

MAG – 077 – The Kind Mother

Content warnings:

- Supernatural impersonation
- Family estrangement and conflict

Discussions of: gaslighting, arguments

Mentions of: murder, parent death, sadism, graphic injury

SFX: low drone, high pitched tone, electrical interference

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode seventy-seven. The Kind Mother.

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro – Continued]

GERTRUDE

Case 9941509 – Lucy Cooper. Incident occurred in Draycott, Somerset, August 1994. Victim's name given as Rose Cooper. Statement given 15th of September 1994. Committed to tape 4th of November 1996. Gertrude Robinson recording.

GERTRUDE (STATEMENT)

There is a stranger claiming to be my mother. I don't know who she is. Everyone else says that she's my mother, and gives me looks of alarm when I tell them she's an impostor. I don't know what to do.

My mother and I have always had our differences. To be honest, it's only been in the last five years or so that we really began speaking again. She was always a strong-willed woman, never one to blunt her opinions, and throughout my childhood it gradually got worse. Nothing I ever did was quite good enough, and any hint of pride I might have taken in myself or my achievements was always undercut by some cutting little critique. Even on those rare occasions that I succeeded at something highly enough to actually warrant her praise, it was always appended with doubt. I remember when I was fifteen I came first in an inter-school athletics competition. I was two seconds ahead in the hundred metre sprint, and all she could say was, "Make sure being the best runner doesn't distract you from your exams".

It didn't really come to a head until I got engaged to Laurence, though. We'd been dating on and off through university, and I'd sat through enough awkward family dinners to know that my mother didn't like him, but her disapproval was nothing new, so I ignored it. When he proposed to me after our graduation, I'd assumed she would simply tolerate it as she had every other one of my decisions. I was wrong. When I told her, she got angry. Not the chill, disapproving anger I was used to from, but a genuine shouting rage. She accused me of throwing my life away, told me I'd regret it, and that Laurence was good-for-nothing scum who'd drag me down and stop me achieving anything. I answered her in kind, and the argument that we had that night was the last time I saw her for almost ten years. I'd try to convince myself that our differences were just that: we were simply two very different people. But sometimes I worry that the reason we could never get on was that we were far too much alike.

For instance, we were both far too stubborn for our own good. Maybe that's why I stayed with Laurence through two affairs, as if accepting that I'd made a mistake would be letting her win. In the end I only left him when he was jailed for embezzlement, eight years into our marriage. Even then, I didn't want to speak to her. Didn't want to tell her she'd been right. It wasn't until my father had his accident that I finally decided to try and make amends.

My father is a gentle man. To this day I couldn't really tell you anything about his thoughts or opinions on anything, as they were invariably bulldozed by my mother. He was a benign, ineffectual presence, always in the shadow. For all that, I did love him; so when he fell from a ladder and ended up in wheelchair, I made the decision to try and reconnect with my parents.

It wasn't easy. Beyond the greying of her hair, my mother hadn't changed, and the reconciliation I'd hoped for never really came. I spent my visits biting my tongue, or getting into vicious fights whenever I wasn't able to. But I could always see on my father's face how much he liked to see me, how happy he was to have our small family together again, so I persevered. I think she saw it too, to be honest, and whenever he wheeled himself painfully into the room, she would try her best not to antagonise me.

After a while we came to an uneasy peace.

There were practical issues as well. They'd retired to the small village of Draycott in the Somerset countryside, and as I lived in London and didn't have a car, it was two trains and a long bus ride anytime I wanted to see them. But I made the effort. I even conceived a reason to go more often – I've been doing some freelance work this summer for the British Library, recording and compiling oral histories on various topics, and it so happened that during her

time as an academic my mother had been something of an authority on English and Welsh folklore. In fact, one of the reasons she always gave for retiring out there was how many myths and legends made their home in the area. So I proposed that I make some recordings of her, telling and discussing them for the project. She agreed, though not before telling me how pointless the whole thing sounded, and over the last few months I saw them several times. My father was happy, the recordings I got were surprisingly usable, and everything seemed to be getting better.

Two weeks ago I went to see them, and someone else opened the door. Someone I didn't recognise.

She wore my mother's clothes, but they shouldn't have fitted her. My mother is tall, rail thin and always keeps her hair cut short, but the woman who answered my knocking was shorter, rounded about the middle and wore her curly white hair down almost to her shoulders. I had definitely never seen her before. I asked if my parents were home, and she laughed. It was a soft, joyful sound that was so unlike anything I expected to hear in that house that I had to take a step back to collect my thoughts. My father wheeled round the corner and shouted a greeting as though everything was perfectly normal. He moved up beside the plump old woman standing in the doorway and looked at me, smiling. The image made me feel queasy. I'm not even sure why, at this point I had no reason to think this person was anything other than a friend of my parents, but something wasn't right.

I asked where my mother was, and they both got very quiet. I repeated the question with more force, and my father looked up to this strange woman in confusion. She smiled sadly and stepped towards me, opening her arms as if to hug me, but I yelled at her to get back, demanding to see my mother. My

father's face grew dark, and he told me that my joke wasn't funny. With the most force I'd ever heard from him, he told me that however angry I was, this wasn't the right way to deal with it. I looked back at this woman, standing there with open arms, and she smiled at me.

"Come, give your mother a hug," she said.

The hour or two after that are a bit of a blur. I have vague memories of being numbly taken through into the living room, sat on the sofa and handed a cup of tea. I tried to drink it as they talked on at me, but it was ice cold, so I must have been sitting there a long time. I nodded once or twice, I think. My dad clearly thought I was having some sort of breakdown, and was just talking about whatever came into his head in the hopes of calming me down. The woman who was not my mother just talked cheerily, as though there was nothing at all amiss.

She had a kind voice, and her words were warm and friendly. She was nothing like my mother, and I was very quickly becoming deeply afraid. Had she done something to my real mother, and somehow convinced my father she was her? It seemed a ridiculous thought. My father may have been disabled but his mind was still sharp, and he'd never showed any signs of the sort of dementia that would let a stranger pose as his wife. Was he her prisoner? Maybe, but he didn't seem to be acting as though nything was wrong, and if that was the case why bother trying to convince me of so obvious a lie?

I excused myself, and moved quickly out towards the back garden. Neither of them made a move to stop me. I saw a phone near the back porch and grabbed it, intending to call the police, when something caught my eye. It was a series of photographs on the wall, showing our family in happier times. It had

been there for as long as I'd been to the house, and likely a lot longer. I had spent a long time staring at it my first visit there, lost in pleasant nostalgia, remembering days at the beach or the trip we took to Hanover when I was eight. But now, in every one of them there stood this new woman where my mother should have been. She looked younger in these pictures, just like my father, and across the dozen pictures on the wall I could see a timeline of this woman growing old alongside him.

There was no way these photos could have been staged, and I could even see a small crease on the bottom corner of the Hanover picture. I remembered I'd sat on the pictures by accident on the journey home, bending the corner out of place. I'd got a nasty talking to after that, and certainly not from the kindly fraud currently putting the kettle on in the kitchen.

It didn't make any sense. It still doesn't make any sense. After dinner I insisted that we get out the photo albums, spouting some nonsense about catching up on memories. My father and the woman who was not my mother agreed readily enough, and so out came the albums and I began to look through them. I must have looked at well over five hundred photographs that evening, and not a single one was out of place or failed to feature this stranger where my mother should have been. As my turning of the pages became more and more frantic, I spotted a look on the face of this new mother. It was amused, almost mocking, and I became sure that she knew. Whoever this woman that called herself Rose Cooper was, she knew it was a lie as much as I did, and my confusion and fear delighted her.

For all that, though, I was at a complete loss to explain any of it. Every piece of photographic evidence I can find supported this woman's claim to be my mother. My father's memories agreed, as did the memories of the two

neighbours I was able to talk to the following day – Tom Harrison and Joanne Fisher. Both of them told me that they'd known George and Rose Cooper since they'd moved in, and when I asked them to describe Rose, they said she was medium height with a kind, round face and long, curly white hair.

I even took a walk up to the Church of St. Peter's, where I knew my mother occasionally visited, to ask the vicar, a polite man named Neil Angus. He told me the same thing as the others, though he did ask after my mother's health. Apparently, she'd had a bit of a fall the week before outside the church, and the vicar had come out to help after hearing her cry out. He turned a bit pale when he said this. I pressed him further, and he told me that, although she'd seemed fine when he had reached her, the scream was like nothing he'd ever heard.

I asked the woman who is not my mother about her 'fall' near the church. She looked me right in the eyes, smiled, and said it was nothing. She'd just had a "bit of a funny turn".

That's it, really. I left immediately and haven't been back. I've never been a believer in the supernatural before, but it seems clear to me that something attacked my mother near St. Peter's church, killed her and somehow replaced her completely. The only piece of evidence I can find is the recordings I'd made of her beforehand. The tapes still have her real voice on. I have a few, so you can have one for whatever tests you might want to do. I'm going to go back to my father and play him the others. Maybe it'll jog a memory or maybe he'll try to have me put away. Either way I have to try.

I used to think I hated my mother; I really did. But now I can't stop listening to those tapes, now I know they're the only way I'll ever hear her voice again. All

of them except the tape we recorded on the old myths of the fae, of changelings. I'm not ready to listen to that one yet.

GERTRUDE

Final comments: Unfortunately for Ms. Cooper's attempts to convince her father, it appears George Cooper died of carbon monoxide poisoning from a gas leak two days after this statement was recorded, before her next visit. No other bodies were found and there has been no sign of anyone identifying themselves as Rose Cooper since.

Based on the interactions and effects, I suspect this to be the creature that Adelard Dekker refers to as the “NotThem” in statement 9910607. If the pattern of behaviour is consistent with what he establishes, then further follow-up on this case is pointless: the thing has finished with the Cooper family and will not be revisiting them. It rarely seems to stay in the same place or with the same people for long, though it’s hard to guess at its motives. Personally, I suspect it to be an aspect of The Stranger, though that’s entirely conjecture at this point.

What puzzles me more is why one or two people can always see through it. The sheer power that it must be able to call upon to be able to rewrite so much of reality, seemingly as a reflex, is staggering. So why does it always miss a few witnesses? It is at least reassuring to know that magnetic tape seems to escape being overwritten, so if I get changed, you can be sure this is my real voice. Based on Dekker’s statement, it would seem Polaroids are also relatively stable. Beyond that, I find it comforting that this creature appears content to travel freely sowing random terror. I dread to think the damage it could inflict

if it had a purpose. I have destroyed the tape Ms. Cooper provided us as a precaution – I have no interest in attracting this thing's attention.

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on.]

ARCHIVIST

I found this tape while rifling through the boxes Basira provided me. It was labelled “Changeling / Imposter” and given Melanie’s outburst last week, I thought it a prudent place to start listening. It is uh...

The tapes that went missing after the Prentiss attack all had Sasha’s voice on them. I hadn’t put it together until listening to this. I don’t know what this... I know exactly what this means. But I don’t know what to do about it. I can’t tell the others. Even if I could get them to believe me, they’d find out about Gertrude’s tapes. I can’t risk that. I need to deal with this myself. And that means I need more information on this thing. How it works. How it k...

I need to know how to stop it. I’m going to start by tracking down the statement by this “Adelard Dekker”. I... I think the statements from the Nineties are marginally more organised now. If it’s here, if Sasha... I’m going to find out how to kill it.

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

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Today’s episode was written by Jonathan Sims and directed by Alexander J Newall.