

MAG – 017 – The Boneturner's Tale

Content Warnings

- Body disfigurement
- Body modification
- Discussions of:** blood, gore
- **Mentions of:** violence, animal disfigurement, death, car accident

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill Presents The Magnus Archives Episode Seventeen The Boneturner's Tale

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro - Continues]

JONATHAN SIMS

Statement of Sebastian Adekoya, regarding a new acquisition at Chiswick Library. Original statement given June 10th 1999. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Statement begins.

JONATHAN SIMS

(Read aloud from the archived witness statement of Sebastian Adekoya)

Books are amazing, aren't they? I mean, when you think about what they really are. People don't give the actuality of language the weight it deserves, I feel. Words are a way of taking your thoughts, the very make-up of yourself, and giving them to another. Putting your thoughts in the mind of someone else. They are not a perfect method, of course, as there's plenty of scope for

mutation and corruption between your mind and that of the listener, but that doesn't change the essence of what language is. Spoken aloud though, the thought dies quickly if not picked up. Simple vibrations that vanish almost as soon as they are created, though if they find a host then they can lodge there, proliferate and maybe spread further. Still, it is not a reliable method in terms of a thought's endurance, as humans are fragile creatures and rarely last a century.

A book, though, is another story. There are written texts that have outlived the civilisations that created them. Imagine, thoughts hundreds, thousands of years old, preserved and ready to be taken again. Corrupted, or translated, perhaps, by a culture that does not understand them, but still, ideas that have outlived by lifetimes the mind that first conceived them. Will the thoughts that first ran through Shakespeare's head ever stop being thought by someone, somewhere? And a book, so dense with a mind's fossilised creations, is it any wonder they have been ascribed such power throughout the ages? Or that an old library, with heavy tomes covering every wall, seems to have such a weight to it, beyond the physical presence of the texts it holds?

I used to work at Chiswick Library. I didn't have such ideas back then, though. I just knew I loved books, always had, and so when the opportunity arose to work in my local library I jumped at the chance. I had been a voracious reader ever since I was old enough to hold a book for myself, and even before that my mother tells me I would pester her constantly to read to me. I suppose you might say my mind has always been receptive to the thoughts that lurk in the written page. Still, Chiswick Library is a long way from the cramped and austere libraries you're probably imagining. It's light and airy, with bookshelves and carpets that speak more of cash-strapped local councils than of the rich

majesty of knowledge. It has an extensive children's section and the vast majority of its stock are dog-eared paperbacks of true crime, literary fiction and reference books. It has a modest collection of books on tape and the atmosphere, though quiet, is far from oppressive. In a word, I would sum the place up as 'unthreatening'.

It was three years ago when this happened. I had already been working there for about a year when the book first turned up. Now, we used to buy all of our books new, and I never did any of the acquisitions for the library, so I couldn't say when or where it might have been bought from, but it looked old and pretty beaten up when I first noticed it. It was handed back with four other books at the front desk, and as I was scanning them through I noticed that one of the barcodes didn't seem to match up. The barcode and ISBN both registered as being that of *Trainspotting* by Irvine Welsh, but the book itself was an almost featureless black paperback, with a title on the front in a faded white serif font *The Boneturner's Tale*.

I was a bit confused, and called the librarian, Ruth Weaver, over to ask about it. She didn't recall seeing it ever before, but stuck in the front was the ex-libris bookplate of Chiswick Library, as well as a lending label with a handful of stamps going back several years. Ruth shrugged and told me not to worry too much about it – we'd get it recorded and put on the system properly, but something about the situation bothered me, so I decided to check the record of the man who had returned it. His name, at least according to his library card, was Michael Crew, and sure enough three weeks ago he had borrowed four books from us. Specifically, the four others he had returned. I suggested to Ruth that perhaps he was a self-published author who was trying to trick his way onto our shelves, and she laughed, saying it was probably it, although why

anyone would go to the trouble of faking it just to get on the shelves of Chiswick Library was beyond her. The book even looked worn, though, like it had seen decades of being read, with a line creased down the spine and one half of the cover faded from the sun. Nor, from what I could see, did it list any author at all.

It was at that moment that Jared Hopworth came in, and I had to put the book to one side. Jared and I had once been fast friends; growing up on the same road, attending the same schools, we had spent much of our early life as inseparable. But he had always been, well, not to put too fine a point on it, thick as mud, and when I went away to university, he stayed behind. I think he saw it as something of a betrayal, and when I finally returned, I knew immediately something had changed between us. He spent the time I was away becoming a bit of a crook, and upon my return began what would eventually become a campaign of petty terror. He was always very careful to stop before he did anything that might get the police involved, and I guess there was enough leftover affection from a childhood spent together that I never really thought about reporting him. It was

JONATHAN SIMS

Oh, Erm Hello Elias.

ELIAS

Do you have a moment?

JONATHAN SIMS

Not really, I'm sort of in the middle of something.

ELIAS

I understand, it's just that Miss Herne has lodged a complaint.

JONATHAN SIMS

A complaint? I could just as easily complain about her wasting my time.

ELIAS

That's not how it works, Jonathan.

JONATHAN SIMS

I wouldn't even have had to do the recording if Rosie kept her equipment in better condition.

ELIAS

Regardless, I would prefer that you not antagonise anyone connected to the Lukas family. They are patrons of the Institute, after all.

JONATHAN SIMS

Fine, fine, I'll be more lovely. Now, can I get back to work?

ELIAS

Very well. By the way, have you seen Martin?

JONATHAN SIMS

Oh, he's off sick this week. Stomach problems, I think.

[Sound of Elias Leaving]

JONATHAN SIMS

Blessed relief if you ask me.

Statement resumes.

JONATHAN SIMS

(Read aloud from the archived witness statement of Sebastian Adekoya)

It was worst when Jared visited the library, because that inevitably meant that he was bored enough to seek me out for harassment. Sure enough, he started chatting with me, meaningless jibes that served to wait it out until Ruth, who didn't know about Jared's problems with me, returned to her office and closed the door. As soon as she had done so, he turned and in a single movement tipped over the metal returns cart, spilling the recently received books all over the floor. He smiled at me and apologised. I did my best not to show any irritation, or indeed any reaction at all as I slowly walked around and bent down to start collecting them. As I rose to my feet I felt an impact on the back of my head and staggered. Behind me, Jared stood holding the book I had put aside, *The Boneturner's Tale*, and had apparently picked it up to hit me with. But rather than offering me a fake apology or further violence, instead his eyes were locked on the book. We stood there in silence for a few seconds until he said something about needing something new to read, turned around and walked off.

I was, I will admit, a bit unsettled. As far as I could recall I had never seen Jared read... well, anything, really. And the look in his eyes when he had left had something in it not entirely unlike fear. Still, it was a welcome relief to have him gone, and I quickly tidied up the rest of the books before Ruth noticed anything amiss.

There was nothing else I recall that happened that day at the library, but on the way home afterwards I passed by Jared's house. I had moved back in with

my parents while I got everything sorted out after university, and he had never moved out of his childhood home, so we still lived on the same street. It was late September at this point, so by the time I had walked back from the library it was dark, and I noticed a small shape moving in the pool of orange light below the streetlamp.

As I got closer, I realised with a slight start that it was a rat, and not a dirty, wild rat but a large, white one, quite well-kept and clearly once a pet. But there was something very wrong with it. It was dragging itself slowly, pulling from the front legs, and I saw that the back half of it was flat, as though deflated somehow. I thought it must have been run over, but there was no blood or sign of crushing, nor did it seem to be in any actual pain. It just had a back half that flopped and twitched obscenely as it made its gradual way across the lighted pavement and out into the darkness. I just stood there and watched, transfixed by it, until it disappeared from view. Thinking about it now, I remember its head was turned at a strange angle, far further round than it should have been, although I might be getting confused. Many of these experiences run together when I look back on them. There was no light on in Jared's house, but I hurried home quickly after that.

I didn't see Jared again for some time. At first I was just happy for the space, but as the days turned into weeks I started to feel something I wouldn't have expected to – worry. If it hadn't been for the way he had left last time it probably wouldn't have bothered me, but he had looked so strange, and even without him coming to the library it was rare I would go a week without seeing him. By now it had almost been a month. Still, I resisted the urge to go to his house and check. If it turned out he was fine, then I'd be inviting a whole world

of unpleasantness, and besides that, I reminded myself, he wasn't my problem anymore.

It was late October when Jared's mother came in. It was near the end of the day, and outside was already dark. I was putting up a display about good Hallowe'en reads before heading home, when I heard the door open. I turned around and there she was. It took me a few seconds to recognise her, if I'm honest. I hadn't seen much of her in the years since Jared and I had been close, and she had aged noticeably. Mrs. Hopworth wore a bulky overcoat, though it wasn't that cold yet, and her arm hung down in a sling. Something about the angle of the arm and how it hung there seemed faintly abnormal, and I wondered if she had broken it.

When I asked Mrs. Hopworth if she was okay she just stared at me, her eyes burning with hatred. With her good arm she reached into her coat and pulled out a small, black paperback. She threw it on the floor without saying a word and turned to leave. I couldn't help myself, I asked her if Jared was alright. She spun back and started to swear violently at me, told me I had no business with her son and that I, and my books, were to stay away from him. As she spoke, I couldn't look away from her arm and the odd ways it twisted as she gestured. How her fingers seemed to bend the wrong way. I was glad that Ruth had gone home early as I didn't want her to witness the disturbing confrontation I had now apparently caused.

When she had finished, Mrs. Hopworth spat towards me, though I noticed she was careful to avoid spitting at the book that now lay on the floor between us, and left. I put down the copy of Stephen King's *Misery* that I now realised I'd been clutching, and approached the discarded volume that lay on the carpet. The battered black cover seemed the same as when I had first seen it weeks

ago, with that faded white title on the front: The Boneturner's Tale. I reached down to pick it up, but before I did so a thought flashed across my mind, a memory of the last time I had seen Jared, and I grabbed some tissues from the desk before using them to pick up the book. Even then I felt my skin crawl as I held it.

I decided not to deal with it that night. I wasn't entirely sure that reading it in the daytime would be that much better, but shadows cast from outside seemed to have gotten that much starker since the book had been brought back into my library, and it scared me. I placed it in the book returns cart and left, double-checking I had firmly locked the door behind me.

It rained heavily that night. My room is in a converted attic and when the weather is bad it's as if I can hear every raindrop against the window that is just above my bed. It wasn't a storm, there wasn't the wind for it, it was just that heavy pounding rain that drummed and beat on the glass above me. I couldn't sleep. There was a nagging apprehension in my mind, something that after three hours lying in bed had turned into almost a panic. How could I have just left the book? There was something wrong with it, that much was obvious. What if Ruth came in earlier than I did tomorrow and took it? What would happen to her? Should I have destroyed it?

That last thought was quickly pushed away. I wasn't sure I had it in me to destroy a book, even one with such a strangeness to it. It surprised me just how easily I accepted that The Boneturner's Tale had dark powers, but I suppose I've always felt that books have a sort of magic to them, so it was really just a confirmation of what I had suspected, deep down, for a long time.

It was two in the morning when I decided that I couldn't just leave it there overnight. I got up, dressed and, quietly, headed out into the rain towards the

library, making sure to take my gloves. My coat was supposed to be water resistant but still managed to soak in the twenty minutes it took me to walk there. I had the key from locking up that night, and deactivated the alarm as I entered.

It was almost pitch black inside, and part of me wanted to keep it that way, but I turned on as many of the lights as I could without it being immediately obvious outside the building. It wasn't many, and I still had to half-feel my way through the foyer and into the library proper. As I approached the desk and the book returns cart where I had left *The Boneturner's Tale* I began to step less cautiously. It was darker in that corner of the library and I put a hand out to steady myself against the handle of the small metal cart. I'd taken my gloves off at that point and my hand came away wet. I quickly fumbled for the torch I had snatched before heading out and turned it on. Red dripped and pulsed from the cart, soaking the pages and forming a small pool around it. The books were bleeding.

I laughed at that. It seemed so appropriate somehow, so utterly correct that those neighbouring books should suffer, should be contaminated by it. Just as it seemed right and proper that, when my torch found *The Boneturner's Tale*, it was dry, unmarked by the gory scene around it.

I put my gloves back on and carefully took out that sinister volume and placed it on the desk. Perhaps I should have fought harder against the temptation to look inside but my curiosity was too strong. The thick gloves made turning individual pages almost impossible, and I still had enough good sense to keep them on, so I just opened it on a few random pages and started reading.

Perhaps I was being paranoid. After all, I touched the book with my bare hands when it was first given in to the library, and had no problems, but the image of

Jared's mother wouldn't leave my head. How her arm had twisted when it moved. I decided to keep the gloves on.

It was written in prose, and certainly seemed to be a story of some kind. The part I read dealt with an unnamed man, at various points referred to as the Boneturner, the Bonesmith or just the Turner, watching an assembled group of people as they made their way into a small village. It's unclear from what I read whether he is travelling with them, or simply following them, but I remember being unsettled by the details he observed in them: the way the parson would move his hand over his mouth whenever he stared too long at the nuns or how the cook looked at the meat he prepared with the same eyes that looked at the pardoner. It was only at that point that I realised the book was describing the pilgrims from *The Canterbury Tales*.

Now, this certainly wasn't some lost section of a Chaucer classic. It was written in modern English, with none of the archaic spelling or pronunciation of the original, and besides that the writing itself was of questionable quality. There was something compelling about it, though. The debate about how finished *The Canterbury Tales* were... well, it's a very real debate. In the Prologue, over a hundred tales are promised, but the most complete surviving version doesn't even reach two dozen. The book just sort of ends, with Chaucer adding a short epilogue imploring God for forgiveness. A plea that is generally read as sarcastic or rhetorical.

I flicked ahead a few pages, and found the Bonesmith had apparently crept up to the Miller while he slept. It described him silently reaching inside him, and... it's a bit hazy. All I remember clearly is the line "and from his rib a flute to play that merry tune of marrow took". And as for the rest, I don't recall in detail,

but I know that I almost threw up, and that the Miller did not survive. This was on page sixteen, and it was a thick book.

I turned to the frontispiece, desperately curious as to how this book had ended up in our library. In the harsh light of the torch, I could see the creases and peeling edges of the Chiswick Library label, which usually meant it had been removed and re-stuck, or taken from another book entirely. I could even see the edges of another label underneath. Using a pair of scissors, I carefully peeled off the top one, but was disappointed. It was the label for another library, probably the last place it had been left, although I think it must have been in Scandinavia, because it was something like the library of Jergensburg or Jurgenleit or Jurgerlicht or something like that. It didn't help me.

I was all set to return to reading the thing, when I heard the sound of breaking glass behind me. I turned around to see Jared Hopworth standing in front of the shattered window. Or at least, I assume it was Jared, as it demanded the book from me in Jared's voice, but wore loose fitting trousers, and a thick coat with a hood that almost completely covered his face. Or its face.

He was longer than Jared had been, and stood at a strange angle, as though his legs were too stiff to use. When he gestured for the book, I saw that his fingers looked... sharp, as though the skin at the ends were being pushed into a tight point by something inside. I told him that the library was closed, because at that moment I could think of nothing else to say. He ignored me, and demanded again that I give him the book. That was when I did something a little rash, which is to say I punched him.

I had never really thrown a punch in anger before, or even desperation, so it came as quite a shock to me when I managed to drive a single, solid fist into his solar plexus. But as I did this, and this is the part that still gives me nightmares,

I felt his flesh give way and almost retract, drawing me in close. And then I felt his ribs shift, shut tight around my hand, as though his ribcage were trying to bite me. They were sharper than I would have thought possible, and at last, this was what actually started me screaming. Never before or since have I ever screamed like that, and I'm still a bit surprised I'm capable of making such a noise, but there you have it.

In my panic I dropped the copy of *The Boneturner's Tale* and, in less than a second, Jared was on it. He released my hand and grabbed it with a frantic desperation, before he turned to run back out the way he came in. I started to chase after him, until I saw how he was moving. How many limbs he had. He had... added some extras. That was the moment it finally all got too much for me; I stopped running. It wasn't my book, it wasn't my responsibility and I had no idea what I was dealing with, so I didn't. I just stood there in a daze and watched the thing that was once Jared disappear out into the rain. I never saw him again.

The police turned up soon after. Someone had apparently heard my screams and called in a report. I spun some tale about falling asleep at my desk and being woken up by an attempted robbery. God knows how I explained the bloody books, because it wasn't some disappearing phantom. It took weeks to get out. Everyone seemed to believe me, though, and miraculously I kept my job. I haven't seen Jared in the years since, and I haven't done any further research on the book. The best scenario I can possibly imagine is that this statement is the last I ever need to hear or speak about Jared Hopworth or *The Boneturner's Tale*.

JONATHAN SIMS

Statement ends.

Well, this makes me... deeply unhappy. I've barely scratched the surface of the archives and have already uncovered evidence of two separate surviving books from Jurgen Leitner's library. Until he mentioned that, I was tempted to dismiss much of it out of hand, but as it stands now I believe every word. I've seen what Leitner's work can do, and this news, even 17 years out of date, is still very concerning to me. I'm going to have a discussion with Elias as to what we can do to address the issue. I know he'll just give me the old "record and study, not interfere or contain" speech again, but I at least need to make him aware of it.

Tim and Sasha have cross-referenced the events here with police reports, and sure enough there was a warrant issued for the arrest of Jared Hopworth for breaking and entering, as well as assault. He was never found, though, and the crimes weren't serious enough to keep the case active for very long. I've been doing as much research myself as possible, but the book seems to have vanished along with him.

I asked Martin to try and hunt down Mr. Adekoya himself for a follow-up, but have been informed that he passed away in 2006. He was found lying dead in the middle of the road on the night of April 17th. Despite the fact that there were no crushing or trauma marks on the body, the inquest ruled it a hit and run car accident due to the mangled position in which he was found. It was a closed casket funeral.

Recording Ends.

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Outro]

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