

MAG073 – Case #171102 – “Police Lights”

ARCHIVIST

Here.

BASIRA

Thanks.

ARCHIVIST

I assume it didn't go well, then?

BASIRA

[Swallows drink] We lost Altman. Just... wasn't... paying attention. Don't know what they're going to tell his family. Guess it could have been worse, though, if I hadn't talked to you first. So thanks.

ARCHIVIST

I'm surprised you're here. Surely you have a lot of

paperwork after something like that? A lot of forms to sign?

BASIRA

They've given us a few days 'compassionate leave'. I think they just want us out of the way while they figure out the official version of what happened.

ARCHIVIST

Well, I'd like to hear the real one, if you're ready?

BASIRA

Yeah. How much context do you need?

ARCHIVIST

You said it started with a kidnapping case?

BASIRA

Yeah. Callum Brodie. Twelve... twelve years old. Disappeared from his home in Dalston three weeks ago. Sitter was asleep when the mother came home, the front door was open, there was no sign of him. There was no forced entry so it started out as a missing persons case, but they got a witness claiming he'd seen three unknown figures entering the Brodies' home that night, so it was kicked up to Serious Crime. There was some back and forth with Kidnap Squad since no ransom demand had been made, but not much progress in terms of finding the kid.

I only found out about all this when we were suiting up yesterday. The Brodie case had nothing to do with my department or my borough. When me and Daisy got the call that we were being brought in for an operation to recover the kid, it was... it was totally out of the blue. The sergeant in charge had to brief us in the van. I had no idea why we'd been called in until I looked at the other officers involved and saw a good

few of them... they were fellow signees of a Section 31. Whatever we were heading towards, it was going to be weird. I think the sergeant in charge must have been sectioned as well, but I didn't know him. It's not too surprising, though. I mean, it's not like any of us have a full list of sectioned officers but one must exist somewhere.

It looked like most of the others had made the same connection, and none of us were feeling right about it. I mean, we had a counter terrorist firearms squad with us, which didn't exactly put my mind at ease. That said, I wasn't exactly sad we might be getting some sectioned firearms officers, but it was just a lot, you know? The briefing was pretty short. We were told that Callum Brodie had been found and it was suspected he was being held by a man named Maxwell Rayner, with an unknown number of accomplices. There were suspicions that there might be cult involvement. That's when I phoned you.

ARCHIVIST

And did the lights help at all?

BASIRA

Oh, I'm... I'm getting to that. I told the sergeant, and he didn't even ask me where I'd gotten the information. He just nodded and told everyone to load up on torches. The firearms team wasn't short on tactical gear so, by the time we headed inside, we had two or three heavy duty flashlights each. I had four.

The building was in an industrial complex up in Haringay. It was a two storey brick building with a weathered sign claiming it belonged to Outer Bay Shipping. We were instructed to go inside in teams of two, with one armed officer paired with one sectioned. You... you have to understand, that was massively against protocol, but I guess they wanted to be sure that none of the firearms team

encountered anything weird without being accompanied by anyone experienced. I looked around to see if the others were going to make anything of it, but no-one made a peep. I think everyone knew that this was about as far from a normal operation as they came.

I was paired with an older guy. Goodman, I think his name was, though we didn't really talk. The way he carried his weapon in the van, I could tell he'd been handling it awhile, but I couldn't help but notice his hands were shaking slightly as we made our way around the building. We were going in through the loading dock at the rear, and as we approached the security lights that lit the rest of the estate seemed to get dimmer. Well, not dimmer, really, they just didn't illuminate the place as much as they should have. Aside from a small pool of white light directly below, the darkness around them didn't seem to be affected. I didn't have much time to think about it before the order came down and we were going in.

I cut the padlock on the metal gate and slid it up while Goodman gave me some cover. The inside seemed normal. Pallets of boxes were neatly lined up on shelves around the loading bay, and the heavy lamps overhead gave us plenty of light. We started to make a sweep of the area, eyes peeled for anything that looked out of place. I took a second to check a few of the larger boxes but they didn't contain anything remarkable. Mostly sheets of plastic for manufacturing, although some were full of copper piping or paint. And that's when I heard the scream.

It came from behind one of the shelves to my left and it didn't sound like a cry of fear or pain. It was a scream of rage, almost animal-like, and when I turned I saw a figure moving behind me. It was only for a second, but it seemed to be dressed head to toe in black, like a leotard or one of those morphsuits. It was hard to say for sure, as it was less than a second

before it darted back behind the shelves and Goodman opened fire.

I hadn't prepared myself for it, and the sudden gunshot sent a jolt of pain shooting through my head as my eardrums rang with the noise. Goodman called something to me but I couldn't make out a word of it. I just followed him as he ran around to where the figure had disappeared to. There was no sign of it, although a small spray of fresh blood told me that my jumpy new partner's aim had been too wide of the mark.

We... we started to hear sporadic gunfire from the rest of the building. I mean, it was basically all I could hear at that point as everything else was still a muffled, high-pitched whine. I was worried Goodman might panic at this, but to his credit he seemed to have pulled himself together and we finished the sweep of the loading bay before heading through to

the rest of the building. I saw a handful of armed officers heading up the stairs to the upper floor, and I was going to follow them when I felt a tug on my arm. Goodman was... he was saying something and pointing towards the other direction. I saw a pair of uniforms and a face I recognised. Leo Altman, one of the sectioned officers from up in Waltham Forest. I had met him once before, when Daisy took me out for some very quiet drinks with a few other sectioned cops she knew. I remembered him being one of the friendlier ones, though he still stopped short of telling any stories.

Leo was stood with an armed officer that I didn't know. From her lack of trigger discipline it looked like she was either very new or seriously rattled. They were staring down a long metal staircase that seemed to lead into what must have been the building's basement. The briefing hadn't mentioned anything about a basement, and it was clear they weren't entirely sure how to proceed. When me and Goodman

joined them it seemed to make up their minds and, with a quick nod to us, Leo and his partner started to head down. I didn't want to follow, and I could see that Goodman wasn't too keen either, but we weren't just going to leave them without backup, so down we went.

At the bottom of the stairs was a door. It was old and made of steel that had started to rust around the edges. But... it wasn't right. You know how when the lights are turned on in a room and you can see it from outside? Like, a thin line of light leaking under the doorway? Well, it was like that, except what seemed to seep out from underneath it wasn't light. It was shadow. Like, if darkness was somehow shining from behind it. As I got closer I started to hear something. I couldn't really tell what it was under the buzzing in my ears, but the best way I could describe it is that it sounded like a waterfall, but slowed right down. A steady, flowing crash and churn, but deep and drawn out. I wanted to ask the others if they

heard it as well, but Leo was already moving to open the door. I barely had time to get my torch out.

I'm glad I did, though, because as the door opened every light in the building went dark.

That moment I was in complete darkness had to be one of the longest seconds of my life. I felt like I'd gone blind. Not just my eyes but everything. Like every sense I had was severed and the only thing I could feel was a wave of nausea. It seemed like, for that second, I wasn't anywhere that light had ever reached. Then, I clicked the button on my torch and the beam cut right through it.

The flashlight was weak, nothing like the power I would have expected from the heavy bulb, but the faint glow was enough to bring me back to myself. I shone it behind me, over the pale, panicked faces of the others and, as it touched each of them, I saw them start and reach for their own torches. Soon four

pale beams were struggling out into the thick, aggressive gloom.

I turned around, trying to shine the light on the wall or even the door we came in from, anything that would give me a sense of the room we were standing in, but it just disappeared into the pitch dark in all directions. Thinking about it now, I realise, we never actually walked through the door.

Small flecks of black dust floated in the air, like... like inky snow. They moved gently through the torchlight and they never seemed to settle on the ground, and I began to realise how cold it was. Everything was so still, and the only sound was the same dull roar from up ahead of us. I don't know how long we stood there, but when my torch sputtered and died, I knew we didn't have long.

I took out another and turned it on. The light seemed

even fainter than the first one. Still, it was something, and we started to walk forward, or at least what we assumed was forward. If anyone said anything I didn't hear it. The black dust danced in front of us, but it never seemed to actually touch us or land on our clothing. There was no smell at all here. The building above us had smelt of sawdust, old metal and industrial cleaner, but down here there was nothing. I didn't... I didn't shine my torch upwards. I didn't want to see if there was a roof over our heads.

By this point we had easily walked the whole length of the building several times and still hadn't seen anything. The roar was getting louder and louder, until it was all that was in my head. The four of us were all on our second or third torches by that point, and I could feel that I was starting to panic. There was a scream building up inside of me, clawing its way up my throat. Actually, you know what? I might have been screaming. I don't know. It was... it was impossible to tell over the noise and the thick,

choking darkness. Then Goodman's flashlight beam hit something ahead of us and it... it all went to hell.

I think it took about five seconds. Everything seemed to happen at once, and only going over it in the reports afterwards was I able to process what I saw. Five seconds and everything was over, but I'll try and describe it in as much detail as I can.

Goodman's torch beam had landed on an old man. He was tall, but I couldn't say much more than that. His body was hidden in the folds of a robe of some sort. It was the same colour as the dust that had filled the air and seemed to move and shift in the same way. His white hair was thin and wild, covering an unkempt face and a scraggly beard. His eyes were milky white. I think he was blind. From the description the sergeant had given us, I was sure this was Maxwell Rayner.

Next to him was an old chair that looked like it could have come from a dinner table. The wood was stained, covered in dark mould, and tied to it with thin metal wire was Callum Brodie. The kid's eyes were blank, though not clouded like the old man's, and his face was locked in a silent scream.

Rayner was facing him, thin, bony hands raised to his face. Something was... something was flowing out of his mouth. It looked like ink, but it flowed more like a heavy fog than any sort of liquid. It drips down his forearms and onto the floor, where it.. it rolled towards Callum, climbing up the chair and oozing across the boy's body towards his face. It was moving slowly, and had just reached his chest. The roaring sound seemed to come as it convulsed out of the old man's mouth.

Then Goodman opened fire. The muzzle flash seemed impossibly bright as it cut through the dark and... I

could swear that, for a second, the room it lit up was not a basement but a cathedral. He let off three shots in a quick burst, and every one of them hit Rayner square in the chest. His robe twitched violently as he staggered backwards, and all the dark liquid suddenly washed down onto the floor in a single movement, leaving Callum untouched. It still gushed from his mouth, though, and as the shots tore through him he spun about and an arc of the dark substance flew through the air.

Altman had started running towards them as soon as he had seen the kid, and was almost at the chair when the wave of it spewed out. A few droplets hit him on the cheek and he started to howl and claw at his face. Goodman fired again at Rayner, dropping him to the ground, and the horrendous noise stopped suddenly, leaving only Leo's cries of pain. The lights came on all at once, and in the sudden painful brightness none of us had time to do anything as a woman who hadn't been there a moment ago ran up

to Leo. She wore a robe similar to the old man's, and by the time any of us had seen the knife in her hand she had buried it in Altman's throat. More gunshots, this time from the officer who had partnered with Leo, but she was too slow. By the time the woman with the knife had been dropped, he was already bleeding out on the floor.

Five seconds. Two dead kidnappers, one dead police officer... and silence. We were standing in a small basement room lit by dingy fluorescent bulbs, no sign of the black liquid or any sort of dust. The kid seemed fine. I mean, I'm sure he'll need a lot of counselling, but he didn't seem physically any worse for wear. Goodman went to untie him while I ran to check on Altman. It was too late, of course, but as I looked at his still, cold face, I saw his eyes were a milky white.

The rest of the squad arrived a few seconds later and helped to take us back out to the van. After that it

was all questions, debrief cups of coffee I never quite got around to drinking. And Section 31 forms. Lots of them.

All in all there were five people killed in that building, including Leo Altman. Aside from Rayner and the woman, who was identified from an old report as Natalie Ennis, two more were shot and killed when they attacked some of the other officers. Three more were subdued and arrested, but as far as I know they still haven't said a word. God knows how they're going to process them with all the secrecy around the operation, but thankfully that's not my problem. I think they were connected to that cult group from way back, the Church of the Divine whatever.

ARCHIVIST

The People's Church of the Divine Host. Rayner was their leader back in the early Nineties. I have a few statements related to them if you're interested.

Natalie Ennis was actually one of the...

BASIRA

No. I'm not interested. Not even a little. I've been thinking a lot over the past few days, and I'm done. With the police, with Section 31, all of it. I wanted to tell you in person. And give you the statement. It seemed the least I could do.

ARCHIVIST

You're really quitting?

BASIRA

Yeah. And you should too. This place... It's not right. Goodbye, John.

[Door opens]

ARCHIVIST

Basira, wait. What about the tapes?

BASIRA

What?

ARCHIVIST

The tapes. Fr... from Gertrude's case. Is there any way I can-

[Door closes]

No, I suppose not.

[CLICK]

Well, that seems to close the book on Maxwell Rayner. Maybe the whole People's Church of the Divine Host. I can't help but feel I've got the last chapter of a story and I don't even know the title. At least I hope it's the last chapter. I still can't find much about the company Outer Bay Shipping. Looks like a shell corporation, but tracking corporate ownership is not something I'm skilled at.

I'm disappointed with Ms. Hussain's decision. It's not exactly a surprise, though. I've... thought about quitting myself. It's not an option, of course. I'm in far too deep now. I get the impression that to quit would be giving up whatever small protection I seem to have here. I just wished... I don't know. Oddly enough, all I can think about is how did the police know where Rayner was keeping the boy? Basira didn't seem to know, and the Church clearly wasn't expecting the police to arrive. With a few exceptions, Rayner managed to stay off the grid for two decades. How did they find him now? Someone must have known what was happening and tipped them off. And I don't think it was anyone inside that building.

End supplement.