

MAG – 025 – Growing Dark

Content Warnings

- Religion
- Cults
- **Discussions of:** Manipulation, emotional abuse
- **Mentions of:** Food, parental death, insomnia, grabbing, nyctophobia
- **SFX:** High pitched tone

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill Presents The Magnus Archives Episode Twenty Five Growing Dark

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro - Continues]

JONATHAN SIMS

Statement of Mark Bilham, regarding events culminating in his visit to Hither Green Chapel. Original statement given April 19th 2015. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Statement begins.

JONATHAN SIMS

(Read a loud from the archived witness statement of Mark Bilham)

Let's get one thing straight right now. I don't think I should be here. What happened was really weird and I'm pretty sure it was illegal, but it can't have been actually supernatural. Like ghosts and stuff. That's not real. No offence, I guess. I'm just here because I told Kathy what happened, and she insisted that

I tell your Institute. She's more open to that kind of thing than me. Maybe that's why she chose to live with Natalie.

Sorry, I should start at the beginning. Kathy's my girlfriend. Katherine Harper. We've been dating about a year and a half now. She graduated last year but I'm doing a medical degree, so I'm not leaving London for another couple of years. She managed to get a job as a trainee teacher up in East Ham, so ended up staying as well. I've got to say I'm glad about it. I'm not sure how good I'd be at a longdistance relationship. Anyway, the original plan was to move in together sooner, but stuff didn't match up properly and this was before she got the job, so she had to move back with her parents for a while. Long story short, I had to get a houseshare with some other med students, and she came up later, moving in with Natalie Ennis.

I don't know where Kathy met her. They've always been friends, but I don't think she was at uni with us. She never talked about it if she was. Kathy grew up in London, so maybe they were friends from school or something. She seemed nice, when I met her. Quiet, but nice. She was very serious, though. I don't know if I ever actually heard her laugh. Maybe she just didn't find my jokes funny. Who knows? She was religious, too. I've never had much time for God, myself, and Kathy didn't either. That's why I was kind of surprised the first time I visited her new place and found a framed Bible quote on the wall. Can't remember what it was. Something about Jesus and faith, I don't really know Bible stuff. Kathy said it was Natalie's. She didn't mind her putting it up there in the living room. Kathy's nice like that, you know? Just letting people be themselves.

Me and Natalie... didn't get on. I don't know if you picked up on that. We didn't hate each other or anything like that, we just... didn't have anything in

common. She didn't really watch TV or movies, and I didn't know anything about crochet, politics or God, which were pretty much her only interests. Kathy was always trying to get her to come out with us, and she'd just say no, which was fine by me. She always seemed happy enough, though, hooking yarn into whatever she was making at the time, reading some boring book on the political history of the bonnet or something.

That changed last October, when Natalie's mum died. I don't know how it happened, exactly. Heart failure, I think. It was sudden, I know that much, and it hit her hard. I mean, obviously it did, it was her mum, but I think... I think she lost her faith. The Bible quote wasn't on the wall the next time I went over, and when I asked Kathy about it she gave me a look like I shouldn't bring it up. I didn't see much of Natalie after that. She was still around, I'd sometimes see her heading into the kitchen to get some food or tea or something, but apart from that she just stayed in her room.

So far, so normal, right? You lose your mum and it messes you up. That month was sad, but it's not what Kathy wanted us to talk to you about. No, it was what happened afterwards. It was after Natalie found her new church. It was Kathy who told me about it. This must have been about two months after Natalie's mum died. I must have asked how she was doing, if she was feeling any better. Kathy said that, yeah she was. Apparently, she'd found a new congregation and seemed to be getting some comfort there. She hadn't been crying so much at night, Kathy said, and hadn't been quite as prickly when she tried to talk. I noticed that the Bible quote hadn't gone back up, though.

I thought if she was doing better I'd probably see Natalie around more when I stayed with Kathy, but if anything she seemed to almost completely disappear. She never seemed to be there when I went over. I'd see her leave in the

evening and come home early in the morning, just as the sky was starting to get light. She'd go straight into her room, ignoring us completely. When I asked her where she'd been one time, she just told me "church". I asked her a few more questions, but she stared at me in this weird way until I got freaked out and left the room. I joked with Kathy that her flatmate was turning into a vampire, but instead of laughing she just got defensive and said that Natalie couldn't be a vampire. Then she started listing times she'd seen her in the sunlight, before just kind of trailing off. I think we both realised how messed up it was if she could list the number of times she'd seen Natalie in daylight. Other strange stuff began to happen around the flat as well. The light bulbs kept blowing, to begin with. Well, that's not entirely true. It always seemed to be that when we got in after dark, we'd try to turn on the lights and, well, nothing would happen. At first we just threw the old bulbs out and replaced them, but it kept happening. We checked the fuses, the sockets, Kathy even called the landlord to have someone check out the wiring, but it all seemed fine. The lights kept not working, though. Then I had a thought. The next time it happened, instead of changing the light bulb, I just tightened it. Just like that it turned back on. The first time this happened I was so surprised I nearly fell off the chair I was stood on. The bulbs hadn't been breaking, someone had been unscrewing them. Not much, not enough that we could spot it, just enough for them to not work. I say 'someone' had been doing this, but there was only one person it could have been. For some reason, Natalie had been unscrewing all the lightbulbs in the flat, every chance she got.

That was also when Kathy started to look so tired. She kept nodding off when we went out for dinner and would often zone out when we were watching TV. I asked her about it, but she just brushed it off and said she hadn't been sleeping well. It wasn't until she was so tired she almost walked out in front of

a car while she was crossing the road that I finally got her to tell me what was going on. She said that Natalie had started staying home at nights, but she was so loud that it stopped her sleeping. Natalie would wander through the living room and sing, in a language Kathy didn't know, and the tune was so discordant that it set her teeth on edge. Natalie would stop singing if she came into the living room, but would then just move to her room and the song would start again.

Kathy even said that when Natalie did leave, always at night, there would still be the sound of movement from her room. Shuffling, thumping noises, and occasionally the sound of something being knocked onto the floor. She'd come close to opening the door so often, but could never bring herself to do so. It seemed to be louder when she was trying to sleep, and once she thought it had moved into the living room, but she didn't go out to check. So no, Kathy wasn't getting much sleep. She started staying over with me a lot, as she said she just couldn't handle living alone with Natalie.

One night, she arrived at my house almost in tears. I took her up to my room, and sat her on the bed. She stared at me for a few seconds and I was about to ask what was wrong, when she started to speak. She said that Natalie had tried to 'convert' her. She had come to Kathy's room earlier that night, knocked on the door, very polite. She'd seemed cheerier than she had since her mum's death, and asked if Kathy wanted to have some dinner and talk. Now, obviously, Kathy had wanted to discuss moving out for months, but she'd never been in a fit state, so she jumped at the chance.

The dining room was dark. Natalie must have unscrewed the lightbulb again because the switch did nothing. Thin slivers of moonlight coming through the curtains gave just enough light to see the table, and two bowls at either end.

Natalie sat at one end, and waved for Kathy to sit at the other. Kathy had wanted to run... but didn't know quite how to do so. She said it would have felt... rude. So she sat down, and tried to eat what Natalie had prepared. She thought it might have been spinach, but if so it must have been boiled for far too long and all that remained was a stringy, limp mush. It was stone cold, and she could barely get through two forkfuls before she started to retch; it was so slimy. She pushed it away as gently as she could. She said Natalie just watched, not even glancing at her own bowl.

Finally, Kathy managed to get the nerve to speak, and told her she wanted to move out. There was silence for a long second, and then Natalie had said she did as well. I'll admit I sighed with relief when Kathy said that, but she shook her head and continued. Natalie had begun to speak, longer and in more detail than she had for a long time. She had said that she need to move out, that the she had a new home to being going to, a new family. She said that they were all going, that 300 years was a long time to wait, but she was lucky to have found it so close to the end. She said that it wasn't long until they were collected by Mr. Pitch. She said that Kathy could come too, if she liked. She could be saved.

It was at this point Kathy realised Natalie was talking about her 'church'. She became... very scared, and stood up, telling Natalie thanks, but she wasn't really one for Christian worship. And Natalie laughed at this. Laughed long and hard, never breaking eye contact. She had said, "No, but you're a natural for Them. You're worshipping as we speak." It was at that point Kathy ran, and came over to my house. Natalie hadn't tried to stop her.

At this point I was angry as all hell. If Natalie wanted to join some weird cult, and by that point we were both sure that's what it was, then that was her

business, but she was scaring Kathy. There was no way I was going to let that stand. I told her that I was going over to her flat and was going to have it out with Natalie. I don't know what I was going to do. I mean, I wasn't going to hit her or anything; I just needed to make it clear that you couldn't just screw with people's lives like this. Kathy told me not to go, but she wasn't in any fit state to stop me. I got in the car and started to drive.

It was an overcast night, and without the moon the streets were dark. The lamps on the road seemed... dull, and even my headlights didn't reach as far as I thought they should. It wasn't far to the small house. I didn't expect any lights to be on, but the silent darkness of the place still sent a shivers down my spine. I had a key to the door, and let myself in. I'd taken a torch from my car, and sure enough the lights weren't turning on. The hallway was silent, but my nerves were on edge and I started to look through each room in turn. Nothing. There was no sign of Natalie at all.

I stood there, in front of her room. It just had a normal, wooden fire door, but my hand still hesitated as I reached to open it. I knew it was empty, by now I was sure she wasn't home. Still, I was starting to feel that fear that Kathy had described, and I saw that my hand was shaking. I tried to ignore it, grit my teeth, and I opened the door.

The room inside was empty, as I had thought. But it wasn't just that Natalie was out; it was completely bare. No furniture, no possessions, nothing. The carpet had been torn up, leaving the bare floorboards exposed and the wallpaper had been stripped from the wall. All of it had been stuffed and nailed up against the room's only window, leaving it completely covered. No light from outside got through, and the torch was the only reason I could see at

all. I started to look around for any clue to what Natalie had been doing, or where she had been.

In the corner, half-slipped between the boards, I spotted a piece of paper. It was small and thick, and seemed to have something written on it. Picking it up, I saw it had three words on it: Hither Green Dissenters. The other side had a symbol of some kind, written in thick marker pen: a curved line, with four straight lines coming off one side of it. Like a closed eye. I kept the paper, and your Institute can have it if you want. It's not like the police were interested in it.

I called Kathy to tell her what I'd found. She was worried about me, but also about Natalie. Whatever this weird church was that she'd joined, I think we both reckoned it might be bad for her. Really bad. Kathy wanted to phone the police, but I told her there just wasn't enough for it to be a crime. Not yet. I told her I'd keep looking. I might have lied, to be honest, and said I was just going to look around the house more, but... well, I did a search for Hither Green Dissenters and it looked like there was an old abandoned chapel, the Hither Green Dissenters Chapel, in a graveyard near Lewisham. I had decided that I needed to check it out. No idea what I was hoping to find. Enough to call the police in, I guess.

By now it was just past midnight; the drive down wasn't too difficult. There was still that thickness to the night, a heavy gloom that deadened all light. Like someone had turned the brightness down on London. I found a parking spot not too far away from Hither Green Cemetery, and started to walk towards it. The iron gates stood wide open, so I went in.

The graveyard itself wasn't as bad as I'd feared. If anything it felt quite peaceful. The darkness seemed right for it, and the stones stood silent and firm. I walked along the path, until my light fell across a small building. The chapel. It was tiny, surrounded by temporary fencing that looked like it had been there long enough to become permanent. It had a single, pointed bell tower, and the windows were covered with old boards that looked like they'd seen the worst of the rain. There was only a single entrance, a pair of double doors set at the front. To my surprise, they stood open. I called out Natalie's name, shouted and asked if anyone was in there, but there was only silence.

I shouldn't have gone in. Of course I shouldn't have gone in. I'm not that stupid. I've never been that stupid. But for some reason, standing there in that dark, empty cemetery, I made the decision to look inside.

It was easy to squeeze past the barriers. I still had my torch with me, but it didn't shine very far in. I entered slowly, casting my light over everything, just in case there were some hooded cultist freaks waiting to jump me, but there were only old, broken pews, discarded bottles and cigarette ends. The normal detritus any abandoned building collects. I was just about to turn around and leave... when my torch died.

Immediately I was plunged into complete darkness. No light was coming in through the door. I couldn't even see where the door was, everything around me was pitch black. I tried to get the torch to turn back on, turning the bulb and hitting it in a near panic. I tried to take the batteries out and put them back in, but I couldn't see anything and I ended up fumbling and dropping them. I knelt down and tried to feel where they were, but the ground felt... odd. I hadn't paid much attention to it when I first came in, but the floor had been chipped, dusty and covered with a layer of junk. But... when I started to feel around for the batteries, it felt smooth and clean and very cold, like marble or something.

I called out for help, but my voice just echoed in the silence. Then the singing started. It seemed like there were dozens of voices, but they didn't match together right. Some were singing really high and others so low it made my teeth hurt. The words were in some other language, but I remember they kept coming together for the words "Nee-allisand" or "allisunt", I think. I was freaking out, so I got to my feet and started to walk forward as fast as I was able, my hands stretched out in front of me in case I hit anything. The chapel

couldn't have been more than thirty feet long, and maybe twenty wide, but I walked for well over a minute without hitting anything. I just staggered through the complete darkness, with that awful singing everywhere. At one point I honestly thought I might have died and gone to hell.

Finally, my fingers brushed against something. It was cold, like the floor, but rough. It felt like rusted metal. Thin strips of rusted metal in a criss-cross pattern, with small gaps between them. At least, that's what it felt like. I didn't hold on to them for very long, because as my hands rested there, I felt... fingers reach through the holes and try to grab me. I couldn't see them, but they felt leathery as they brushed against my skin.

I screamed and leapt back, falling to the floor, and as I did so I felt something hard jab me in the hip. My phone. In all that had happened I had forgotten I had it. I reached in and pressed the button and the screen lit up, faint and barely visible, but I started crying like it was the first light I had seen in months. It didn't light up anything else, but as the singing began to crescendo I desperately went to the torch function and turned it on. And it did turn on in a sudden flash of brilliance and the singing stopped.

In the silence I shone the makeshift torch in front of me and saw a broken pew. The floor was once again covered in junk and I could see the doorway behind me, leading out into the night. I ran, calling Kathy first, and then the police.

They didn't find anything, of course. They gave me a telling off about trespassing and took down a missing person report about Natalie. Nothing was found, and as far as I know she's still gone. I didn't tell Kathy exactly what happened for a few weeks, but when I finally did, she made me come here and talk to you.

I think that's everything. Can I go now?

JONATHAN SIMS

Statement ends.

The last section, naturally, is the one that invites my scepticism, but let us disregard that for now and discuss the other aspects. Sasha has confirmed that Natalie Ennis was reported missing by Mr. Bilham on March the 11th 2015. There were no leads regarding her location beyond the piece of paper mentioned in the statement, and no traces of any church or cult was found within the Hither Green Dissenters Chapel or the graveyard surrounding it. When we contacted Mr. Bilham and Ms. Harper to follow up, neither of them had heard from her in the intervening year, nor did they have anything to add to the statement.

The symbol upon the piece of paper does indeed resemble a stylised, closed eye, and there are enough other parallels to statement 0020312 to make me suspect – and a suspicion is all that it is at present – that the People's Church of the Divine Host may still be in existence. Also of note, the words "Ny Alesund". I don't know for sure if Mr. Bilham remembered them correctly, but Tim pointed out that Ny-Ålesund is actually a small town in Norway. In fact, except for research installations, it is the most northerly human settlement on Earth, located at a latitude of North 78°55'30". It is a company town, owned and operated by Outer Bay, but what it has to do with Mr. Bilham's account is anyone's guess. Assuming it isn't all... coincidence. That far north... during the winter... nights can last for a very long time

Martin found one other thing while combing through police reports for the Hither Green area. About a month after this statement was given, on May 15th 2015, police were called out to once again investigate the chapel. Neighbours had apparently heard screams from inside, just after 11pm, but when officers arrived they found nothing to indicate any sort of incident or foul play. I'd be content enough to ignore this... if it wasn't for the fact that, according to the official file, May 15th 2015 was day Gertrude Robinson, my predecessor, passed away.

[Post statement]

Recording Ends.

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Outro]

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