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MAGNUS INSTITUTE
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STATEMENT

Saraki, Lesere - February 11th 2012

First Aid

I'm a nurse at St Thomas' Hospital, down in Lambeth near Waterloo Station. Technically these days I work for Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, but Guy's Hospital is at a completely different location the other side of London, so for the sake of clarity, I work at St Thomas'. Christmas is one of the worst periods to be working at a hospital, and in the Accident and Emergency department it's even more unpleasant. Pensioners who can't afford to properly heat their homes, drunken partygoers who overindulge and hurt themselves, even just people who didn't look where they were going and slipped on a patch of ice. Christmas brings out the side of people that always seems to lead them to the hospital, so I was relieved last year when I got my shift pattern and learned that my last A&E shift of the season was going to be on the 23rd, two full days before Christmas itself. That was the good news. The bad news was the 23rd was also the Friday immediately before the big day, and that meant people finishing work for the holidays and going out for some celebration. When you work in Accident and Emergency, there are few words that fill your heart with such dread as the word "celebration".

I know exactly what you mean.

That night wasn't as bad as some I'd seen: a few broken bones and a couple of drug-fuelled injuries, but no fights or angry drunks, which was a blessing. It must have been about half-past one in the morning that the ambulance arrived. They had radioed ahead, and we knew that we had a pair of severe burn victims being brought in, so we were as ready as we could have been. I was heading out to meet the ambulance when I noticed that the A&E waiting room was totally silent. I looked around and there were all the people there that I expected to see, some cradling obvious injuries, but none of them made a sound. They continued to stare at their phone, read books, comfort one another, but not one of them spoke. I didn't have much time to really consider what I was seeing as, at that moment I heard the ambulance pull up outside and ran off to see to the first patient.

By the time I arrived, they were already wheeling him out and the doctor was assessing his burns. The doctor's name was Kayleigh Grice, and she was a junior doctor at St Thomas'. She started giving some instructions to myself and the EMTs, but I was struck by how quietly she was speaking to me. She didn't whisper, but every word was very soft, as though it was a real effort to get them out. Nobody else seemed to notice, so at the time I assumed the effect was due to my own lack of sleep. I've always had difficulty adjusting to the late nights and this time had been particularly bad. We finished transferring him to a treatment room, the only available one we had that night, and the doctor and EMTs returned to get the other patient while I began dealing with the burns on the first.

I'm 48 years old, and I have been a nurse for most of that, so I've seen a good number of burns in my time. I was prepared for some deeply unpleasant scenes when the call came in, as bad burns can be some of the nastiest injuries you see working in a hospital. These ones surprised me. They were second-degree, which is severe, but not usually such as to require hospitalisation, except that they appeared to cover his entire body. Every inch of exposed skin showed signs of this burning and, cutting away his clothes, it became apparent that the damage had spread there as well. Anything hot enough to cause this sort of effect should have damaged his clothing or even melted them onto the skin in places, but they were utterly unharmed, as though he had been dressed after he'd been burned or the heat had passed right through his clothes without touching them.

He was a tall man, heavy-set with the sort of build I associate with an athletic middle age. Any hair he might have had was gone, apparently burned off, and his clothes were a nondescript black suit and white shirt. He didn't scream or cry or moan in pain, and in fact the doctor had had to check his pulse when he'd come in to confirm he was still alive. He was, but as far as I could tell he appeared to be sleeping peacefully.

hang on...
 I had just started treatment when the second patient was wheeled in. He was in almost identical shape to the first, except for the fact that the burns seemed to stop at his neck, along a clear line. It was as though he'd been wearing a choker that the heat couldn't get above, but his neck was bare. He was smaller than the first man, and younger, I'd guess in his mid-thirties. He was clean-shaven, but had long hair dyed completely black. He wore a similar suit to the older man, except that over the top he wore a long black leather coat, just as undamaged as the rest. It looked new, and I felt quite bad having to cut it off him, but we had to confirm how extensive his injuries were. Like the first, he was completely covered in almost uniform second-degree burns, except for what at first I thought were small black scorch marks. Looking closer, I saw that they were eyes. Small, tattooed eyes on every one of his joints: his knees, his elbows, and even his knuckles, as well as just over his heart. I would have expected the burns to have almost destroyed tattoos that small, but instead they were unblemished and the skin about a centimetre around each one also didn't seem to have been affected.

To say I was unsettled by this would have been something of an understatement. I barely noticed when Dr Grice and the EMTs returned. They seemed to be talking normally now, and discussing who these two people were. Apparently, the fire brigade had responded to reports of a blaze in a building site near St Mary's churchyard, and had turned up to find the two men lying unconscious. There had been no fire, although the ground they lay on showed several burn marks and a metal bar that had been lying nearby appeared to have bent slightly as if from great heat. The fire service had called out an ambulance, and they had brought the men here. Apparently the older one hadn't had anything on him at all, no ID, no phone, no keys, nothing, while the younger man had only a Zippo lighter with an eye design on it similar to the one tattooed all over him and an old passport that identified him as Gerard Keay. I never got a look at the passport, but from the way the EMTs were talking about it I gathered the man was well-travelled.

I knew it! Need to check against case 0132806

It was at this point that the EMTs had to head out on another call, and Dr Grice and I got down to treating the two men, the weirdness temporarily forgotten. Medically speaking, there was nothing abnormal about the burns, and it didn't take as long as I had feared to get them properly cleaned and bandaged. Throughout it all, the two of them didn't stir, and I wondered if they were comatose, but that sort of diagnosis would require a lot more testing, which probably wasn't going to happen that night. So, having finished giving them what treatment we could, the men were moved to one of the few wards with bed space and I returned to working A&E. And, for an hour or so, I forgot about the odd strangers that lay unconscious just a few doors away.

Like the Sumerian demon?

I only noticed them again when I had to pass through that ward heading towards the nearby stockroom for some more gauze. As I walked through, I became aware of a sound coming from the bed of the older burn victim. I never did find out his name. I walked towards him slowly, straining my ears to hear what he was saying. It was so quiet as to be almost inaudible, but was definitely words, the same words over and over; the more I heard, the more it sounded like most of them weren't in English. The first sounded like "Asak" or "Asag", then "Veepalach", and finally in English, "The lightless flame". The last part was very clear, and I assumed he was talking about whatever burned him, but he said it with such intensity that the words made me feel quite uncomfortable. His eyes were still closed, and his lips were barely moving. I started to feel warm, like there was a fever quickly creeping out towards my skin. It wasn't the first time I'd had a reaction like this, though, so I took a moment to centre myself and the feeling receded.

The burned man was still whispering; I might even have called it chanting, and I wasn't entirely sure what to do, so I checked his bandages to make sure they didn't need changing and left to go and

continue my shift. If I saw Doctor Grice, which was more than likely, then I could tell her that our mystery burn victim had started talking. Mostly I just wanted to get out of that room for as long as possible.

It was as I returned to the main Accident and Emergency reception that things started to get really strange. And by really strange, I mean that the reception was completely empty. I don't care how late it gets, and at this point it was nearly three in the morning, the waiting room for A&E is always full, especially on a night like this. I mean, I'd been in there not five minutes before and there were upwards of thirty people, but now it was utterly deserted. Even the staff at the admissions desk were gone. I was freaked out, quite frankly, and started checking through all the examination rooms, the wards next door and the individual patient rooms. All empty, except for those patients physically too sick to move or hooked up to IVs. They lay there sleeping, and part of me wanted to wake them, just to hear the sound of another human being, to not be alone, but like I say it was three in the morning and, weird as this all was, I couldn't justify waking up patients just to put my own mind at ease. I went as far as to make as much noise as possible directly outside their rooms, but they just slept on.

It was as I returned to the waiting room for the third time in as many minutes that I heard it. It sounded like the growl of an animal, a rolling, angry sound, and I realised that the floor was shaking, ever so slightly. I looked around for the source of the noise. I was getting more and more frantic by the second, and then I saw it. Lined up against the wall of the waiting room were two vending machines. I rarely paid them any attention, as there were better options in the staffroom and one or both of them were usually out of order. But I now saw that the one on the left, a clear-fronted machine that stocked bottled soft drinks, was shaking violently. As I got nearer, I saw why: in every bottle, in every row of the machine, the drinks appeared to be violently boiling. Cokes and lemonades and fruit juices shook and bubbled, before one by one the bottles exploded, coating the inside of the clear plastic front with liquid that still kept steaming and hissing. It couldn't have taken more than thirty seconds for all of them to pop, and then the waiting room was silent once again.

That does sort of line up with myths about Asag

At this point I was just about ready to abandon my shift and leave the hospital. Whatever was going on there, I wanted no part of it. I ran towards the door leading from the A&E to the chill of the December night, not something I would ever have thought I'd look forward to. As I approached, though, I noticed that the plastic at each end of the metal handles was ever so slightly warped. I tentatively touched the back of my hand to them and withdrew it almost immediately – I didn't even have to touch it to feel the intense heat radiating from the door. I almost wept. If I was getting out of there, it wasn't going to be through that door.

I started to make my way back through the wards, heading towards another exit, but as I passed through, I could hear the burned man still mumbling to himself, louder now, so that his weird chant was audible even outside of his room. It was starting to get to me. I went in; I don't know what I was planning to do, I just needed to make him shut up somehow. His eyes were open now, bloodshot behind the bandages and staring blankly towards the ceiling. At that moment, I decided that I was going to shut him up, even if I had to physically hold his mouth closed. I approached him slowly and reached towards his face. The second before I could touch him, a hand shot out and grabbed me by the wrist. I turned to see the other burn victim, whose passport had identified him as Gerard Keay, on his feet and shaking his head. His grip on my wrist was far stronger than I would ever have expected from someone that injured, and I could feel a heat through his bandaged hand, like his skin was still burning somehow.

Who the hell is this guy?

I screamed. Why not? I'd already established no-one was around to hear me. He immediately released my hand and apologised, said he'd only been trying to protect me. I asked him from what and he gestured to the burned man, still lying motionless in his bed, chanting his nonsense phrases. Sparing a glance at his own wrapped form, he said that touching the man would have been a "bad idea". He seemed to be in tremendous pain as he spoke, but did his best to hide it.

I didn't say anything then. I wanted to ask what was happening and it seemed like he was waiting for me to do just that, but something stopped me. Something told me that if there was a coherent explanation for everything that had happened since the ambulance arrived, then I would be no better off for knowing it. After a few seconds of awkward silence, Gerard spoke. He asked me if the paramedics had brought any items in with them. Specifically, he was after a small book bound in red leather, and a brass pendant he had been wearing. He didn't say what design had been on the pendant, but I guessed it had been an eye. I told him that neither of those things had been brought in with him, and he was quiet for a long time.

After the last ten minutes spent desperately wishing for another human being to talk to, I should have been relieved with Gerard's company. But watching him, standing and walking despite the burns covering eighty percent of his body, despite the sheer quantity of painkillers we had given him, he just made me very afraid. Finally he nodded, as though dismissing me, and limped past into the corridor, towards the supply cupboard. I followed him, asked what he was doing. I got no answer, but he seemed to know the code to the door immediately and strode right in, scanning the shelves for something. He saw what he was after and picked up a small object wrapped in paper and plastic. I recognised it immediately as a sterile scalpel. He was going to kill the chanting man; I could feel it in the way he stared past me as I stood in the doorway.

He started walking towards me. The storage room was not big, and it took him barely a second before he was in front of me, but it was the longest second I have ever experienced as I tried to decide whether to risk my own life for that of the burned stranger blankly chanting his unsettling prayer. Behind Gerard I saw bottles of saline solution start to bubble and boil. I stepped aside. He nodded in appreciation and said something that I remember very clearly, even though it still makes no sense. He said, "Yes. For you, better beholding than the lightless flame".

Another murderer. Not ideal.

I didn't try to stop him as he walked back into the ward. I just stood there and watched as he took out the scalpel, muttered some words I couldn't make out, and plunged the blade into the centre of the chanting man's throat. At that moment there was the sound of sizzling and a smell like rotten meat on a grill. I watched as the flesh around that wound began to blacken and crack, the bandages curled and disintegrated, and the scorched skin spread over his body like water. There was no fire and I felt no heat, but over the course of twenty seconds I watched this man's body cremate itself to ash. Even the scalpel was gone.

Gerard Keay walked over to his own bed and, picking up the empty bedpan beneath it, gently swept the ashes into the basin and handed it to me, asking me to dispose of it. I took it and numbly walked out, heading towards a medical waste bin. As I walked the corridor, I noticed a figure at the other end. It was Doctor Grice. I'm not ashamed to admit that I wept in relief as I ran to the waiting room and saw it once again full of people complaining and moaning to themselves. By the time I was finished and got back to the room, Gerard was lying in his own bed, apparently sleeping. I considered asking him now what had happened, but at that moment another ambulance arrived with three members of a Christmas party that had gotten dangerously out of hand, and just like that, the rest of my shift was

gone.

Worth keeping an eye out for him in other statements.

Gerard Keay was treated for a further four days in the hospital before being discharged into the care of his mother. I tried to talk to him about what happened, but he was on a lot of painkillers and never seemed to really register I was there. It may have been feigned, I suppose, but in the end the result was the same. Since then I've just tried not to think about it. I've managed to get almost thirty years of nursing under my belt before something like this happened, so, with any luck I'll be long retired by the time anything like it happens again.

I worry sometimes, though. Over the last few months, when I'm alone on the wards, I get the feeling I'm being watched. Not threatened or judged, just watched. I avoid that storeroom, particularly.

There's obviously a lot to unpack here, so let's start with what is provable. Sasha managed to get access to the hospital records for this period and they do list the admission of Gerard Keay and an unknown male for burn injuries similar to what Ms. Saraki described. Furthermore, there are only discharge papers for Gerard Keay and a short police report on the disappearance of the second burn victim. No evidence of foul play was found, and no official missing persons case was ever opened.

As far as the mystery man's chanting goes, if it was indeed 'Asag' that he was saying, then that's quite interesting. Asag is the name of a demon in Sumerian mythology associated with disease and corruption, which doesn't really seem to have much relevance to this statement except that it was also fabled that Asag was able to boil fish alive in their rivers. Admittedly in Sumerian myth this was because he was monstrously ugly, but a curious coincidence nonetheless. 'Veepalach' might also be a mishearing of the Polish word 'wypalac', according to Martin, which means to cauterize or brand.

Admittedly, if Martin speaks Polish in the same way he 'speaks Latin' then he might be talking nonsense again, but I've looked it up and it appears to check out. I can't find anything conclusive on the phrase 'the lightless flame' however; it crops up in a lot of different contexts throughout various esoteric literatures.

It has not escaped my notice that this is the second time Gerard Keay has turned up in this Archive. I'd be very keen to get his statement, but unfortunately it looks like he passed away from a brain tumour late last year. We're doing further research into him, though, and if we're lucky maybe we already have a statement from him tucked away somewhere in these damn files.

We contacted Ms. Saraki to see if she wanted to make a follow-up statement but she declined. Apparently, she still gets the watched feeling occasionally, but aside from that there haven't been any other abnormal occurrences in her professional or personal life.

One final note: sasha has been able to access the hospital's CCTV footage for the night of 23rd December 2011, and it shows something quite startling. I had assumed that there was a significant hallucinatory element to Ms. Saraki's story, and indeed the ward where Gerard Keay was admitted didn't have a camera, but the Accident and Emergency waiting room did. At 03:11:22, it shows everybody in that room, which I personally counted at 28 people, standing up and calmly filing out of the doors. After this, Ms. Saraki can be seen entering and leaving three times, once taking a minute to stare at something beneath the camera, which I assume to be the vending machine. The rest of the staff and patients do not return until 03:27:12, over 15 minutes after they left, when they walk back in through the same doors. The footage does not contain any sound, and no alarm of any sort was recorded, so I cannot offer any guess as to why they left or what they were doing in the intervening time.

There is one other thing that sasha highlighted, however. At 03:22:52, the feed cuts out for less than a second, and is replaced for a single frame by a close-up of a human eye, staring back through the video feed.

St Thomas' Hospital
Accident & Emergency Department



Single frame captured from Waiting Room CCTV

