

MAG027 – Case 0032408 – “A Sturdy Lock”

ARCHIVIST

Statement of Paul McKenzie, regarding repeated nocturnal intrusions into his home. Original statement given August 24th 2003. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Statement begins.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)

It's strange to live alone. Maybe not if you're used to it, I suppose. If you've lived a solitary life then I'm sure it doesn't feel so isolated or empty. Heck, I remember a time when I wouldn't have batted an eyelid at living on my own. But now I'm so used to having other people in the house that it's a sad, lonely existence I've found myself living. Even before I started having my nightly visitor.

My son Marcus moved out about two years ago, and before that he'd spent a lot of time away at university or, later, moving around because of his work. So I'd grown accustomed to his absence. But when Diane, my wife, passed away four months ago it has... left the place so terribly hollow. I tell myself that it was a mercy, that by the end her condition meant she wasn't able to live as she deserved to. And while I'm sure it's true, the sentiment does little to make the bed seem anything other than far too large for just me. She'd hate me saying that. Diane never had any time for mopers or people who wallowed in self-pity, but after forty years of marriage I think I've earned it.

The thing about living in a house full of people is that you can just ignore any noises that you hear in the night. Is that a creak on the stairs? It's probably just someone going down for a glass of water. What was that thump? Probably Marcus up too late, and accidentally knocking things off the table. I know it

doesn't actually make you less likely to be robbed or broken into, but you stop panicking about it every time you hear the slightest noise from outside your room. I think that's normal, at least. I've never considered myself to have a nervous disposition, but maybe other people just get on with things and don't worry so much.

Still, since Diane died my nights have become a constant vigil. No house is silent if you listen hard enough, and since ending up alone, I have been listening so hard that at points I have to remind myself to breathe. Now every soft groan of the settling house is the sound of some violent thug or burglar in my home, waiting to see if they need to kill me. Marcus has suggested I get a pet so the house doesn't feel so empty, but I've never had a pet before, and I'm too old to learn now.

Given how alert and paranoid I generally am when

trying to sleep in an empty house, I'm sure you can imagine my terror when I heard something outside my room one night about a month ago. I've lived in the same house since I married Diane, and I know every squeaky floorboard. It was the one just at the top of the stairs. I waited, desperately straining my ears to hear any other sound of movement. I had heard no windows break or doors open downstairs, and I definitely hadn't heard anyone coming up the stairs, but I was convinced there was someone there. I could feel their presence waiting on the landing. Had they realised how loud the floorboard was? Were they stood there, motionless, listening for any movement from me just as keenly as I was listening for them?

Then the sound came again, and I was sure there was someone stood at the top of the stairs, but rather than staying there, I began to hear the heavy tread of what was unmistakably footsteps. At first I... simply lay there, paralysed with fear, thinking that I would

just... stay, let them take anything they wanted from the house, and call the police once they had left. But from what I could make out they didn't seem to be going into any of the other rooms. They were slowly, and deliberately, walking towards my bedroom.

The door does have a lock on it, but it's been so long since I even thought to use it that, at the time, I couldn't even think where the key might have been. My heart almost stopped when I heard the door handle rattle ever so gently as a hand was placed upon the other side. And slowly, so painfully slowly, the doorknob began to turn. In a burst of adrenaline I didn't even know I was capable of I sprang out of the bed and across the room. I seized the handle and twisted it back the other way, using both hands to try and match the strength of whoever was on the other side.

Still the handle tried to turn, with a slow, relentless effort that spoke of patience and determination, but

sheer panic lent me equal strength. My hands began to grow wet with what I assumed, at the time, was sweat, and I worried about keeping my grip. I did, though. For twenty long minutes, I wrestled in the dark over the door handle of my room. I could have reached the light switch, but that would have meant having only one hand to keep on the door, so I stayed in the dark.

Then all at once the pressure vanished. The handle no longer tried to turn. I had heard no other sound from outside, though. No footsteps leading away, no sound of someone going down the stairs, the house was just silent. I stood there for the rest of the night, the handle gripped tight. And it wasn't until the first rays of sun peeked through the windows that I found I had the courage to open my bedroom door and look outside.

Nothing.

I was so stiff that I could barely walk back to my bed and dial the number for the police. It was as I reached for the phone that I looked at my hands and saw that what was on them was not sweat. It was blood. I checked all over my hands and arms for cuts or injuries. Nothing. And the door handle was completely clean. I washed my hands thoroughly before I dialled 999.

The police came and they listened patiently to my story. They checked all around my house, but there were no signs of any intruder. All the windows and doors were still firmly locked and there was no sign of forced entry, nor had any of my possessions been taken or even moved. The officers assured me it was no problem, that they were happy to help, all in that tone that told me they thought I was just a senile old man hearing things in the night. I thanked them as they left, even though they had been of no help whatsoever, and spent the rest of the day searching for the key to my bedroom door. I found it in the

end, and hoped that with it firmly locked I could sleep a bit easier that night. I was wrong.

When evening came, I tried to sleep. At least, I had convinced myself that I was trying to sleep. Actually, I was listening for any sign that the intruder had returned. Every creak of the house settling, every whine of the pipes sent me into a state of near terror. By two o'clock in the morning I had heard nothing, and had almost convinced myself that I would not be visited again, when there was that slow, ominous creak of the floorboard at the top of the stairs. As before, the footsteps approached my bedroom, heavy and methodical. I turned on my bedside lamp and watched as once again the handle of the door began to turn. I could see the pressure being put on the door by whoever was on the other side, but it was locked, and as the door failed to open, there was a long pause.

Then it began to turn violently back and forth, rattling and banging as it rotated with such force that I worried it might come off entirely. I let out a cry as the assault intensified, and phoned again for the police. It took them twelve minutes to reach me, and all the while my bedroom door shook with the relentless turning of the handle, but the lock held firm. As soon as the doorbell rang, it went immediately still and silent. I didn't want to unlock and open the door, but if I didn't the police officers might break down my front door or, even worse, leave.

What happened next was almost identical to what had happened the day before, except this time there was less gentle tolerance in their voices when they spoke to me. I got the clear impression that if I called them again without proof, there would be... undesirable consequences. One of the two muttered something about how difficult it must be for me to live on my own, a message I got loud and clear. I

have no intention of being put in a home.

And so, for the last month I have lain awake almost every night, as whatever it is beyond the threshold of my bedroom tries with all its might to get in. I watch the doorknob obsessively, always waiting for the signs of that gentle turning. The first one's are always so slow.

I tried to get proof for the police. I got Marcus to stay over with me a few nights, in the hope of either scaring the intruder away or having a witness who could corroborate my story. Those were the only nights I got any peace. Nothing came up to my door when he was there. In some ways it was a relief, to have a way of ensuring I could sleep, but it gave me no evidence to convince anyone, and I know he didn't believe me when I told him what was going on. He just looked... worried when I brought it up, and I didn't mention it again.

Unfortunately, I can't get Marcus to stay with me every night. He has his own life to lead and is living with his fiancée at the moment, so I can't just ask him to move back in with his dad. I tried to set up some cameras in the upstairs hallway, at the top of the stairs and outside my room, but they show nothing. They don't even pick up the door handle turning, even at times I know for certain that the thing was trying to get inside. There was only one moment, just a frame or two, I think, where the shadows the camera caught on the wall seemed almost to form a face. It seemed to be leering at me, the mouth wide open in a mock scream. It scared me so badly that I had to delete the footage. I have no evidence for the police. Or for you either, I suppose.

I guess that's why I'm here. This is what you people do. You investigate these things. You know what to look for and can identify the signs of things that...

aren't right. You know, not of this world. I'm not saying it's a ghost or anything like that, it's just... that well, if it was a ghost, you'd be the ones to talk to, right? I just need it to stop. And I don't want to be put in a home. I know they will, if I keep telling them about how my door handle rattles and turns every night, they'll think I'm senile and useless and send me to a home, and I will not let that happen. It's my house, and I don't care how much it scares me, nothing is going to make me give it up. Maybe Marcus is right. Maybe I should get a dog.

ARCHIVIST

Statement ends

I want to believe Mr. McKenzie, I really do. I am not entirely made of stone, and am apt to be moved by the plea of a scared old man as much as anybody. I mean, dementia is, of course, the most likely explanation, and he admits himself that he has no

proof of any of it. Yet part of me still wants to believe him. Perhaps this job is making me sentimental.

In any case it's a moot point. Mr. McKenzie died of a stroke some two months after making this statement, and there doesn't seem to be any obvious connection between his passing and his statement to the Institute. When this was originally logged, apparently we did send a then-member of the research staff, one Sarah Carpenter, to take some readings of the house. Apparently she felt there was little enough danger to justify an overnight vigil at the place, but like everyone else in Mr. McKenzie's tale, she encountered no strangeness or intruders on the upstairs landing, or in any other part of the building.

Sasha, who has now returned after her brief convalescence, has confirmed the call outs against police reports and they appear to match, though obviously they're rather light on detail. Martin made contact with the son, Marcus McKenzie, but he

declined to talk to us, saying that he'd "already made his statement." This leads me to believe that Marcus McKenzie may also have a statement lurking somewhere here in the archives, lost among the mess and misfiling.

The only other thing that stands out from this as strange is that Sarah Carpenter, the researcher originally sent to look into this back in 2003, took some rather detailed photographs of the interior and layout of the house. Looking through them now, it strikes me that the bedroom door, to which Mr. McKenzie refers so often, does not appear to have a keyhole, or any sort of lock.

End recording.