

MAG018 – Case #0081212 – “The Man Upstairs”

ARCHIVIST

Statement of Christof Rudenko, regarding his interactions with a first floor resident of Welbeck House, Wandsworth. Original statement given December 12th 2008. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Statement begins.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)

Never buy a ground floor flat. It may seem like a good idea, especially if, like me, you just spent a decade dragging shopping up three flights of stairs every week, but it's noisier, always has a worse view and is far more prone to break-ins and other... problems. And then there is the matter of upstairs neighbours. I know that higher floors will, more often than not, also have people living above you, and

moving from living in a top floor flat to the ground floor like I did is not a common thing, but it's still true. I never had any real concerns about it until I moved to the ground floor of Welbeck House. These days I keep a much closer eye on those I live near.

Welbeck House is a five-storey block of flats in Wandsworth town centre, a great area to live, actually. It's close enough to London proper that you can commute in easily, and enough amenities that you don't often need to, especially if, like me, you're self-employed. It wasn't cheap, but I've always been good with money, so when I decided to try and actually buy a place at age thirty four, I was able to afford a nice flat. After almost a year of searching, I settled on the ground floor at Welbeck. At the time I hadn't really given much thought to my neighbours – those I had encountered in the course of buying the place had seemed nice enough, and the previous owners of my flat hadn't mentioned anything.

On the day I moved in – this would have been late 2002 – I saw a man smoking, leaning out of the window just above my own. It was a grey, overcast day and the forecast had said there would be rain later, so I was keen to move the last of my boxes inside and start unpacking, and didn't really pay him much attention. I remember that he was wearing a hooded jacket, though, pulled up tight and obscuring most of his face. We locked eyes briefly – at least I assume we did – I couldn't see his eyes but I felt him looking at me – and I could swear I smelled the weirdest odour. It's hard to describe, halfway between the smell of a pavement after rain on a hot day and chicken that's starting to turn. It was unpleasant, to say the least, but the wind changed and it was gone as quickly as it came. The man in the upstairs window kept watching as I took my boxes inside, just continuing to smoke in silence, `til at one point I came outside to get the last bits and noticed he was gone.

I was slightly spooked by the encounter. It's hard to say exactly why, as aside from the smell, which could have come from anywhere, there was nothing outwardly upsetting about it, yet something in the man's manner had shaken me. I didn't even know at the time whether it was a man, that was just an assumption I made but I certainly had no plans to check. I'm quite a private person, so the idea of going round and trying to meet my neighbours at all was not one that I gave a lot of consideration, let alone this one who had spent the better part of half an hour staring at me. I decided to ignore the whole thing, and get on with the process of moving in.

I was very successful at ignoring the man upstairs, at least at first. It wasn't difficult, as he was usually quiet and rarely came out of his flat as far as I could tell. In fact, as the time in my new home wore on I started to recognise the other residents of Welbeck

House: the white family that lived across the hall, with their little girl – I sometimes heard her in the evening, loudly protesting her bedtime; the old spinster next door – Dianne, I think her name was, or Diana; the Asian guy on the first floor that worked nights and slammed the doors too much. I doubt I ever exchanged more than a dozen words with any of them but I began to know their sounds and their habits. In all that time, though, I'm not sure I ever saw the man who lived above me. Not in the hallway, not out the window, it was like he didn't exist, which was fine by me, except that I would still very occasionally catch a whiff of that smell. Rotten and earthy, it would catch me by surprise and I'd usually spend a minute trying to track it down before it vanished. Once, I swear that as I stopped to look around I heard the door upstairs close quietly.

It seemed to me pretty obvious it was him. It wasn't ideal, but his hygiene problem was nobody's business but his own, and having figured out the source of the

smell, it stopped bothering me quite so much on those rare moments that I caught it in the air currents of our building. It didn't enter my home, although I did take to lighting scented candles just in case – a habit I still keep up today. I decided all that was important to me was that he was quiet, which he was. At least, for the first couple of years.

The banging started on 5th July 2004. I know because it was the day before my thirty-seventh birthday, and I was unpacking a crate of beer for the friends I had invited over. At first I assumed the man upstairs was just nailing something into the wall but after ten minutes it still hadn't stopped. Instead, it just seemed to move. While at first it had sounded like something being nailed into his wall, the banging started to move downwards, until it seemed he was knocking things right into the floor. At one point he was hammering directly over the light, causing it to sway slightly with each blow. This went on for almost an hour, and all I could do was try to ignore it, as

there was nothing I wanted to do less than climb those stairs and knock on his door. Even so, by the time it finally finished I was on the verge of doing exactly that. It did stop, though, and after it became clear it wasn't coming back any time soon, I tried to put it out of my mind and get back to my preparations.

Thankfully, there was no disturbance from upstairs during my small party the following night, just the family from across the hall at one point asking for the music to be turned down. In fact, I didn't hear anything from him for another two weeks, when the banging started again. Again it was almost an hour of hammering, first into the walls, then moving down onto the floor, before stopping altogether. I was not happy about this, as I'm sure you can imagine, but I was still reluctant to confront this nameless person who lived over me, so I let it slide. From that point on, every two weeks it came, the hammering, for an hour or thereabouts. I tried to find someone to

complain to, but it seemed like whoever lived there owned the flat outright, so there was no landlord or housing association that I could report him to.

The final straw came about six months later; it was actually a very simple thing. I got a package delivered incorrectly to my flat. It was addressed to Mr. Toby Carlisle, and the flat number on it was not mine but that of my upstairs neighbour. The envelope was thick and soft, must have been mainly full of bubblewrap or other packing material. It wasn't much, but it gave me another reason to go upstairs and, while delivering it, I could politely request that he stop his fortnightly hammering.

It was harder than I thought to walk up those stairs and I was surprised to find that my legs were shaking slightly as I reached the top. I got another whiff of that dank, rotten smell as I approached. The carpet immediately in front of the door was stained ever-so-

slightly, a darker colour than it should have been, as though something had leaked out from underneath it. The wood was old and worn compared to the others in the building, which looked to have been replaced relatively recently. There was no number on it, or any indication that it was, in fact, Toby Carlisle who lived there. I knocked, trying to give the action a confidence that I frankly did not feel.

There was no answer, so I knocked again, louder this time, and I heard some movement from inside, gradually heading towards the door. The steps were muffled, like he was walking over thick carpet, until they stopped on the other side. There was no sound at all.

I waited for a minute, and was just about to knock again when the door opened, just a crack. There didn't seem to be any lights on inside; it wasn't open wide enough for me to get a good look or even see

the man himself, but it was enough that I heard when a cracked, ragged voice spoke. It said, "What do you want?"

Through that crack I was hit by a sudden wave of that rancid air and reeled backwards, fighting back the urge to vomit. Through it, I just about managed to stammer out the question as to whether he was Toby Carlisle, that I'd had a delivery for him. There was silence for a second, then a hand shot out and grabbed the package I held, pulling it out of my grasp before I had a chance to fully realise what was happening. The hand was thin and pale, with long, filthy yellow fingernails. On the back I saw a single dark red mark, that might have been a cut or a lesion, but it was gone before I had a chance to see it in more detail. The door slammed in my face, and I was left standing in the hall, nauseous and confused. As I turned to go, I noticed that there was a spot of viscous liquid on my jacket sleeve, where the hand had brushed me, thick and off-white. I had to throw

the jacket out, in the end. I couldn't rid of the smell.

And so that was it for a long time. The man upstairs was named Toby and he was a disgusting shut-in who smelled rancid and occasionally made hammering noises. It was a long way from ideal, but it was something I could understand and live with. Two years passed like this, and I had almost forgotten about him, to be honest. He had become just another part of my life and could be lived around. It wasn't until late 2007 I had cause to really think about him again. My mother's health had taken a turn for the worst over the previous few months and I had made the decision to move back up to Sheffield to be nearer to her. As I mentioned, I'm self-employed so the move wasn't as much of a difficulty as it might have been, but it did leave me with the need to sell my flat. I don't want to get bogged down with the details of my mother's ailments; in the end she actually passed away a few months later from complications following an operation. I still ended up

moving, though for a very different reason.

It was difficult to sell the place. Every time someone came round for a viewing it ended the same way, and I started to dread when the inevitable question would come: what's that smell? It was the third time that the potential buyers, a nice professional couple who worked in the City, pointed out the stain on the living room ceiling. It was subtle at first, a slight discolouration that I had managed to overlook. They assumed it was a leak, and I did too, promising to have a plumber come over and check it out, though I didn't hear back from them anyway.

I did call for a plumber, but for whatever reason was told that it would be another week before they could see me. I tried to have a couple more viewings in that time, but the stain on the ceiling was becoming more obvious, and the smell had begun to pervade my whole flat, to the point where I was thinking about

staying in a hotel until the plumber arrived. I was starting to doubt it was a leaking water pipe. As it grew, it started to turn a dark yellow in colour and glistened ever so slightly when the light hit it. I knew it was something to do with the flat upstairs, though when I went up to ask this time, my knocking went unanswered.

Finally the plumber arrived. He wrinkled his nose when he entered, though didn't make any comment about it. I assume unpleasant smells are just a part of his job. I pointed him towards the stain on the ceiling and he looked momentarily confused, before telling me what I already knew – that this didn't look like a problem with the pipes. Still, he said he'd need to knock through the ceiling to have a look, and I'd need a contractor to come and redo that bit of ceiling anyway. I stood back when he put up his stepladder and climbed up to have a look at it. He put on a pair of rubber gloves and gingerly touched the spot, testing it with his fingers. It collapsed almost

immediately, buckling and tearing like wet cardboard, and the fluid that oozed out of it was a sickly yellow in colour, with viscous white lumps glistening in it. The plumber looked like he was going to throw up. I did throw up. He made his apologies, and said he'd have to call someone. I didn't try to stop him leaving.

I was furious, and the anger that surged through me overcame any apprehension I might have felt from approaching the flat upstairs. I stormed up and began to hammer on the door, shouting and threatening that I'd call the police if he didn't answer. On my third knock the door swung inwards ever-so-slightly, and I realised it was not locked. There is... little in my life that I regret quite as much as going inside.

I pushed the door open as much as I could but it didn't open very wide, as there seemed to be some sort of resistance behind it. The smell would have

been overpowering, but by this point I was almost used to it, and fought down the nausea. There was no light coming from inside, and I fumbled on the wall for a switch. I found it, and the instant before I flicked it on, I realised I felt something soft and wet on the wall next to it. Unfortunately, before I had a chance to fully comprehend what I was feeling, I had turned on the light and saw Toby Carlisle's flat in its entirety.

The light that came on was weak and tinged with red, but it was enough to see by. I looked around, and saw that every surface, the walls, the floor, the tables, everything except the curtained windows, was covered in meat. Steaks, chunks of chicken, even a whole leg of what I assume was once lamb, had been nailed everywhere. There were layers of it, the newest additions simply stuck on top of the old, and a putrid yellow-white rot could be seen where the oldest pieces had long since turned to liquid. Flies buzzed thick in the air and maggots carpeted the

place. Looking up I saw the light too, had been smeared with meat, causing the place to be bathed in that dull red light.

Lying there, in the centre of the hallway, was the body of Toby Carlisle. His hood was pulled back and I saw his face was covered in puckered, septic lesions and holes. I couldn't tell which of them had once housed his eyes.

I was frozen in place by the raw horror of what I was seeing, and almost automatically my hand found its way to my phone and I dialled the police. It was only then that my eyes drifted numbly towards the kitchen. There, in the centre of the floor, was a pile of discarded meat and bone, stacked almost as high as a person. It seemed less decayed than the rest of it, though that foul yellow fluid oozed from it and— this is the reason I'm talking to your institute, you see. Everything else could be put down to the problems of

a very, very sick man, nothing supernatural about it, but... when I looked at that heaped pile of meat, it moved. I don't know how... I don't know quite how to explain it, other than to tell you that it opened its eyes. It opened all its eyes.

The next thing I remember is the police's arrival, and a lot of questions from officers trying to hide the fact that they had just finished vomiting. The pile of meat was gone, though the bits that had been nailed to the walls and floors remained. I told the police everything that I just told you, although they dismissed the last bit out of hand. I believe they had to call in a hazmat team in the end.

There's not much more to it, really. The rest of the story is largely arguing with insurance companies and counting how many showers it took before I felt clean again. I did move out in the end, and now live in a house in Clapham with some friends. People who are

very clean, and don't mind the fact that I have recently become a vegetarian.

ARCHIVIST

Statement ends.

Well, I'm certainly glad I had my lunch before recording this statement. Looking into this one has proven a bit tricky, as police, hospital and even fire department records give wildly conflicting reports. What we can be sure of is, that on the evening of October the 22nd 2007, there was an incident at a first floor flat in Welbeck House that involved hazardous biological material and led the recovery of the body of one Toby Carlisle, the legal owner of the property. The cause of death was listed as gangrene.

We contacted Mr. Rudenko, who confirmed that since moving he had had no further experiences he believed to be linked to these events and after an

extensive course of counselling was attempting to move past them. He did corroborate the existing statement, though, saying he still believed it to be a true account of what happened to him. I'm not entirely sure I agree, although obviously there's little in the way of evidence to the contrary.

One thing puzzles me, however. Sasha managed to get access to some of Toby Carlisle's old financial records and it didn't appear like he had any real money coming in, and what he did have was largely going to pay council tax on the property. There are no records of transactions at any supermarkets or online delivery firms, and Tim even asked round some of the local butchers, as Martin is still off sick. At the end of all this, we've still been unable to answer one question: where was he getting the meat? I don't know why, but it bothers me.

End recording.