

MAG – 051 – High Pressure

Content Warnings

- Thalassophobia
- Nyctophobia
- Suffocating
- **Discussions of:** Physical pain & violence, murder
- **Mentions of:** Decompression sickness, sexual reference, haunting
- **SFX:** Low drone, high pitched tone

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill Presents The Magnus Archives Episode Fifty One High Pressure

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro - Continues]

JONATHAN SIMS

Statement of Antonia Hayley regarding a deep dive that took place near Sable Island, Nova Scotia, in August 2006. Original statement given January 7th 2008. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Statement begins.

JONATHAN SIMS

(Read aloud from the archived witness statement of Antonia Hayley)

I should be dead, really. It's a weird feeling. You ever had a near death experience? I've had a few. They're not uncommon in my line of work. But this? It feels different. It's not that I put myself in danger and managed not to die. I should be dead. Decompression sickness that severe is almost never

survivable and I should have had an embolism. The fact that I didn't? Blind luck. It's hard to reconcile yourself with avoiding a death that you feel should have been yours. If there had been others with me who didn't make it, if I could write it off as survivor's guilt, but... I was alone. You ever get that? Of course you don't, sorry. Anyway, I'm not here to talk about the bends.

I'm a diver, both by nature and by trade. I grew up in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and was swimming almost before I was walking. I did my first scuba dive at eight years old – it was barely deeper than a swimming pool, but it was enough to instil a lifelong passion for it. I got fully qualified as soon as I was legally able and almost flunked out of college because I was always running off to some dive or other. I must have missed more classes than I went to by the end. I scraped by, but as it turned out, even if I hadn't it wouldn't have mattered too much, as it wasn't my psychology major that got me my first job after graduation. It was diving.

I worked at a marine salvage company based off the coast of Nova Scotia. You'll forgive me if I don't give their name. I still hold out hope I might go back to work there some day and I'd feel like an asshole dragging their name through the mud, even if it is just to you and your 'strict confidentiality procedures'. If you're desperate, they shouldn't be hard to identify, but it's not really relevant to what happened.

You ever heard of 'The Graveyard of the Atlantic'? Probably not, and it's a confusing name anyway since it actually refers to two distinct locations along the eastern coast of North America, both notorious hotspots for shipwrecks. In this case, I'm talking about the one off Sable Island in Nova Scotia. The waters are some of the roughest, where the Gulf Stream hits the Labrador Current, and depending on which historical records you believe, there could be

anything from four to 600 shipwrecks down there, and that's only from when the European settlers first arrived.

Normally it's not the sort of place where we would accept jobs. It's too dangerous to send a salvage crew in when the waters are that unpredictable. But this time was different. Maybe the old man was just a real sweet-talker or maybe he slipped the captain, a leathery old cuss by the name of Morton Kemp, just enough extra under the table that he fudged the location on the release forms. Either way, word came down that we were doing a dive off Sable Island.

None of that was to say the captain was stupid about it. We kept a very close eye on the meteorological reports and only headed into the graveyard when we were certain we'd have a window of relatively calm seas to do it. It helped that the job was relatively simple. The old man, Simon Fairchild, had come to us claiming that he had pinpointed the location he believed his great-grandfather's sailing yacht had been sunk almost 120 years ago, and he was keen to retrieve any heirlooms or curios he could from it. The only thing interesting or unusual about his story was the amount of money he was willing to throw around to back it up. It was certainly enough to get us dropping anchor a hundred miles from the coast on a hot, sunny morning at the end of August.

The journey out had been a bit subdued. Normally me and Julio Hernandez, the other diver on the crew, would spend our time chatting, playing cards and once even screwing, though we generally don't talk about that. This time we had to babysit Mr Fairchild, who had stubbornly insisted that he make the journey with us. Again, this wouldn't normally have been an option, but the guy was not shy about throwing his money around. He must have been

pushing a hundred years old, just a tiny pink skeleton of a man, sat in the corner watching us the whole trip. It was hard to get any sort of friendly chat going with him perched there like some sort of vulture. I tried to talk to him a few times, but he only seemed interested in discussing this shipwreck and how preserved I thought everything might be. I told him I had no idea, as it really wasn't my area. I was just the diver. He didn't say much to me after that.

When we hit the graveyard, the sea was almost completely still, far more so than I would have expected, even given the weather predictions we'd been working on. It didn't strike me as odd at the time, just an unexpected bit of help with the job. Initial checks managed to locate a wreck that seemed to match the old man's description, a steam yacht, circa 1890. It seemed to be in surprisingly good shape and in the camera's torchlight we could just about make out the name: *The Maria Fairchild*. The old man was practically dancing with joy and I was genuinely concerned he might give himself a heart attack.

We suited up and prepared to go under. The wreck was at a depth of 160 feet, which meant we'd be in a high-pressure environment, but we shouldn't need hypoxic gas or full pressure suits, which was something of a relief. Julio made his prayers, Captain Kemp gave us a stern nod, and into the water we went. As I went in, I thought I heard Simon, the old man, shout after me, but I couldn't make it out. And then the world was nothing but silent blue. I had expected the water to be warmer, given the temperature on the surface, but the chill hit me all at once and it took a moment to get to grips with it. I saw Julio next to me, a few yards away, and with a thumbs up, we began to dive down towards the sunken boat.

Most people don't appreciate how quickly it gets dark underwater. You don't need to be nearly as deep as you think before the sun is just the faintest

change in the water hues. If you're not careful, it's easy to forget which way is up and become lost in the murky depths, but Julio and I were a well-practiced team and we weren't going so far down as to face any darkness that our torches couldn't handle.

It was during that descent, when I saw that our two points of light were the only signs of movement down there, that I noticed the absence of life. I wasn't particularly worried by this; if anything, I was rather relieved. Anyone who's been diving more than a few years will be able to tell you of at least one close call with a shark, and I'd had two so far, so the less movement the better, as far as I was concerned. Still, it was a surprise that we hadn't seen even a single school of fish on our journey to the sea floor and, once we were down there, it was just as lifeless. I gestured my confusion to Julio, but he just shrugged and started over towards the wreck.

Down there, deep below the surface, I find myself sometimes entering an almost meditative state. You can feel the weight of the world, a world you were never meant to be part of, pressing in on you from all directions, and the constant, overpowering awareness of your own breathing, of how little there is between you and the very space around you that is completely hostile to your existence. The danger is real, as is the faint, hardened fear in your gut, but I've always found that it sometimes put me in a state not too unlike how it feels staring into the flames of a fire. Hypnotic – my mind cleared of all thoughts but the dull, pulsing rush of adrenaline. That feeling was so strong here that I almost swam past *The Maria Fairchild* completely.

Julio was already inside and I quickly located a large enough tear in the hull and made my own entrance. The yacht was bigger than I had thought when viewing it from the boat, but the layout was not complicated, and we already

had quite a good idea about where would be best to look for the sort of antiques and sentimental treasures that Simon wanted. Julio had taken the bedroom, so I started on the bridge. It was certainly an impressive sight – a late 19th century steam yacht, slightly decayed from its time on the ocean floor, but all in all, astoundingly well preserved. I looked over the chair and the various panels and controls, but could find nothing which could be classed as an easily removable heirloom, although I did make a mental note of which bits of the bridge were well enough preserved that they might be worth removing. It would need more equipment than we had with us, but I could suggest it to Simon if we returned empty-handed.

I checked in on Julio, but he was still busy ransacking the bedroom, so I decided to do a sweep of the engine room, and it was there I found the hole. It was large, maybe 7 feet in diameter, not unlike the one I had used to get into the wreck in the first place. But there was something about it that immediately put me on edge. The shape was too regular somehow, the water outside it was too dark and – it took me a few seconds to notice this – but the direction of the tearing seemed to indicate it had been made from the inside out. I dropped the rusted wrench I had been examining and let it float slowly towards the floor as I made my way to the hole. I gripped the side and looked through.

As soon as I put my head through, I felt a change wash over me. The pressure increased all at once, becoming so intense that I screamed in surprise and pain as my head erupted in agony. The pressure was upon my whole body now and I was finding it hard to move with the crushing weight on every part of me. My eyes bulged as I stared forward and I saw two things: the first was that below the hole there was no sea floor, just a deep and endless expanse of empty

water, as though the boat were on a cliff edge; the second was that it was far, far too dark.

The deepest that humans can survive in the ocean is the mesopelagic zone, which begins roughly 650 feet below the surface. It is colloquially known among oceanographers as the twilight zone, as it is the level where only the faintest of light penetrates from the sun and the water can only be seen in the many shades of darkness. Down that far, any glow that makes it is so diffused as to be utterly useless in determining which way is up. But as I stared out in terror, I was absolutely sure that there was no up and I could swim as far as I liked, but there would never be anything but water.

Then I saw it. It was only a shadow in the dark, but it was there and it was huge. It stretched from one side of my vision to the other and, as I fought against the pressure to turn my aching head, I still couldn't see the end of it, only its blurred outline was slightly better contrasted against the lighter shade of the twilight water that surrounded it. I could not see the ends of it. It was so big it made me lightheaded to think about it, to try and place myself in some believable scale against it. I think it was a hand, but I could not see enough to be sure. Then it moved, slowly but clearly, and I realised how far away it still was, as it got bigger and bigger and bigger and I could see nothing else and I screamed.

It was the jagged metal of the hole itself that saved me in the end. As I cried out in horror, I felt the sharp edges of it digging into my hands and they gripped it, and the unexpected burst of pain snapped me out of whatever it was that held me in place. With a surge of strength, I pushed myself back into the boat and I felt the pressure lift all at once. Of course, this brought its own set of problems, but I didn't care. The light-headedness was already setting in

and my vision was blurring when I swam out of the sunken ship and headed towards the surface at full speed, ignoring all decompression procedures. I blacked out 30 feet from the surface.

I have vague memories of the trip back, fading in and out of consciousness, feeling the worst I have ever felt in my life. Then I recall a helicopter, shouting, and finally waking up fully in a hospital bed. Captain Kemp was there and he immediately laid into me, calling me all sorts of horrendous names, before informing me exactly how serious my condition had been and how lucky I was to be alive. I should be dead, he told me, and I know he was right.

I left the company soon afterwards. I still plan to go back some day, but it'll be a while longer before I am comfortable in the water again. Julio never came to visit me in hospital and I was unable to get in contact with him after I was discharged. I hope he's alright. I did ask Captain Kemp what happened to the job after I left, as I also hadn't seen the old man since that morning. The captain got a strange look in his eyes then and gazed out of the window with a scowl I had never seen on his face before. "The sea is a dangerous place," he said, and walked away.

JONATHAN SIMS

Statement ends.

No real follow-up can be made to this statement, as it all took place in Canadian territory, and we don't have the contacts over there that we do here. Not to mention that what little I could glean appears to be a mass of overlapping and conflicting police, coastguard and port authority reports. We could spend years trying to unravel this one case if we had a mind to and I, for

one, do not. We weren't even able to glean sufficient information to track down any of those mentioned in the statement, aside from Captain Morton Kemp, who now runs boat tours near Winnipeg and declined to comment on it in the strongest possible terms.

Instead I will focus on Simon Fairchild, who I recall may have come up in case #0022010, along with a young woman.

I may have encountered Fairchild before, or it may just be a coincidence of names. One of my first cases as a researcher for the Institute in 2012, was looking into the history of a jewellers in Hackney that had reported cases becoming cracked in the night. Nothing was ever taken, but each morning it would be like a heavy weight had been dropped upon them.

Looking into it, it turned out that the jewellers had, in the 1930s, belonged to a con artist and fence who had attracted the displeasure of the local population. When one particularly irate customer threw him out of a fourth-floor window into a crowded street at midday, no one claimed to have seen anything. A minor possible haunting with a decidedly pedestrian backstory, but notable because, while I was never able to discover the original name of the con artist, one of his many, many aliases was Simon Fairchild, and had appeared on several business listings around the time.

Whether it's a coincidence or not is something of a moot point at this stage, however. A cursory bit of research reveals the Fairchilds in question to be an exceptionally wealthy family based down in Cornwall.

No real business to speak of, but it appears they've invested very wisely in aerospace technology, shipping logistics and underwater drilling and construction. Whatever their origin, I feel it's worth keeping an eye on them.

End recording.

[CLICK]

[CLICK]

Supplemental.

I had a strange conversation with Sasha earlier today. I have been doing some research into her, but there's little to go on, save that she worked in artefact storage. I decided to pay it a short visit to acquaint myself with any new acquisitions. Not much worth reporting really – a new oak wardrobe light is apparently unable to penetrate, a carved rock eye they keep in a black velvet bag, apparently it interferes with the video cameras otherwise, and a rather nasty looking scalpel that is supposedly rife with disease, no matter what they use to sterilise or disinfect it. That one's kept in a hermetically sealed plastic box.

I stumbled across Sasha staring at that damn table again. Luckily, I had the wherewithal to bring my tape recorder and managed to turn it on unnoticed. Recording follows.

[CLICK]

JONATHAN SIMS

It's fascinating, isn't it? In the literal sense, I mean.

NOT!SASHA

Yes, sometimes I can't pull myself away from it.

JONATHAN SIMS

Given recent events, I... I've been trying to figure out if it's a fractal.

NOT!SASHA

No. No, it isn't. I've always seen it more... like a web.

JONATHAN SIMS

I guess it has caught us, in its own way.

NOT!SASHA

I don't think we're the first to be caught.

JONATHAN SIMS

No?

NOT!SASHA

I believe it caught Graham as well.

JONATHAN SIMS

I thought that was... I... whatever crawled through his window. Unless you think they're linked, somehow?

NOT!SASHA

I doubt it. It didn't sound like the sort of thing that would want to be bound to an object.

JONATHAN SIMS

I suppose. And we haven't seen any long-limbed stalkers, so let's concentrate on the table.

NOT!SASHA

Agreed. If you'll excuse me.

JONATHAN SIMS

Of course.

[CLICK]

Odd, but not alarming, though I think I may discuss restricting her access to the table with Elias. Oh, and I've found out where she's been going when she takes extra-long lunch breaks. It seems harmless enough, but I admit I'm a bit baffled. Every few days, she travels up to Baker Street to spend anywhere from 10 minutes to a full hour in Madam Tussaud's wax museum.

End supplement.

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[The Magnus Archives Theme - Outro]

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