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1818



MAGNUS INSTITUTE
LONDON

STATEMENT

Rentoul, Lee - May 29th 2011

PieCemeal

That's a... bold start

Let's get one thing straight right off – this is not a goddamn confession, alright? If you go to the police with this, I will deny every word, and I know enough about the law to know that even if I spill my guts to you about all the horrible things I've done, it will count for nothing in court. It's not like you'll even be able to help me, I just... My mate Hester said he came to you a few years back, been seeing ghosts and that, and you guys looked into it and told him it was some sort of noise messing with his head, 'infasound' or something, and he's fine now. I need that. I need you to tell me that it's just coincidence and my mind's playing tricks, and I need to not lose any more bits of me.

Well, that took a turn.

An interesting metaphor

So yeah, I killed that asshole Noriega Stabbed him in the throat and left him to bleed out on the dockside. Maybe that shocks you a bit, maybe not, but trust me when I say he had it coming. Eight years we worked together, and it was him that got carried away kicking McMullen's head in and moved it from assault to GBH, but sure enough when we get picked up he turns on me and I get pinned for it. Five years I served because of him, while he walked free as you please. I'd say that I was due a bit of payback and I certainly got it.

It wasn't my first choice, though. I'm not stupid and parole keeps you on a short enough chain that slitting Noriega's throat was not my top priority. Don't get me wrong, it was something I'd been itching to do for five goddamn years, but I wasn't in a rush. I had plenty of time to arrange something nasty for him, and I wanted him hurt more than I felt I had to do the deed myself. So when I got out in June last year, I bided my time and kept my ear to the ground. Tried to get in touch with him, but was told by the few friends we had in common that he wasn't interested in talking to me. He'd clearly done ok for himself in the years I'd been away, and could afford some muscle to make sure that I didn't bother him. I ended up with a couple of bruised ribs when I finally got tired of the run-around and tried to have it out with him properly. It was laying there, some grim side street in Lewisham of all places, that I came to the decision that if I was going to hurt this asshole, and I mean properly hurt him, I was going to have to think outside the box a bit.

Grim indeed!

I decided to pay McMullen a visit. Before Noriega had gone to work on him, Toby McMullen was just some street punk. These days he was just a street punk who had trouble turning his neck. I've met plenty of born losers in my time, I mean it's kind of a given in this business, but I've never met someone so intent on being a screw-up as McMullen. When I saw him he was high as a kite and barely knew I was there, but you bet his eyes lit up when I mentioned Paul Noriega. It took hours to get anything useful out of that waste of skin, but eventually I pieced together his side of this sorry tale. Noriega had paid him a visit in the hospital, apparently, before the police had picked us up, and promised that if he fingered me for the assault, then he'd have all of the narcotics his little junkie heart could dream of. Only once he was out of hospital and my conviction had gone through, it wasn't two days before McMullen was out on his arse again, and Noriega didn't want to know. Any idiot could have seen it would play out that way, but not poor, stupid Toby. Still, he'd been itching to get the knife in for almost as long as I had, and he had had the freedom to plan it, so I asked him if he had anything I could use.

yes, you should have.

I shouldn't have been surprised when he suggested magic. Toby had always been into all of that mystical crap, even before the drugs, and if there was some half-baked New Age fad going round you could bet you'd find it dribbling out of his mouth whenever he was coherent enough to actually talk. I punched him in the gut and turned to leave. He followed me, doubled over and struggling for breath, begging me to help him. He said he was serious, said it wasn't like the other stuff, said he knew someone with real power, who could put the hurt to Noriega, but he just didn't have the money.

I should have kept walking. I should have shaken him off. I should have beat him so bad he couldn't

turn his neck the other way either. But I didn't. I stopped and I listened to what that piece of human garbage had to say. I was an idiot.

Ah, the perils of love.

So Toby took me to see his friend Angela. He never gave me her second name. I asked him what it was: Wicca, voodoo, some crystal bull? But Toby said no, nothing like that. Said he didn't really know how it was supposed to work, but had a girl a few months back, had told him about Angela; said she'd used her services on a particularly unpleasant ex-boyfriend. Apparently he'd disappeared, and they never found a body. So then I'm thinking maybe there's no magic there, just a killer with a schtick, but hey, if that was the case it was fine by me, just as long as Noriega got done.

When I finally met Angela, it was all I could do not to cave McMullen's head in. I'd just about convinced myself I was going to be meeting with a hardened killer, maybe one that kept a bunch of spooky Halloween crap around, but still someone who'd get the job done. I wasn't even put off when we pulled up to a well-kept suburban house in Bexley. But when the door was answered by an old lady in a lilac dressing gown, I almost lost it. McMullen asked if she was Angela, speaking in a quiet voice like he was actually scared of the geriatric fool. The old woman said yes, she was Angela, and asked us to come in.

Not necessarily fair. The elderly can surprise you in all sorts of ways.

Leaving huge unsorted piles of garbage, for instance...

The house felt almost as old as its owner – faded floral print wallpaper, dark oak furniture and threadbare carpets. The walls were covered with framed portraits, the sort you'd get in any cheap antique store or charity shop, although as we went into the living room I noticed something I didn't expect: they weren't paintings, they were jigsaw puzzles, each completed and framed. And sure enough when we sat down on the worn cloth sofa, there in front of Angela was another jigsaw, half-finished. I've got no problem with the elderly, and if they want to throw away their last years putting together a damn picture then I'm sure not going to stop them, but it wasn't exactly going to kill Noriega, was it?

I was so angry at this massive waste of my time, that when she offered us a cup of coffee, I almost put McMullen face-first through the glass table in front of us. I grunted something which Angela apparently took as a "yes please", and so a few minutes later there I was drinking instant coffee from a chipped mug that this doddering old ass clearly hadn't thought to wipe the dust off of. When she asked if I wanted Paul Noriega dead, I nearly choked.

She asked it very matter-of-factly, like it was a question on some form she knew the answer to but had to fill it in anyway. I glanced at Toby, who nodded at me, and I thought what the hell, I might as well play along. So I said yes. Yes, I did want him dead. And more than that, I wanted him to suffer. Angela smiled when I said that, a warm smile that suited her round face, and said that that wouldn't be a problem. I started to explain the situation, but she waved it away and told me that Toby had filled her in on all the details, and that there was just one thing she needed from me that he couldn't provide. I started to tell her that I wasn't paying for someone's gran to take out a hard case like Noriega, but she said no, she wasn't after money. She said that she was "well-compensated" for the service she provided and that all she needed from me was an object, anything that I had taken from Noriega. Not a gift, she said, staring into my eyes with a look that I recognised from years of working with very unpleasant people. It wouldn't work if it was a gift.

maybe try, though?

At this point I was starting to feel uneasy. Not scared, alright, I wasn't scared of this old woman, but being around her was... bad. I don't know how else to say it, she was bad. You've got to understand, I know dangerous, I understand dangerous, hell, I am dangerous. This was something else. But I wanted Paul Noriega dead so badly. Five years ago, just before we'd been picked up by the Police I'd borrowed his lighter. It was a battered old Zippo, used to have a picture of a topless woman on it, but now that

who says killers aren't classy?

was almost worn away. After he turned on me in questioning, I didn't feel much like returning it to the treacherous backstabber, so I held on to it. I hadn't thought much of it, but here it was, still in the pocket of my jacket, all those years later. I handed it to Angela, and she gave me that look again, and told me that it would work just fine.

And then we left. Angela told us not to worry about it, that Paul Noriega wasn't going to be bothering us for much longer; we just had to wait until she was finished. Finished with what exactly, she didn't say, she didn't need to. We knew whatever it was we were probably better off not knowing.

The waiting came hard, though. After he'd had me roughed up, it seemed like Noriega had decided I wasn't worth worrying about. I'd see him walking those streets like he owned them, his pair of leg-breakers in tow, and I knew there was nothing that I could do about it. He knew it too. So I waited. And I waited. I waited for the shot, or the knife, or the poison or the... whatever would end him for good. It never came. Days turned into weeks and there he still was, as cocksure as ever.

I was patient. God, I was patient, but after three weeks I had almost written off that useless old bag as a time-wasting con job. I was going to give her one more week, just one, but then something came up that I couldn't ignore. Word came down that Noriega was meeting someone at the docks, some fence by the name of Salesa. The man dealt mainly in stolen art and curios, valuable stuff, and was paranoid as hell, which meant Noriega was going to be there alone. It might have been a trap, sure, but I'd been sitting on my ass waiting for him to magically drop dead for so long that if there was even a chance it was on the level, I had to take it.

Turns out it was true, and went off smoother than I could have hoped for. I found the warehouse a few hours before the meet and staked out a good spot. Then I waited. Salesa turned up first, a big Samoan guy with close-cropped hair, flanked by four men in dark suits, who carried a square wooden crate between them. They went into the warehouse, and sure enough five minutes later there he is, that snake. He was alone, and seemed to be limping slightly. He headed inside through the same door, leaving it unlocked. Perfect. There was no point me going in yet. I wasn't keen to get my head kicked in by Salesa's goons, so I just watched, my hand gripping the hilt of the combat knife I'd bought at an army surplus store I know is happy to sell off-the-books.

It was almost an hour later that Salesa and his men left, still carrying that box. They didn't look happy, but I could have given a damn. As soon as they were round the corner I headed inside, as quietly as I could, and there he was, leaning up against a pile of bricks, smoking. I started to move towards him, but as I got near he must have heard me, and turned around. He started to say something about reconsidering, and lowering the price, when he realised I was not Salesa. Then a look passed over the face of Paul Noriega that I will treasure forever. No matter what happens to me, the memory of that look of panicked terror will stay with me.

He turned to run, but whatever was wrong with his leg meant he tripped over the bricks instead. I grabbed him by the collar, my knife already out, and dragged him up. I had always been the stronger of the two of us, and he knew he couldn't fight me. Holding up his hand, he begged me to wait, to listen. I noticed that his hand was missing a couple of fingers, old wounds that had long healed over, though I didn't remember seeing them before. It didn't matter; I could hear the blood pumping in my head and nothing was going to stop me taking my revenge. He begged for mercy, as I plunged the knife into him once, twice, three times. Again and again and again I stabbed that backstabber until, finally, I let him fall. He landed on the floor hard, dead weight, his head making a thick, cracking sound as it hit

Lovely

the bricks, and blood began to pool on the floor around his body.

As the rage started to fade and my breathing returned to normal, I took a second to look over poor dead Paul Noriega, and saw something seemed to have been knocked loose when his head hit the bricks. Picking it up, I saw it was a glass eye. I looked back at the corpse, and sure enough there was a gaping hole where his left eye should have been. When had that happened? He certainly had both eyes when we had worked together and all ten fingers as well. He'd also had all his teeth, where now I saw gaps all over that dead, smiling face. I shivered, though I don't know why.

maybe because you murdered someone?

I won't go into detail about how I went about disposing of the body. Just trust me when I say that even if the cops did find any piece of Noriega's corpse, they wouldn't be able to pin it on me. And life went on. His boys did come looking for me when their boss didn't return, but I knew to lay low for a while, and soon enough they realised that if he was gone, they weren't getting paid either way and moved on. And so I had my revenge, and that should have been the end of the story. But it wasn't.

It was five days after I killed Noriega that I found the first package. I was on Tottenham Marshes, near the reservoir, on business you don't need to know, and I came to a metal bridge over one of the streams there. Now this wasn't a place I went often, and I don't think I'd ever crossed that bridge before in my life, but there, lying in the centre of it, was a small box. It was wrapped in brown paper and string, like an old-fashioned Christmas present, and had my name printed on it in clear letters: LEE RENTOUL, FOR IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION.

Obviously I was a little bit freaked out at this but not as freaked out as when I opened it. Inside was a black cardboard box, full of cotton wool and a single severed finger. It was obviously some sort of threat; some punk reckoned they could put a scare on me. No chance. I threw the finger into one of the canals and set the box on fire before throwing it in a bin. I headed home quickly, keeping my attention all around me and my hand on my knife. I was so busy looking behind me I didn't see the hole in front of me, and I tripped. As I fell forward, I felt a hot pain in the hand that had been on my knife. You guessed it. Falling had caused the blade to slice clean through my little finger.

Oh. I see. Not a metaphor...

I'm not too proud to admit that I screamed at this. I tore up my shirt, trying to make a bandage to stop the bleeding, at least until I could get to a hospital. But as I began to wrap it up, I noticed that it wasn't actually bleeding. The wound was closed. It had healed, like it had happened years ago. I didn't know what to think. I didn't know what to do. So I just went home. I wasn't getting my finger back, so I figured I could try to deal with it after a decent night's sleep.

maybe think it has something to with the magic spell you agreed to?

There was another box at my flat. Same as before. This one contained two toes. I tried to ignore it and keep my foot well away from any knives, but... I was trying to adjust the settings on my flatscreen when it fell off the wall. Hit my right foot and, well, have you figured it out yet? That was two weeks ago. Since then, I lost four more fingers to accidents, most of my toes, ~~this eye~~ I managed to put out on a goddamn fencepost. I've lost count of the number of teeth gone, and believe me when I say that you don't want to know how I lost the hand. Each time, a box wrapped in brown paper: LEE RENTOUL, FOR IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION.

Think I might have

I've tried everything. Once I thought I managed to outsmart it. Spent the day in my bedroom – nothing sharp, no edges. I'd taken out everything except the mattress. It didn't matter, I woke the next morning with an agony in my foot far sharper than any knife could cut, and the big toe missing, just like the one I'd received the morning before.

Oh yes, 'outsmart' the magic. That'll work.

I knew it was Angela. Of course I did, I'm not thick. Whatever curse she'd laid on Noriega must have passed to me. I went over there, you know. Went to confront that old... and you know what happened? She let me in. She was, nice, civil. Offered me another cup of coffee! I told her where to stick it. Demanded, asked, begged her to stop whatever was happening to me. You know what she did? She shrugged. She just shrugged! Told me that "Some hungers are too strong to be denied", whatever the hell that means. So I went for her. I was going to strangle the life out of that curse-flinging bag of bones. But as I reached for her, I... I don't know. I don't know what happened. I know that that's how I lost the hand. I know I... chewed it off. *Huh. Unsettling.*

Look it doesn't matter. I just need your help. I need this to stop. I don't know how, but this is your area, right? This is what you do. You look into this weird ghost crap, right? Well this is the definition of weird ghost crap, and I need you to help me. I need you to save me from whatever is happening.

I don't have much time. I got a box this morning, a few hours before I came here. It was a tongue.

Hmm...

It doesn't look like this case was ever properly followed up. According to the supplementary notes, shortly after making his statement, Mr Rentoul became violent towards Institute staff and in the ensuing incident there was... an accident. No details are given, but apparently it required Mr Rentoul's hospitalisation. I'm reminded of a somewhat tasteless joke about loose tongues. He did not return to the Institute afterwards, and his statement was archived.

According to the arrest records Sasha uncovered, Mr Rentoul was telling the truth about the somewhat chequered past of himself and his associate Paul Noriega, with extensive files on both of them. The last listed interaction between the police and Mr Noriega is two months before Mr Rentoul's statement, and since then no sign can be found of him in police records, or indeed anywhere else.

I sent Martin to look into this 'Angela' character, not that I want him to get chopped up, of course, but someone had to. Apparently he spent three days looking into every woman named Angela in Bexley over the age of 50. He could not find anyone that matches the admittedly vague description given here, though he informs me that he had some very pleasant chats about jigsaws. Useless ass.

Tim has done his best to try and hunt down Mr Rentoul and see if we can contact him for a follow-up interview or evaluation, but it looks like he disappeared shortly after making this statement. We were able to find his old landlord, though, who said that Mr Rentoul vanished in early April of 2011, leaving many unpaid bills and no forwarding address. He said that when he had gone to clear out the flat, he had been surprised to find there was no furniture left. All that remained, he said, were hundreds and hundreds of small cardboard boxes.