

MAG – 022 – Colony

Content Warnings

- worms
- Trypophobia
- Parasitic infection
- Cleithrophobia (fear of being trapped)
- **Discussions of:** Spiders
- **Mentions of:** death, food, homelessness
- **SFX:** Wriggling worms

[CLICK]

JONATHAN SIMS

Martin, are you sure about this?

MARTIN

I just want to make a statement about what happened to me. I mean, it... it's what we do.

JONATHAN SIMS

No, what we do is research statements. Usually those made by liars and the mentally unwell.

MARTIN

Well, I need to tell someone what happened, and you can vouch for the soundness of my mind, can't you?

JONATHAN SIMS

That is beside the point.

MARTIN

If you're that worried about it, it doesn't need to be an official statement. I just need a record of it.

JONATHAN SIMS

Fine. You're right. I suppose. Statement of Martin Blackwood, archival assistant at the Magnus Institute, London, regarding...

MARTIN

A close encounter with something I believe to have once been Jane... Prentiss.

JONATHAN SIMS

Recorded direct from subject, 12th March, 2016. Statement begins.

MARTIN

Well, a couple of weeks ago, you were looking into that statement about the spider that wouldn't go away. Carlos... Vittery I think his name was? I knew there was something not right about the whole thing from the off. I said it probably wasn't natural, him dying and being encased in web when he was found, and I stand by that, though it wasn't anything to do with spiders that ended up after me. Almost wish it had been.

(Nervous Laughter)

I like spiders. Big ones, at least. Y'know, y'know the ones you can see some fur on; I actually think they're sort of cute...

JONATHAN SIMS

Please stick to the statement, Martin.

MARTIN

Right. You asked me to investigate that flat that he lived in down in Boothby Road, and that's what I do. I take the Northern Line up to Archway and walk the rest of the way down there. It's still quite early then, and I find the building easily enough. It looks just like Mr. Vittery said it did in his statement, and there's a big thick door on the front, that looks like it leads into the hall and then to the flats. Obviously it's locked so I try the buzzers, but nobody's answering and I figure they're probably all out at work. I didn't want to come back to you without due diligence, though – I've learned that lesson – so I have a look around the place to see if there's another way I could go in and have a poke around. Sure enough, as I walk round, I spy a basement window that's slightly ajar. It isn't much, but I reckon I can squeeze through it if I try.

As I get... closer, though, I notice there's something on the ground, nearby. The sunlight catches on it and at first I think it must be a screw or a little piece of metal that someone's thrown away. I get closer and I see that it looks more like a worm of some sort. It's maybe an inch long, with a silver segmented body that goes black at one end, almost like it's been burned. It's very... still, so I kneel down to have a look and as I get closer it begins to twitch. Its darkened head twists towards me and it starts to... writhe in this kind of eerie way, moving along the ground very fast and straight at me.

Well, to be honest I... I freaked out a bit. I leapt to my feet and I just stamped on it before I had a chance to really think about what I was doing. I felt it pop beneath my shoe with a faint cracking sound, like stepping on an eggshell, and a thick, black slime started to ooze from where I stepped on it. Now, obviously I was pretty disgusted by the whole thing, so I take a moment to scrape off

what's left of it and check around for any more. There's none that I can see, so after composing myself for a couple of seconds, I continue on my way into the basement. The window was small. Quite a tight squeeze for me, I mean, I'm not exactly the smallest guy in the world, I know, and it's only once I'm inside that I realise it's only at ground level for the outside, so I take a bit of a tumble onto the basement floor.

Luckily I get away without hurting myself and start to have a quick look around the room. It's pretty big, and it looks like it goes under pretty much the whole building, but the light from the window doesn't get very far inside so most of the place was very dark. Then I realise that I don't have any sort of torch with me, and I can't see any light switch on the nearby wall, so I've no real way of looking round. I almost decided to turn around and try to climb out back the way I came, not least because the place had a really bad 'feeling' to it. Like, like there was this musty smell, and the air was dusty and thick.

Also, you're going to think I'm an idiot when I say this, but I didn't like the way my... shadow moved. The light from the window behind me cast it pretty clearly on the floor, and looking at it I swear the edges seemed to move. It was like a... like a, like an undulation, like, like they were being shifted by something. I mean... look, I know you hate the word, but it was really... spooky. Look, anyway, that was when I saw the bottom of the stairs leading up, and I, I didn't waste any time heading up them. The door at the top wasn't locked, so I find myself in the ground floor hall of the building and I'll admit it was a real relief to get out of that place and into the well-lit main building. I could have left at that point, probably should have, but I decided to try one more time to see if I could talk to the current occupants of Mr. Vittery's old flat.

Due diligence... and all that. So I, I head up to number four and give a few knocks on the door. I didn't expect anyone to be in, but the door's opened by

an old woman in a headscarf. I tried to ask her some questions, but it became clear she didn't really speak much in the way of English. After a few seconds she just shook her head and pointed behind me, closing the door unceremoniously.

Turning around, I see a large, dark-skinned man in a very nice-looking suit eyeing me with a bit of suspicion. He introduced himself as Yasir Kundi, and said he owned the building, and became slightly more co-operative after I lied to him and told him that one of the upstairs residents had buzzed me in. I told him why I was there, although obviously I didn't mention... breaking in or the Institute or what we do because I find people often don't understand or respect that out in the real world. I just said that following Mr. Vittery's death I was looking into some aspects of his history and did he remember anything about the time he was a tenant? Mr Kundi was about as helpful as you might expect. Told me Carlos Vittery had lived there, seemed weird, always shut himself up, but was never a problem, paid his rent on time. Used to have a cat, but it now lived with the Sanderson couple in number two. He seemed genuinely surprised to hear about the death, but wasn't able to shed any sort of light on it. It wasn't a lot, really. Still, about as much as I might have expected, so I headed back to the Institute and updated you on what I'd found. And, well, as I'm sure you're aware that was the last time I saw you before I disappeared.

I was heading home when I got to thinking, and I was worried I hadn't really done enough investigation for you, since I got so freaked out by the basement and all. And then I remembered that I'd seen quite a lot of spider webs in the brief time I was down there, and maybe I should check it out again. I mean, like I said, I'm not really afraid of spiders. So... I went back for another look. It was dark when I got to Boothby Road, but I saw that the basement window was still

open. I'd made sure to bring a torch this time, and after a quick check to make sure nobody was watching, I climbed inside. I knew right then that I'd made a huge... mistake. The air was just as musty as it had been before, but it seemed warmer than it had been, which was strange because outside it was a cold February night. I turned on my torch and shone it around, but was disappointed to see that all those spider webs that I remembered seemed old and unremarkable. If there were spiders there, none were easily seen, and... for a second I thought that the only interesting part of my return trip was that it would land me in prison if I wasn't careful. Then, I heard movement. From the other side of the basement. It was... faint, just a rustling, really. I didn't want to check it out, I really didn't. I've catalogued and looked into enough of these cases to know that following the noise is always a really, really bad idea, but... I mean... it's my job, isn't it?

So, I slowly moved towards it, keeping my torch held in front of me like a... like a shield. The beam was so much weaker than I had thought it was, and it only lit up the stark outlines of the shelves and detritus that littered the basement. The movement had stopped, or at least I couldn't hear it anymore, and I'd almost made up my mind to just turn around and leave, when my torch fell across what looked like a human figure. It appeared to be... a woman. She was facing away from me, apparently staring at the corner of the wall. Her hair was long and black, though it was so twisted and dirty it was hard to tell if that was its original colour. She wore a threadbare grey overcoat, though beneath it her legs were bare, and covered with what I at first I thought were spots. In her right hand she held a stained, green handkerchief. She stood there, totally still, either not noticing the torchlight that was shining on her, or not caring. I didn't move a muscle. Then, with a quick, jerky movement she brought the handkerchief to her face and coughed. I mean, I call it a cough, because that's

what it looked like, but it didn't sound like a cough. It was more like... like... you know in a nature documentary, w-when the lion's caught something and it's, it's ripping it apart? That noise of wet meat...? Yeah, it was, was like that. I saw something drop from the handkerchief onto the floor. It was about an inch long, silver, and it wriggled as it fell. I screamed. I'm not ashamed to admit it, though looking back I really wish I hadn't.

Her head snapped towards me and she locked eyes with me. Her pupils seemed ragged and collapsed, and when she smiled her teeth were chipped and blackened. I started to stagger backwards, expecting at any moment for her to lunge at me, but instead she slowly reached up and... let the overcoat fall to the floor. Her skin was pale, almost grey, and full of... sorry, it still makes me sick to think about it. It was full of holes. Deep, black holes just honeycombing every bit of flesh like a... wasps' nest. I could see those... thin, silver worms crawling in and out, and their black tips twitching as they squirmed through that... pitted... meat. I mean, it wasn't human. It can't have been.

Sh-She... It took a step towards me and as it did so the worms began to writhe out of every hole and cavity, falling to the floor in a cascading... wave and starting to crawl towards me with... with alarming speed. I had the oddest thought, then, and even as I backed away towards the stairs, I started to get my phone out. The daft thing is I wasn't even going to call anyone for help, I just wanted to take a picture of the thing. To prove to you that it happened – you're always so quick to dismiss these statements and I wanted proof for you. Except, well, I managed to drop it, of course. Just as I was bringing up the camera app, one of the worm-things reached at me and leapt at my face. That thing jumped literally 6 feet through the air at my face. It missed me, but I was

so taken aback that I fell onto the stairs behind me, and dropped my phone to the ground.

I-I didn't stop to pick it up, I just fled up the stairs as fast as I could. Obviously the door at the top wasn't locked. If it had been... I'm sure I'd be dead. Or... worse. I ran faster than I ever have in my life – I've never been good at running – and every moment expected to feel something wriggling up my leg. I didn't stop running until I was sat in the Underground and had checked every inch of my seat for worms.

I live in Stockwell, right at the other end of the Northern Line, so by the time I got home I was... starting to feel a bit safer... though utterly exhausted. I knew that there was no way I was going to be able to work the next day, but without my phone I couldn't let you know. I mean I don't have a landline – who does anymore – but couldn't bring myself to stay awake long enough to send an email, so I just collapsed, fully clothed onto the bed. I don't know how long I slept for, but it was still dark when the knocking woke me up. I don't know if it was the same night, or if I'd slept right through the day. Either way, I dragged myself up and, as I sat there, it all came back to me, what I'd seen, and I shuddered.

I tried to tell myself I'd imagined it. Maybe I'd overreacted to finding a homeless woman sleeping in the basement. Maybe she was sick and needed an ambulance. Oh god, maybe I'd left her to die. There was more knocking and I reached up to flick the light on. But when I did so nothing happened. I tried the lamp next to my bed, but again, nothing. Looking around I saw that none of my electronics seemed to be on. There must have been some sort of power cut. Again, someone knocked at the door. Maybe it was one of my neighbours... coming to check whether I'd lost power? So I shuffle over towards the door and... reached for the handle.

As I was about to open it I got a sudden chill and stopped. What if she was outside, waiting? I mean th-the worms that made a hive of her body, eager, striving to make me one as well. I thought of that awful case you had us looking into where that woman... burst into worms, and I realised that this woman must be that Jane Prentiss you were telling us about. I never had one of those peepholes added, so I couldn't see what was out there, but as I took a step back I saw something on the floor, crawling out from underneath the door. It was a small, silver-looking worm. I think I might have... lost my mind a bit, then. It all... feels very... strange, blurry. I-I remember stamping and stamping as-as more made their way under my doorway. I-I remember grabbing every towel, sock, bit of fabric scrap that I could find, stuffing them under the door, into the cracks around the window. Anything where a slender worm might crawl I made airtight. And then I sat there and waited. I-I still had no power, no phone, no way to communicate with the outside.

This went on for thirteen days. Every time I thought it might be safe to try and leave I'd hear that knocking at my door come back. Luckily there was no problem with my water supply, so I had plenty to drink. I'm just glad none of them thought to come up through the pipes. I eat a lot of... ready meals, cans, that kind of thing, so... I had food, although after the first few days I had to start rationing.

If I ever see another can of peaches... But... I-I think the worst part was the boredom. No internet, no phone, no power. I read the handful of print books I own several times. I-I didn't really sleep. Every time I closed my eyes I'd start to feel something was crawling... up my legs and I'd have to sit up and check. Other times I'd be awoken by that knocking. I spent a lot of time trying to remember what you told me about Jane Prentiss when we were working on Tim Hodges statement, but... all I remembered were that she called herself to

be a practising witch and was believed to be infected by a-a dangerous, unknown parasite. She never talked to me. I-I could have heard her clearly through the door, but she never made a sound apart from that knocking. From what I saw, maybe what was in her throat didn't leave room for a voice. Strangely, she never tried to break down my door, either. Just knocked. She knocked... and knocked... and knocked.

Finally, I woke up this morning and she was gone. I don't know exactly how I knew. I-I think she brought that musty smell with her, and this morning I-I couldn't smell it. And there was no knocking. I mean, it still took me about four hours of checking and double-checking and listening at the letterbox before I got the nerve to actually open the door, but when I did... there was no-one there. And I ran... all the way here.

JONATHAN SIMS

Statement ends.

You're sure about all of this, Martin?

MARTIN

Look, I'm not going to lie to you about something like this, John. I... like my job. Most of the time.

JONATHAN SIMS

Very well. In which case there's a room in the archives I use to sleep when working late. I suggest you stay there for now. I'll talk to Elias about whether we can get extra security, but the Archives have enough locks for now. It's also supposed to be humidity controlled and, though it hasn't been working for some time, it does mean it's well-sealed. Nothing will be sneaking through any window cracks.

MARTIN

Okay... thanks. To be honest I didn't, didn't expect you... to take it seriously.

JONATHAN SIMS

You say you lost your phone two weeks ago? **MARTIN** Thereabouts. When I went back to the basement.

JONATHAN SIMS

Well, in that time I have received several text messages from your phone, saying you were ill with stomach problems. The last one said that you thought it "might be a parasite", though my calls trying to follow up were never answered. So, if this does involve Jane Prentiss, then I take it deadly seri-

[PHONE BUZZES]

JONATHAN SIMS

Hang on.

MARTIN

What?

JONATHAN SIMS

I just received another text message. From you. "Keep him. We have had our fun. He will want to see it when the Archivist's crimson fate arrives."

MARTIN

What does that mean?

JONATHAN SIMS

It means I ask Elias to hire some extra security. I should probably warn Sasha and Tim as well. I'll also have a look through the Archives, as I believe we should have a statement from Ms. Prentiss herself in here somewhere.

Recording ends.

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Outro]

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