

MAG006 – Case 0140912 – “Squirm”

ARCHIVIST

Statement of Timothy Hodge, regarding his sexual encounter with one Harriet Lee and her subsequent death. Original statement given December 9th 2014. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Statement begins.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)

I don't know what happened. I mean, I'm sure she's dead, but I don't...

Let me start from the beginning. I work as a designer. Mainly freelance, with a few more regular gigs with companies who like my work. I also have, well, *had* the luxury of a flat I'd managed to get set up so I could do most of my work there. This meant when I have a big job I spend quite a lot of time not

leaving my home. Not the most stable of employment but I got quite good at balancing it so that after a big project I left myself a few days, or maybe even a week, before I had to get started on the next one. I find it's important that I use this time to unwind and blow off a bit of steam, as when I've got work I often end up missing out on the regular weekend. Drinking and clubbing are my relaxation methods of choice, usually down Camden or Old Street, and while I'll admit I'm not above the occasional party drug I swear that I was stone cold sober when this all took place.

That night in particular, it was about three weeks ago now, I'd just finished a big job for one of my more demanding clients and I wanted to get a bit wrecked. Unfortunately none of my friends were free to join me – not surprising as it was a Thursday in the middle of November – so it didn't feel worth heading all the way into the city. Luckily I live in Brixton, which means I have a few decent options almost on my

doorstep, and I happened to know that the Dogstar ran a pretty decent club night on Thursdays. I decided to go along and enjoy myself.

I did enjoy myself in the end. Despite the crowds and the music, I wasn't feeling quite as wild as I expected but I drank a bit and danced plenty. Ok, maybe I wasn't quite as sober as I said earlier but I certainly wouldn't have called myself drunk. Now, I wasn't particularly looking to get laid that night, but I know I'm not an unattractive guy and I live local, so I'm always alert, shall we say, for any possibility of finding myself a partner. It was closing in on midnight when I saw her. She was skinny and had that student look which could have put her age anywhere between nineteen and twenty-eight. Her hair was long, dyed a deep henna red, and she wore torn tights and too much eyeliner. Exactly the sort of girl I go for.

She was lurking on the dance floor and I wasted no

time trying to catch her eye. It was harder than I'd guessed, though, as her attention seemed to be mainly focused on the doors. At first I thought she was waiting for someone but, the more I watched her the more I saw the nervousness in her eyes, maybe even fear? It was at that point she noticed me, and our eyes just locked, you know? She came over and we began to dance together. She was excellent, far better than me, and moved in a smooth, rolling sort of rhythm that made the word "writhe" leap suddenly to my mind.

I offered her a drink but she refused, gesturing instead for water, which I happily got. I couldn't really hear her over the music but you don't go to these nights for conversation. Besides, I heard her loud and clear when she leaned over and asked me if I wanted her. I said yes. Looking back it was stupid, of course it was, but she was beautiful and there was something in the way she moved that really got me. She smiled when I said yes, and for a moment it

looked less like a smile of anticipation and more like a smile of relief.

Outside the Dogstar it was much quieter and we had a chance to talk. She told me her name was Harriet and she was very pleased to hear I lived locally, as it was a cold night. She held my arm tightly as we walked back towards my street. At first I thought this was for warmth as she didn't have a coat and I doubted the light jacket she was wearing had much insulation. When I looked at her, though, I saw she was looking around the same way she'd been watching the door earlier. Her nervousness was even more obvious now and she was peering intently down every street we passed. I asked her if anything was wrong, and tried to tell her that I lived in a nice neighbourhood, she was perfectly safe, that sort of thing. She nodded and agreed but still seemed jumpy.

When we were about half way, she started scratching

her arms. At first I thought she was just rubbing them for warmth, but after a few seconds it became clear that she was scratching them quite hard, leaving obvious red marks where her fingernails dug in. I was starting to suspect something was wrong and asked Harriet if there was anything the matter, anything I should know. She just insisted we head back to my place as quickly as possible. I agreed since I figured that whatever the problem was, we could deal with it easier in my flat than on the cold streets at midnight.

By the time we reached my building, she was staring over her shoulder in near panic. I followed her gaze but couldn't see anything, so quickly opened the front door and let her in. She seemed to relax a bit once we were both in the relatively warm corridor with the door shut firmly behind us. My flat was on the third floor and even though, as I said, I don't live in a bad area, I did have an extra deadlock on my door.

Harriet visibly relaxed when she saw it, and more so when it was closed. The skittish glances and

scratching her arms stopped almost immediately. I offered her a coffee or tea to warm up. She just asked for a glass of water, said she was feeling a bit unwell. We sat down and, once I'd fetched her water and fixed myself a coffee, we talked for a while. My instincts had been right – she was a student, studying art. She hadn't been in London long, she said, was originally from Salisbury and had been finding it... difficult recently. When she left that pause, I saw in her eyes hints of that panic I'd seen on the street.

I asked her to tell me what was wrong, said something was clearly bothering her and I'd like to help. She got very quiet for a few moments and then nodded. She told me she'd been mugged the night before last, although the way she said the word "mugged" made it sound like she wasn't sure. I just nodded and let her continue talking. She lived up in Archway, on a street named Elthorne Road, and had been walking home around midnight when she saw a

woman lying face down on the pavement. This woman wore a long red dress and Harriet said she could see it shifting in the orange glow of the streetlamps, as though something was moving underneath it. Harriet was close to her house, which she shared with several other students, so she said she was maybe less careful than she should have been and had approached, calling out and asking if the woman needed help. There was no response but all movement stopped and the red dress went very still. Suddenly, far quicker than Harriet could have expected the woman leapt to her feet and sprinted directly towards her, seizing her by the shoulders and pushing her back against a nearby wall. It happened so fast the Harriet said she had never really gotten a good look at the woman beyond her dress, a head of long, matted black hair and wide, staring eyes. The woman growled something at her but Harriet couldn't make it out. She tried to ask what the mugger wanted, but as she did she felt a sudden pain in her stomach, as though she'd been stabbed, which is

exactly what she thought had happened. She told me that she had fallen to the ground and lost consciousness almost immediately.

When she awoke, the woman in the red dress was gone. Harriet had expected to find herself lying in a pool of blood from her stomach wound but could instead find no trace of any injury anywhere, except for some scraped knees where she had fallen to the floor. She had staggered home and tried to sleep it off. Since then, she said she'd been seeing that woman everywhere she went. She felt like she was being followed all the time and couldn't stay in her own home, as whenever she did it was like this weight was dragging her down. Her skin became so itchy as to be nearly unbearable. Harriet had apparently tried to go to the police, but said as she approached the station she was overcome with such a powerful nausea that she threw up on the pavement. She had tried the hospital but they just told her there was nothing obvious and to make an appointment

with her doctor. She had been spending the last three days just wandering in cafés and bars and clubs, anywhere there were enough people that she felt safe. She just didn't know what to do.

By now point Harriet was crying and I felt like a complete asshole for having brought the issue up. I mumbled some apologies. I don't know what I said; I was just trying to make her feel better. Not sure what I expected to happen but I certainly didn't expect her to kiss me at that moment. I know, I know, she was vulnerable and I feel like an a... But I swear I wasn't trying to take advantage. I asked her again and again if she was sure, but she just kept nodding and dragged me to the bedroom. I mean, we had sex. There's not much more to say about that, really. The important thing is what happened afterwards.

As we were lying there in bed, exhausted, I rested my head against her shoulder. I was about to say something or other, but before I could, I felt

something move. It's hard to describe exactly but it wasn't her shoulder that moved, it was something inside it, under the skin. It squirmed ever so slightly against my cheek. I shot up in bed, but the only indication that she'd noticed anything amiss was that she reached over and absentmindedly scratched where I'd been lying. I started to relax, lie down again; maybe I'd just imagined it. But at that moment she doubled over and groaned in sudden pain. Her eyes went wide and she clutched her stomach tightly. I tried to see what was wrong, asked if I could help, but she just pushed me away. I had no idea what to do, so I ran out and towards the bathroom. My mind was going completely blank and I couldn't remember whether I had any painkillers or indigestion medicine. Or should I be calling an ambulance? I wasn't sure, and I ended up rooting through my medicine cabinet, looking for... I don't know; anything that might have helped. I could still hear Harriet moaning in agony from the bedroom, and had just made up my mind to call for an

ambulance, when I heard something that stopped me dead in my tracks.

It's hard to really describe the sound that came from the bedroom. The closest I could come would be to say it sounded like... an egg being dropped onto a stone floor; a sort of wet, cracking thump. Then silence. Harriet was no longer making any noise at all. I slowly, very slowly, walked back towards the bedroom. The door was open, but I hadn't turned the light on, so there was little to be seen inside except darkness. I could have turned on the light in the hall, I suppose, but something inside made me think that I didn't want a good look inside that room. I stopped at the threshold. The only illumination at all came from a thin sliver of light coming in through the gap in the curtains from a streetlamp outside.

You'll have to excuse me. What I saw is difficult to put down on paper, but it's the only way to explain why I had to do it. Why setting my flat alight and

standing naked in the winter streets until the fire brigade arrived was far better than spending another second in that place. And yes, I admit here I set the fire myself. Show it to the police for all I care, I just need someone to understand.

The room was unrecognisable when I returned. There was a shape on the bed, where Harriet had laid, but it wasn't her anymore. I could barely make out anything even remotely human in the pile of pitted and warped flesh that now remained. The bed itself was slick and shiny with a dark fluid that dripped off the hanging sheets and onto the floor. But what truly repulsed me, what made me flee as I did, was what moved and squirmed on all of it. They covered every surface: the floor, the bed, what used to be Harriet, even the ceiling. A thick, moving carpet of pale, writhing worms.

The flat burned for a very long time.

ARCHIVIST

Statement ends

This story is concerning. Not because of Mr Hodge's experience, although I'm sure it was very upsetting. If it was true, of course. In fact, the police report that Sasha was able to acquire throws doubt on much of his story. While Mr Hodges' flat did indeed catch fire on November 20th of last year, there was apparently no evidence of arson and no human remains found inside, despite the fact that the fire was brought under control long before any significant damage was done to the structure of the building. They did find some charred organic matter in the bedroom but it was tested and apparently wasn't human, though the report doesn't list whether its source was ever determined.

I will say it does link up with the reported disappearance one Harriet Lee, a student at Roehampton who was reported missing shortly after

this statement was originally given. She seems to match the description given here. Still, that's not really what concerns me either, though obviously it's a tragic loss of life, etcetera, etcetera.

No, what I find quite alarming is that if Mr Hodge's recollection of Harriet's tale is correct and she was attacked by a woman in a red dress in Archway, then that matches the description and last known location of Jane Prentiss. I can't find any evidence that my predecessor took follow-up action on this statement, so I've taken the step of reporting Mr Hodge's to the ECDC. We were unable to locate him to request a follow-up interview and if he has had intercourse with one of Prentiss' victims, then they'll need to deal with him sooner rather than later. I just hope it's not too late already.

Recording ends.