN

John, do something!

[There's a buzz – an intercom]

DAISY

Don't.

ELIAS

Excuse me.

[Elias answers the intercom.]

Yes?

ROSIE

Elias, there are some police officers here to see you?

ELIAS

Ah, yes, thank you Rosie. Er, could you ask them to wait a minute or two?

ROSIE

Yep, will do.

ELIAS

There. That should make it even easier for you. Right, Detective? I know you were planning to kill me, but surely an arrest is a consolation prize?

BASIRA

Daisy?

ELIAS

Oh, didn't she tell you why she hadn't gone back to the station?

Allow me. She rightly suspected that I held evidence of various murders she had committed, and that I sent this to her superiors.

She's quite the killer, your partner. All in the public good, of course. And she was correct, I spent some time acquiring that evidence. Or creating it. And while your superiors don't much care about the killings, the fact there is proof... They're not happy. And they want you brought in.

DAISY

Heh. So I kill you, and go to jail. I'll take that deal.

ELIAS

For someone who used to be a detective, you're remarkably reluctant to think things through. You think you're the only police officer eager to do violence and call it justice? No, there are plenty of other rabid dogs out there, mad with the hunt. And some of them have signed a Section 31. There are plenty of others your superiors can call on to clean up this mess.

BASIRA

Er... they wouldn't.

DAISY

Yeah. They would.

ELIAS

And anyone close enough to be implicated. They will kill Basira.

MARTIN

Okay, wai-wai-wai-wait, that's the police that you're talking about! Okay, they... they wouldn't... Would they?

DAISY

I'm sorry, Basira.

BASIRA

Yeah.

ELIAS

If the officers down there take you away... Oh, but perhaps I was wrong when I called them. Maybe it was a false alarm.

DAISY

What do you want?

ELIAS

Collateral.

[A piece of paper is moved.]

DAISY

That... What?

ELIAS

A contract of employment. For Basira.

BASIRA

Uh?

MARTIN

What?

ARCHIVIST

Oh, no...

ELIAS

Sign it, and I'll send your ex-colleagues on their way.

DAISY

Basira, I...

TIM

Don't do it.

BASIRA

There.

ARCHIVIST

Oh damn it.

ELIAS

Hmm.

[Elias presses a button the intercom again.]

False alarm, Rosie. Could you apologise to the officers for me, and thank them for their time.

ROSIE (INTERCOM)

Oh. Um. Alright...

DAISY

So... what, you're her boss now? Is that supposed to stop me?

ELIAS

Yes.

MELANIE

Um, I mean, she's still got a gun?

ELIAS

Ah, of course. Er, sometimes I forget how new you all are to this.

Basira is now tied to the Institute. All of you are. Like fingers on a hand. And I am the beating heart of it. Should I, or the Institute, be destroyed, you will all, unfortunately, follow suit.

MELANIE

Wait, what?

TIM

Yup, that sounds about right.

ELIAS

And it would not be a pleasant death.

DAISY

Bullshit!

ELIAS

Then shoot me. Just squeeze the trigger, and watch the only person you care about die screaming. Your last connection to humanity. Do it.

BASIRA

Daisy...

DAISY

What do you want?

ELIAS

The police are not the only ones who can find a use for your violence. I'm sure there'll be plenty here for you to do. Feel free to go where you like in the meantime. I'll be in touch.

DAISY

You piece of –

BASIRA

Daisy, it's... it's okay. We'll figure something out.

MELANIE

This is insane!

TIM

You get used to it.

ELIAS

Now that's taken care of, if you'll all give me and John a moment alone. I'm sure we have some things to discuss.

DAISY

Yeah.

MARTIN

Come on.

[Everyone else leaves and the door is closed behind them.]

ARCHIVIST

So.

ELIAS

Come on, John, there's really no need for the scowl.

ARCHIVIST

What do you want?

ELIAS

Honestly? To offer some congratulations. You're doing a lot better than I expected.

ARCHIVIST

Feels like all I've managed to do is... not die.

ELIAS

And believe me, that is a remarkably rare skill.

ARCHIVIST

I'm not getting any answers out of this, am I?

ELIAS

The easily-digestible sort that wipe away any doubt and fear, and neatly organise your new world into happy little columns? No. Not from me. These are things you must discover on your own.

ARCHIVIST

Why?

ELIAS

(Sighs) What are you?

ARCHIVIST

I... The Archivist.

ELIAS

Precisely. It is your job to chronicle these things, to experience them, whether first-hand or through the eyes of others. To simply be told, well...

ARCHIVIST

It doesn't please your master?

ELIAS

Our master, John.

ARCHIVIST

I never chose this.

ELIAS

You never wanted this, no. But I'm afraid you absolutely did choose it. In a hundred ways, at a hundred thresholds, you pressed on. You sought knowledge relentlessly, and you always chose to see. Our world is made of choices, John, and very rarely do we truly know what any of them mean, but we make them nonetheless.

ARCHIVIST

(Sighs) So what now?

ELIAS

You were doing fine before you forced this little scene. I suggest you continue.

ARCHIVIST

So it was you sending me statements.

ELIAS

A little bit of direction never hurt anybody. So to speak.

ARCHIVIST

(Laughs) Directed towards what?

ELIAS

The Unknowing. I need you to stop it.

ARCHIVIST

Again with – What is “the Unknowing?” Exactly.

ELIAS

A ritual. The Stranger and its kin attempting to gather power enough to bring it closer.

ARCHIVIST

They're trying to, what, summon it?

ELIAS

Not exactly. These things that touch us, they... don't have a form of the sort that could exist in physical reality. So the Stranger wishes to remake that physical reality into something closer to itself. It wants to make this world its own.

ARCHIVIST

And how do I stop it?

ELIAS

That is what you need to find out.

ARCHIVIST

No. You are not doing that. I know you have Gertrude's notes, her, her files. She was working on a way to stop this. Not to mention that apparently you can... effortlessly see anything at any time!

ELIAS

Hardly effortlessly, but I take your point.

ARCHIVIST

So you obviously know how to stop it. You could just tell me!

ELIAS

I could. But I believe that if I did so, you would fail. The Stranger is antithetical to us.

We thrive on ceaseless watching, on knowing too much. What we face is the hidden, the uncanny, and the unknown. If you are to stop them, you need to get better at seeing. And my explaining things is simply not enough.

ARCHIVIST

And you can't just give me all of the statements?

ELIAS

John, even when you had them all at your disposal, you barely got through one statement a week. Why do you think that is? It takes its toll on you. And I know you've had problems with moderation.

ARCHIVIST

So it's... it's back to breadcrumbs, and statements, and risking my life talking to things that barely remember how to be human anymore?

ELIAS

For now. I'll be in touch. Anything else?

ARCHIVIST

Am I... Elias, am I still human?

ELIAS

John, what does human even mean? I mean, really? You still bleed, you can still die. And your will is still your own, mostly. That's more than can be said for a lot of the 'real' humans out there.

You're worried about ending up like that thing, lurking in the dirt under the streets of Alexandria? Don't be. Just do what you need to, and you'll be fine.

Understood?

ARCHIVIST

I suppose so.

ELIAS

Good. Well, I have work to be getting on with. I'll send you a Return to Work form, but don't worry about the doctor's note. Now, if there's nothing else?

ARCHIVIST

Right.

[Tape clicks off.]

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Outro]

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