

MAG072 – Case #0092010 – “Takeaway”

ARCHIVIST

Could you say that again? I've put you on speaker

BASIRA (on speaker)

Maxwell Rayner. Have you heard of him?

ARCHIVIST

Yes. Why?

BASIRA (on speaker)

Who is he?

ARCHIVIST

He was a cult leader back in the Nineties. I don't know about now.

BASIRA (on speaker)

The Church of the People?

ARCHIVIST

The People's Church of the Divine Host.

BASIRA (on speaker)

Right.

ARCHIVIST

Is he involved in a case or something?

BASIRA (on speaker)

We're on our way to arrest him.

(pause)

Hello?

ARCHIVIST

No I'm... Yes, I'm here. You've found him?

BASIRA (on speaker)

Not me, but I'm one of the ones going in. There's a lot of sectioned guys here, so I thought I'd give you a call. Any advice?

ARCHIVIST

Bring torches.

BASIRA (on speaker)

Torches?

ARCHIVIST

As many as you can get your hands on. How many do you have?

BASIRA (on speaker)

Um, there's a firearms team here, so we should have plenty of tactical lights. So you reckon it's going to

get dark?

[CALL STARTS DISTORTING AND CRACKLING]

ARCHIVIST

Basira? Hello?

BASIRA (on speaker)

(Almost too distorted to make out) Jon? Jon? Can you hear me?

[PHONE BEEPS AND CUTS OFF]

ARCHIVIST

Oh... damn. Right. *[SIGH]*

Statement of Craig Goodall, regarding his explorations of an abandoned chicken and kebab shop in Walthamstow. Original statement given 20th October 2009. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Statement begins.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)

I feel like I should be upfront with this right at the beginning. I'm probably a cannibal. I don't know for sure, but the likelihood is high. You ever hear of Han Yong? Otherwise known as John Haan? I guess it depends on what corners of the Internet you lurk in or what tabloids you were reading in 2004. If you haven't, let me explain. John Haan ran a small takeaway on Higham Hill Road in Walthamstow. Weirdly enough, it wasn't a Chinese; it just served kebab, chicken, burgers... the usual. Well, it went out of business in May 2004 when Mr. Haan was arrested for murdering his wife, Lanying. So far, so mundane, right? Except for the fact that over the previous two weeks John Haan had been disposing of the body the way only a takeaway owner can. He went full-on Sweeny Todd.

Now, the thing is, I live just off Higham Hill Road, and I used to go to that takeaway all the time. I definitely went there a few times in May 2004. I haven't been able to find out from any of the news reports exactly what he was selling the meat as, but over the course of the month I definitely had chicken wings, doner kebab, chicken kebab and a burger, so there's a very good chance I ate some of her. It's weird, though, everything I've found online says that human meat is meant to be very similar to pork, but nothing I was served was like that. I mean, pork is pretty different from beef or lamb or chicken, and I can't see how it was being easily passed off as any of them. But he must have managed it somehow. Maybe the doner? It was so heavily spiced it would have disguised the flavour, I guess. I don't know how he would have made it look like doner meat, though. It's very distinctive and I was always under the impression that you needed to order those huge rotating columns of things specially.

Regardless, the fact of the matter is that I am almost certainly a cannibal. You know the weirdest part, though? The bit I regret most is that I don't know which of the meals it was. I feel like, if I've been tricked into eating a person, I might at least have learned what a human being tastes like. And I don't really have a problem with the idea, in any sort of moral sense, at least. I know how that sounds, and I'm certainly not okay with murder, not to mention the issue with prion diseases, but the actual act of eating meat that comes from a human? I'm fine with it. I can't help but feel that anyone happy to eat other meats is something of a hypocrite if they're not at least theoretically fine with eating human. There's nothing inherently special about us. We feel as much pain, see the world with the same eyes as a real pig. Meat is meat. That's what John Haan said when they arrested him. The only thing he said. Meat is meat.

None of this really changes anything. Whether or not I've eaten chicken wing made of person doesn't

actually factor into this, I guess, except that it's the reason I always kept an eye on the old takeaway. After John Haan was arrested, it was never sold on. Not surprising. It's the sort of history that people tend not to want in their property investments. I didn't move away, though. I kept right on living there, and walked past the old boarded-up shop almost every day. As far as I'm aware it never actually had a name. I mean, it must have, but it wasn't clear from the front. Over the door was a large, hand-painted sign that simply read 'FOOD' in bright white capital letters, while a neon sign that protruded from it glowed with the word 'GRILL' on both sides in bright red. As the months of its closure started to turn into years, the old green paint on the window panes gradually started to fade and the large metal sheets that covered the windows and door were almost lost beneath a sea of posters and flyers advertising club nights and escorts.

Sometimes, if the light hit it just right, I could lean in and see inside through the tiny holes in the steel. I could see the bright shine of the fryer, the glass of the heating drawer, the tall column of metal that would have rotated the kebab. It all seemed somehow too clean for it to be so abandoned, and I was sure I could even see the vivid colours of soft drink cans in the clear-fronted fridge.

It was a grey, dull afternoon when I heard it. There was a miserable rain; the sort that doesn't even fall, it just seems to hang in the air, speckling your face with a fine, soaking mist. There wasn't a single patch of sky that disrupted the uniform gloom as I walked past the old takeaway. I stopped for a second, staring at the broken old building as I so often did, when I heard a sound from inside. It wasn't a loud sound, like something small and light falling to the floor. I went closer, listening, but the sound didn't come again. Leaning in, I tried to see through to the inside of the building, but the overcast day didn't give

enough light to see by. I stood up, trying to convince myself that I had imagined it, when a cold breeze blew down, cutting through my coat, and I heard laughter. It was so quiet. I could have imagined it. Or maybe it came from one of the houses nearby, but I looked around and the windows were as dark and empty as the sky.

I turned back towards the shop, and noticed for the first time the missing bolts along the edge of the panel that covered the side window. It was ever so slightly ajar. The sound of movement came again, soft and furtive from inside. Someone was in there. I knew that much at least. So I left and called the police.

I walked to the pub across the road, bought a pint of pale ale and sat outside on the wooden benches. The drizzling rain diluted my beer slightly, but I didn't mind. I waited. Twenty minutes later a police car pulled up, and I sipped my drink as I watched them

open up the door and head into the old takeaway. Through the now-opened entrance I could still see the faded remnants of crime scene tape flapping gently in the wind. There was the sound of shouting, and I saw them pulling out a teenage white boy holding a can of red spray paint. Kid couldn't have been more than fourteen with a ratty old hoodie and brand new sneakers the same colour as his paint can. The cops must have talked to the kid for a good ten minutes before they finally took the paint and let him go with a warning, like I knew they would the second I saw him. Figures. The cops locked the old takeaway back up and went back to get in their car. The rain was coming down heavily now, and the one holding the spray can lost his grip on it. It wasn't a long drop from his hand to the pavement, but it must have hit a sharp stone or something, because when it clattered onto the ground part of it split open. The red seeped out of it, mixing with the flowing rainwater in a river of colour that made me very uneasy. The cops didn't

seem to care; they just got back in their car and drove away.

I watched the place until I finished my drink. I wanted to see if they'd realise they'd still left the window panel partially open, where the kid had probably got in. If they did, they didn't come back to fix it. I was soaked to the bone by that point and decided to head home and get dry. My sleep that night wasn't great. I kept dreaming of a paint can impaled on a rotary kebab skewer. The liquid dripping from it bubbled and boiled in the heat, but it wasn't paint.

I woke up the next day bleary-eyed and exhausted, but my mind was still on that open window. I just couldn't shake it, and I knew I wouldn't be able to relax until I'd got to see the inside of that place. So I called a friend of mine, Leroy Yates, and told him what was going on. His hobby was somewhere in between urban exploration and housebreaking, so I

wanted to talk it through with him. He was over in Homerton, and offered to come help me out. I told him I reckoned I could handle it, but that if I didn't check in with him in an hour or so, he should come down, in case I had trouble of any kind. I grabbed a quick bite of cold sausage for breakfast, got my big torch and a small prybar, then headed out into the morning.

The rain had stopped but the sun still hadn't come out and the wet shine seemed to weigh heavily on everything. There was nobody on the street. Most were probably at work already. The old takeaway sat there, the letters of 'FOOD' now grey and lifeless. For a second I thought I saw the red neon 'GRILL' sign flicker, but I'm pretty sure that was just my imagination, as I know the tubes were busted. I slipped around the side and found the metal panel covering the window was still ajar. I'm a bit bigger than a scrawny teen vandal, but it didn't take much

coaxing before there was a gap wide enough for me to squeeze my way inside.

The air was cold and clean. I was in what must have been the storeroom and food prep area. There wasn't much light filtering through the tiny holes over the windows, so I turned my torch on and cast it about. It looked like anything perishable had been removed from the place, but other than that it seemed untouched. Sealed cans of pickled vegetables, vats of oil, rows and rows of clean, shining equipment. There wasn't a speck of dust on any of it, though it certainly didn't seem like it was in use. My torch moved over the rest of the room until it fell upon the huge freezer. There were letters sprayed onto it, several inches high. It looked like this was what the kid had been doing. He'd been spraying the phrase 'MEAT IS MEAT' onto the door of the freezer, but the cops must have gotten him before he's finished, so what was actually written upon the matt silver surface were the words 'MEAT IS ME'.

I'm not going to pretend that a shiver didn't run right through me. It made me feel ever so faintly ill. In a fit of stubbornness, I decided that the only way to dispel this fear was to open the freezer. To know for sure that there was nothing inside. No meat of any sort. I walked over with a confidence I didn't really feel and gripped the handle. I took a breath and pulled. Inside the freezer... was absolutely nothing. No meat, no ice, not even a chill. It hadn't been on in years. I let a sigh of relief. Which is when I heard a very quiet laughter from next to my feet.

I shined my light down and saw a face looking up at me from underneath the counter behind me. The face belonged to a gaunt, pale Chinese man, who looked up at me with a terrifying glee. In his spindly hands he held a pair of bolt cutters, with the blades positioned either side of my ankle. I barely had time to register this when he pulled them closed, cutting through my Achilles tendon. There was an intense

spike of agony and I fell forward hard, smacking my head on the side of the counter. And... everything went dark.

When my eyes snapped open, I was laid out on a wooden floor. I couldn't move and, by the plastic I could feel digging into my flesh, I assumed I had been bound with cable ties. My ankle throbbed with pain, though not as sharply as I would have expected. The room was small and mostly bare, and looking at the windows I guessed I was on the upper floor of the old takeaway. A few shreds of fading sunlight were filtering in through the covered windows, but most of the light in the room came from a trio of oddly textured candles a few feet from my head.

I strained my neck to look around the room. It seemed devoid of furniture but dotted around seemed to be small piles of bric-a-brac. I saw chipped teacups, a stack of what looked like old bibles and then something that made my breath catch in my

throat. A small pile of human fingers. I could feel a despairing moan escape my chest before I could do anything to stop it. At this, there was movement behind me and the man I had seen earlier stepped into view. He was shirtless, and the glow of the candles seemed to illuminate in stark shadow how painfully thin he seemed. He was chewing thoughtfully on something, though I couldn't see what, and held a long, sharp butcher's knife in his hand.

I tried to say something, but the words caught in my throat. What the hell are you supposed to say in that sort of situation? After a minute or two, he swallowed whatever he had been eating in a swift gulping motion, like an owl consuming a mouse. He smiled a smile of both satisfaction and expectation, and asked me if I was awake. He spoke with a crisp RP accent, which surprised me. You know what's messed up? Here was this guy clearly about to kill me and carve me up for meat, and I still somehow felt bad about

making the assumption that he couldn't speak English, like I didn't want my last thoughts on Earth to be low-key racist.

I tried to ask him who he was, but again my breath caught in my throat. He seemed to notice, though, and walked over to me slowly. He crouched down on his haunches, lowering his face to me, and asked me to speak up. I finally managed to croak out a question, asking who he was, but he just laughed that soft, disorientating laughter. In a single, smooth motion the knife lashed out, cutting through my bound hands and neatly severing three of my fingers in a sudden burst of white-hot pain. I screamed, both from the injury and the hopes that someone might hear, but my captor didn't seem to notice or care. Instead he picked up my fingers one by one and tossed them off-handedly onto the pile behind him.

Walking over to the pile of old bibles he picked one up and started to distractedly leaf through it. He

started talking again, asking if I knew that one of the reasons the Romans persecuted early Christians was because they believed them to be cannibals. Most people, he told me, assumed it was due to the Romans being confused over the nature of the "body and blood of Christ" that the early Christians were consuming, but that Octavius of Minucius Felix listed all sorts of grotesque accusations, including initiation rites that involved the murdering of an infant and drinking its blood. He looked over to see if I was listening, which I was, though mostly in the hopes he wouldn't cut me again. I asked him if he was a Christian, and a look of irritation crossed his face. He shook his head and threw the bible back onto the pile, telling me that I wasn't listening, that I didn't understand, that the accusations were obviously false, like any iteration of the old blood libel, so of course he wasn't a Christian, as they both honour and disregard the body, and then something about their view of the soul.

I was getting really lost at this point; he was rambling on about meat and souls and blood and I just lay there, waiting for him to kill me. I wanted to scream again, try to attract someone's attention from outside, but I didn't know what this thin, jagged man would do. He stopped his speech mid-sentence, as though he could tell I was no longer listening, and looked into my eyes with a grin. He started to walk towards me, the knife held loosely at his waist, a wetness on his lips, and in that moment I was a hundred percent sure I was going to die.

All at once a huge, dark shape barrelled into my captor, knocking him to the floor and sending the knife clattering to the ground. It was Leroy. He must have gotten worried waiting and come to find me. He stood over the thin, winded form and kicked it in the ribs, hard enough that I could hear something snap. Then he picked up the knife, walked over to me and cut through the cable ties keeping me in place. He started to pull me to my feet before I could protest

about my ankle, but surprisingly, it seemed to bear my weight without any problems. I looked down and, although I could plainly see dried blood all around it, my ankle was... fine. I stared in disbelief, then looked at my right hand, which still seemed to have all five fingers. It didn't make any sense. I could still see the ones he had cut-off on the pile. One of them bore my heavy silver ring, while the same finger on my hand did not.

I started to say something about this to Leroy, but as I did there was a sudden heat from behind me. We turned to see one of the candles had been pushed onto the pile of bibles, setting them almost instantly ablaze. I looked around quickly for anything to douse the flames, but I could see nothing, and the fire was already starting to spread up the wall. Leroy and I ran, keen to get away before the fire brigade or police arrived. I didn't see what happened to the man who had been cutting me, and we didn't stay to watch the old takeaway go up in flames.

It's still there, you know. Now a gutted, empty shell, smoke-blackened through the windows. I wonder if they'll ever get around to tearing it down. It doesn't really matter, though. I've decided to move.

ARCHIVIST

Statement ends.

Meat again. Not quite in the volumes of some previous statements, but still, a theme that continues to disconcert. First point to make is that I believe Mr. Goodall gave us a fake name and details when making his statement, as neither myself nor Sasha have been able to find any record of him to follow up, certainly none that match Martin's admittedly vague recollections about the man. Tim has confirmed the 27th of September 2009 as the date of the fire that destroyed the takeaway in question, which was

registered as “Waltham Express Grill”, but can find no record of anything out of the ordinary about the fire, which was put down to unknown local vandals. We’ve also been unable to find anything on a teenager being picked up for trespass on that property, though that’s not a particular surprise.

I’ve had Martin looking into the case of John Haan, though it’s slow going as whenever there’s a picture he ends up needing to take a breath of fresh air. Apparently Haan was second-generation British Chinese, marrying his wife Lanying shortly after she arrived in the country and setting up Waltham Express Grill. He seems to have been utterly normal, according to the testimony of his former employees. What Martin did find, is that according to coroner there was a noticeable lack of defensive wounds on what remained of Lanying’s body, and some of the injuries seemed like they might have been self-inflicted. From my perspective, however, what is more interesting is that six months before his arrest,

John Haan let the last of his staff go and replaced them with a nephew of his who had recently moved over from China. The nephew's name was Haan Tao, although upon moving to this country he took the name 'Tom Haan'. I've checked, and this is the same Tom Haan who was employed at the Dalston meat processing plant from late 2009 until his disappearance in 2013.

I doubt this is the last we hear of him and his strange relationship with meat.

End recording.