

MAG078 – Case #0011206 – “Distant Cousin”

ARCHIVIST

I... er...

We... we didn't...

Statement of Lawrence Moore. Regarding something that was not his cousin. Original statement given June 12th 2001. Audio recording by Jonathan Sims, Head Archivist of the Magnus Institute, London.

Statement begins.

ARCHIVIST (STATEMENT)

I used to have a cousin. His name was Carl. We weren't close. I saw him plenty growing up – his family lived in Peterborough and mine lived in Leicester, so it wasn't too far. We'd go over occasionally, or we'd all be left together at our

grandmothers if our parents were doing something together. They never came over to our house, though; at least I don't remember them doing so. My memories of childhood are a bit hazy, so I can't be completely sure. Putting it down on paper now, though, I realise that, given how close we lived, it's odd that we didn't see each other more. I wonder how well our parents really got on. Thinking about it, I suppose they never had much in common.

Either way we got on fine, me and Carl. I think. I was a few years younger than him, and when you're a kid that makes a lot of difference. I suspect he saw me as a bit of an annoyance, a bit of a tag-along, but I don't remember us ever getting into fights or anything like that. We'd spend most of the time exploring my grandmother's wide country garden, or sitting awkwardly together pretending to do something while our parents talked about whatever grown-up topics needed their attention. Since I grew up and moved out, though, I hardly ever saw Carl. A family

dinner at Christmas some years or the occasional big family birthday, but if you totalled up all the hours we spent together since I turned eighteen, I doubt we'd be very far into double digits. And if you only count the time we'd actually spent talking to each other... I'm not sure you could even piece together a full hour. It didn't really bother me, and it certainly didn't bother him. I remember, shortly after I moved down to London I actually bumped into him shopping in Covent Garden. Turned out he lived about twenty minutes bus ride from me. I half-heartedly suggested we should go for a drink or hang out or something. And he said, "Yeah", in a flat tone that told me he had absolutely no interest whatsoever in doing so.

I wonder if I ever did anything as a child to set him against me? Or in that tiny sliver of time we actually interacted as adults. It's weird to think about people who knew you as a child. You change so much, and when you talk to them again, they're not talking to you. They're talking to someone else, someone you

used to be. The person they think they're seeing has been dead for years, but they didn't see the change. They're looking at a complete stranger, and they have no idea.

I went to my brother's wedding recently, and there was something pretending to be my cousin Carl. Adam, my brother, had always gotten along slightly better with him than I had, being closer in age, and during the ceremony I had been surprised not to see Carl among the guests. It was only later, at the reception, when I was being introduced to a number of my brother's friends I'd never met before, that I offered my hand to a dark-haired stranger and asked his name. He looked at me for a long, off-putting second as a wide smile crept across his face. "I know it's been a long time, Lawrence," he said, "but surely you haven't forgotten your cousin Carl?"

What are you supposed to say to that? I just sort of

stammered and wandered off. I didn't realise exactly what was happening until I asked my brother who the stranger was, and he gave me a puzzled look and told me, yes, that was Carl, my cousin. I assumed he must be playing some sort of joke, but the whole thing had really kind of unsettled me, so I asked my father, and he said the same thing. Now, my father is not somebody who jokes. He's never been one for humour and I can count on one hand the number of times I've ever heard him properly laugh. There was no way he would play along in any sort of prank Adam might try to arrange. I looked over, and the person who claimed to be my cousin was staring at me, smiling wide enough to show off rows of yellow-stained teeth.

I could feel panic beginning to rise in my chest, and I started asking everyone who might know Carl, and all of them told me the same thing. When my aunt gave me a withering glare for asking who her son was, I had to leave. I just walked out of the hall, got in my

car and drove back to London. I don't drink, so it definitely wasn't that. I thought maybe I was having some sort of dissociative episode. That must have been it. I'd been under a lot of stress at work, and my own marriage had recently ended, so perhaps that had affected me more than I thought. Maybe it had done something to my memory. I even managed to half-convince myself that if I was having a nervous breakdown and all that meant was I misremembered a cousin I never see, I'd gotten off quite lightly.

But I couldn't let it go. It nagged at me. As I lay awake in my too-empty bed, it twisted in my mind. I wasn't just remembering Carl wrong. I did not know the person who was using his name. It wasn't Carl. It just wasn't.

I was signed off work at the time, and mostly spent my days just kicking around the house, but a about a week after the wedding it occurred to me that, when

my grandmother passed away a few years before, my parents had asked me to go through her old photos, see which ones we might like to keep. I'd taken them, but had never actually gotten around to going through them, and they should still be in the loft. Not having anything better to do, and still a little bit off-balance after Adam's wedding, I pulled down the ladder, and went to fetch them.

The attic space was warm and dry, with that thin film of dust in the air that isn't quite enough to set you coughing but leaves your mouth feeling dry and sticky. I pushed away a few plastic crates of old comics, until I found the brittle cardboard box that held the pictures. My grandmother had loved her camera, and I remember her shelves were always full of tiny canisters of film, but it wasn't until I started to look through them that I realised quite how many pictures she'd actually taken. There were hundreds, maybe thousands, in there, and going through them I watched myself grow from a squash-faced toddler to

a chubby little boy and a spotty, scowling teenager. And alongside me was my brother Adam, and another child, who I did not recognise, but whose dark hair seemed to match the man I had met at the wedding. By the end, my whole body was shaking. Not because of all those pictures of a strange child playing in the garden with us, but because of the two – only two – pictures I found of Carl. The Carl I remembered, with light brown hair cut short and an almost piggish nose. The second of those photos looked like it had only been taken moments after a different picture of us playing tag, but that one showed the other child where Carl should have been. Where I knew he had been. I stared at those photographs for what must have been an hour or more, completely unable to make any sense of what I was looking at.

At some point, I was roused by a knock on the front door. It wasn't hard, or impatient, just a light series of taps. As though whoever was on the other side had no doubt that was in, and was politely trying to

attract my attention. I put the pictures back quickly, and hurried down to answer it. Standing on the other side was my new cousin Carl. He smiled that same yellow smile, and said that he'd been sad to see me leave Adam's wedding so soon, and that since we lived so close together, it seemed rude not to drop by. I tried to tell him to leave, to demand to know where Carl was, but my heart was beating so fast and I was just too scared. He walked calmly past me, into the house, and I closed the door behind him.

What followed was the longest afternoon of my life. I sat in an armchair and he took the sofa opposite, sitting stiffly in a way that seemed far too still. Neither of us said a word. He just stared at me, smile still wide and something twinkling in his eyes that might have been amusement. Or triumph. He showed no desire to make any sort of conversation and I was too terrified to say anything at all. I just kept thinking, what had this man done to Carl, and could he do it to me? I tried to look at him, to really look,

but the more I attempted to focus on him properly, the more my eyes seemed to slide off him. Like one of those optical illusions that only comes into focus when you're looking at a different part of the picture. At one point it almost seemed like his neck was too long, but when I looked again it was normal. The only two things I knew for sure was that I had never been as scared as I was just then and that I did not know this man.

When evening finally came, he stood up. He nodded at me and told me how much he had enjoyed his visit. "We must do this again," he said, "and soon." Then he left. I stayed sat in that chair and I cried.

It was full dark when I was broken out of my despair by another knock on the door. This one was harsh and jarring, and I could hear the doorframe rattle slightly at the impact. Standing there was another man I'd never seen before. He was black, dressed in a

crisp white shirt with the sleeves rolled up, and a thin necktie. For a moment I had the idea he might be a Jehovah's Witness, but one look at his face dispelled that idea immediately. It was hard and stern, set in look of determination, and his short hair was iron grey. He was very thin, with aging skin stretched tight over wiry, corded muscle, and though he was slightly shorter than I was, it seemed like he towered over me. He asked if I knew the man who had left my house earlier that evening.

I laughed at that; a harsh laugh that surprised even me. I said I did not know him, no matter how many pictures might tell me I did. At this, the old man's eyes lit up with excitement, and I took an involuntary step back. If he noticed, he didn't show it, walking past me into the house and ordering me to get any photos that hadn't changed. I don't know if it was the certainty in his voice or my own feeling of helplessness, but it didn't even occur to me not to do what he said.

I returned from the loft with the box of photographs to find him sat on the sofa, exactly where my impostor cousin had sat not two hours before, and I finally got up the courage to ask him who he was. He told me his name was Adelard Dekker, and that he was an exorcist, of sorts. I asked him if he thought my cousin was somehow possessed, but he was already looking through the box, and ignored me. He pulled out the same two photographs I had found, the ones that hadn't changed, and his mouth twisted into a wry smile.

He told me to follow him, and I did. We walked over to an unmarked blue Transit van parked on the other side of the road, and he opened the back doors.

Inside was a large wooden box with a hinged lid. The man who called himself Adelard Dekker climbed in and picked up the back of it, commanding me to take the other end. I did, and together we carried it into my house. It was heavy and barely fit through the front door, but any objections I might have had were

silenced by one look from Dekker. We placed it down in the middle of the living room, and I instinctively went to lift the lid. I caught a brief glimpse of dark, varnished wood before he slammed it down, almost trapping my hand, and shook his head once. "It's not for you," he said.

Then he instructed me to go to my bedroom, and not to leave until he told me it was safe. I did protest at that, and I asked him how my locking myself upstairs would help save Carl. There was no sympathy in his voice when he told me my cousin was dead, that nothing would bring him back, and that my best chance to not join him was to stay in the bedroom until everything was over. He did not seem inclined to tell me what he meant by "everything".

So I did what he said. I suppose I could have called the police, but this strange, old man spoke with such certainty that I felt like following his instructions was

the only hope I had. I lay in my bed and I tried to sleep. I did, though not well. The image of this new Carl kept intruding in my dreams and jolting me awake. The sun came up, and there was no word from Dekker, so I stayed there, waiting for something to happen, though I had no idea what. I lay in bed all morning and then into the afternoon.

Finally, at about three o'clock, I heard the soft knock at the door. It was the exact same knock at the exact same time, and I felt my body seize up with fear. There was the sound of the door opening, but nothing else. I just lay there, straining my ears to hear any sound. The air grew close and heavy, like a thunderstorm about to break, but still I heard nothing. Ten minutes passed. Then an hour. And then the air was split by the most unnatural scream I have ever heard. I cannot even begin to describe it, except to say that there was nothing in it but the purest rage.

Panic surged through me. I had to get out of that house. I threw open the bedroom door and charged down the stairs towards the front. And as I did so, I passed by the living room, and I instinctively turned my head to see inside.

Adelard Dekker stood in the corner. He was straight and motionless, his lips moving rapidly, though no sound came out of them. In the centre of the room, next to the empty box, stood a table carved from dark wood and wrapped all over with a sprawling, intricate pattern. And in front of that table was the thing that had said it was my cousin. It was long and thin, the tops of it bent against the ceiling and its stick-like limbs flailed from too many joints and elbows. Wrapped around it were thick strands of what I think was spider's web, stretching back into the table, which I now saw pulsed along its carved channels with a sickly light. The face at the top of that gangly frame was like nothing on earth.

That was all I saw, because the second after I had taken it in, I was out of the door and down the street, running as fast as I could away from that house. I kept running until I collapsed, and lay there on the street until a passer-by asked if I needed help.

I didn't return to my house until the next morning. Dekker's blue van was gone, and in its place was another one, dirty white. There was something printed on the side, but I couldn't make it out under the grime. I watched two men in overalls carry that same box out of my house, load it up, and drive away. That was about two months ago, and it was the last time I saw them, the table, Adelard Dekker or the thing that wasn't my cousin.

My aunt and uncle have reported Carl missing. The police did come round and asked me if I knew anything but I told them nothing. I just said we weren't very close.

ARCHIVIST

Statement ends.

I found this in the folder marked 9910602, where Gertrude's tape had indicated I would find the statement of Dekker himself. There is nothing else in there, but I think it tells me what I need to know. This thing, this "Not Sasha", it's tied to the table. It...

I found the tapes.

[TAPE NOISES]

SASHA (RECORDING)

I thought it was pronounced "Kah-lee-o-pee?"

ARCHIVIST

They were in her desk. Well hidden, but... If I'd been a bit more thorough, if I...

[TAPE NOISES]

SASHA (RECORDING)

It's just a scratch, Jon. I'll be fine. Can we begin?

ARCHIVIST

Was there anything I could have done? Could I have...

[TAPE NOISES]

SASHA (RECORDING)

Hello? I see you. Show yourself.

[TAPE NOISES]

NOT!SASHA (RECORDING)

Hello?

[TAPE NOISES]

I see you.

[TAPE NOISES]

I see you.

ARCHIVIST

And now I see you.

[CLICK]

[CLICK]

TIM

You wanted to see us.

MARTIN

Are you ok? You look awful.

ARCHIVIST

I'm... I'm coming down with something, I think.

Listen, you should take the rest of the day off.

Tomorrow as well.

MARTIN

Are you sure you-

ARCHIVIST

Don't want to infect anyone else. Best you stay home.

TIM

Wouldn't it make more sense if you went home, then?

MARTIN

Are you feverish? We should probably get you to a doctor. Look, there's a walk-in centre nearby I can-

ARCHIVIST

No. No, I have things I still need to take care of here. And, besides, I know you've both been under a lot of... pressure lately. I think we could all do with a bit of break.

MARTIN

Well... well, yeah but...

ARCHIVIST

I know, I know, a lot of it's been because of me. Most of it. I'm sorry. Tim, I know things have been... fraught.

TIM

I guess that's a word for it.

ARCHIVIST

Yes, well, I think some time off could only help.

TIM

Because you're ill.

ARCHIVIST

Yes.... Yes. And I'm... I'm sorry. About everything.

MARTIN

J-John... look, are you-

TIM

Ok. Right you are, John. We'll be going.

MARTIN

Wait, what?

TIM

Come on, Martin. We could do with a break. Er... do you need us to tell Sasha?

ARCHIVIST

Oh, no, no. I'll be seeing her later.

MARTIN (BACKGROUND)

Tim... Wait...

TIM

Great. See you Monday.

MARTIN (BACKGROUND)

No, no...

ARCHIVIST

Yes, see you then.

MARTIN

Hang on, Tim we should probably–

[DOOR CLOSES]

[CLICK]

[CLICK]

ARCHIVIST

[Whispered] It is remarkably easy to buy an axe in Central London. Harder to sneak it into Artefact

Storage but not impossible. I don't know if destroying this is going to kill that thing... but I am damn sure it's going to hurt.

[NOISE OF AXE HITTING & SPLINTERING WOOD AND THE GRUNTS OF THE ARCHIVIST AS A STRANGE MUSIC BEGINS TO BUILD AND INTENSIFY]

[SOUND OF SHATTERING WOOD AND THE STRANGE MUSIC DISAPPEARS]

Hollow. Just cobwebs and dust.

[FAMILIAR EERIE LAUGHTER]

MICHAEL

That was very stupid.

ARCHIVIST

What do you want?

MICHAEL

There's no other way out of this room, you know.

ARCHIVIST

What?

MICHAEL

You don't have time to escape before they get here.

ARCHIVIST

The... the... the "Not Sasha"? No, but the table...

MICHAEL

Was binding it quite effectively.

ARCHIVIST

Oh. Oh no.

MICHAEL

Even with all the protections you have on, I doubt you can survive them now.

[IN THE BACKGROUND, THE ARCHIVIST IS WORRIEDLY MUTTERING 'NO' OVER AND OVER]

NOT!SASHA

[Heavily distorted, distant] Jooooohhhnnnn....

ARCHIVIST

Er... I...

[SOUND OF A CREAKY DOOR OPENING]

MICHAEL

You. Need. A door.

ARCHIVIST

NO. No, I... I just... I need...

[DISTORTED VOICE FROM THE NOT!SASHA
CALLING OUT HIS NAME AGAIN]

ARCHIVIST

Shit!

[MICHAEL LAUGHS AND LAUGHS]

[STRANGE SOUND ALMOST LIKE SOMETHING
ROARING OPEN AS MICHAEL'S LAUGH ECHOES]

[CLICK]