

MAG 159 — The Last

Content Warnings

- Isolation
- Murder / Death / Loss
- Family estrangement / Neglect

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

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Rusty Quill presents... *The Magnus Archives*. Episode one hundred and fifty-nine: "The Last."

[Theme finishes]

[Tape clicks on]

[Waves break on the shores of a windswept nowhere]

[Faint continuous sound of the Lonely (Peter's) static]

[The Archivist walks, gravel crunching under his feet]

ARCHIVIST

(Calling) Martin!

(Calling) Martin!

[Peter Lukas isn't there]

(Peter's voice slowly shifts from side to side, trailing echoes)

PETER

He doesn't want to see you.

[The Archivist stops walking]

ARCHIVIST

Where are you?

PETER

I'm not here, Archivist. No-one is. It's only you.

ARCHIVIST

Fine. Then maybe no-one can answer some questions.

PETER

You've still got time, Archivist. Turn around and leave. You've played your part.
Now go.

ARCHIVIST

What's wrong Lukas? Afraid of talking face to face?

(Peter chuckles)

PETER

Of course. Or haven't you been paying attention.

(The Archivist makes an angry noise)

[The Archivist restarts walking]

ARCHIVIST

(Calling) Martin!

PETER

It's odd, really. You each think you're so focused on the other. But how much do you really know each other? How much time have you spent together when not working, or bickering, or fleeing from that latest thing that wants to kill you? So what are you seeking? The image you've each created of the other? The people you think you love don't exist, not really. And that's a very lonely place to be.

ARCHIVIST

(Vicious) Shut up. **(calling)** Martin!

[The Archivist stops walking]

PETER

He doesn't want to see you.

ARCHIVIST

Then let me hear that from him.

PETER

Just go.

ARCHIVIST

(Mean) Make me. **(considering)** Unless you can't. The Lonely and the Eye aren't too far apart, are they? Not really. What good's being alone if you don't

know how alone you truly are. Which means... Well, I think you're worried. You know I'll find him eventually and you know I can find *you*.

(Beat)

Hm. Thought so.

[The Archivist restarts walking then stops]

[Martin is there]

(Martin's voice slowly shifts from side to side, trailing echoes)

ARCHIVIST

Martin.

MARTIN

(Flat) John?

ARCHIVIST

I-I'm here. I-I came for you.

MARTIN

Why?

ARCHIVIST

...I thought you might be lost.

MARTIN

Are you real?

ARCHIVIST

Yes! Yes, I-I, I am. C-come on, we've got to get out of here.

MARTIN

N-no... No, I don't think so.

ARCHIVIST

Why?

MARTIN

This is where I should be.

It feels right.

ARCHIVIST

Martin don't say that.

MARTIN

Nothing hurts here. It's just quiet. Even the fear is gentle here.

ARCHIVIST

(Concerned) This isn't right — this isn't you.

MARTIN

It is, though. I really loved you, you know?

ARCHIVIST

Martin, listen, he-he's done something, Peter's done something to mess with your—

[Martin is no longer there]

ARCHIVIST (CONT'D)

Dammit! **(Calling)** Martin? Martin!

[The Archivist restarts walking]

[Peter is not there]

(Peter's voice slowly shifts from side to side, trailing echoes)

PETER

I tried to tell you. He's gone. He made his choice. And it wasn't you.

ARCHIVIST

It was *for* me, though. I'm the reason he— I did this to him as much as you.

PETER

Yes. I suppose you did.

Where are your friends, Archivist?

ARCHIVIST

Tim and Sasha are dead.

PETER

Yes?

ARCHIVIST

Daisy and Basira are, probably dead.

PETER

Because. Of. You.

ARCHIVIST

Georgie and Melanie have left me.

PETER

And?

ARCHIVIST

Martin's gone.

PETER

You're *alone*, Archivist. The last one standing. I did warn you. I did want you to leave but, perhaps it would be better if you stayed awhile. After all, you can't hurt anyone in here.

ARCHIVIST

...Yes...

PETER

Yes.

[The Archivist stops walking]

(Beat)

[Peter is there]

[Hissing static starts]

ARCHIVIST

Or perhaps you could answer some questions.

PETER

What?

ARCHIVIST

I wouldn't try to leave if I were you. I can see you now. I can find you wherever you go.

[Hissing static ends]

[The Lonely static gets louder]

[Footstep]

(Peter's voice stops shifting side to side, and no longer echoes)

PETER

Fine. It was just a thought. So leave.

[The Lonely static become faint]

ARCHIVIST

Not before I get some answers.

PETER

That's not going to happen.

ARCHIVIST

Tell me your story, Peter Lukas.

[Hissing static starts]

PETER

No.

ARCHIVIST

(Compelling) Tell me!

[Hissing static intensifies]

(Peter makes a pained noises)

PETER

(Pained) Fine! Fine!

Where do you want to begin?

[Hissing static ends]

PETER (CONT'D)

The start? A lonely youth? My gradual path to becoming an only child? That's the thing, you see, about a family faith, you've got to double down on the believers. My mother had five children over her life, before my father finally drifted away. She was a Lukas to the core, though not born into the family, while my father, for all he believed himself keen on a life without obligation, gradually withered away to nothing as she cultivated the space between them. The house was sprawling, our bedrooms were kept as far apart as possible and changed often as we were cared for by a rotating cast of nannies and tutors. You know, she's still alive, but I still can't picture my mother's face with any

clarity, and I consider that a blessing. I'm not even burdened by hatred for her, she is simply someone who exists far away from me.

It was the sort of childhood that would not be allowed if we didn't have money, but we're an old family with shall we say a remarkably direct line of inheritance. The sort of family where no social worker would even be allowed on the property. But for all that, aside from a few oddities of faith, I don't know how different my upbringing was from other scions of aristocracy. **(slight chuckle)** From what I understand, severing the connection to your humanity is a cornerstone of an upper class education, though I was spared the targeted traumas of boarding school as my mother clearly believed the danger of friendship was too acute.

I suppose to call myself an only child is technically untrue. Two of my sisters still live, though they disavowed the family and moved far, far away. Still, to be cut off from one's family is its own very special sort of loneliness, isn't it? So we all serve in our own ways. The other two, my brother Aaron and sister Judith, well, they weren't considerate enough to quietly grow to adulthood and disappear. They simply didn't have the temperament to thrive in the Lukas household, always trying to instigate games, make friends, connect with people. As far as I'm aware they were sent away to live their lives with *very* distant relatives, never to return. I'm sure it's possible my mother resolved the matter in a less pleasant manner, but in my limited interaction with her she never struck me as a cruel woman, and I would imagine for children that age the fear and isolation of being uprooted and sent away is just as strong as that of meeting a more... grisly fate.

I, of course, was the favoured son, being quiet and reserved and, at all points, deeply engaged with my own loneliness. I had no time for books or television

or any of the escapes and artificial friendships of fiction. No; I was myself and that was enough. I would spend my days exploring the wide grounds and forests of our estate, finding the hidden corners I thought that none would have found before me, **(amused)** though now I wonder how many generations of Lukas' had exactly those thoughts in exactly those spots.

As soon as I was old enough, I would run away for days at a time. I would take what money I needed from my mother's purse and hitchhike to any city I could reach. Looking back I realise how odd it was that her purse was always so full of cash, and I believe it may have been the closest thing I ever received to her blessing. By the time I arrived at whatever destination I had arbitrarily picked it would usually be night. I would walk around the darkened streets, drinking in the sodium orange, looking at the lit windows of the tower blocks that surrounded me, each one a small cosy den of warmth and humanity, and revelling in my distance from them. Sometimes I would pass another late night traveller on the street and I would *hate* them. They shattered the distance, my cocoon of quiet stillness, and I wished with all my heart that they would simply disappear. And one day, one of them did.

I still remember him well. He was tall and broad, wearing a green raincoat he clearly bought before middle age began to set in. There was a thin drizzle that night, one of those rains you can't see, but leaves everything glistening and damp, and he was struggling with an umbrella. I tried to pass him quickly, but his eyes met mine and he... smiled. And asked if I could help him. I can't describe the feeling that passed through me, I can only say that I told him to go away. And he did. Or perhaps I did? In retrospect it's hard to be sure which of us fell out of the populated world, but either way the sense of blissful relief

edged with a strange creeping fear was something I'd never experienced before. It, was, *intoxicating*.

When I returned I was met by my mother and a small group of stern-faced relatives that I had never seen before, except at funerals. They took me below the house and showed me the truth of our family. It was... difficult to accept at first, not because I didn't want it to be true, but because it seemed unbelievable that any god could be so perfectly in tune with my heart. I left the house again shortly after, and took to the sea. I never saw my mother again. Except, of course, at funerals.

Some of my most peaceful memories were on the *Tundra*. I had gathered a small group of trusted souls who I knew were loyal and dedicated to my money. They had no qualms or morals about what we did on that boat, and at my request each signed to the ship under a false name so I would never have to know who they were. Those lonely nights of sacrifice and waiting, hearing the dreadful sound of my ancestor's whistle drift over the dark and brooding waters, knowing another soul was leaving this world. God, I wish I was there now, locked in my cabin, staring over the quiet emptiness of the open ocean. But it's moored now, and I came on land at Elias' request. My crew is out there waiting for a call I think I am now unlikely ever to give them.

I will call him Elias, for that's how I've known him for most of our acquaintance, though I originally met him when he was still James Wright, head of The Magnus Institute. I considered him a dull little man at first, so keen to watch other people's misery, to lose himself in second-hand pain and drama, exactly the sort of thing I'd always been so keen to avoid. Gertrude was the one that scared me. She seemed to have no interest in meeting me whatsoever, something I appreciated, but there was something in her eyes when she

looked at me, as though she was making a calculation, and I was an unwanted integer she was deciding whether to remove. It wasn't until much later that I realised exactly how true that was. Still, it seems I was never a pressing enough concern for her to sail out after me, or even wait until I made port and waylay me. I suppose even she couldn't have predicted how it would all turn out.

Thinking about it now, perhaps one of the reasons I lasted as long as I did was that I was, at the end of the day, predictable. A known quantity. I had my little patch, sending my poor lost sailors to their forsaken end, but I rarely stepped outside of it. When I think of all those I met who travelled in this secret world we've found ourselves in: Gertrude, Simon, Mikaele, even Raynor, there are plenty whose lives might well have been easier with my death, but it was rare that I strayed outside my habits. Maybe that's why, when I crossed paths with Adelard Dekker, we ended up talking, and he told me his theory of the Extinction, something that stayed with me even after he died pursuing it.

The thing is, the loneliness I crave, that fills my heart with that reassuring unease, relies on distance from other people. But a world without people at all, or at least anything I would recognise as people, it is meaningless. Without the lighted window in the distance, how am I to see myself apart from it? No, such a world would be terribly dull, and scares me in a very different way. A fear I am happy to offer up, of course, but one that I would prefer not come to pass. My instinct was much like the others, I thought that if I could complete my ritual first, then the potential birth of the dreadful change would be meaningless.

I started it shortly before Simon convinced me to join him in his little space experiment. It was interesting, of course, but in the end a tremendous waste of money just to scare a single astronaut. But, I had it in my mind that it might

distract from my true attempt. I had commissioned the services of architects, designers and sociologists, all under a variety of pretences, and had secured a plot of land near Aldgate East. I was going to build a tower block of my very own. Oh, it was a marvel of design, deceptively spacious apartments, yet no room quite big enough for a double bed or decent sized sofa, cooking facilities that seemed adequate until you tried to do more than microwave, an office space in every flat, but without a door so you could never truly escape your work. None of them had more than a single bedroom, though each had a main bathroom and an ensuite, which is a small touch I was very proud of. The lower four levels were left deliberately empty, so anyone living there could only see the people below from a distance, the lights of the city that they were removed from. The windows were thick and every wall had soundproofing inside it. The corridors were full of false doors, so even though each floor was designed to minimise the probability of residents encountering each other, it would seem as though they were crowded in by doors that would not open if knocked on. I made the elevators very small.

Then I offered the rooms at a ridiculously low price for their central London location, and then screened the applicants mercilessly. I prioritised those who were newly moved to the city, graduates who needed cheap accommodation and were moving into intensive, high-stress jobs that would give them little time for socialising. Recent divorcees were also very suitable, especially those whose friends had sided with their partner. I crammed them in, pushing them to stew in a cocktail of distant lights, empty corridors and lukewarm takeout for one. The plan was to wait until those inside reached a critical mass of loneliness and despair, then, all at once, lock them in remotely, cut off their internet and phone lines, and leave them to die alone in their single-occupancy

professional tombs as the Forsaken emerged from their terror. I called it The Silence, though to be honest it was mainly because I thought they had to have names. Can't say if the title was desperately inspired.

Then, of course, Gertrude Robinson happened. Do you know how she did it? What devastating weapon she used to derail my plan? The newspaper. She tipped off someone in The Guardian. I still remember seeing the headline, there in black and white: "The Loneliest Building in Britain". Trouble is, everyone I'd picked was while middle class, so people actually cared, falling over themselves to declare it emblematic of the problems of the modern world. Urgh. The think-pieces started to pour in, the applications started to drop off, and I was up to my neck in community outreach programs. No way to salvage it. Years of my life and a sizable fortune down the drain. She didn't even have the decency to kill me.

It really knocked me back. Took me years to find myself again. I returned to the *Tundra*, tried to forget, but the trouble was I'd tasted the game now, and I was still hungry for more.

I suppose that's why I was so keen when Elias contacted me. We'd kept in touch, of course, my family helped fund the institute, and he'd always been good about tipping me off to potential victims. Going through something horrific can leave you feeling very isolated indeed, especially if you know no-one else will believe you. And of course, he knew I find it hard to resist a wager.

If I could convince one of his staff to willingly pledge themselves to the Lonely, it was all mine. He even let me pick the victim. He was so sure the prize of the

Institute, the Panopticon, and a willing vessel to use it would be just too much for me to resist. And he was right. Just didn't go quite as I'd hoped.

You know, this is one of the first bets I ever made with him that I've actually lost. But I guess that's how hustlers work, isn't it? They lose and lose until you're willing to put it all on the line and then... the trap shuts. So I suppose that's probably why I reacted so rashly, trying to rip his victory away, keep you here. But it looks like I might have underestimated my opponent once again.

ARCHIVIST

And what was his prize? What did he get if you lost?

PETER

Oh, he got you.

ARCHIVIST

I-I don't understand.

PETER

And you won't. Not from me. I'm done.

ARCHIVIST

Tell me.

[Hissing static starts]

[The Lonely static gets louder]

[Footsteps]

PETER

(Fighting) I'm... not saying... another... word.

ARCHIVIST

Tell me or I will *rip* it out of you!

[Both statics keep increasing in volume]

PETER

No!

ARCHIVIST

(With all his power) ANSWER MY QUESTION!

PETER

NO!!

LEAVE!

ME!

(Echoing) ALONE!

ARCHIVIST

TELL ME!

**[The statics crescendo; there is the sound of electric tearing and
Peter screams as he is conceptually ripped apart]**

[The hissing static ends; the Lonely static becomes faint]

(The Archivist is breathing heavily)

ARCHIVIST

(Quietly) Stubborn fool.

(Beat)

ARCHIVIST

(Whispered) Martin.

[Martin is there]

He's gone, Martin. He's gone.

(Martin's voice slowly shifts from side to side, trailing echoes)

MARTIN

(Flat) His only wish was to die alone.

ARCHIVIST

Tough. N-now, listen to me Martin, I-listen...

MARTIN

Oh. Hello, John.

ARCHIVIST

Listen, I know you think you want to be here. I know you think it's safer, and... well maybe it is. But we need you. / need you.

MARTIN

No you don't. Not really. Everyone's alone but we all survive.

ARCHIVIST

I don't just want to survive.

MARTIN

I'm sorry.

ARCHIVIST

Martin. Martin look at me. **(compelling)** Look at me and tell me what you see.

[Hissing static starts]

MARTIN

I see... I see you, John.

(Small disbelieving laugh from Martin)

(Martin's voice stops shifting side to side, and no longer echoes)

MARTIN (CONT'D)

I see you.

ARCHIVIST

Martin...

[Hissing static ends]

[They embrace]

(Martin makes sobbing breaths)

MARTIN

(Emotional) I was on my own. I was all on my own.

ARCHIVIST

Not anymore. Come on. Let's go home.

MARTIN

How?

ARCHIVIST

Don't worry. I know the way.

[Footsteps]

[Tape clicks off]

[The Magnus Archives Theme — Outro]

JONATHAN SIMS

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