

MAG043 – #0160919 – “Section 31”

[CLICK]

BASIRA

I really shouldn't be talking about it on tape.

ARCHIVIST

That's entirely up to you. You came to us.

BASIRA

Yeah... Just wanna talk about it with someone, you know?

ARCHIVIST

Very much so.

BASIRA

I'm breaking the law by talking to you. You understand that?

ARCHIVIST

I... think so. Some sort of non-disclosure agreement, I believe?

BASIRA

Pretty much. D-Do you need my real name?

ARCHIVIST

Technically no, but from what I understand of your situation, you'd be rather identifiable even without it. This is not the first time we've had statements from witnesses in sensitive positions. I'll mark the tape and file it for internal use only, which means it comes under the Institute's own, very strict, NDA policy and cannot be referenced or requested by external agencies or authorities.

Such as the police.

BASIRA

[Pointedly] That's the best you can offer?

ARCHIVIST

I'm afraid so, though I remind you again you are under no obligation to make a statement if it makes you uncomfortable. Or, if you're worried about your voice being recognised, you could always write it down. I'll make an audio copy later.

BASIRA

I'm not really big on writing. I'm more of a talker.

ARCHIVIST

Odd choice of career, then; [attempting levity] I hear there are lots of forms to fill in.

BASIRA

Not much since I became Section 31.

ARCHIVIST

Yes, you mentioned. This Section Thirty– you know what, we will cover it in the statement.

Statement of Police Constable Basira Hussain regarding her time investigating... strange occurrences as part of

Section 31. Statement taken direct from subject,
September 19th 2016. Statement begins.

BASIRA

...

Now?

ARCHIVIST

Yes.

BASIRA

Right, well, first off, I'm not 'part' of Section 31. It's not like a unit or a division within the police force or anything like that. It's a form you have to sign. Section 31 of the Freedom of Information Act covers exclusions for information pertaining to law enforcement. It just means that any information that could interfere with the prevention or detection of a crime can't be given out as part of an FOI request. So what happens is, when you stumble across something a bit... weird, then after it's over you're taken to one side, and told to sign a form officially declaring what you saw and experienced was

directly related to a crime. Then it's covered by Section 31 and can't be revealed under the Freedom of Information Act. There's a whole bunch of other NDA stuff in there as well, but it basically means you have to keep quiet about it.

Thing is, signing your first Section 31 really marks you out. Word spreads fast in a station, and once they see you've signed one, people start to push you in that direction. They call you 'sectioned', which I guess is kind of appropriate? You're generally assigned to head out with others who've signed, and if any officers get a whiff of something weird from a scene, they'll wait 'til you arrive, rather than going in themselves and risk getting sectioned themselves. I suppose in some ways it's kind of a unit, but not one with any funding or training or official power. Just a bunch of burned out cops with a retirement rate five times the average.

That's why it took so long to get a car here when your friend found Miss Robinson's body. I was on a burglary call-out with Carver, the only other sectioned officer on

shift, and you can bet no-one else was responding to a call from the Magnus Institute. No offence.

ARCHIVIST

None taken. And full names, please.

BASIRA

What? Oh, PC Richard Carver.

ARCHIVIST

Thank you.

I did notice you seemed less... taken aback by the large number of shrivelled silver worm corpses than I would have expected.

BASIRA

Yeah. I mean, that was easily one of the most disgusting things I've seen on the job, but not the weirdest.

ARCHIVIST

Shall we start at the beginning, then?

BASIRA

Okay, well, the first time I got hit with a Section 31 was five years ago, August 2011. I'd got my badge the year before that, and was still getting used to some of the more stressful bits of the job. The week before this happened, I'd heard an officer get his leg shattered by some arsehole with a cricket bat. We were speeding towards the scene, but couldn't do anything but listen to it over the radio. That sort of thing it, it does something to your brain; that mix of adrenaline and helplessness, so... so I was still a bit rattled when the call came in.

There was a fire out near Clapham – a residential home had gone up, and the fire brigade were calling for some police back-up. Apparently the homeowner was getting violent, and there were suspicions of arson. I was riding with John Spencer back then. We didn't really get on – let's just say I wasn't a fan of the tone he always used when he said the word “diversity”, though I never had enough to bring any real grievance about it. Even so, he didn't deserve what happened to him.

So we arrive at the smoking ruin of a house, and the firefighters have got it pretty much locked down, just a lot of smoke and damp rubble, except for where we see a couple of firefighters struggling to keep a guy restrained. He was a Hispanic male, probably mid-to-late 40s, heavy set with a completely shaved head. Another of the firefighters, this one with a fresh black eye, comes over to brief us. Apparently the guy had burst out of the house shortly after they arrived, not a single burn mark on him. The fire brigade had approached to see what help he needed, but instead he just started throwing punches and trying to run.

That was an assault charge, sure, but why the arson? The fireman just sort of nods to him, and I realise for the first time the bald guy's saying something. Not loud, but intensely. I mean, this was years ago, so I don't remember exactly what he was saying, but it definitely involved the words "cleansing fire", "all shall be ash" and the name Asag, which I later learned is some kind of Sumarian demon. So that's fun. I reckoned suspicion of arson was probably about right, and Spencer agreed.

So he went to arrest the guy, maybe calm him down some, while I got the handcuffs on. There's still part of me that feels guilty it was that way around. As I was cuffing him, there was this sudden intense pain in my hand. It was just as I touched the metal to close them; it was incredibly hot. I once took a welding class, ages back, just kind of on a whim, and made the mistake of forgetting that just because metal isn't glowing red doesn't mean it isn't scorching hot. It was that same burn, too intense for your mind to process for a second, then all your nerves fire at once.

It hurt, is what I'm saying.

If I hadn't managed to get the cuffs closed before the pain really hit, I don't know what would have happened. As it was I ended up with some badly blistered fingers, while in front of me the guy leaned over to Spencer and whispered something right in his ear. I didn't hear what he said, but Spencer went completely pale. He was shaking slightly as we shoved the guy in the back of the car, and I had to drive us back to the station. He... refused to tell me what the guy had said.

Our arsonist's name was Diego Molina. He was assistant curator at some Mexican museum, come over with a loan to the Natural History Museum, but they hadn't heard from him for a few weeks. He didn't say much in questioning, though his English was clearly fine. Unfortunately, the arson case collapsed pretty quickly, so... we just had to slap him with assault and let him walk with a hefty fine. Spencer didn't exactly help matters by getting himself suspended. The only thing Diego Molina had on him when we brought him in, was a small book bound in red leather. They caught Spencer in Storage, trying to destroy it with a Zippo lighter. I never saw him again.

They told me he killed himself when he got home. Apparently he'd somehow filled the bath full of boiling water and just... just got in. Official story was he'd somehow done it using a kettle, which... that, that's just about the weakest cover-up I've ever heard.

[HEAVY SIGH]

Anyway, after that happened, and I'd explained my burned fingers, they gave me my very first Section 31.

ARCHIVIST

I see... I-I see. How many, uh, potentially paranormal events do you generally investigate – a-as a police officer?

BASIRA

None. No-one says the P-word. Not `paranormal`, not `supernatural`, not even `spooky`. The words you learn to look out for are “weird”, “odd”, “strange” and if you hear the phrase “I'm not quite sure what I'm looking at”, then yeah, you're not getting much back-up.

Almost all of them are false alarms. We get called to a lot of bad drug trips, animal attacks and folks with genuine mental health issues. Those are the ones that have the potential to sound weirdest during initial contact. I didn't get another genuine Section 31 case for... almost three years.

July 18th 2014. I remember because it was the hottest day of the year, and the air con in the car was out, so we were really suffering. It was me and Alice Tonner, who... everyone calls her "Daisy", but I can never get her to tell me why. Anyway, Daisy was sectioned years before I was even on the force. She's never been that forthcoming about any of her own experience; takes Section 31 very seriously. The most I could get out of her was that she was originally sectioned for something she referred to as "spider husks". The way she described it, it sounded like she'd found a bunch of shells, the sort crabs leave behind when they grow, but I could never figure out if it was meant to be the husks of people-sized spiders, or the spider-like husks of people. And Daisy never seemed like she wanted to clarify. I'm sure she mentioned vampires once as well, but... I think she was joking. Probably. Maybe.

Anyway, we were headed towards Kensington. This one had originally been called in for the ambulance, but then neighbours had reported gunshots, and we had a very strange call with the paramedics. They had specifically refused to confirm there was a gun on the scene so we

didn't send an armed unit. They were still on standby, but something in the paramedics' report made the other responders decide they should wait for us to get there.

The building was pretty run-down for Kensington. Still nicer than my house, but, you know. The paramedics met us at the door and showed us up. The lift was out, so we headed up the stairs. On each floor I saw faces peering out of the cracks in front doors. They must have been the neighbours who heard gunshots. We, we carried on up, [heavy exhalation] until we reached a door that was already open. The lights inside were off; paramedics said they've all been smashed. The windows had all been painted over, and it was like a boiler room in there. But, even in the gloom, it was... it was clear there was a lot of blood around. A lot of blood.

We found the 'victim' in the living room, sat on a large armchair. His face was a mess. We got a torch on him, and it was clear he'd been shot in the head multiple times at close range. He was male, white, youngish. Age was hard to guess from what was left of his face. His clothes were new, and there were a lot of expensive-

looking trinkets about the place. A lot of old-looking domino sets in glass cases.

Daisy spotted the gun lying next to him, and went over to retrieve it while I-I checked the place for any other signs of life. I'd just turned around when I heard Daisy scream. The guy was moving, trying to gurgle something through what was left of his jaw. He was reaching for the gun. Daisy leapt for it, but it was right next to him and she missed. The man who... he should have been a corpse already... raised the gun, and pointed it into this... mass of flesh that was his head. Daisy grabbed the gun before he could pull the trigger again, and managed to wrestle the gun away from him. Then he made a, he made a noise, just... just a really horrible sound. I think he was trying to cry.

The paramedics took him after that. They didn't really want to, but it was clearly more in their domain than ours. I assume hospitals probably have their own version of a Section 31 those poor idiots had to sign later. Daisy and I told them we'd clear it up on the police side. Just a standard suicide, and the body was taken by the

ambulance. It cut down on the forms, and neither of us wanted to sign another goddamn Section 31.

ARCHIVIST

Fascinating. What other cases have fallen under this classification?

BASIRA

Officially, I've only had one other, and that was yours.

ARCHIVIST

Officially?

BASIRA

You get a few dozen calls a year from people who have strange experiences, but they don't have any evidence. I mean, if what they say is true, then it would be a Section 31, but... there's nothing that can be investigated or proven, so there's nothing to report. I always feel bad for them; they're always so sincere, so sure you can help, but unless they can point to the ghost or the spooky clown doll or whatever, there's not *really* a lot we can do.

I've also been quite lucky, to be honest. I've dodged quite a few of the nastier Section 31s over the years. I remember Harry used to get wasted and tell all sorts of grim stories.

ARCHIVIST

Ah, full names, please.

BASIRA

Sorry, Sergeant Harry Altman. Worked with him a few years back, before he retired.

ARCHIVIST

Right. So... just to return to, er, Gertrude's body. That's currently considered a para— a weird case?

BASIRA

I mean, we're investigating it as a murder because that's what it is, but you guys are basically an automatic Section 31, so I've got almost no help on it. Maybe that's why I wanted to make a statement, you know? I can't talk to anybody about this stuff, and then I come here,

and you've got all this... all these people's experiences listened to and filed away. It's... I don't know. I've been meaning to come in ever since that callout.

ARCHIVIST

Mm. Yes. S-So um... so no-one is helping you with Gertrude's case? No oversight?

BASIRA

Not really. I tried making the argument that the murder didn't seem to connect to any of your 'paranormal business', at least not directly, but nope. I've got a shot corpse, three boxes of cassettes, and Daisy, who's CID now, which I suppose means it's technically her problem, but she's now the only detective who's already sectioned so she's always way too busy. As far as I know, neither of us have even had a chance to actually start listening to the tapes.

ARCHIVIST

Interesting. Uh, listen—

[CLICK]

[CLICK]

ARCHIVIST

Obviously further investigation of the police cases to which Ms Hussain refers is out of the question. Ensuring that the breach of non-disclosure and spreading of confidential information remains hidden is our top priority in this instance. Further investigation, however subtle, could put that in significant danger. Beyond that, Ms Hussain did not appear to expect any such investigation. I can't say I blame her. Much as I value the deductive powers of my team, they are not trained detectives with the force of the Metropolitan Police behind them, so I imagine there would be little more they could unearth. Certainly nothing worth the risk.

If nothing else, it appears we now have a name for our mystery burn victim from Case #0121102. Diego Molina. And I have a suspicion I know where he got that book. It's a shame he's dead, of course, but a piece of the puzzle is not something to be ignored.

End recording.

[CLICK]

[CLICK]

Supplemental.

I have convinced Basira to give me access to the tapes. It won't be many or often, as they are currently police evidence and thus hard to subtly remove, and she can't necessarily guarantee the ones I get will be the most pertinent to the case, but it is still a significant victory. I only ever spoke to Gertrude once or twice during her time as archivist. I-I was very new. I don't remember what her voice sounded like. Part of me worries about what I might find on these tapes, but a bigger part of me worries I will find nothing. This uncertainty is wearing on me, and I don't know how much more I can take.

End supplemental.

[CLICK]