

MAG 196 — This Old House

Content Warnings

- Manipulation
- Altered reality
- Spiders
- Heights / vertigo (including SFX)
- Mentions of: death, blackmail, war, knives, human remains, paranoia, body horror, live burial, children in peril, arson
- SFX: harsh static, insects

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents... *The Magnus Archives*. Episode one hundred and ninety-six: "This Old House."

[Theme finishes]

[Tape clicks on]

[Footsteps on pavement walk steadily, accompanied by a few
tweeting birds]

ANNABELLE

Are you going to walk this slow the whole way?

MARTIN

Are you going to stay silent the whole way?

ANNABELLE

Perhaps that's because you didn't seem to like what I had to say.

MARTIN

No, it's because you weren't really *saying* anything, were you? It was all just ominous foreshadowing again.

ANNABELLE

Perhaps I was just trying to make things feel... familiar?

MARTIN

Perhaps the whole 'answer a question with a question' thing is wearing a bit thin. Besides which it's a bit late to play coy. You promised me an actual straight answer.

ANNABELLE

You'd have it a lot more quickly if you didn't keep stopping.

MARTIN

Hey, this is *your* magic bubble. You're the one making it so that we're, like, actually *walking* walking all the way to Oxford. So sorry I've got to sit down occasionally, like a human.

ANNABELLE

And the book breaks?

MARTIN

It's not like you're entertaining company.

ANNABELLE

And it's nothing to do with the fact that any lost souls in our area also get a break from their torment? Hmm?

(Beat)

MARTIN

So what if it does? Is that a problem?

ANNABELLE

Actually, I find it very reassuring.

MARTIN

Great, because I'm still going to need to rest. Some of these houses have actual beds, and I haven't slept on a mattress since Sa—

[Footsteps slow, then stop]

MARTIN (CONT'D)

Hmm.

ANNABELLE

Problem?

(Beat)

MARTIN

Did he suffer?

ANNABELLE

Did *who* suffer?

MARTIN

Just... answer the question.

(Beat)

ANNABELLE

No.

I did it in his sleep.

He'd always been accommodating, so... I wanted to honour his wishes.

MARTIN

That's a shame.

ANNABELLE

(Firm) Is it?

MARTIN

I mean... he seemed nice. To us at least.

ANNABELLE

And what of his victims? The people whose lives he destroyed?

(Beat)

MARTIN

I can't speak for them. I didn't know them, did I?

ANNABELLE

No. You didn't.

[Footsteps resume]

(Beat)

MARTIN

(Sighs) Is it much further?

ANNABELLE

Less so than last time you asked.

MARTIN

Could you just try answering a question properly? Just once?

ANNABELLE

...We're close now. Just a few more streets.

MARTIN

Thank you.

...Oh. Uhh... Huh. Um...

ANNABELLE

Oh come on, Martin. You didn't really expect him to find us before we got here, did you?

MARTIN

(Unconvincing) N... no...

ANNABELLE

We have a sizable lead, and the camera too, don't forget. Besides, even if he did 'ride to your rescue', what then? Would you explain to him that you're here of your own free will?

MARTIN

I mean, that's a pretty generous way to describe being blackmailed.

ANNABELLE

Oh, it's blackmail, is it? Offering you a way out of all this?

MARTIN

You said if I told John or waited then you'd leave, and I'd never know.

ANNABELLE

And you believed me, which was very gracious of you.

MARTIN

(Sputters slightly) I shouldn't have.

ANNABELLE

Why not? I didn't *lie* to you, I do have another option for you. One that means neither of you need to die **or** be consumed by any dark power.

MARTIN

Oh, but you can't just **tell** me **or** John. Oh no, no, that would be far too straightforward.

ANNABELLE

I could.

(Martin sighs)

But it's much better if you see it for yourselves. And he would not have come willingly. He needs to think he's coming for you.

MARTIN

He can see literally everything, I'm sure he probably knows it already.

ANNABELLE

In a way, perhaps. But I guarantee that being here in person is something very different.

Come on.

MARTIN

Hey, is that—? You told me not to bring a tape recorder.

ANNABELLE

No. I said we wouldn't *need* one. We have plenty of tapes.

MARTIN

(Crosstalk) But then—

ANNABELLE

(Crosstalk) We're here.

[Footsteps cease]

MARTIN

This is it?

ANNABELLE

Ah, I forget. You've never actually been here before, have you?

Well? What do you think?

MARTIN

It's... I-I mean, it's, um...

ANNABELLE

Just a house?

MARTIN

Well... well, yeah.

ANNABELLE

What were you expecting?

MARTIN

I don't know, like... something a bit more dramatic, I guess.

ANNABELLE

We'll... see what we can do.

[Footsteps, then Annabelle opens the door]

(Dramatically) Step into my parlour.

MARTIN

Hmmm.

Fine.

[Footsteps as Martin follows, changing from pavement to wood]

[Door closes behind him]

ANNABELLE

Do take a seat.

[Martin puts down his backpack and takes a seat]

MARTIN

(Warily) So... What now?

ANNABELLE

I've written you a statement. I would like for you to read it.

**[Paper rustling and footsteps as Annabelle passes the statement
to Martin]**

MARTIN

And if I don't?

ANNABELLE

Then we sit here in silence until the Archivist arrives. But I would suggest you do read it. I believe you'll find it... illuminating.

[She sits]

(A long beat before Martin sighs heavily)

MARTIN

Screw it. Fine! Fine.

[Throughout the reading there is the occasional rustling of paper from Martin, wood creak from the building settling, and distant tweets of birds outside]

MARTIN

Once there was a house, a building that for all it *might* have looked like those around it, was not the same.

Stop, no.

It didn't start with the house. It was here long before any might have thought of it as a home.

Once, there was a patch of land, not quite as firm in this reality as that which surrounded it.

Stop, no.

It's not about the land. Mud and soil has no part in what is there.

Once, there was a point in space that did not *quite* obey all those petty rules that decide what can be allowed to happen in a world.

Stop, no.

It's not a point in space. The Earth spins and hurtles through the darkness, but it still carries it along.

Let us simply say that once there was a place. A place where the universe had... cracked.

None of us remember what had caused the crack, not even those things beyond time who might measure a generation in the echoes of their screams. It had been there as long as they have, if not longer. It's not a large crack, and to walk by it, even through it, you'd never pause to notice. Perhaps the air around it is slightly thinner, lights slightly dimmer... In the Summer there may be the slightest chill. In the Winter a warmth that is almost unsettling. The fungus that grows in the damp there is somehow more vibrant in its whiteness, while flowers remain duller than those that neighbour them. But these changes are slight, and none have dwelt on them long enough to call the place cursed. Indeed, few have ever thought much of it at all. Perhaps there are many such places across the Earth. Perhaps it is unique. Certainly, no-one has known either way.

The first to build a home upon that spot was named Eowa. He was a Saxon, and a coward, who had fled the field against the Mercian king, and sought to find his peace there. His squalid little hut was far removed from those of his once-kinsmen. Nonetheless, there he lived and worked, and tried hopelessly to forget the stench of blood and rot, and the feel of a seax knife in the wound he carried to the end of his life. Did his terror call to him with the drumbeat voice of carnage? Did it sing to him with the squirming melody of decay? Could any have told you the difference?

It is strange. That a name, a face, a taste of fear should linger through the centuries, and yet I cannot be sure which of them it was that ate so well. Some fears are eternal, but within them lie a hundred titles, whispered in the secret places of every era of every corner of our world. Who can say if any of them are true?

Whichever it might have been, they knew Eowa's terrors well. Until he was no longer there. Until he awoke in a place that was a place but... somewhere else. Somewhere the Mercians had pushed further, had taken more. For all his dread of a violent death, his end was quick and clean. And none of his kinsmen ever knew his fate. His hut, left unattended, quickly fell to disrepair, then to collapse. No-one used the wood; the grain was warped.

Many lived in that spot across the following years. Some in peace, some in misery, a few in strangled fear. But none tied their sorrows to the land or the dwelling they might have erected upon it. The village slowly grew and became a more populous town though not ever a remarkable one. That said, perhaps, sometimes, in the quiet, those who tried to make it their home might have felt a whisper, an echo of some other place, some place not quite their own. But it never disturbed their sleep.

[Wood creaks from the building]

MARTIN (CONT'D)

So what does it mean, for a place to be haunted? A place can be haunted by **someone**, some poor soul whose bones lie restless in the shallow soil. It can be haunted by **something**, some crime or atrocity that indelibly marked itself upon the soul of a spot. But can it be haunted by **somewhere**? An echo of worlds that are not our own, alien pasts that draw to unknown presents, leaking through the smallest, narrowest crack at the very edge of existence?

The closest anyone ever came to knowing was a man named Geoffrey Neckam, a scholar from the University. He bought the house that then sat there from a bow-legged milliner whose name he never bothered to learn, seeking some peace and removal from his more raucous colleagues. He was a man of God, of

course, but also a keen master of natural philosophy, a study he put to use when he first felt the oddities that pervaded his new home — the strange draughts that shifted his candle flame, the gentle murmur that almost sounded like voices. Once he even found a new room, though he very wisely did not enter it.

His investigations were crude, of course, convinced as he was that it was some working of his god; an unseen passage to a heavenly sphere, perhaps, or, as he more often feared, an infernal one. That said, his observations were surprisingly astute, and his rubric of belief closer to the truth than you might imagine. But Geoffrey Neckam had neither the words to talk of dimensions, nor a mind able to meaningfully conceive of worlds beyond the one within which he lived, and its requisite afterlives of course. And so, as a result all his mediations and his intellect ultimately lead him nowhere.

They were not, however, entirely in vain. Because, you see, Geoffrey Neckam lived in fear. There was a reason he chose to live apart from his peers, why he cooked his own paltry meals in privacy, and avoided academic meetings. He was certain that his scholastic rivals were somehow plotting against him, weaving intricate schemes to ruin his reputation and cost him his position, even take his life. It was this obsession that first brought him to the attention of Mother-of-Puppets, the Great Spider, and how we became aware of what this place *was*. What it might mean.

Eventually, the long-awaited knife in the dark did indeed find its way into the belly of Geoffrey Neckam. But by then his only meaningful work was done, and another, altogether grander plan, was now in motion.

It was no easy task, keeping the place close through the ages, working all the while to weaken that crack, luring in the servants of other powers, and so in the resulting clash, pressing ever harder against the edges of our reality.

For a while it belonged to a sculptor of puppets, who made his strings from the tendons of those he felt did not appreciate his art, and he would dance them around in a mocking effigy. He was, in time, slain by a crusading hunter of the Reformation, who would let no heresy go unanswered. He was bisected with his own wood saw.

Once there lived there a writer of anonymous letters, who could not have told you where his secrets came from, only that he knew the darkest desires of many souls, and had the wit to use them to their best effect. He was deemed a civil war traitor and buried alive deep beneath the house in which he had drawn his schemes by a man whose teeth were always stained with mud.

So many schemers and spiders and full-throated monsters. Twisting manipulators and furtive liars. **Each** meeting a violent, grotesque end; **each** widening the crack just a little. Until finally, a man named Raymond Fielding, a smiling pillar of the community who fostered children into food for his grotesque arachnid god, was murdered by flame, immolated by the chosen of the Ravening Burn. The house of the time was destroyed along with him, reduced to ashes, and with that the crack finally became... a gap.

[An unusual wood creak]

MARTIN (CONT'D)

A hole around which time, dimension and reality began to bend, shudder and leak.

An opening into, we believe, other worlds than this tired old thing.

It was not wide enough to allow true passage, not yet, save for the odd accident. But it was wide enough for what we now intended...

(Martin exhales)

Okay.

So. A crack in reality?

ANNABELLE

Oh, it's so much more than a crack now. It's an aching hole, a gaping wound in the very fabric of our world.

[Martin puts down the statement]

MARTIN

And a gateway to other dimensions.

ANNABELLE

Not quite yet.

(Martin exhales slowly as he processes)

MARTIN

Oooooookay.

ANNABELLE

Dramatic enough for you?

MARTIN

So this is what you wanted me to see?

...Annabelle?

ANNABELLE

(Wistful) It's a real shame, you know.

[Annabelle stands up and takes a few steps]

ANNABELLE (CONT'D)

I was so looking forward to filling you with spiders.

MARTIN

E— Wh— Excuse me?

ANNABELLE

They would have hollowed you out, and worn you like a cheery jumper!

MARTIN

(Nervous laugh) Uh, right. But, since you're *telling* me I can assume you're not going to now, right?

ANNABELLE

That's the thing about webs. People get so caught up on how intricate they are, how perfectly constructed. They never consider how flexible they can be. The sort of storm they need to weather. You can't be precious about a *single* strand.

MARTIN

R-right, yeah, but a-a-again, because you didn't *really* answer me, um, filling me with spiders **isn't** a strand of your web now, right? Um. I-I just want us to be, a-heh, absolutely clear on this.

A-Annabelle?

(Beat)

ANNABELLE

No.

(Martin breathes relieved breaths)

Not anymore.

MARTIN

R-r-right, thanks. Sorry. S-s-sorry to interrupt ah, just, just checking.

ANNABELLE

It's such a shame. There was a time when I was certain you had what it takes to join us.

MARTIN

What? Because I like spiders? Well, used to.

ANNABELLE

Because you always managed to get what you wanted through smiles and shrugs and stammerings that weren't nearly as awkward as they seemed.

(Small sound of Martin's concession to the point)

MARTIN

Point taken.

ANNABELLE

But I didn't foresee how deep you would fall into The Lonely. Or how far the Archivist would go to get you back. It made things... awkward.

MARTIN

Why are you telling me all this?

ANNABELLE

(Strained) Because... explaining things, giving answers, like this... it's not what I am. It's difficult, against my nature.

And I'm trying to practice.

MARTIN

Why?

ANNABELLE

Why do you think?

(Martin groans)

Sorry.

MARTIN

Okay, let's try a different question. What **was** your plan?

ANNABELLE

I was gonna snatch you away. Lure you both into this web, and then take you. Drive him to despair, so that when you returned to him, bulging, and talking in a thousand tiny voices, it would drive him to a final push.

MARTIN

And now?

ANNABELLE

(Sighs) Your bond is too complicated. I couldn't drive that kind of rift between you now. I've considered every angle, examined every cause and effect, and have finally come to the conclusion that I... **(sighs)** I need to tell you the truth, to explain things.

MARTIN

(Frustrated) Yeah, but **why?**

ANNABELLE

Because if I do... you'll do as I ask.

MARTIN

Oh will we?

ANNABELLE

Yes.

(Annabelle takes a deep breath)

[She takes a few steps]

He's nearly here.

MARTIN

John?

ANNABELLE

Let's make the setting a little more... appropriate, shall we?

[Sliding wood sound]

MARTIN

Hey, just... ah, hah, ah put the camera down, okay?

ANNABELLE

You said you wanted something more *dramatic*, right?

MARTIN

Wh-what? No, no, no, wait, wait, wait. Wait... wait—

(Annabelle chuckles)

[She hefts the camera into the ground; glass shatters]

[A harsh and fast building static crackles and cracks and twists the scene; whipping wind; the sound of tapes rewinding at speed, fading away; hissing static that then fades away; what remains is a dark electric void sound, swirling winds and crackling thunder; Annabelle and Martin stand on an impossible web stretched across a gaping chasm]

MARTIN

Oh! Ooooh shit..! That's a long way down. Ooohhh...

[Speeding by every so often is a chitinous rewinding tape sound]

ANNABELLE

Further than you can possibly imagine.

(Martin continues audibly quivering)

[Sticky sounds slap wetly as Annabelle slings web]

MARTIN

Oi! W-what're you—? Urgh! Urgh. What i—? What—? What is this?

ANNABELLE

What do you think? It's for your safety. So you don't do anything...
unpredictable. I'd hate for you to fall.

(Martin makes disgust noises)

[Swirling winds and distorted rumbling continue]

MARTIN

When John gets here, he is going to *kill* you.

(Martin continues to express his disgust at the silken restraints)

ANNABELLE

As long as he listens to me first, it won't matter.

[Tape click]

ARCHIVIST ON TAPE

(From left side) So just listen—

[Tape click]

ARCHIVIST ON TAPE

(From right side) (Crosstalk) Listen Martin, you should know—

[Tape click]

ARCHIVIST ON TAPE

(From middle-left side) (Crosstalk) Now, listen to me, Martin, li-listen—

[Tape click]

MARTIN

Wait. Wait...

The tapes...

ANNABELLE

A fine material to spin a web with, don't you think?

MARTIN

What? All this time, through all of this, it, it was just you *spying* on us?

ANNABELLE

Oh Martin. You have no idea who's listening, do you?

[Tape clicks off]

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

JONATHAN SIMS

The Magnus Archives is a podcast distributed by Rusty Quill and licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial ShareAlike 4.0 International licence. Today's episode was written by Jonathan Sims, produced by Lowri Ann Davies, and directed by Alexander J Newall. It featured: Alexander J Newall as Martin Blackwood and Chioma Nwalioba as Annabelle Cane. To subscribe, buy merchandise, or join our Patreon, visit rustyquill.com. Rate and review us online, tweet us at TheRustyQuill, visit us on Facebook, or email us via mail@rustyquill.com. Join our community on the Discord via the website, or on Reddit, at [r/TheMagnusArchives](https://www.reddit.com/r/TheMagnusArchives). Thanks for listening.