

MAG034 – Case #0161207 – “Anatomy Class”

[CLICK]

ARCHIVIST

Apologies for the somewhat archaic—

DR. ELLIOTT

No need to worry, I understand. Some things you just can't trust to computers. It's like I always say about those robotic surgery machines. It's just not the same. If I'm going to be operating on a man's pancreas, I want to feel that pancreas. Fiddling with a joystick just won't cut it. As it were.

ARCHIVIST

I didn't think you still performed surgery?

DR. ELLIOTT

I keep up with the developments. And I remember the feel of a pancreas.

ARCHIVIST

Well... quite. Now, if you'd be so good as to—

DR. ELLIOTT

You know you have an infestation, don't you?

ARCHIVIST

Excuse me? I'm not sure—

DR. ELLIOTT

Yes, little, grey, maggot things. I saw a few on the way in. Don't recognise the species, but I'd say you need to get the exterminators in here. Gas the little blighters.

ARCHIVIST

You saw them? You weren't bitten were you?

DR. ELLIOTT

Bitten? They're worms. Still, I'll admit I didn't like the look of them. I reckon the sooner you get someone in to kill them dead, the better.

ARCHIVIST

We've tried, believe me. Now, shall we?

DR. ELLIOTT

Oh, certainly. Where do you want me to start? The bones? The blood? The... uh... the fruit?

ARCHIVIST

Right from the beginning. One second.

DR. ELLIOTT

Statement of Dr. Lionel Elliott, regarding a series of events that took place during his class...

DR. ELLIOTT

Introduction to Human Anatomy and Physiology

ARCHIVIST

At King's College, London, in early 2016.

Statement recorded direct from subject 12th July 2016. Statement begins.

DR. ELLIOTT

Now?

ARCHIVIST

Yes, just start from the beginning.

DR. ELLIOTT

Right. Well, I shouldn't even have been teaching the class, really. As far as I knew, I wasn't going to be needed for any teaching on the Biomedical Engineering course this year. I can't say I was particularly upset. The Human Anatomy module is where a lot of the engineers discover just how messy the human body is, and while the human heart is a phenomenal piece of machinery in terms of design and function, most of the students would be more comfortable holding a transistor. Not to put too fine a point on it, I get tired of... squeamish students, and was glad that I could avoid it this year.

You can perhaps imagine, then, that I was not best pleased when Elena Bower, the admissions officer, emailed me last November to say that there had been a mistake, and I was needed to take a 'spillover class'. Apparently the system had

accepted more students for the course than there were places, and they were trying to organise an additional class for the seven who were unassigned. It didn't make a lot of sense to me, Anatomy class wasn't until the second term, so surely this mistake should have emerged earlier, but Elena just kept saying she didn't know, she just had seven students who needed tutorials. I won't pretend I took the news gracefully. I have a lot of research due shortly and, well, you know academia – never enough hours in the day. Still, I was the only staff member both qualified to teach the class and technically free when it had to be scheduled. So I agreed, although that really makes it sound like I had more of a choice than I actually did.

I didn't meet the students until the module started this January. I wasn't responsible for any of the lectures, so the first time I saw them was in

our initial class tutorial. They all sat there, all seven, staring at me, and I felt... oddly uncomfortable. There, there was nothing wrong with them, of course, nothing strange to see or to look at, just... well, this is going to sound stupid to say out loud, but I don't remember what they look like. Any of them. I remember that each wore blue jeans and a white shirt, though they were all different makes and styles; I think one of the girls had a skirt, instead. I must have noticed that they were wearing the same outfits, but it didn't strike me as odd. They all just looked so... normal.

Unremarkable. I remember their names, though, from the register. They stuck with me – maybe because they were such an international group.

There was Erika Mustermann, Jan Novak, Piotr and Pavel Petrov, who I think were brothers, maybe twins, John Doe, Fulan al-Fulani and Juan Pérez.

I greeted them when I entered the room, and was met with silence. Not a malicious or angry silence, just silence. I've never been self-conscious when teaching, but walking to my seat with those fourteen eyes just... watching me... it made ever so slightly uncomfortable. I got the oddest feeling they were judging my walk. [Nervous laugh]

The class began, and we started going over some of the basics of anatomy and how the body works. They started to talk then, and some of my unease left me. I don't remember exactly what was said, after doing it long enough most tutorials just kind of blur together a bit, but I recall being struck by just how basic some of their questions were. The composition of blood, where in the body the various organs sat, the sort of thing that anyone who's done a science GCSE should know. I was almost tempted to ask where they went to school.

At the time, I didn't question the fact that they must have all gone to the same school.

Aside from that it was mostly normal, except... about halfway through the tutorial, we discussed the lungs and respiration. Inhalation, alveoli, et cetera. As I said, basic stuff, but I paused afterwards, just to have a think about where to go next, and I heard the sound of them breathing. That's not abnormal, I know, but it seemed to fill the silence so suddenly, and all at once. I could... I could have sworn that I didn't actually hear it before that moment. Like they'd only just then started breathing. [Nervous laugh] Which is, which is absurd, obviously. I was probably just listening out for it because we'd been discussing the lungs. Even so, it was disconcerting, and I don't mind telling you that I breathed quite a sigh of relief myself when the tutorial was over and I could get out of there.

Now, I consider myself a conscientious worker, and in all my years at King's I can count on one hand the number of times I've called in sick, but when the time came for the next tutorial with this class, I had to stay home with a migraine. It wasn't a lie, exactly, the thought of sitting there for another two hours with those staring, placid eyes gave me such a spell of anxiety that my brain felt like it was being stabbed with a shard of ice. I did have to teach them eventually, of course. I couldn't avoid it forever. Re-entering that room, though... All of them were sat in the exact same positions, in the exact same clothes, their breathing deliberate and almost pointed. When Erika Mustermann – or was it Jan Novak? – said 'Good morning', the others followed suit, one by one, and I had to fight the urge to run. It struck me then that, despite how diverse their names were, none of them seemed to have any

noticeable accent. Not that it did anything to reassure me.

There was no-one else who could take the tutorials. Believe me, I did everything I could to try and find a replacement. Still, once I got used to their stares, their silence, and the fact that their questions were both specific and oddly basic – one of the Petrovs once asked me “How sharp are the knees meant to be” – I swear, it was just about tolerable. I’m a bit ashamed to admit it, but I came to terms with the fact that I didn’t care if they passed any exams, and that actually made the whole affair more manageable. I just did my best to stop caring.

And then came our first of two sessions in the dissection room. We were looking at the skeleton. I had been dreading this. Given exactly how creepy and unsettling the students were just sat

in a classroom, the idea of what they could do when given access to human remains made me feel quite nauseous. But I couldn't bring myself to leave them there alone, so I went.

It was even worse than I'd feared, seeing them stood there over the bits of cadaver. Their faces, normally so neutral, were alive with... what was it I saw? Excitement? Curiosity? Hunger? Whatever it was, it didn't reach their eyes, still staring and blank. I went through the procedures with them and tried my best to keep the trembling out of my voice. When Fulan reached for a scalpel and started cutting into our samples, I felt faint.

I was trying to keep an eye on everyone, but the dissection tables were arranged in a semi-circle around the lab, and each time I turned to face one of the students, I began to hear this cracking sound from whichever tables I wasn't looking at.

Like a snapping bone, or a ribcage being forced open. I'd turn back and see nothing untoward, just John or Erika or Juan or whoever it was, looking at me quizzically over distinctly unbroken bones. But it kept happening. Whenever I wasn't looking, I heard the crunch and the crack of bone. I couldn't ask about it. I knew the dead-eyed, mute stare they'd give me if I did, and I just couldn't face that.

Finally, I managed to position myself so that I could see what was happening behind me in the reflective edge of the metal table. It wasn't much, but I could see a slightly warped image. It was Pavel, in this case. I saw him pick up a bone – a radius I believe, from the forearm. He held it up next to his own arm, and then there came that snapping, crunching noise. I swear I saw his arm distend itself, the skin shifting as something inside

changed and rearranged, until it matched the length of bone he was holding up to it.

I tried not to react, not to make a noise at this mad impossibility that I saw. I couldn't help it, though, and my legs gave out. I collapsed on the floor with a whimpering cry. None of them looked at me, none of them offered to help me up, none of them gave any reaction at all. I shut my eyes tight as that cracking sound began to come from every direction, as all seven of them began to change themselves. It went on for almost half an hour, until our allotted time in the lab ended. And then they left, walking past me, still sat helpless on the floor. As they did, each of them thanked me for the lesson as though nothing had happened. And I swear that every single one of them was taller than when they started.

I started taking more sick leave after that. I avoided their tutorials as often as possible, and when I did go we largely just sat there in silence until one of them asked a question about human anatomy, which I would reluctantly answer. I know I should have just abandoned them entirely. If they were going to complain to anyone they would have done it already. But even then I was worried my colleagues might notice, and I really didn't want to get a reputation as some absentee tutor. It didn't help that a colleague of mine, Dr Laura Gill, once expressed surprise on learning I'd been absent the day before, as apparently she'd passed by my teaching room and my anatomy class had just been sat there, waiting quietly. The thought of them politely filing into every tutorial, just sat there, blank and staring, whether I was there or not, just waiting... To be quite frank I think that bothered me almost more than being sat there with them.

Still, I managed to largely avoid them until the 21st of March, when they had their second lab dissection. Hearts. I'm not an idiot. I was well aware of the sort of sinister nonsense that was likely to happen if I went, but I also knew by now that they would attend whether or not I was there. And to leave them in the lab unsupervised would be the sort of thing that would get me actually fired from my position.

It was a rainy morning. I remember that, because I deliberately didn't put up an umbrella.

Something inside me was so dreading what was going to happen that the very act of opening umbrellas seemed pointless, as though my being dry couldn't stop what was coming, then there was no reason not to get soaked. So I was dripping wet when I entered the lab, and my glasses had steamed up to the point where I could

no longer see through them. When I wiped them clean, they revealed those seven blank faces, utterly unconcerned with my sodden state. Each had somehow got the heart laid out in front of them on the dissection tray. I decided not to prolong it, and waved them to start.

I don't know what I expected. Maybe I thought they'd descend into some sort of feeding frenzy, but they didn't. They just began to dissect the hearts, as any other class would, occasionally asking me polite questions. I was so taken aback at how normal the whole situation seemed to be that it took me some time to actually answer them. I did, though, and the first hour of the class almost put me at least a little bit at ease. The more I thought about it, the more it made sense. Maybe they were doing weird things to their insides, but if it was the heart, then I couldn't see it and I couldn't hear it. And I'd long since

decided with this class, that if I couldn't see or hear it, I didn't care.

Then Erika Mustermann held up her heart and looked at me. I began to get that sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach as she asked me "How does the heart pump blood?" I started to explain the biological mechanisms of the heart pumping, when she shook her head slowly and said, "What does it look like?" And then, when I didn't answer, "Is it like this?"

The heart in her hand began to spasm. Not like the regular, rhythmic pulse of a heartbeat, but like a balloon being rapidly squeezed at one end. Bits of it swelled and stretched and distorted seemingly at random, and blood began to flow haphazardly from the ventricles, dripping down Erika's forearm and dribbling onto the floor.

I stood there speechless, staring at this horrible miracle, from when behind her I see Fulan raise his heart, saying, "That's not what it's like." And blood starts to gush from all over his heart in tiny geysers, shooting in every direction. Soon each of them is holding a heart up, each pumping and throbbing differently, blood leaking, spurting out of them in a different way, a different nightmare. They wanted me to tell them which was right. [Nervous laugh] I don't know how long I stared before I finally raised my hand to point at Jan Novak, who seemed to have the closest to an accurate impression of a regular human heartbeat. Then I turned and walked out of the lab.

I spent the rest of the day sat in the staffroom, waiting for someone to come running in, screaming about the lab being full of blood. I expected questions I couldn't answer and immediate termination. But nothing happened.

No-one came. When I returned to the lab several hours later, there was no sign of any blood, except for the tiniest speck, dried into a tile crack in the corner. Unless that, that had been there before? I don't know. My shoes were still speckled with blood, though, so I know I wasn't hallucinating it. I checked with Dr. Gill, who confirmed that she could see the spots, though I neglected to tell her it was blood. I had no intention of inviting further questions.

I missed the next three tutorials. I just stayed at home. But something wouldn't let me just simply let it go. Finally, I made a decision. I wanted to see where they lived. I felt like I needed to, for some reason. Needed to see if they existed outside of my class, outside of my mind. I asked Elena and, irregular as it was, she gave me the address. It didn't surprise me to find out they all lived in the same place. A semi-detached house on

Kingsland Road in Newham. I'm afraid I don't remember the number, and the details have disappeared from the college systems.

The house itself was run down, as might have been expected, and I must have spent a good fifteen minutes just stood in front of it, waiting for the courage to approach. Finally, I knocked on the door. The wood was old and dry, and some flaked off under my knuckles. It opened immediately, and there stood Jan Novak. When she saw me, her mouth twisted into something I think was meant to be a smile.

"Hello," she said, "have you come to give us more lessons? We would like to learn about the liver." Her eyes locked onto my abdomen.

I was about to reply when a muffled scream of pain came from somewhere deep inside the house.

It sounded ragged, like whoever was crying out had been gagged. I looked to Jan Novak, who showed no indication she had heard it, still staring at where I had taught her my liver would be. I ran, and she watched me go without moving.

I did call the police, but they just told me that the house was currently unoccupied, and they'd found no evidence that there had been anyone present. I took great pains never to see the class again. I avoided all tutorials, and simply waited until the end of term. I haven't seen them since.

ARCHIVIST

That's it?

DR. ELLIOTT

Not quite. There was one other thing. When I went to the classroom shortly after what should have been their final tutorial, I found something

on the desk. It was an apple. Next to it was a handwritten note that said "Thank you for teaching us the insides". I burned the note, just in case.

ARCHIVIST

And the apple, did you... eat it?

DR. ELLIOTT

Do I look like an idiot? Of course not! I cut it in half, first, to check if it was... off.

ARCHIVIST

And?

DR. ELLIOTT

Human teeth. Inside were human teeth arranged in a smile. Here, I brought you the two halves to see for yourselves.

ARCHIVIST

Oh good lord! That's...

DR. ELLIOTT

Deeply unpleasant, yes. You can keep it, if you want. As proof.

ARCHIVIST

We do not want it. I'm afraid it isn't really proof. Someone could have stuck those teeth in after the apple had been cut.

DR. ELLIOTT

[Somewhat distressed] You think I would do that?!

ARCHIVIST

I didn't say you would, I just said it was enough of a possibility that I don't think your... tooth apple

has a place in our artefact storage. Also, it is technically medical waste.

DR. ELLIOTT

Fine. I'll dispose of it myself. Now, is there anything else you want me?

ARCHIVIST

No, this should do. We'll investigate and get back to you if we find anything.

Statement ends.

[CLICK]

The first thing about this statement that makes me dubious is that it comes from a fellow academic. Historic and prestigious as the Magnus Institute is, there are still many within the sphere of higher education that do not grant it the

respect it deserves, and some have been known to make false statements as ill-conceived jokes.

Another mark against the veracity of the statement is the names of the students. A quick Internet search reveals 'Erika Mustermann' as the official German placeholder name, similar to the English, well, the English name 'John Doe'. The same is true the other names, 'Juan Pérez' is the generic name of choice in most Spanish speaking countries, 'Fulan al-Fulani' in the Middle East, et cetera. It seems strange to me that Dr. Elliott would fail to take note of this.

Still, Tim made contact with Elena Bower in the King's administration office, and while she couldn't find any actual records of them in the system, she does remember them being there, and confirms that she assigned them to Dr. Elliott last year.

She could be in on it, of course, but Tim seems to believe her.

There's also the matter of the teeth. I stand by my assessment that there is no evidence they were placed there by supernatural means, but it does seem an awfully long way to go for a bad joke. In the end we did send them off to a dental specialist, but they weren't able to tell us much beyond the fact that they all seemed like healthy adult teeth, and most of them appeared to come from different people.

There's not much more we can do to follow this up, without dedicating additional time we can't afford. The only other lead was Sasha's discovery that, early last year, Dr. Rashid Sadana took his own life. There's no direct connection, except that he taught the Anatomy, Physiology and Pathology for Complementary Therapies course at St Mary's

University, and the only note found near the body simply read "NOT TO BE USED FOR TEACHING".

End recording.