

MAG032 – Case #0142302 – “Hive”

ARCHIVIST

Statement of Jane Prentiss, regarding... a wasps' nest in her attic. Original statement given February 23rd 2014. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Statement begins.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)

I itch all the time. Deep beneath my skin, where the bone sits, enshrined in flesh, I feel it. Something, not moving but that wants to move. Wants to be free. It itches, and I don't think I want it. I don't know what to do.

You can't help me. I don't think so, at least. But whatever it is that calls to me, that wants me for its own, it hates you. It hates what you are and what

you do. And if it hates you, then maybe you can help me. If I wanted to be helped. I don't know if I do. You must understand, it sings so sweetly, and I need it, but I am afraid. It isn't right and I need help. I need it to be seen. To be seen in the cold light of knowledge is anathema to the things that crawl and slither and swarm in the corners and the cracks. In the pitted holes of the hive.

You can't see it, of course. It isn't real. Not like you or I are real. It's more of an everywhere. A feeling. Are you familiar with trypophobia? That disgusted fear at holes, irregular, honeycombed holes. Makes you feel that itch in the back of your mind, like the holes are there too, in your own brain, rotten and hollow and swarming. Is that real?

I'm sorry, I know I'm meant to be telling you what happened. What brought me to this place. This place of books and learning, of sight and beholding. I'm sorry. I should. I will.

I... I haven't slept in some time. I can't sleep. My dreams are crawling and many-legged. Not just slithering and burrowing, though it is the burrowing that draws me. They always sing that song of flesh. I hope you will forgive me for such a rambling story. I hope you will forgive me for a great many things, as it may be I do worse. I have that feeling, that instinct that squirms through your belly. There will be great violence done here. And I bleed into that violence.

Do you know, I wonder? As I watch you sitting there through the glass. Eating a sandwich. Do you know where you are? You called me "dear". "Have a seat, dear." "You can write it down, dear." "Take as much time as you need, dear." Can you truly know the danger you are in?

There is a wasps' nest in my attic. A fat, sprawling thing that crouches in the shadowed corner. It thrums with life and malice. I could sit there for

hours, watching the swirls of pulp and paper on its surface. I have done. It is not the patterns that enthrall me, I'm not one of those fools chasing fractals; no, it's what sings behind them. Sings that I am beautiful. Sings that I am a home. That I can be fully consumed by what loves me.

I don't know how long the nest has been there. It's not even my house, I just live there. Some sweaty old man thinks he owns it, taking money for my presence as though it will save him. I used to worry about it, you know. I remember, before the dreams, I would spend so long worrying about that money. About how I could afford to live there. Now I know that whatever the old man thinks, as he passes about the house with brow crinkled and mouth puckered in disapproval, it is not his. It has a thousand truer owners who shift and live and sing within the very walls of the building. He does not even know about the wasps' nest. I wonder how long he has not known. How many years it has been there.

Have you ever heard of the filarial worm? Mosquitoes gift it with their kiss and it grows and grows. It stops water moving round the human body right, makes limbs and bellies swell and sag with fluid. Now, when I look at that fat, sweaty sack, I think about it, and the voice sings of showing him what a real parasite can do.

How many months has it been like this? Was there a time before? There must have been. I remember a life that was not itching, not fear, not nectar-sweet song. I had a job. I sold crystals. They were clean, and sharp and bright and they did not sing to me, though I sometimes said they did. We would sell the stones to smiling young couples with colour in their hair. I remember, before I found the nest, someone new came. His name was Oliver, and he would look at me so strangely. Not with lust or affection or contempt, but with sadness. Such a deep sadness. And once with fear. It didn't matter, because no-one

in the shop wanted to hear about the ants below it. I tried to tell them, to explain, but they did not care. The pretty young things complained and I left.

That was when I still called myself a witch. Wicca and paganism, I would spend my weekends at rituals by the Thames. I wanted something beyond myself, but could not stomach the priest or the imam or pujari of the churches. I knew better. I knew that it was not so simple as to call out to well-trodden gods. I never felt from my rituals anything except exhaustion and pride. I thought that those were my spiritual raptures.

I wish, deep inside, below the itch, that they were still my raptures. I have touched something now, though, that all my talk of ley lines and mother goddesses could never have prepared me for. It is not a god. Or if it is then it is a dead god, decayed and clammy corpse-flesh brimming with writhing graveworms.

When did I first hear it? It wasn't the nest, I'm sure of that. I never went in the attic. It was locked and I didn't have a key. I spent a day sawing through the padlock with an old hacksaw. My hands were blistered by the end. Why would I have done that if I didn't know what I would find? The face of the one who sang to me dwelling within the hidden darkness above me. I had seen no wasps. I know I hadn't. There are no wasps in the nest. So how else would I have known that I needed to be there, to be in the dark with it, if it had not already been singing to me?

No, that's not right. The nest does not sing to me. It is simply the face. Not the whole face, for the whole of the hive is infinite. An unending plane of wriggling forms swarming in and out of the distended pores and honeycombed flesh. The nest is nothing but paper.

Was it the spiders? There were webs in the corners, around the entryway into the attic. I would watch

them scurry and disappear in between the wooden boards. 'Where are you going, little spiders?' I would think. 'What are you seeing in the dark? Is it food? Prey? Predators?' I wondered if it was the spiders that made the gentle buzzing song. It was not. Webs have a song as well, of course, but it is not the song of the hive.

I used to pick at my skin. It was a compulsion. I would spend hours in the bathroom, staring as close as I could get to my face to the mirrors, searching for darkened pores to squeeze and watch the congealed oil worm its way out of my skin. Often I would end with swollen red marks where it had become inflamed with irritation or infection. Did I hear the song then?

Was it when I was a child, such a clear memory of a classmate telling me a blackhead was a hole in my face, and if I didn't keep it clean it would grow and rot. Did I hear it then, as that image lodged in my mind forever? Or was it last year, passing by a strip

of green they call a park near my house, after the rain, and watching a hundred worms crawl and squirm to the surface.

Perhaps I've always heard it. Perhaps the itch has always been the real me, and it was the happy, smiling Jane who called herself a witch and drank wine in the park when it was sunny. Maybe it was her who was the maddened illusion that hides the sick squirming reality of what I am. Of what we all are, when you strip away the pretence that there is more to a person than a warm, wet habitat for the billion crawling things that need a home. That love us in their way.

I need to think. To clear my head. To try and remember, but remember what? I was lonely before. I know that. I had friends, at least I used to, but I lost them. Or they lost me. Why was it? I remember shouting, recriminations, and I was abandoned. No idea why. The memories are a blur. I do remember

that they called me "toxic". I don't think I really knew what that meant, except that it was the reason I was so very painfully lonely. Was that it? Was I swayed and drawn simply by the prospect of being genuinely loved? Not loved as you would understand it. A deeper, more primal love. A need as much as a feeling. Love that consumes you in all ways.

You can't help me. I'm sure of that now. I have tried to write it down, to put it into terms and words you could understand. And now I stare at it and not a word of it is even enough to fully describe the fact that I itch. Because 'itch' is not the right word. There is no right word because for all your Institute and ignorance may laud the power of the word, it cannot even stretch to fully capture what I feel in my bones. What possible recourse could there be for me in your books and files and libraries except more useless ink and dying letters? I see now why the hive hates you. You can see it and log it and note it's every detail but

you can never understand it. You rob it of its fear even though your weak words have no right to do so.

I do not know why the hive chose me, but it did. And I think that it always had. The song is loud and beautiful and I am so very afraid. There is a wasps' nest in my attic. Perhaps it can soothe my itching soul.

ARCHIVIST

Statement ends.

This is... uh...

Excuse me, reading that was, um... hmm. While I am pleased that we have... found the statement that Prentiss gave the Institute, it answers far fewer of our questions than I would have hoped, and gives us little new information about her than we had before, save for a snapshot of her mental condition before her hospital admission. We were already aware of her

religious history, and her breakdown over an ant infestation that apparently led to her termination from her work at the Good Energies spiritual supplies shop in Archway.

The wasps' nest is interesting. The paramedics report claims that when they and the police responded to reports of screaming at Miss Prentiss' flat on Prospero Road, they found her in a loft space, passed out, with her forearm buried up to the elbow in "pulped organic matter". This could indeed have been a wasps' nest, I suppose, but no nearby residents reported to have seen any wasps in the area.

Unfortunately, it could not be examined further, as later that night there was a fire that completely destroyed the flat and killed the landlord, Arthur Nolan. The fire service determined he had fallen asleep with a lit cigarette, due to the fact that he was found sitting in the remains of an armchair, with no sign he had made any attempt to escape.

Miss Prentiss was taken to the Emergency Department at Whittington Hospital, but she was already showing signs of the... infestation that would characterise her later appearances. Six hospital staff were attempting to treat and sedate her, when many of the worms were violently expelled from her body. They quickly burrowed through the soft tissue of the medical personnel – eyes, tongue, et cetera – and into the brain, killing them after roughly a minute and a half. She then walked calmly out of the door to A&E. A nurse attempted to run, but in his panic he tripped on the stairs and broke his neck. Then she was gone. The Institute was consulted, as apparently during her admission she had claimed that she was being possessed, but it was decided the situation was medical in nature and our involvement was dropped in favour of, what I can only describe, as a cover-up. If we'd known about this statement, perhaps things might have been different, but here we are.

Still anyone who's familiarised themselves with her file could tell you this. We still don't have any evidence that Prentiss is actually paranormal. It could just be an unknown, aggressive parasite. There are weird things out there that are perfectly natural. It's not, though. I know it's not natural. Somehow I... I feel it. I'm sorry, my academic detachment seems to have fled me. Something in this statement has got to me a bit. I'm... I'm going to go lie down.

End recording.