

## MAG031 – Case #0100912 – “First Hunt”

### ARCHIVIST

Statement of Lawrence Mortimer, regarding his hunting trip to Blue Ridge, Virginia. Original statement given December 9th 2010. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Statement begins.

### ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)

I always wanted to go hunting. It always seemed such a manly sort of pursuit. I mean, killing the deer or elk or whatever else was always beside the point; it was just the idea of setting off into the wild, surviving out there, cooking and eating what you kill – it all sounded like such an adventure. I mean, I’d thought about trying it in this country, but shooting pheasants with shotguns and riding down foxes all

seemed too much the domain of, uh, nitwits in tweed. So, if I was going to go hunting, I would need to go to another country to do it. Somewhere where they had a few animals worth going after. Thinking about it, I suppose that is what happened in the end, in a perverse sort of way. And it did cost poor Arden his life.

Well, my desire to go hunting was always something of 'someday' project. I'm sure you know what I mean: those ideas you have, holidays you plan to do 'sometime in the future', but they're never time-dependent and usually you just keep putting them off for more pressing things. So when I turned fifty back in February, I thought, 'dash it all, I'm going to go hunting before I drop dead!' When I told my friends they all thought I'd gone loopy, but I just reminded them that it isn't just the young that can be impetuous and daft.

Anyway, over the past few years I'd become great friends with an American. Arden Neeli was his name. We'd met on a sceptics message board and got on like a house on fire. When I mentioned I was looking into impetuous hunting trips, he asked how averse I was to hiking. I said not at all, I've been a very active sort, and he told me that in Virginia, his home state, there were a lot of excellent places to go hunting, providing I didn't mind waiting until October or November. I wasn't exactly expecting the Grim Reaper to come knocking in the intervening months, so I told him it sounded lovely.

We spent a good long while discussing it, and finally decided to take a three day hike into Blue Ridge on the Appalachian Trail, and see if we could find a deer or an elk for me to shoot. Nature, seclusion and guns – to my ears it sounded just perfect.

So, early last month I packed my bags and caught a plane over to Virginia. The weather was cold but

otherwise pleasant, and to be honest I was surprised how similar it felt to Torquay in November. I normally live in Torquay. I think I put that on your form there. If I did, it won't hurt you to have it written down twice. I wasn't, however, fully prepared to meet Arden in person. I'd never met an Internet friend in real life before, and he was far louder and more outgoing than I was prepared for, based on the well thought-out and considerate communications we had previously exchanged. He kept laughing at everything I said as though it was a joke, even when it wasn't a joke, and would not stop going on about my accent.

Still, all was forgiven when he showed me his gun cabinet. They were beautiful, and while I'm a member of a few shooting clubs over here, you've always got to keep your rifles under lock and key, hidden away out of sight. To see a dozen, well-cared for weapons displayed proudly, well, it was just lovely.

We set out the following day, driving up to Blue Ridge from his home in Richmond. It took some time to get there, as everything is so much further apart in America, but we parked at Crabtree Falls shortly after midday. We had our tents and our supplies. I was very excited to don my hunters orange, and to take up my rifle. I was carrying a Winchester M70, which I had read was very good for beginners, while Arden carried a Remington Model 673, his preferred firearm, which he talked about to me at great length. And off we went up the trail.

Our first day was unsuccessful. I was something of a blundering presence, and though Arden was at pains to assure me that our failure was simply due to being too close to a road, I was sure that it was my own crashing footsteps scaring away the creatures. I mean, we hadn't gone far compared to our proposed route, but we were already several miles from the nearest road.

As the day wore on, we began to look for somewhere to set up camp. We were attempting to "Leave No Trace", as the Americans say, so we were likely going to set our tents up on the trail itself, but as we began to get them out I heard the strangest thing. It sounded like somebody whistling, a slow version of *The Farmer in the Dell* or, as I believe it's more commonly known, *A-Hunting We Shall Go*.

I looked over, and by the expression of puzzlement on Arden's face it was clear he heard it as well. I was just about to call out to whoever was whistling, when a figure wandered very casually through the treeline and onto the trail. He walked out of thick woodland as though he were strolling down a promenade. He was short and lean, with long, shaggy black hair and a slightly unkempt goatee. His clothes were the rugged, durable sort you'd expect to see on a hiker, but he had no jacket or coat. He carried no backpack or kit of any sort. In fact it seemed like he was just wandering through the woods with the clothes on his back.

Arden was quicker to pick up on this than I was and asked the man if he needed any help. The hiker stared at him for several long seconds, as though trying to deduce something, then smiled and said, "No". I didn't like that smile one bit. Far too many teeth to it, I'd say. He asked us where we were heading, how long we were on the trail for. There was something ever so slightly odd about his intonation, and he dragged the Rs somehow when he spoke. We answered as vaguely as we could without being rude, since neither of us felt comfortable near this man.

The hiker shrugged, and started to walk across the trail, between us. As he did so, he paused for a second, and took a deep breath, and it seemed for all the world like he was sniffing us. Then he said something, I forget exactly. "Tomorrow will be a good day for a run," or something like that. And then he just started whistling again, and wandered off into the forest behind us. I think both myself and Arden

wanted to stop him, it was so clear something wasn't right with the situation, but we were both... astounded with his manner and I don't think either of us could have thought of how to do so. And then he was gone.

I needn't tell you that sleep came difficult. The sounds of the forest at night were far louder than I had ever heard them back home, and every cracking branch, every rustle of leaves, set my nerves on edge. It was an overcast night, and outside the tent was almost completely dark. Around two o'clock in the morning I could have sworn that I heard someone laugh, slow and softly, outside my tent. It sound like it was right by my head, just the other side of the thin nylon wall. By the time I'd managed to get up the courage to check, of course, there was nobody there.

The next day we packed up the camp and set off hunting again, donning our lurid orange vests and

rifles. I must admit, I felt ten times better with the weight of the gun in my arms, and was inclined to put the events of the night before behind me. In fact, after a morning spent walking and joking and, on two occasions, damn near bagging an elk, I thought we were both having a splendid time.

It was about four in the afternoon, the sun just starting to begin its descent towards an early autumn dusk, when I saw my elk. I don't know why, but when I saw him through the trees I knew that he was mine. I told Arden and we started to creep towards it very slowly. He had been teaching me since yesterday, and it wasn't long before I had my position, and raised my gun. I sighted it just below the ear, and there was a moment, when its head turned right towards me. I could have sworn it looked me in the eye as I prepared to pull the trigger.

A gunshot rang out, but it was not from my gun. The elk startled and ran, and I spun round, but Arden was

nowhere to be seen. The shot still echoed through the trees, but he seemed to have vanished. I began to search frantically for him. Had he... Had he been lured away by an elk of his own? Had he been accidentally shot by some other hunters? I called out his name, but there was no reply.

Eventually, after several minutes of desperate searching, I came to a small clearing. There, slumped against one of the trees was Arden. He was dead. The tree behind him was painted in a spray of crimson, and there was a messy hole in the centre of his throat, as though it had been torn out entirely. His rifle lay next to him on the ground, also coated in blood. It seems silly to say now, but my first thought was to check his pulse. So I put my gun down to do so. Obviously he didn't have one, but I couldn't understand what was happening. I'd been with him not three minutes before and he had been alive and unharmed. It didn't make sense.

Then I heard that whistling. That infernal whistling from the treeline. I turned and there was the hiker. His right hand was coated in Arden's blood, and he grinned at me. Then he began to sprint. His speed was incredible, and he loped from side to side with a sort of zigzag motion. I ran. I know I should have picked up my gun, but you can't understand just how frightening it is to have something like that, a true predator, running at you full pelt. Your death charging towards you like freight train. You can't understand what it is to be prey. So I ran.

I turned tail, leaving my pack and my gun behind, and sprinted into the woods. I didn't look back, I couldn't. It took all my concentration to keep my footing, to not trip. I could hear him occasionally behind me, as he charged through a bush or scratched against a tree. I think he did it deliberately, you know. To let me know he was still there. There's no way I could have won that footrace, but I think he must have been toying with me. After a while I could

no longer hear him directly behind me, so I slowed to catch my breath. I'm in good shape, as I say, but I'm not a young man and I was dizzy with the exhaustion.

I sat there, so intent on listening out for any sign of danger, of this man, that I barely even noticed night fall. There were no clouds that night, and I was glad, since I had left my torch along with my pack. If I was to run at all during the night, I would need the moonlight to see by. Of course, any experienced hiker would tell you never to travel the woods at night, and certainly not to run through them, but I hardly had any choice if it came to it. And of course it did. The night was barely half an hour old when I heard it again, that... whistling, then the words floating through the trees, but with an low, bass tone to them. "A-hunting we shall go, A-hunting we shall go".

And once again I ran. By all rights I should have broken my neck, charging off into the darkness like that. I should have tripped on a root or put my foot in a rabbit hole. I should have at least twisted my ankle. Somehow this didn't happen, though; I ran and ran and, well, I just kept running. It didn't seem to do me any good, of course. I was still far slower in the dark than I had been during the day, and it was obvious my pursuer could easily outpace me if he wanted to. So many times I'd hear that song coming from in front of me, and turned sharply to avoid it, until I was utterly lost.

Finally, I broke through the treeline. I thought at first I'd found another clearing, but looking down, I saw I was next to Arden's mutilated body. The wretched thing had just sent me in a circle. For fun. For the chase. I was tired, scared, covered in scratches and bruises over my entire body, and for nothing. I was still going to die.

I turned to face my fate, and for the first time that night got a good look at my hunter. The moonlight shone on him in full and what I saw was not human. It's hard to describe exactly, but everything about him was sharper. His fingers, his teeth, his face, his eyes. His skin.

As I looked at him, the strangest thing popped into my head. Have you ever read *The Duchess of Malfi*? I had to study it for my O-Levels, many years ago. Dreadful play, as I remember, the worst sort of old revenge tragedy, all incest and murder and madness. But there's a line that stays with me, a doctor diagnosing the Duchess' brother with lycanthropy. As I recall it goes, "Once met the duke, 'bout midnight in a lane behind St. Mark's church, with the leg of a man upon his shoulder. Said he was a wolf. Only difference was, a wolf's skin is hairy on the outside, his on the inside". Looking at this thing that wanted to kill me, it's the only way it's the only description that feels right.

He didn't charge this time, but slowly stalked towards me. I was... acutely aware of the loaded guns by my feet, but I'd seen how fast it could move and I didn't rate my chances. It got close. Close enough that I could smell the foetid breath. Close enough that I could see the most disturbing thing illuminated by the moonlight: the slick drool on its lips as it salivated in anticipation of a kill. Then it attacked me.

I am, in some ways, very proud of how I acted during that encounter. You see, as long as the thing didn't think I was any sort of threat, I hoped it might get sloppy and clearly telegraph its strike. I was right; it drew back its arm and swung a clumsy, triumphant blow. I forget, did I mention my military background? Well, I used to be an officer in the Air Force. Now, it's been a long time since the Gulf War, and I didn't do much in the way of hand-to-hand fighting even then, but the training is something that stays with you. It certainly served me well for this

one, desperate move, as I caught his arm and pitched his motion around. His claws dug into my shoulder, but missed my neck, and he fell to the floor, tripped by his own momentum. He began to get to his feet almost immediately, but it brought me the precious seconds to grab my rifle and press it to his chest. I didn't hesitate.

The shot ripped through him and he jerked in pain. Not wanting to take any chances, I fired again and again and again until my rifle was empty. Then I picked up Arden's rifle and emptied that one into him as well.

Even after all of that, he still wasn't dead. He had three bullets in his heart, two in his head and many more through the rest of him, but still he writhed there, making weak noises. I didn't know how long this would slow him down for, but I hoped it would give me enough time to escape properly. I looked back as I left the clearing to see him slowly and

painfully pushing his claws into his chest, digging for the bullets.

It was luck that saved me, in the end. Some park rangers were driving past our trail on a road about two miles distant. They were coming to investigate the gunshots and I stumbled on to the road through sheer good fortune. I never saw that thing again, or Arden, unfortunately, though they managed to find and recover his body about a week later. I don't think I'll try hunting again. I know the thrill of power that comes with the ability to end the life of something weaker than you, but... I can't forget what it's like to be the hunted.

## ARCHIVIST

Statement ends.

Hunted. Yes, I think I'm starting to know the feeling.

Arden Neeli was found dead half a mile off the Appalachian Trail in Virginia on 1st December 2010. His death was ruled a wild animal attack. Mr Mortimer was treated for physical and mental trauma, but was not implicated in his death. Quite frankly that's all the investigation I'm willing to do on this one. 'Wolfmen in America' is too far-fetched and too far away for me to care about.

It's... been two months now since Martin returned and we became the ones being... hunted. Are we being hunted? Martin's still living here, and I'm leaving less and less. The worms keep turning up. We kill them, but there are more each week. What is she waiting for?

End recording.