

MAG – 076 – The Smell of Blood

Content warnings:

- Arguments
- Graphic injury & violence
- Blood & gore
- Stabbing
- Murder

Discussions of: paranormal encounters, physical violence, hospitals, gaslighting

Mentions of: self harm, disappearances, Knives (scalpel), deaths

SFX: low drone, high pitched tone, static distortions

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Introduction]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode seventy-six. The Smell of Blood.

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Introduction – Continues]

MELANIE

So, can I make my statement now?

ARCHIVIST

I think that might be for the best. Statement of Melanie King, regarding her further researches into...

MELANIE

I'm just calling them war ghosts.

ARCHIVIST

Recorded direct from subject, 13th February 2017. Statement begins.

MELANIE

Ghost Hunt UK struggled after Aldershot. Sarah Baldwin disappeared. I spent a while trying to track her down but nothing led anywhere. I'm sure you found the same. The thing is, even though her peeling and stapling her own skin was the weirdest part of what I saw, it wasn't what I got really hung up on. Fact is, there was a presence in that place. A genuine, unseen presence that physically attacked her. I've got no real reference point for who or what Sarah Baldwin might be, but I sure as hell know what a ghost is and how to look into one.

The others were dealing with their own stuff. We struggled through another year, but it wasn't the same. Toni was the worst. She just got harder and harder to pin down for shoots, and then I struggled to reach her by phone or email. When she moved down to Bristol in March, she didn't even tell me. I had to hear it from Pete; in the exact same call he said that he was thinking about leaving the team as well.

I think that's kind of why I came to you guys. I knew it was what happened at the CMH that was breaking us apart, but I couldn't actually talk to them about it. Then Andy decided to take what he called "a bit of a holiday" from the show, and I wasn't sure if he was coming back. If he did, I thought maybe we could find a new team and keep the show going.

But he didn't.

As far as Ghost Hunt UK is concerned, he's still on holiday, and it's just me.

I actually went back to the Cambridge Military Hospital. It was being torn down, but I hopped the fence after dark and just waited. There was nothing. Just dust and rubble and silence. If I closed my eyes I could trick myself into thinking that the wind was some sort of howl of pain, but that's all it was, really. The wind.

So I started looking into similar buildings, military hospitals specifically, but anywhere with a reputation for being haunted and connected to historical conflicts.

It was then that I started noticing something about the paranormal investigator community. We all look in the same places. There's a surprisingly small number of hauntings and cryptids that we all, sort of, swap between, repeating each other's research and coming to similar conclusions. That's why so many of us tend to go over to America. It's so much bigger that there's a lot more supposedly haunted locations on the circuit. Even then, it's not as many as you think. I mean, we get plenty of tips from the public about other stuff – they don't all come to see you, you know – but if they're not reporting something that we're already at least a bit familiar with, we tend to dismiss them out of hand. I used to assume this was to protect us from drunks and weirdos who ate the wrong kind of mushroom. I don't think that's it, though. I think it's to protect us from the stuff that might be real. Make sure we only go looking after encounters that others have already confirmed as safe. I mean, I don't know what it was about Sarah Baldwin that mixed so badly with the presence in the CMH, but that was the first I'd ever heard of a significant encounter there. Somewhere, somehow, the community had deemed it as not dangerous. Asbestos notwithstanding.

So, the more I looked, the more I realised that there was this huge list of places that my colleagues steered completely clear of without even realising it, and a handful of stories to go with them. It wasn't much, but it was a start.

Even back then, I could feel all my old friends starting to distance themselves from me. Like they sensed I was crossing some unspoken line about what we were allowed to investigate. Everyone had a story about the friend who'd gone to the wrong place alone and disappeared or had quit the paranormal scene without explanation. I'd heard them all before, but now they weren't just pub chatter spook stories, they were not-so-subtle warnings about straying from the path. I couldn't go back, though. It was like once I had seen that there was a path to stray from, I couldn't unsee it. And I couldn't ignore the call from the woods all around. I stopped asking the others for help, and I kept my research to myself. I talked to them less and less.

By the time I was arrested, I think a lot of them had already given up on me. I'd been looking into a bunch of online stuff, the forums and the sites without the right sort of reputation for most of my lot. The sort of places with twenty made-up ghost stories for every one that might have some meat to it. After a while, you start to get a feel for the ones that are real or, at least, that the writer thinks are real. They tend to be the messy ones. The ones that don't really have any sense or resolution, no narrative flow. Where there isn't even a guess at an explanation, and often you end up just thinking, "Is that it?"

There was one, though, that caught my eye. It was some anonymous worker at the C.F. Booth scrap metal and recycling yard. If you haven't heard of it, it's in Rotherham, and it's one of the biggest train graveyards in the UK. The guy said he worked there scrapping train, but there was one metal rail car that had been there since he got the job, and it never seemed to be on the queue for

recycling. He'd asked his supervisor, but they just shrugged and told him if it wasn't queued it didn't get scrapped, and he couldn't get a straight answer out of anybody as to why it had just been sat there for years.

He said it was old, like 1950s old, or even earlier maybe. More than that, he said that anytime he passed it while working late, he got a really strong, metallic odour that cut through all the other smells of the junkyard. He said he'd never been inside the carriage, but that it smelled like old blood.

The same post was on a couple of different forums, and each time told slightly differently. It wasn't copy-pasted, and it seemed like the posts had been made over the course of a couple of years. There was nothing really to separate it from the hundreds of horror story liars that surrounded it, but it stuck with me. It kept playing on my mind, something about the way he had described the old rolling stock felt real to me.

So, I decided to check it out. I have family up in Sheffield that I hadn't seen in way too long, so I made arrangements to go and stay with them for a week. I figured it wouldn't be too hard to head out and check the yard at night, since Rotherham's only a few miles away.

I was right about how easy it was to get there, but not about getting in. I always forget how big a target places like that are for thieves, and how hard they work to keep them out. High walls, sturdy gates and security guards all stood between me and this supposedly haunted train. I should have turned back, really, but by then I was kind of obsessed with finding anything to reassure me that I hadn't been seeing things back in Aldershot.

ARCHIVIST

I think I understand the feeling.

MELANIE

I'm sure you do. I got over the wall on my third night of watching. I'd managed to figure out enough about how the cameras and security guards covered the place that I could take a full minute to get over quietly.

The forum poster whose lead I was following hadn't given much away about his own identity, but he had been very detailed in describing what I was looking for.

An almost featureless steel boxcar, with a slightly curved roof, large windowless sliding door, and a few flecks of olive green paint still visible. Even so, finding it was tricky. There was almost no light inside the yard except for the security lights that I was trying not to trip. I had brought a torch of course, but I was reluctant to turn it on in case I was spotted.

After about ten minutes, I began to realise that my eyes weren't actually going to be the best way to find it. Because there, on the wind, was the smell of blood. It was faint at first, but as I felt my way past old, discarded trains, it got stronger.

My eyes had adjusted now, and I could see the rusted ancient skeletons of freight and passenger cars. They stood empty and still, silhouetted against that dull orange of a cloudy sky that glowed with light pollution. As I got closer I started to get jumpy, and I swear more than once I saw figures sat in the broken windows of those old trains. They were never there when I looked again.

Finally, I saw it, the stark, angular shape clear even in the dark. It was far enough from the security stations that I finally dared to turn on my torch. The light hit the dull steel, casting long shadows into its crevices, and it somehow

seemed heavier than it should have been. It was old, really old, but there was no rust on its edges.

The smell of blood was almost choking. I began to walk towards the large sliding door, but as I did so my torchlight caught on something tucked in the corner of the panelling. It seemed to be a serial number, stencilled in black paint. It was clear and legible, despite its age, and surrounded by patches of still-unpeeled green paint. The colour made me think of the army. I took a few seconds to jot it down for checking later, then reached up and slid the large metal door to the side, shining my light inside.

At first it still seemed dark, and I couldn't see much. My light hit the opposite wall, but it was the same featureless steel as the outside. Then my torch beam drifted downwards, and I caught sight of the thick red stream dripping from the now-open side of the car. The floor of the carriage was about chest height for me, and as I looked I could see it was streaked with trails of blood that led down to the doorway. I traced my light up and along the shallow red stream and it hit what looked like an old metal hospital gurney. The fabric that covered it was that same military green as outside, and the body that lay on it was covered in a white cotton bag, stained black near the bottom. It wasn't lying still, either, but it twitched and writhed as though in pain.

I wanted to run, but without warning a shape ran out of the darkness to my left. There was a glint of shining metal in its hand as it charged over to the twitching white body bag, and began to plunge the scalpel into it again and again and again. It looked like a man. He was maybe mid-twenties, dressed in army fatigues and wearing a white armband with a red cross on it. His eyes, though, they... they weren't human. I mean, they were, but everything in them

that makes us people was gone. The only thing in those eyes was violence.
Carnage.

ARCHIVIST

Blood.

MELANIE

Yeah... blood. I was so fixed on those eyes I didn't even notice him run at me. I was only when I felt the scalpel slice into my shoulder that I realised what was happening and thought to scream. Next thing I knew, I was being carried away by security guards. They were shouting at me, while I ranted at them about blood and ghosts. I only had a chance to look back at the carriage once. It was too dark inside to be sure, but I... I think it was empty. They couldn't decide whether to call the police or the ambulance, so split the difference and called both. The cut was nasty, but not deep enough to do any real damage; as you saw, I'm getting quite a scar from it. Still, it meant that even though I was technically arrested, I got to go in the ambulance rather than the police car. The guys from the scrapyard told them I'd cut myself in the dark on a sharp piece of metal. I started screaming at them, trying to tell them what actually happened. That must have been when that dog-walker, or whoever the hell it was, started filming. I was actually a meme for a day or two.

You do know what that is, don't you?

ARCHIVIST

Yes, I know what a meme is. You were saying?

MELANIE

Well, that's it, really. After I recovered they dropped the charges, and I came to you, looking to use your library. You see, I still had the serial number, and I looked up the carriage afterwards. It was from World War 2. The 11th US Army Hospital train, operating in the European theatre from August 1944. The train crew was actually commended for their service.

ARCHIVIST

But...?

MELANIE

It crashed in April 1945. Derailed, killed 5 crew and seriously injured 14 more. There weren't any patients on board at the time. At least, not officially. There was only one steel train car that avoided derailment.

ARCHIVIST

I see.

MELANIE

Exactly. There's not a lot more information on it, though, and I've no idea how it ended up in Rotherham. So I came here to dig a bit deeper.

ARCHIVIST

Really? Our... our library is extensive, but it's hardly focused on the Second World War.

MELANIE

No, but the most detailed description of the crash that I could find came from the report of a man called William W. Hay. And later in life William Hay...

ARCHIVIST

Became a noted occultist, whose memoirs and researches were only ever published in a heavily edited form. And we have unexpurgated copies.

MELANIE

Exactly.

ARCHIVIST

Did you find anything?

MELANIE

Plenty. He served on the 11th Hospital Train as engineer, and there was a lot he had to say about it. They even let me make a photocopy.

ARCHIVIST

(Reading) On the subject of savagery, I have myself seen the long-term effects upon the psyche of witnessing the violence men may inflict upon one another. A dulling of the senses is merely the first step, though one that few progress beyond. In more acute cases, there comes a strange mania, a fascination with the mechanisms of this violence, the tactility of injury and the sensations that accompany it. The smell of blood especially appears to incite in a certain sort of mind, numbed by the horrors of war, the urge commit unspeakable violence. I saw it once in the eyes of a young medic near Merey, a thing so grotesque that I have some sympathy with those who decided to crash, rather than risk his rampage. But even that pales to insignificance compared to what I saw in the infirmary at Amritsar. Two dozen Ghurkhas tearing each other to pieces, consumed by the terrible butchery they had inflicted. Such things are not to be dwelt on, but serve to illustrate my proposition that violence,

inflicted, received or even just witnessed, can not only deal injury to the body or the mind, but to the soul itself.

ARCHIVIST

I see. So does this mean...?

MELANIE

Yes. And I've got my plane to India already booked.

ARCHIVIST

Even after your experience with the hospital train? It sounds like this could be far more dangerous...

MELANIE

Oh thank you but I don't need your fake concern. I've heard them talking upstairs. You know this obsession even better than I do. I just wanted to make my statement...

ARCHIVIST

In case you get murdered by ghosts.

MELANIE

Yes.

ARCHIVIST

I understand. Thank you, Melanie.

MELANIE

Sure. Where's Sasha, by the way? I wanted to say goodbye.

ARCHIVIST

I'm sorry?

MELANIE

Sasha. Your assistant. I haven't seen her in a while. You didn't fire her, did you?

ARCHIVIST

I'm not sure I understand, she brought you down here.

MELANIE

Oh... No, is that another Sasha? Are you collecting them?

ARCHIVIST

No, no, there's just... there's just Sasha.

MELANIE

You know who I mean. Tall, long hair, glasses... She was here when I first came in. Back last April? We had a long conversation about haunted pubs.

ARCHIVIST

No, I... I remember. But that is Sasha.

MELANIE

Right, okay, um... are you trying to gaslight me or something?

ARCHIVIST

What? No!

MELANIE

Is this a joke to you?

ARCHIVIST

No! No... I... I...

MELANIE

Because I am not crazy. And that is not the same woman I met before!

ARCHIVIST

Yes it is! I mean... What?

MELANIE

There is something very wrong with you.

ARCHIVIST

No... what?

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on.]

I... um... I haven't followed up on Melanie's statement. I just keep thinking about what she said about Sasha. She was so certain. I mean, it's Sasha. Obviously it's Sasha. But... something... There's more than one thing in the files that can trick you. I can't just ignore it. So many stories about things that aren't as they appear to be. Why Melanie, though? If... Why... It doesn't matter. I need to do more research. When Melanie came in I was looking through the box of tapes Basira gave me, trying to decide where to start. Now I think... I think I have an idea.

End supplemental.

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Outro]

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