

Magenta Presents  
by LongCat Media  
Douglas Speaking, by Lindsay Sharman

CREAKING door

M – Greetings fans of the esoteric and welcome to... Magenta Presents. If you've been listening for a while, you might remember Lindsay, who wrote that story about the big hairy lass.

B – The Woodwose.

M – And maybe you also remember that Lindsay came here-

B – to Misty Moor Rectory

M – --because we invite all our writers to come here to record their story. So we don't have to pay an actor to do it, for the most part. Anyway, despite our repeated warnings to Lindsay that she should NOT go poking around Misty Moor Rectory on her own--

B – because it's very haunted. And structurally unsound. And possibly a gateway to the other World.

M – --despite saying all of that, she went poking around anyway - writers are terribly nosy, that's why they write, they just can't mind their own business. Anyway, she poked around and found out, as they say. She came a cropper.

B – We're not entirely sure what exactly happened to Lindsay, because we never saw her again.

M – Well. That's debatable. Occasionally, something at the corner of our vision scurries past, and I'm pretty sure it's her. It smells like her, anyway. Sort of... eggy.

B – Maybe that's sulphur, dear. So it might be a demon of some description. Especially as the scurrying thing sort of makes tippy-tappy noises as it goes, like it has claws.

M – Oh possibly! But regardless what the scurrying thing is, she's definitely still here somewhere, because the other day, we woke up, and she'd left us a new story!

B – Written across the walls of our bedroom! Or not so much 'written' as finger-painted... using some sort of substance. Some sort of brown substance.

M – Blood dries brown, lets hope it was that. Anyway, it's nice she's still being creative, despite... whatever's happened to her. Although really, I must say, giving us a new story is the least she can do, seeing as she's not paying rent.

B – Oh, by the way, while we're on the subject, we had a question from an eagle-eared listener about this--

M – Do eagles have good ears?

B – Well, I believe bald eagles are diurnal hunters, and diurnal birds have hearing about equal to that of humans.

M – So this listener has the ears of an average human?

B – Yes! And using their eagle-human-ears, this listener has been listening to our other podcast (Madame Magenta Sonos Mystica). In a very early episode of that podcast, we reference our *daughter* Lindsay. So the listener wanted to know if the Lindsay who wrote *The Woodwose* is the same Lindsay as our daughter!

M – Goodness me! Can you imagine if it was our daughter who was scurrying around in the shadows and not paying rent? (beat) Hohoho!

B – It'd be just like the old days! Typical teenager, eh! Hoho!

M – She certainly was a demonic entity for a while though!

B – Hoohoo! But no, the Lindsay who wrote the *Woodwose* is not our daughter. Our daughter wants nothing to do with our podcasts! (teasing) Although... that might be about to change!

M – Oh yes, true. Daughter Lindsay is in a forthcoming episode of *Sonos Mystica*.

B – She made an exception, just this once. (fond) Y'know, I think she's mellowing with age.

M – She needs our help, more like. But back to the other Lindsay, the one who scrawled a story on our walls in sh—blood. (portentous) A chilling tale, entitled... 'Douglas Speaking'. Actually, it's less a story and more a mini-drama. Bernard's doing the acting in this one! Because we didn't want to pay any actors.

B – Your mother has a small role in it too. Also unpaid. And she's also on our other podcast soon, too! *Sonos Mystica* is becoming quite the family affair!

M – (mutters) Worst idea we've ever had.

B – Y'know, I think your mother might be mellowing with age, too.

M – Do you think?

B – Not really. She's getting weirder, if anything. I wonder what the listeners of *Madame Magenta: Sonos Mystica* will make of her?

M – Bernard. Focus on this podcast, not the other one.

B – (whispers) Oh. I was just trying to tempt our listeners into checking out season four of *Madame Magenta Sonos Mystica*.

M – (whispers) Yes, but we can't be too obvious. It has to seem natural, like 'oh, just came up in

conversation'.

B – (whispers) Yes, of course.

M – (whispers) Make sure you edit this bit out too.

B – (whispers) I will, don't worry.

M – (whispers) Don't forget to do that.

B – (whispers) I won't.

M – (whispers) Good.

B – (whispers) They will never suspect!

M – And so, dear listeners, it is time! MAGENTA PRESENTS 'Douglas Speaking', by Lindsay Sharman.

Hello, 543 1953, Dr Fir speaking.

Hahah! Doug! Finally! How are you! What year is it? How old are you?

I'm sorry, can I ask who's calling?

Heh... Who am I... yes. Well, Douglas, in many ways I am a stranger. In other ways, I know you better than anyone ever will or ever could. Insofar as anyone can say they know themselves, of course.

What's that? Stick to the script? Hmm.

Douglas, I'm going to tell you something now, and upon hearing it, you might be tempted to put the phone down. But trust me when I say; you're reeeally gonna wanna hear this. So please; lean into that insatiable curiosity you possess, and hear me out.

Do I know you? You sound familiar. Can I ask who's calling, please?

There's no way of saying this that doesn't sound silly, so I'm just going to say it and sound silly. Douglas... I'm you from the future. I don't expect you to believe me straight off the bat, but I can prove it, if you give me a chance. Douglas? Are you still there?

*(laughs)* I'm here. I don't think I've ever been crank-called before. You don't sound like a kid, either. Aren't you too old for this sort of thing?

No, come on then, let's hear it! What's the future like? Where did you park your time machine? Do you need change for the meter? I'd hate for you to come all this way and get a ticket!

Well, aren't we funny. But alright, let's pretend you're serious. There is no such thing as a time machine. Travelling through time is impossible. I am *calling you* from the future. A call that has taken decades and billions and driven the finest scientific minds to the edge of reason. And yet, you're about to ask me for next week's lottery numbers, aren't you, Doug? Like a reeal comedian. Tell me, has Amy left you yet?

Amy? How do you know about Amy? Sorry - who is this? Did Amy put you up to this?? Or was it Brian? This is Brian, isn't it? Are you one of Brian's friends?

Her husband?

Husband?? No, no, they're not—

No? Aren't they married yet? Just tell me what year it is, old boy, I'd rather not keep guessing. But if you insist! (Clears throat) Let's see... Amy left you on Christmas Eve, 1987...

How did you know—

When did she get engaged the Brian...

No, no, this is nonsense!

I know what you're thinking, Doug; you're thinking: I should already know what date and time it is that I'm calling. But the time-calling technology doesn't work like that. It's a bit of a crap-shoot. You can aim, but the chance of hitting the target bang-on are pretty slim. So this would be a lot quicker if you just tell me what the bloody date is.

Oh! Well! You tell me! If we're the same person, surely all you have to do is *remember* when I got this call!

Heh... you know what? You're absolutely right! I SHOULD have a memory of this.

Yes! There it is! A new memory... from fifty years ago! Hahaaaa!

The night of the phonecall, I was in my apartment on Ogilvy Street! Was that the name of the street? Yes, yes, it was. At the time, I'd been there just under a year. Oh I remember now, it *stunk* of cigarettes from the previous tenants. I hated that place.

(*knowing*) Great view from the window, though. Eh?

Hehehe... Greeeeat view.

Now then, let's see. When the call came, I was watching TV. I wasn't enjoying it much. I was too nauseous, depressed. Normally at that time I'd be at the lab, but I was off sick. I told them it was flu but... it isn't flu, is it Doug? (*chuckles*) Don't worry, I won't tell if you won't.

How... how do you know all this?

Gosh, this memory... crystal clear. You know, when you get to my age, Doug, very few memories have any substance. They become smoke and whispers. Except for the *big* moments!

This phonecall right now, this is a big moment for us, Doug. The moment I realised the only one who can save me... is me.

How are you feeling, by the way? Still feverish? I recall the antibiotics gave me the shits for a week. I wish you hadn't waited so long to get treatment, Doug. Problems don't just go away if you ignore them. For someone with an IQ in the high 140s, you can be a real dumbo.

How is this possible? Are you spying on me? Who told you about the syphi... was it Amy? No, she wouldn't tell anyone. She's too embarrassed. You're a friend of Brian's, I know it. He told you. What do you want? Is it blackmail, is that what this is? Or are you just trying to humiliate me? What do you want? What do you want from me??

Douglas, Doug, shhhhshshh. I'm here to help. I'm on your side. I'm the *only* person on your side! No-one else gives a shit! Certainly not Amy.

How many messages did you leave, saying how sick you were? How there was no food in the house? How scared you were that you might die alone in that stinking apartment? Four messages? Five?

Why are you doing this?

And she never called back.

Just tell me what you want.

Do you remember when she said if we ever broke up, we'd still be friends. But friends check up on friends.

Friends visit sick friends with Lucozade and soup. Friends don't move house and fail to tell you where they're going! She lied to you, Doug. She lied to us.

And now you have nothing. No girlfriend. No friends. The people at the lab don't even look up from their work when you arrive. Your family are strangers to you, and you to them.

Maybe we're the problem, maybe you're incapable of real connection. Even with Amy, when she spoke you waited for her to stop, and when it was your turn, you said what someone else might say if they were you.

And one day Amy woke up and realised she was in bed with the outline of a man, a cardboard cut-out. And she cheated on you... with Brian.

The day she left, she went straight to his place. They spent Christmas Day together. They pulled crackers and exchanged gifts and sucked and fucked by an open fire while Bing Crosby played on the radio.

Ever since, it's all you can think about. Isn't it, Doug?

No. Yes. That doesn't mean you're... who you say you are.

OK, then. How's this? You popped your cherry when you were nineteen. Her name was Crystal, she was German. Music annoys you. As a child, you designated your right kneecap female, and your left male. Your toes are their children. The woman in the upstairs flat makes too much noise; so you punctured one of her tires. At university you drank absinthe to seem sophisticated. You tried to flush a friend's hamster down the loo when you were nine. But it wouldn't go down, so you had to use a toilet brush to push it round the u-bend.

Just some of the things you haven't told a single soul.

I could go on.

Oh god!

No? OK.

Onto business. Why have I called? Because the world needs you, Doug. You were starting to think you were the least important person in the world, but it turns out: quite the reverse!

Oh god.

The lab, Sonos Laboratory, how long have you worked there? Four years? So by now you know that Sonos is run by a collection of scientists who are... uninspired. Pedestrian.

Except for two. Working together, two of them will go on to change the course of history. Doug, do you know who I'm talking about?

Amy!

Mmm!

Amy and... me?

Mmmm. Almost. You're half right. I'll give you a clue: it's not you. Think; who at Sonos is a better scientist than you are? That's right! Brian!

I'm sorry Doug. Your ex and the man she cheated on you with become the Pierre and Marie Curie of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

No no no no!

Yes, alright. You're upset. You should be. They fell in love right in front of your eyes. They saw their own brilliance and ambition reflected in the other. And together, they'll birth a scientific legacy that drones like us could only dream of.

Love can be the most selfish force in the universe. And it's not just you they destroy, Doug. It's the world.

What? They... they destroy the world? How? What do they do? What happens?

Well! Major spoilers ahead: plague makes a comeback in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In a big way! The first pandemic inspired a whole slew of conspiracy theories. One of them was that the virus was created in a lab as a bio-weapon. Not true.

The *third* pandemic, on the other hand... that was lab-grown alright!

And why? Imperialist ambition! Imperialism and plague, who knew they'd make a comeback!

The idea was to target plague at designated countries in order to utterly decimate the population. Without workers, all systems would fail. Health, transport, food, energy... Defence.

Meanwhile, certain countries would find they had natural immunity. They would be called upon to help their fallen brothers and sisters. They would be invited to colonize the plague-ravaged countries. No force required.

Except, of course, it IS force. Just not in the way we normally categorise it. Over five and a half billion people perish in the third plague.

My God. But you survived? *I* survived?

Oh, no no no! Don't get excited, Doug. You're the colonized, not the colonizer! And by now, you're old and your health is failing, and they have no need of you. You may survive the virus, but you barely survive the invasion.

While the self-styled elite reform the world in their image, you and your brethren hide in holes in the ground.

Oh, and by the way, you don't invent time travel either. Far better scientists than us do that! Maybe if you'd treated the syphilis earlier, you'd have had enough brain left to contribute! IQ probably not in the high 140s anymore, eh?

No, no, that's not true. I got it in time! I'm fine. I'll recover. Hey, Amy had it too, and you said she's some kind of genius!

She went to the doctors in time, you oaf! And then she left you for a *real* scientist! And now they run the bloody world while you eat rats to survive!

Why are you telling me any of this? If I'm so insignificant, why are we even speaking?? There must be a reason! So what is it? Hm? What do you want from me??

I want you to kill them. Professor Amy Rennie and Dr Brian Adamu, the architects of the third plague.

Come on, Doug. Don't pretend you've never thought about it. There's a reason you moved to that stinking apartment. What a view it has! Straight into Amy's living room.

You could do it tonight. Your hunting rifle; use that.

Are they home yet? Go to the window and check.

No. I can't do that. No no. I can't kill them. I'd go to jail!

You won't. We'll protect you. We'll make other calls, you'll be fine. Better than fine; once the deed is done, we will create a future for you that will be the envy of the world. Think of what we could do together.

This is your chance to be someone, Doug. And as for Amy and Brian... no more Christmas Days for them.

Come on. Go to the window. See if they're home. If they are... you know what to do.

...Alright.

Good man. And Doug; leave the phone off the hook. I'll be here when you get back.



SENATOR: That didn't take long. (breathes tension out). What happens now, Alec?

ALEC: (relaxed) Depends if he does it or not. If he fails, we'll call whoever's next on the list. But if it actually works, if he does as he's told, we're looking at a new world order. The hard reset! Five and a half billion souls gone toodle-oo. Not us, of course. We'll be sitting pretty.

SENATOR: I don't believe he'll do it. He's a scientist, not a soldier.

ALEC: Are you doubting our ability to pick a target, Senator? Dr Fir is a silly little man driven mad by his own inadequacy; just the sort to resort to violence. Cognitive decline caused by tertiary syphilis helps, of course.

SENATOR: What would've happened to him? If you hadn't called him?

ALEC: He dies in the third pandemic after refusing to take the vaccine. And why does he refuse it? Because his ex and her husband developed the damn thing! Petty little man.

They data-stripped his cognition before he popped off, of course. Otherwise we'd have no idea about Crystal the German escort, and toilet hamsters, and all the other sordid little details. Ugh. I need a shower.

And of course, if this works, if he shoots the architects of the vaccine... I imagine he'll tell the police his future self made him to do it.