

MAG – 071 – Underground

Content Warnings

- Tunnels & underground
- Claustrophobia
- Crushing

Discussions of: altered reality, blood & gore, physical violence,

Mentions of: alcohol, body horror, character death, food, religion

SFX: low drone, high pitched tone

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro]

JONATHAN SIMS

Rusty Quill presents: The Magnus Archives. Episode seventy-one.
Underground.

[The Magnus Archives Theme – Intro – Continues]

KAROLINA

Okay?

ARCHIVIST

One second. Statement of Karolina Górká, regarding a brief period trapped on the London Underground. Statement taken direct from subject 25th January 2017.

KAROLINA

Thank you. On the night of the 6th of January 2017 I left the Star of Kings and walked down to the tube station at King's Cross St Pancras. For reasons I'm not interested in discussing here, I have for some years now maintained a tradition of celebrating a personal New Year's Eve with a handful of close friends, a week or so after the actual event. The last two of these celebrations have taken place at the Star, a pub which I have grown fond of for its choice of beer and the open fireplaces that it keeps lit during the winter. I find it a very comforting place. It was exactly one in the morning when I left, as that was when the pub closed on a Friday, and the only guests still remaining were a colleague of mine named Andrew Barnet, my friend Leanne Hilliard and her husband Mark. All of them will confirm my presence and the time of my leaving. I had originally planned to go home shortly after midnight, and my housemate, Tamara Simpkin, had gone back at that time, but I had been in a rather heated discussion with Andrew and had stayed until last orders. On my way to the station I stopped into Crystal Kebab and bought a box of chips which I ate there. I ate slowly, as the wind had picked up and I was not keen to go back out into the cold.

By the time I arrived at the station, I had missed what would have previously been the last Tube. It was with some relief that I realised the Victoria line, which would take me up to my home near Seven Sisters, had recently started running an all-night service on Fridays and Saturdays. I was somewhat reluctant to share my ride home with a carriage full of drunks, but that was always the danger of drinking on a Saturday. So I made my way down the escalators and through the tunnels to the northbound Victoria Line platform. It was deserted; not a single person was there beside myself.

Looking down to the other end, I did see another figure, just one, but they were walking away and out into the rest of the station. It was hard to tell from a distance, but I believe he was holding a shovel of some sort. There hadn't been a train for almost ten minutes, but at the time I didn't think much of it.

It was eerie, waiting there, and maybe I should have taken it as a warning sign, but there had been a lot of noise around me all night and now I was relishing the quiet. I hoped that if the platform was this deserted, maybe the train would be quiet as well. Perhaps I could even get a carriage to myself.

The train pulled up as normal. Maybe the brakes squealed a bit more than they should have, but there was nothing that stood out to me as odd. Looking back, maybe the train car was older than it should have been, or dustier, but I wasn't paying that much attention and I didn't get a good look at it afterwards. So when the doors opened, I stepped inside and took a seat. I turned out I'd been right, there wasn't anybody else in the carriage at all. It was just me. My phone had died two hours before, so I couldn't listen to my music, and I just sat there in silence as the doors closed and the train began to move forward. At some point the silence stopped being comforting and began to feel as though it were pressing down on me. Even the rumble of the train's movement seemed to be muted, like it was being muffled somehow.

I tried to take my mind off it. I scanned the adverts pasted above the row of chairs opposite me but they were blank. At least, they seemed blank when I first looked at them. Moving a bit closer I could see that there was something behind the clear plastic. It was dirt. It looked as though each of the adverts had been covered in a layer of dry, tight-packed soil. I turned to the ones behind me, above my own chair, and saw the same thing. I reached up to touch one of

them, and was greeted with a small shower of grit, but still couldn't see anything behind it.

Now that I was looking for it I could see that it wasn't only these signs that seemed to be covered in dirt. When I had first got in I had assumed the carriage was just grimy from a full day of commuters, but everywhere I looked I saw now that it was a thin dusting of dry earth. It was on the chairs, the floor, even the edge of the windows. Where I had been walking, I could see my footprints clearly on the muddy floor. They were the only pair.

I decided that I was going to get off at the next station. When I reached Highbury and Islington I knew there was a night bus that I could take to get home. It would be slower, but it would get me off this train and that was now making me feel very uncomfortable. So I waited.

I had been travelling for about three minutes at that point and I checked my watch impatiently. Five minutes passed. Eight minutes passed. I was sure we should have arrived at the next station by that point, but the train just kept moving. We hadn't gone through the next station; I was sure I would have seen it through the windows, and it certainly seemed to be going as fast as it normally would. Faster, maybe, I don't really know how to measure something like that. Ten minutes went by, then fifteen, and there was no sign that the train was stopping, or even approaching another station. It shouldn't have been possible, but it was. I just stood there, trying to keep my balance, not wanting to sit on the seats or hold on to the dusty handrail. The air had become thick, and I could smell the cold damp, like an old basement or a cave.

After almost twenty minutes I walked over and pulled the emergency lever in the hopes that it might have some effect. I had to dig out several handfuls of

sticky mud from around the handle before I could even reach it. I gripped it firmly and pulled. It snapped off in my hands and I could see the point where it joined the wall had been eaten away by rust.

That was when I finally decided to sit down and wait it out. Either it would arrive somewhere or it wouldn't, and if I had managed to wander into some grubby ghost train then there wasn't much I was going to be able to do about it. I stopped checking my watch and just sat there.

At some point I felt the train beginning to slow. There was no indication of where we were, and the automatic station announcements were silent. I stayed in my seat. It was one of the few times in my life I have regretted being an atheist, as I think I would have valued having a god to pray to. By the end we were going so slowly that I didn't even notice when we finally stopped for almost twenty seconds. I looked at the doors, but they showed no sign of opening, and the other side was still just the bare wall of the underground tunnel. We were not at a station.

I had already decided that, whatever might be out there, not being in the train was better than staying put, so I did my best to force the doors open. It was surprisingly easy, and once I had gotten them an inch or two apart, something must have tripped and they slid the rest of the way on their own. The other side was the wall of the tunnel. But rather than the normal cables and construction you would expect from the Underground, this was bare earth. It was slick with damp, and instead of the two-foot gap you would expect to be between the door and the wall, it came right up to the lip of it. There was no clearance at all: the doors seemed to be completely flush with this solid barrier of soil.

As it became clear to me that there was no way I was going to be able to get out of any of the side exits, I was faced, to my mind, with three choices. I could sit there and wait, at the mercy of whatever situation I had found myself in. I could head through the other carriages leading towards the rear of the train and hope I could get off there and walk back along the tunnel. Or I could do the same thing heading towards the front of the train, hoping that there was someone in the driver's compartment that could explain what was going on. I picked the third option. It was, of course, a mistake.

The doors between the carriages were tiny, and each bore several bright warning signs promising death or prosecution if they were used incorrectly. I ignored these and opened the one leading towards the front of the train. The gap between the cars was slick with mud and a thin rain of dirt trickled down from the roof of the tunnel. I opened the next door and stepped inside.

It was even dirtier in this carriage than in the one I had left, with a distinct layer of muddy soil over everything that I could see. The silence had been replaced by a new noise, a sort of creaking groan that sounded like it was coming from the train itself. It was only later I learned that this is what metal sounds like when under immense strain. I walked briskly through this car, seeing nothing that caught my attention, and opened the next door at the other end, continuing my journey towards the driver. I hadn't really seen how long the train was when I got in, but I had been in the middle of platform so I didn't think it could be more than four or five carriages to the front. This door seemed wedged quite firmly shut, and it was only with a great deal of effort that I was able to pull it open. I almost fell into the space between them while trying to force the next one open. I am sure that if I had done so I would be dead.

When I got into this one the first thing I noticed was the ceiling. In certain places it seemed to have buckled slightly with large dents in the material pushing down. Many of the lights and windows were broken and the whole of the carriage seemed to be bent and twisted slightly, like it was being crushed.

The sound of metal fatigue was stronger here, and I realised with a start that this was exactly what was happening. If it got worse the further through I went, there was a good chance the driver, if there was one, had already been crushed, or at the very least trapped beyond my reach. I turned to go back the way I had come, but the door had swung shut, and in the few seconds it had taken me to understand what was happening, the pressure had already warped the frame too much. It was jammed shut, and no amount of kicking was going to move it.

I was becoming desperate, and looked around for anything I could see that might be a way out. What I saw instead, right at the other end, was a person. It was hard to make out any details, as all the lights in that section were already shattered, but they were sat very still. I called out but there was no response. I made my way over to them, though by the time I reached that part of the carriage I was having to bend down to avoid parts of the ceiling. It appeared to be a man, probably late fifties, early sixties, with a scraggly grey beard and what had once been a nice jacket. He had sunken blue eyes, and the seat around him had twisted so much it was now holding him in place at an angle that looked very painful. The armrests were digging hard into the flesh of his leg, and his back was crooked. Despite this, he seemed to be breathing.

When he didn't respond to my voice, I touched him lightly on the shoulder. His eyes opened slowly, and locked on mine. The look on his face was one of incredible sadness, as though all the fear had been sucked out of him and now

all that was left was some unspeakable misery. I asked him if I could help, whether we could get out there, but he just shook his head, his neck making horrid cracking noises as he did so. I felt his hand close around my wrist, gripping it with an unexpected strength. I tried to push him away but his fingernails dug into my skin, drawing blood. A ragged voice hissed out of him, despairing and full of pain. He said to me, “Not enough space to move. Never enough to breathe.”

Then he let me go.

By then the ceiling was almost on top of me and the walls looked like they were close to giving way. I thought about what options I had and, after a few seconds, I lay down on the floor and closed my eyes.

Being crushed to death would be horrible, yes, but I have never been afraid of dying, and it didn't appear that there would be any point to further escape attempts. Better to accept my fate and hope it was all some awful dream. I kept my eyes shut and tried to relax, as the sound of twisting metal filled my ears and I could feel the floor begin to shift beneath me. It bent up, either side, and slowly began to press inwards. Far away, under the smothering blanket of earth, I could hear the old man screaming.

When I awoke, I was on the platform at Walthamstow Central, with one of the station assistants leaning over me, trying to see if I was alright. I was feeling very groggy and I didn't want to be answering questions, so I played drunk, ignored his offers to help and stumbled out into the cold night air. There were a few blissful minutes where I thought it had all just been a dream, but then I noticed that I was covered head to toe in mud and dirt. And my wrist ached where five deep red marks made the shape of a clutching hand.

That's it.

ARCHIVIST

Well, that certainly sounds like an... unpleasant experience. I'm not sure I understand, though. Did you fall asleep, somehow, or...

KAROLINA

I must have done.

ARCHIVIST

That's... that's impressive. Do you still take the Tube?

KAROLINA

Of course. I live in London.

ARCHIVIST

Right. I, uh...

KAROLINA

Is there anything else? I've told you what happened, so I'm done here, correct?

ARCHIVIST

I suppose so, yes. We'll look into it, and if we find anything we'll let you know.

KAROLINA

Don't bother. I'm done with it. Thank you for your time.

[Tape clicks off]

ARCHIVIST

Well, that was brusque. Ms. Górka may not be interested in the follow up, but I am. Since the Night Tube opened there have been a handful of disappearances that occurred where the individuals in question were reported as intending to travel on the late-night London Underground service, mostly on the Victoria and Northern lines. All of them were travelling alone. The reason none of this has been followed up as related is that CCTV from the appropriate stations does not show the disappeared ever actually arriving. Well, Sasha managed to follow this up and it would seem that there's no record of Ms. Górka ever entering King's Cross St Pancras, even though Martin made contact with Leanne Hilliard and confirmed the rest of her story. TFL have been understandably reluctant to comment.

Interestingly, one of the missing, a man named Nicholas Lekman, has a picture that seems to match the description Ms. Górka gave: age 63, slightly unkempt grey beard, blue eyes. He was last seen heading towards Moorgate station at 2:30 on the morning of Saturday the 17th December 2017, following a fight with his son, who does not believe he ever entered the station. Apparently Nicholas Lekman hated taking the Underground alone as he was a severe claustrophobe. I should probably mention this to Sasha. I believe she takes the Victoria line to work and has a tendency to stay later than she should.

Aside from that, all that's left to do is sweep up after Ms. Górka. She left the place rather dusty.

End recording.

[Tape clicks off. Tape clicks on.]

Supplemental.

Someone is living down there. In the tunnels. I'm sure of it now. I haven't found any more pages or detritus that might indicate that the presence of further books, but the more I explore the lower levels, the more normal rubbish I find. Food wrappers, empty bottles, even a newspaper dated last year. They are normally quite meticulous, it seems, as those things I have found tended to be tucked away in places that might have escaped the notice of someone cleaning up after themselves. But they do miss things.

I find it oddly comforting that who- or whatever is down there needs to eat, as it offers some reassurance that they are at least broadly human. But why? And for how long? And how are they getting their supplies? If Basira was taking my calls I would ask for some police assistance, in case it's some unhinged murderer. Especially as there is every likelihood they were the one that killed Gertrude.

Assuming it is only one. Yes, on second thoughts, I might well suspend my explorations until I can talk to Basira and get some assistance.

End supplemental.

[The Magnus Archives Theme - Outro]

The Magnus Archives is a podcast distributed by Rusty Quill and licensed under a creative commons attribution, non-commercial share alike 4.0 international license. Today's episode was written by Jonathan Sims and directed by Alexander J Newall.