



The Key of Eleusis

Flashback – London, 1889

The fog crept through the streets, settling heavily on the shoulders of passers-by and turning their faces into frozen masks. The gas lamps flickered faintly in the twilight, a feeble promise in a city that never rested. Behind the brick façades, work was being done. Silently. Precisely.

The inspector recalled the feeling these cases left behind – a slight tugging at the nape of his neck, as if someone were standing behind him, counting his breaths. The reports were impeccably written. Too impeccable. “The incisions are remarkably precise,” a doctor had remarked. “No signs of haste.” Not an ordinary murderer, then. And certainly not a madman. He turned the page. A name was missing. As so often. Instead, there was a mark. Small, inconspicuous, almost an oversight in the margin of the report – a circle, crossed by a crooked line. Someone had drawn it with a steady hand. Several times. At first, the inspector had overlooked it. Later, he wished it had stayed that way.

The street was empty when the coachman stopped the carriage. The house looked unremarkable, almost insultingly ordinary. Inside, it smelled of alcohol and soap. “You’re late,” said the man in the white coat, without looking up. “I’m on time,” replied the inspector calmly. A brief silence fell between them. Then a faint smile that no one saw. The body lay on the table. Carefully arranged. Not disfigured – corrected. “Look,” said the doctor, pointing with an instrument at the opened chest. “Perfect lines. No waste.” “You’re talking about a human being.” “I’m talking about work.” The inspector stepped closer. He was wearing gloves, even though the room was warm. “And?” he asked. The doctor hesitated for a moment. “Progress,” he said at last.

The inspector closed the file. Outside, it was quiet. Too quiet for a city that never slept. He wasn’t quite sure what was unsettling him – the precision, the coldness... or the fact that no one was surprised. Not the doctors. Not the police. Not even those who had written the reports. It was as if they had all understood that something was beginning here. And not ending. His gaze fell once more on the symbol. This time he recognised it immediately. And suddenly it was no longer just a detail from an old story, but an echo. The inspector remained seated for a moment longer, even though there was nothing left to read. The file lay open before him, as if it had itself forgotten to be closed. Yellowed paper, frayed edges – and yet everything inside seemed disturbingly topical. Almost brazen. He ran his finger over the symbol at the edge of the page. A circle. A line. Nothing more. And yet enough.

The sound of the door snapped him out of his thoughts. “You’re still here?” He didn’t look up immediately. The voice belonged to Müller – reliable, punctual, and

with an aversion to anything that couldn't be clearly explained. "Apparently." Müller stepped closer, came to a halt. A quick glance at the file. "That's old." "Yes." "Very old." The inspector nodded slowly, as if that were precisely the problem. Outside, a telephone rang. Someone swore in the corridor. Footsteps. Doors. The world carried on. As always. "We've got something," Müller said at last. "At the harbour." Now the inspector looked up. "Something?" "A body." A brief hesitation. "Unusual." The inspector closed the file. Not hastily. Not carefully. More as if he were ending a conversation that had never really begun. "Of course."

The walk outside seemed longer than usual. Perhaps it was the light. Perhaps the weather. Or the fact that something had shifted – barely perceptibly, but irrevocably. He stopped in front of the building, just for a moment. Müller was already a few steps ahead. "Are you coming?" The inspector didn't reply straight away. He looked at his hand. For a split second, he'd thought he could still see the mark there. As if it had been imprinted. Not on the paper... but on him. He clenched his fingers. Then he walked on.

At the harbour

The smell came first. Salt, oil... and something sweet that didn't belong here. "There," said Müller. Two officers stood at the edge, one smoking, the other pretending not to notice. The body lay half in shadow. Not hidden. Not on display. Simply... laid out. The inspector stepped closer. He said nothing. Didn't bend down straight away. Did nothing at all, except look. "No robbery," muttered Müller. "No witnesses. And..." He trailed off. The inspector slowly knelt down. Only now. Very calmly. As if he had all the time in the world. "And?" he asked quietly. Müller didn't answer. He didn't need to. The cut was clean. Too clean. The inspector stood up again. For a moment, he didn't see the body. Not the harbour. Not Müller. But another street. Another table. Another light. And the same result. "We should inform the coroner's office," said Müller. "Yes," replied the inspector. Then, after a brief pause: "And... look for anything that doesn't belong here." Müller frowned. "What do you mean?" The inspector looked at him. Very calmly. "I think..." he said slowly, "we've seen this before."

The archive smelled of dust and times gone by. Not unpleasant. More like honest. The inspector liked that smell. It had something soothing about it – as if everything lying here had already happened and was therefore harmless. An assumption that had proved... optimistic in the last few hours. "Are you looking for anything in particular?" The archivist looked at him over the rim of her glasses. A woman who had learnt to ask questions without expecting answers. "Something old," he said. She smiled faintly. "That applies to everything here."

The drawers slid open reluctantly. Files, bundled, labelled, forgotten. The inspector worked his way through them systematically. Years, cases, reports. His fingers turned grey with paper dust, his thoughts growing quieter with every page. He

wasn't looking for names. Not for perpetrators. He was looking for something else. Something that couldn't be changed.

The first hit was unremarkable. A report. London. 1889. He recognised the handwriting immediately. Not because it was distinctive – but because it wasn't. Matter-of-fact. Cool. Almost polite. Like someone who didn't want to stand out. The inspector turned the page. A second report. A different place. A different year. Same wording. "Cuts remarkably precise." He paused. "Coincidence," he muttered. A word one uses when one still has hope. The third report was further back. This time, no doctor. No official report. Just a marginal note. Barely legible. And beneath it: the mark.

The inspector leaned back. Not abruptly. More as if the body had made the decision before the mind accepted it. He was no longer looking at the pages. But through them. London. The harbour. The body. The cut. "No," he said quietly. Not this time to calm himself. But to correct himself. He leaned forward again. Now deliberately. Now precisely. He began to lay the reports side by side. Years apart. Cities apart. Different investigators. And yet... no difference. The cuts were the same. Not similar. The same. Like a handwriting that had never learnt to change.

"That's impossible," said the archivist behind him. He hadn't noticed she had moved closer. "No," he replied calmly. "Just unlikely." He pointed at the pages. "Do you see that?" She leaned forward. Hesitantly. "It could have been anyone." "Yes." "And that too." "Yes." A brief moment. Then he pointed to the mark. She was silent. For longer this time. "That's no coincidence," she said at last. The inspector nodded. Slowly. Almost relieved. "It's a pattern."

He closed the file. Not for good. Just for now. "If it's a pattern," said the archivist cautiously, "then that means..." "...that it's not over." The inspector picked up his jacket. The dust clung to his fingers. He didn't brush it off. As he walked towards the door, he paused once more. Not because of the files. Not because of the past. But because of a simple, uncomfortable question: if a pattern hasn't changed over decades... who ensures that it continues? He opened the door. Outside, it was noisy. Lively. Indifferent. And that was precisely what made it dangerous.

The room was too bright. Not a friendly brightness. Not soothing. But the kind of light that forgives nothing. The body was already lying on the table when the inspector entered. Covered. Neat. Almost respectful. "You're late," said the pathologist, without looking up. "I was busy." "We all are." The inspector stepped closer. Stopped. Waited. He had learnt that in rooms like this, it was better to take one's time. Not out of respect – but to catch up with himself.

The pathologist pulled back the sheet. Without drama. Without significance. A single movement. The inspector looked. And remained silent for an unusually long time. "When was he found?" he asked at last. "This morning." "When did he die?"

The pathologist paused. For the first time. “That is...,” he began, “difficult to say.” The inspector looked at him. Not surprised. Just attentive. “Have a go.” The pathologist sighed softly. Not annoyed – more like someone caught having to explain something that cannot be explained. “If I rely solely on the condition of the tissue...,” he said slowly, “I would assume several days. Perhaps longer.” The inspector nodded. Slowly. “And if you don’t rely solely on that?” A brief glance. Then a barely perceptible hesitation. “Then I’ll tell you,” replied the pathologist, “that it’s not possible.” Silence.

The inspector stepped closer. Only now. The skin. Discoloured. Irregular. Not fresh. And yet... “No external factors?” he asked. “None.” “Temperature? Storage? Chemicals?” The pathologist shook his head. “Nothing that would explain it.” The inspector no longer saw the whole body. Only details. Cuts. Lines. Clean. Too clean. “We’ve seen this before,” he said quietly. The pathologist frowned. “I haven’t.” The inspector straightened up. Slowly. As if every movement had to be confirmed. “Yes,” he said calmly. “Just not here.” The pathologist fell silent. Not out of uncertainty this time. But because there was nothing left that fit into his world. “It’ll get better,” he said finally, dryly. “I’ve only just started.” The inspector looked at him. A brief moment in which both knew that was no consolation. “Document everything,” he said. “I always do.” “No,” replied the inspector. “More thoroughly this time.”

He took off his gloves. Slowly. Deliberately. “If you find anything... anything that isn’t...” He searched for a word. Couldn’t find one. “...is normal,” the pathologist finished the sentence. The inspector nodded. As he walked towards the door, he paused once more. Not because of the body. Not because of the room. But because of a simple, unsettling realisation: death had changed. But the method hadn’t. He opened the door. And left the light behind him.

The office

The office smelled of cold coffee and stale air. The blinds were half-closed, as if someone had decided that daylight had no place here. It was an atmosphere of oppression, in which every minute stretched out and time passed almost imperceptibly.

The inspector placed the folder on the table. Not gently, not aggressively – simply with a weight that made it unmistakably clear: this can no longer be ignored.

His superior slowly looked up, his eyes hidden behind a thick veil of stress. “I’ve read your reports.”

“Then you know we have a problem,” replied the inspector, his voice firm and resolute.

A brief twitch at the corner of his superior's mouth, more a sign of irritation than a genuine smile. "We have many problems. This one," he tapped the folder with his finger, "is being blown out of proportion."

The inspector stopped, the tension in the air almost palpable. "The press sees it differently."

"The press," said the superior dryly, "jumps at anything that smacks of a sensation."

A few seconds of silence fell between them; only the soft hum of the neon tube could be heard, as if the world outside the office had stood still for a moment.

Then the inspector slid a photograph across the table. "This isn't a rumour. This is forensic evidence."

The superior looked at it, for too long, and finally put it back as if it were just another insignificant document.

"Decomposition processes can vary," he muttered, as if the answer were a protective shield.

The inspector leaned forward slightly; his voice grew quieter, but it became more menacing. "Not like this."

No reply came. A charged silence spread between them.

"You are aware," the inspector continued, choosing his words carefully, "that some of the bodies were already in an advanced state of decomposition just a few hours after death."

Now his superior looked him straight in the eye, for the first time without his usual facade. An expression of astonishment that inevitably broke through.

"Watch how you phrase that."

"I'm not phrasing anything. I'm quoting."

A breath between them, heavy and controlled.

"You're drawing the wrong conclusions."

"I'm basing this on findings."

Silence again, thicker and more oppressive.

The superior leaned back, folding his hands over his stomach. "Listen," he said at last, more calmly, almost fatherly, "we have a heated public, a nervous press and cases that... seem unusual. That is no invitation to develop theories."

The inspector hesitated as the words pricked his mind like needles. He took the folder back, as if it were his only anchor in this discussion.

"They're not theories."

He opened it, turning it so that the other man was forced to look inside.

"It's a pattern."

An almost imperceptible flicker in his superior's eyes, then it faded again, like a candle that had lost its last spark.

"You must continue to focus on verifiable facts," said the superior curtly. "And refrain from... interpretations."

The inspector closed the folder, his movements firm and resolute.

"Too late."

He turned towards the door.

"Too late for what?" came the question from behind him, sharp and challenging.

He paused briefly, without turning round. "For someone else to understand it first."

Then he left, slamming the door shut with a bang that was far too loud, as if the noise could underline his resolve.

The flat was silent. Too silent for a place where life had been pulsing just a few days ago.

The inspector stood in the doorway, hat in hand, whilst the young woman sat opposite him. Her fingers clasped a cup whose contents had long since gone cold.

"May I ask you something?"

She nodded almost imperceptibly, a sign of agreement that promised neither familiarity nor comfort.

A moment of uncertainty crept into his voice as he asked quietly, “Was it the same with your father...?”

A tremor ran through her shoulders, and she closed her eyes for a moment.

“Yes,” she whispered. “Him too.” Her voice was brittle as she continued: “It was awful. We had to bury him in a great hurry... the day after... after the tragedy.”

The inspector lowered his gaze, feeling the weight of her words. He looked at her again.

“Did he catch it on his journey?”

The woman shook her head slowly. “My father... never spoke much about it. Not really. But...” She faltered, as if considering whether she should find the courage to continue.

“He brought something back with him.”

The inspector immediately became alert. “What exactly?”

“Tablets. Tibetan tablets, he said.” Her voice grew quieter. “They were... stolen last night.”

A shadow flitted across his face.

“Stolen?”

She nodded. “Yes. But I’ve...” She reached beside her and pulled out a folder, “made some copies. Photographs.”

She handed them to him.

The inspector took the sheets carefully. His gaze swept over the strange characters, intricate lines and symbols that seemed older than any language he knew.

He remained silent for a long time, whilst the silence stretched between them like a living creature.

Finally, without looking up, he asked, “Have you ever heard of the Tibetan Book of the Dead?”

The woman shook her head. “To me, that’s... Greek. What does it say?”

He slowly raised his gaze. “It’s about... the transmigration of souls.” A brief hesitation, as if he were searching for a sober word for the unspeakable. “About transitions. Between life and... something beyond.”

She looked at him silently, her eyes wide and questioning.

He held one of the photos closer to the light. “These tablets,” he said at last, “could be a kind of precursor. Older than the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Possibly even older than the Egyptian texts.”

“What?” Her voice suddenly sounded high-pitched, almost incredulous. “Then... they must date from a time several millennia before our era?”

He nodded slowly. “Yes. If my hunch is right... from the Kaddesh plateau.”

The woman froze. “Kaddesh?” She laughed briefly, uncertainly. “Like that place from the legend? Does it really exist? I always thought it was the figment of some deranged author’s imagination.”

The inspector carefully placed the photographs back on the table. “One might think so,” he said quietly. His expression darkened. “If one knows the contents of these texts.”

A moment passed, the tension between them palpable and electric.

“I have a... let’s say, solid scientific grounding.” A faint, humourless smile flitted across his face. “But even to me... it sends a chill down my spine.”

The woman drew her shoulders closer together, as if someone had opened a window.

Outside, a wind picked up, and for a moment the inspector felt as though he’d just opened a door that would have been better left shut.

The city library lay in semi-darkness, as if it had decided to reveal its secrets only reluctantly. Layers of dust danced in the dim light of the reading lamps, whilst somewhere in the background a clock ticked – slowly, indifferently.

The inspector sat over an open book that looked as though it had seen more of the world than any human in the room.

“HIIIIIK!”

The sound cut through the silence like a sharp knife.

“HIIIIIK!”

His assistant looked up from the newspaper, his face contorting. “Have you swallowed a fishbone? Or are you practising your death rattle?”

The inspector didn't look up. "Neither." He leaned deeper into the pages, as if he could force them to speak.

"I'm studying the fascinating work on Tibet that your friend, the archivist, dug out for me from the depths of this library."

He turned the pages carefully; the paper rustled dryly.

"Here, a Greek missionary reports..." he paused, as if savouring the words on his tongue. "...of a certain Tibetan ritual."

The assistant slowly lowered the newspaper. "That doesn't sound good."

The inspector raised a hand as if to silence him. "If one utters a scream at a certain pitch with sufficient force," he continued, "the spirit of a dead person can leave its physical form."

An uncomfortable silence spread between them.

"To do this," said the inspector calmly, almost too calmly, "one must open the top of the skull."

The assistant stared at him. "Of course."

Undeterred, the inspector continued leafing through the pages.

"The shaman screams seven times. Seven exactly identical frequencies." His voice grew quieter. "Then the spirit... through a new incision behind the ear... returns to the body."

He finally looked up. "And the dead man," he said, "returns to the living."

The words hung in the air like a eerie echo that didn't quite belong here.

The assistant cleared his throat. "That's..."

"...absurd?" the inspector added calmly.

"Yes."

A faint smile flitted across his face. "That's what I thought too."

He took a deep breath.

"HIIIIIIK!"

The assistant flinched. "Stop that!"

“Unfortunately, I haven’t quite mastered the scream yet,” muttered the inspector, rubbing his throat.

Then he looked at his colleague, a dry twinkle in his eyes. “Well... I’d like to test it on a volunteer.”

A brief pause. “Irony,” he added.

“Fine,” said the assistant curtly. “Very good that you mentioned that.”

He opened the newspaper as if he wanted to hold on to something tangible. “Not me. Now take a look at this.”

He turned the page over.

The inspector leaned forward. His gaze swept over the headline. His face hardened. “Our boss is standing as a candidate for the far right.”

A soft snort. “Does that surprise you?” said the assistant. “It’s a widespread affliction these days.”

The inspector didn’t reply straight away. His gaze wandered back to the old book, to the strange symbols, to the descriptions of a ritual that really shouldn’t exist.

Slowly, he closed the pages. “Diseases,” he said quietly at last, “spread.” He placed his hand on the cover. “Some you can see coming.”

A brief glance at his assistant. “Others...” He hesitated. “...have long since arrived.”

The quiet ticking of the clock now seemed louder, more insistent. And somewhere between the shelves, the inspector suddenly had the feeling that something had been listening.

The archivist

The door to the storeroom was heavier than it looked.

The inspector pushed it open, slowly, as if entering a room designed to remain undisturbed.

Behind this door, the air was different. Drier. Older.

The smell of paper and leather mingled with a note that was hard to place.

“Ah.”

The voice came from the semi-darkness.

Not loud. Not friendly. Just there.

The inspector stopped. His assistant beside him cleared his throat quietly, as if he'd suddenly forgotten how to behave in such rooms.

“One is only too keen to believe in magic and supernatural phenomena.”

A man stepped into the light. Thin. Almost transparent. His face didn't look old – more... worn out. As if it had seen too many stories and decided not to comment on any more.

“That makes a lot of things easier,” he continued, running two fingers along the spine of a book. “There's less to explain.”

The inspector studied him closely.

“And ultimately, there are more things between heaven and earth than our schoolbook wisdom can dream of, aren't there?”

A barely visible smile played around his lips. Not on his mouth. More... in his eyes.

“Is that what you were taught?”

The archivist glided slowly past them. His footsteps made hardly a sound.

“I was taught,” he said quietly, “that everything can be explained.”

He glanced briefly over his shoulder. “People have rarely asked the right questions.”

The assistant crossed his arms. “We're looking for something specific.”

“Of course you are.”

The archivist stopped in front of a shelf. His hand rested on the wood for a moment, as if he were considering whether he really wanted to touch it. Then he pulled out a book. Not particularly large. Not particularly striking. And yet... wrong.

He handed it to the inspector.

“You're not looking for answers,” he said calmly. “You're looking for confirmation.”

The inspector took the book and his gaze slid over the cover. No title. No author. Just a faintly scratched symbol. A circle. A line.

He looked up. The archivist was standing closer now. Too close.

“That’s not possible,” said the assistant, as if he’d been taken aback.

The archivist nodded. “That’s the nice thing about impossible things.”

A brief, dry smile. “You don’t need to justify yourself.”

The inspector opened the book. The pages were densely covered with writing. Symbols, sketches, anatomical lines. And in between... cuts.

He turned the pages. Too quickly. Then more slowly.

“You’ve seen this before,” murmured the archivist quietly.

Not a question. A statement.

The inspector didn’t reply.

“Most people don’t recognise it straight away,” the archivist continued. “They need... several encounters.”

A quiet breath. “You’re not one of them.”

The assistant took a step back. “What exactly is it?”

The archivist looked at him. This time, straight in the eye. For too long.

“A guide.”

Silence spread.

“For what?” asked the inspector.

The archivist hesitated, just for a moment, and then he said: “For something that mustn’t stop.”

A sound somewhere in the room. Perhaps a book, perhaps something else.

The inspector slowly closed the book. “And the plates?”

The archivist lowered his gaze for the first time.

“They weren’t stolen.”

The assistant frowned. “What do you mean?”

The archivist looked up again, and this time there was no smile.

“They were collected.”

A cold moment. The inspector sensed something shifting. Not in the room. In the story.

“By whom?”

The archivist stepped back into the shadows. Slowly. Almost as if relieved.

“By someone,” he said quietly, “who has already mastered the scream.”

Silence.

When the inspector looked up again, the archivist was no longer where he had been standing. Only the soft rustling of the pages remained. And the feeling that they had not been alone just a moment ago.

Observed

The shop smelled of chemicals and old photographs. A narrow room, lined with frames that contained more past than present. Behind the counter stood a middle-aged man whose cautious friendliness gave the impression that he had learnt not to ask questions.

“Sir, how can I help you?”

The inspector placed a sheet of paper on the counter.

“Do you remember this photograph?”

The photographer leaned forward. A moment of silence passed, then he looked up, puzzled.

“But... excuse me?” He tapped the paper. “You must be joking? The frame’s empty!”

The inspector nodded slowly.

“Exactly.”

He gave him a moment.

“The photo showed... a Tibetan plate.”

The photographer blinked. Once. Twice. Then he took a step back.

“I think you’ve got the wrong person.”

“Who commissioned it from you?” asked the inspector calmly. “Under what circumstances did you take the negative? Do you still have it?”

The man grimaced. “Tell me... are you a cop or something?”

A faint smile appeared on the inspector’s lips.

“Not really,” he explained. “Let’s just say... I’m investigating on my own.”

The photographer crossed his arms.

“And what’s my connection to your investigation?”

The inspector didn’t answer straight away. Something had changed. Not in the conversation. In the room.

A barely perceptible sound. The door. A draught.

He turned round.

Too late.

A figure hurried out of the shop. Too hurriedly. The inspector sprang into action before the thought was fully formed.

Outside, the light hit him; voices, footsteps, the pulsating life. The person was moving quickly – too quickly for someone who had nothing to hide.

He followed them, through a narrow alley, then on into a small park whose paths were lined with dense hedges.

Green.

Too much green.

A fork in the path.

Another one.

Then—

nothing.

The inspector stopped, his breathing steady. Too steady. He looked around.

Empty paths. Rustling leaves.

And then...

Movement.

At the edge of the square.

In front of a statue.

He stepped closer. Slowly. Unobtrusively.

The figure was a mermaid. Elegant. Timeless. Almost too perfect.

The person stood in front of it. Still.

Then they raised their hand.

The inspector paused. Not out of caution. Out of instinct.

The right hand touched the statue's breast. Not by chance. Deliberately. Then—the other.

A press. Two points. Simultaneously.

A faint, mechanical sound. Barely audible. The statue's plinth shifted – just a crack, but enough.

A dark passageway. The figure disappeared into it without looking back.

The inspector stepped closer. Now alone. He looked at the statue, whose face was calm and almost friendly.

“Admittedly,” he murmured quietly, “she has an attractive appearance...”

His gaze swept over the surface – too smooth, too deliberately crafted.

“...but despite her appearance...” He placed his hand on the cold stone. “...she is hiding something.”

A brief moment. Then he heard something. Not behind him. Not in front of him. Beside him.

A footstep. A breath.

He turned around.

No one.

And yet he was certain.

He was no longer the one searching.

He was the one...

who had been found.

The Secret Passage

The inspector knelt before the statue's plinth. His fingers brushed over the rough surface.

"It's cement," he muttered. "Applied only recently."

The assistant stepped closer. "Are you sure?"

The inspector nodded almost imperceptibly.

"I was certain that this statue concealed a secret entrance." A quick glance at the sealed spot. "And they wanted to brick it up."

He stood up. "First, we'll remove the layer of cement."

The assistant looked around. "I'll look for some tools—"

"No time."

The inspector picked up a heavy stone from the floor and weighed it briefly in his hand. "This one will do."

A sharp blow. Then another.

"An efficient," he muttered between blows, "albeit primitive tool." The dust trickled down. "It's called... a hand axe."

One final blow – a dull crack. The cement split open.

A narrow crack opened up. Cold air rushed towards them.

The inspector paused and took a breath. "Tides," he said quietly. "This air smells of tides..."

A brief moment. "...mostly of rotten fish."

The assistant grimaced and pulled his scarf over his mouth and nose. "What a stench..." He shook his head. "It brings back bad memories."

The passageway was now open. Dark. Too dark.

"You can hardly see a thing," muttered the assistant. "We should have thought to bring a—"

"Here."

A click.

A narrow beam of light cut through the darkness.

The assistant squinted. "Where did you get that torch?"

The inspector didn't look up. "From my pocket," he said dryly.

They stepped inside.

The passage was narrow. Too narrow. The walls were damp and slippery, as if they had held something for centuries.

"The Celts might have used this passage," said the inspector quietly. "And others before them..."

He paused briefly. "People I wouldn't want to meet here."

The beam of light swept across the walls, touching carved shapes and symbols.

"A temple..." murmured the assistant, "underwater?"

The inspector didn't reply.

He stopped. Leant forward. "Look at this."

A carved motif. Ancient. Too ancient.

"That looks like..."

The assistant hesitated. "Shub-UR-Kur."

Silence.

Then—

a faint light. “There,” said the inspector. “Daylight.”

The passage widened. An exit. Rocks. The sea.

“At low tide,” said the Commissioner calmly, “this passage leads straight out.”

The assistant snorted softly. “Just like with smugglers.”

But the inspector wasn’t listening to him anymore. He had noticed something else.

“From there...” he said slowly. A dark entrance. A staircase leading down. “...the smell is coming.”

The assistant pulled his scarf tighter. “And I thought it couldn’t get any worse.”

They walked on. Slowly. Carefully. The stench grew thicker. Heavier.

“It’s a shame,” muttered the inspector, “that this sight...”

He glanced briefly out at the sea. Calm. Almost beautiful. “...is ruined by this smell.”

“Shh.”

The assistant froze. “Can you hear that?”

A sound. Soft. Damp. Scraping.

“From over there...”

The beam of light shifted, trembled and came to a halt.

“Oh my God...”

Movement. Crabs. Lots of them. They retreated – slowly, reluctantly – and revealed the view.

A woman. Naked. Bound. Chains. Her skin... bluish. Been in the water too long. Dead for too long.

Her entrails...

The assistant turned away. Too late.

“You’ve disturbed them... whilst they were feeding,” he whispered.

The inspector stopped. His gaze fixed. Too calm.

“The daughter,” he said quietly. “The one with the Tibetan tablets.”

The assistant looked at him. Stunned. “You really can boast about your memory for faces...”

No reply.

Another sound. Water. The inspector turned round. “Quick.”

His voice was sharp now. “The flood is coming.”

The water was already creeping into the corridor. Unstoppable.

And suddenly the room grew smaller. Much smaller.

The flood

“Too late.”

The assistant’s voice was little more than a whisper. He cast one last glance back. At the body. At what was left of it.

“Now we’re heading... towards the daughter.”

The inspector didn’t react immediately. His gaze was fixed on the water creeping slowly up the corridor. Slowly. Inexorably.

“Bravo,” muttered the assistant bitterly. “A brilliant demonstration...”

He laughed briefly, dryly, without humour.

“...of how theory and practice fit together.”

The water reached their shoes.

Cold. Too cold.

“My God,” said the assistant, “it’s still rising.”

The inspector nodded. “That’s just the way it is.”

A quick glance towards the exit, then back into the corridor. “They call it... the tide.”

The assistant snorted. “I hate tides.”

He took a step back. “And dying like a rat...” He pulled his scarf tighter around his neck. “...is not in my nature.”

The water was now up to their ankles. Then higher. Silence. Just the soft gurgling of the water.

And then—

it stopped.

The assistant looked down. Then at the inspector. “It... isn’t rising any further.”

The inspector nodded slowly. “Ebb and flow.”

A quick breath. “We’ve got a window of opportunity.”

“Turn off the light,” he said suddenly.

The assistant looked at him. “What?”

“The battery.”

A click. Darkness fell upon them. Now all that could be heard was the water and their breathing.

“Pah...” muttered the assistant. “We won’t last long like this.”

His voice began to tremble. “I’m already cold.”

The inspector remained silent and listened.

“Shh.”

The assistant froze. “What?”

A sound. Dull. Irregular.

“Can you hear that?”

Another thud.

“It’s as if... someone...”

The assistant held his breath. “...kicking the plinth.”

Silence.

Then again: a dull thud.

The inspector raised his head. For the first time... hope.

“Yes.”

He took a step closer to the wall. “Someone’s trying to open the entrance.”

The assistant struck the stone with the flat of his hand. “WE’RE HERE!”

His voice echoed back muffled. No reply. Just another, misguided blow.

The inspector shook his head. “That’s no use.”

His voice was calm. Too calm. “You can’t trigger the mechanism by kicking it.”

A moment passed, then he shouted: “The left breast!”

Silence.

Then—

another sound. A pressing. A soft, mechanical click.

The stone moved.

A narrow gap. Light. Fresh air poured in.

The assistant pulled down his scarf and took a breath. Deep. Too deep.

“Saved...,” he murmured as the opening grew larger.

A figure appeared. In uniform.

“Constable!” said the inspector calmly.

The man helped them out, one by one. The inspector stepped out into the open and paused for a moment. He took a breath. The world was suddenly... too big.

He looked at the constable. “We owe you a debt of gratitude.”

The man merely nodded, saying nothing.

The inspector looked back once more. At the statue. At the entrance. At the darkness. And for a brief moment, he had the feeling... that something had been left behind down there. And had been waiting.

The One Who Waits

The fresh air felt unreal. Too light. Too clean.

The inspector paused for a moment, the water still dripping from his clothes. Behind him lay the dark entrance; before him – the world, pretending as though nothing had happened.

“Oh... please excuse my impertinence.”

The voice came too quickly, too conveniently. The inspector turned slowly.

A man stood a few paces away. Well-dressed. Too well-dressed for this place.

“I recognised you,” he continued, a polite smile flitting across his face, though it didn’t quite reach his eyes. “I wanted to take the opportunity to greet the famous inspector.”

A brief, elegant nod. “Ian McCoy. Professor of Ethnology at the university here in London.”

The inspector sized him up. Not openly, not covertly.

“I must admit,” McCoy continued, “that I am quite surprised to meet you here.”

A slight raising of the eyebrows.

“Rationalism – what I call the scientific side of police work, very much in the spirit of Sherlock Holmes – does not, at first glance, seem prepared to accept paranormal phenomena.”

The assistant snorted softly, but the inspector remained calm.

“Personally,” McCoy continued, “I have no sectarian prejudices that would allow me to rule out such phenomena.”

A brief glance. Direct. Too direct.

“The mere fact that there are people who believe in them...” He smiled slightly. “...already lends these things a certain reality.”

The Commissioner nodded slowly. “I entirely agree with you.”

A moment passed.

“By the way,” said McCoy, “I believe that in the course of your investigations, you’ve had more dealings with madmen than with greedy criminals?”

The assistant was about to reply, but the inspector beat him to it. “Certainly.”

A brief pause. “Even so, my interest in the paranormal wouldn’t have been enough to lure me to this lecture.”

McCoy tilted his head slightly. “Ah.”

“An anonymous letter,” the inspector continued. “It invited me here.”

His gaze remained fixed on McCoy. “The evening passed without anyone revealing themselves.”

A barely perceptible hesitation. Then a smile.

“Indeed... strange.”

Silence.

“But wasn’t the strange precisely what was on the agenda tonight?”

The inspector didn’t reply. He was watching. Too polished. Too prepared.

“For my part,” McCoy continued, “I’m looking forward to this meeting.”

He glanced briefly towards the statue. Too briefly. “Especially as I have to attend a symposium on the myth of the bull. In the West End.”

The inspector looked at him. “Do you know that part of London well?”

Another smile. “Another coincidence?”

The Commissioner said nothing.

“Yes,” McCoy continued himself. “You said it.”

A step closer. “But if there’s one thing I don’t leave to chance...”

He paused briefly. “...then it’s the hotel business.”

The assistant frowned. “What do you mean?”

McCoy looked at him briefly, then back at the Commissioner. “Could you perhaps give me a recommendation?”

The inspector replied without hesitation: “The Nord Pinus. On Formus Square.”

A barely perceptible flicker in McCoy's eyes. "Excellent. Then I shall take up residence there."

He was already turning away. Too quickly. "Have a pleasant evening, gentlemen."

He left without looking back.

Silence.

The assistant watched him go. Then he looked at the inspector. "A strange character."

The inspector didn't reply straight away. His gaze was still fixed on the spot where McCoy had been standing.

"What on earth got into him?"

The inspector shook his head almost imperceptibly. "Nothing at all."

A brief moment.

"He was like that before."

The assistant frowned. "There are people..." he muttered, "who just can't shake off their old superstitions."

The inspector looked at the statue, at the entrance, at the darkness beyond. Then he said quietly: "He didn't wait for the lecture."

Silence.

"But for us."

A gust of wind swept across the square. And somewhere... someone had already planned the next move.

The Revelation

The air in the hotel lobby was heavy – not just from the cigar smoke, but from something else that was slowly brewing.

The inspector stood not far from the reception desk, his gaze calm but alert. Beside him stood McCoy, dapper as ever, yet today there was a nervous edge to his movements. His secretary was hastily leafing through documents, a vague tension in the air.

Then – voices.

Loud. Aggressive.

Three men had broken away from the edge of the lobby. Heavy coats, hard faces. Their eyes sought no dialogue – they sought a victim.

“There he is...” hissed one.

“The traitor.”

Another stepped forward. “Freemason. Traitor. People like you... don’t belong here.”

The secretary froze. “Gentlemen, I beg you—”

“Stay out of this!” The tone cut through the room like a knife.

McCoy raised his head, his voice remaining calm. Almost too calm. “I’m afraid you’re mistaking me for someone who can be intimidated.”

A short, scornful laugh answered his words. “Oh, we know exactly who you are.”

The inspector took half a step closer. Not to intervene, but to observe. Something wasn’t right.

The man at the front suddenly grabbed McCoy’s walking stick. A jolt.

“What are you hiding in there, hm?”

A crack. Too loud. Too deliberate. The cane – old, antique – gave way. Not broken... but opened. A narrow cavity came into view. And inside it—

Paper. Old. Yellowed. With symbols the inspector recognised immediately.

His breath caught in his throat.

Tibetan.

The secretary gasped softly. “That... that can’t be...”

The man with the cane pulled the document halfway out. “Well, look at that... so the professor’s smuggling too.”

But McCoy suddenly moved. Quickly. Too quickly for a man of his age. He jerked the cane back, clutching the document tightly to his chest. His voice was different now. Colder. “You have no idea what you’re playing with.”

The inspector now stepped forward. Slowly. Deliberately. His gaze swept over the paper. He saw the symbols – the same ones as on the tablets.

At that moment, it hit him like a blow: the bodies, the decay, the scream, the rituals. Everything... connected.

He looked at McCoy. “It wasn’t a coincidence that we met... was it?”

A brief silence followed, then a barely visible smile on McCoy’s lips. The men took a step back. Not out of fear, but out of instinct. Something greater had just taken the stage.

And the inspector knew: this... was only the beginning.

The first blow

The first blow came unexpectedly.

A chair toppled over, glass shattered, and the voices of those present rose in a cacophony. Within seconds, the elegant lobby was transformed into a chaos of screams, movement and seething anger.

The men had no intention of merely provoking. They attacked.

“Grab him!”

“Take the document from him!”

The inspector dodged a blow, grabbed an attacker’s arm and twisted it to the side. A dull thud – someone had fallen.

But that was only the beginning.

The secretary.

She stood paralysed, her eyes wide open, her hands trembling.

Then her gaze met the inspector’s.

And suddenly — determination.

She flung open a leather folder, pulled out a thin, yellowed bundle and stumbled towards him.

“Take it!” she whispered frantically. “Before it’s too late—”

The inspector reached out. The paper felt cold and unreal.

At that very moment, a hand grabbed the woman from behind.

She screamed. A scream that cut through the entire hotel.

“NO—!”

The inspector spun round.

Too late.

Two men were already dragging her back, pulling her through the crowd. Guests screamed; some stepped back, whilst others... simply stood still. They watched. Almost greedily.

The place had changed. It had become a scene of discord.

A man laughed. Another shouted something incomprehensible.

And then — her voice.

Torn, panicked, but clear:

“THE KNIGHT OF ELEUSIS!”

Silence. For a heartbeat.

Then the chaos broke out again.

The inspector sprang into action.

“Stop them!”

He shoved a man aside, ran through the crowd, but the kidnappers were already disappearing down the rear corridor.

A door slammed shut.

Silence.

Too sudden. Too final.

The inspector stopped, breathing heavily. He was holding the document in his hand.

Slowly, he unfolded the pages. The handwriting was old... but legible. And he began to read:

1779.

That autumn, I had decided to spend a few days in Venice.

It is the season when melancholy slowly takes hold of the lagoon — like a creeping mist that pushes its far-reaching tendrils ever deeper into the labyrinth of small alleyways deserted by tourists.

One evening, when I returned a little late to my host's residence, I was caught unawares by the fog.

I had often got lost in the narrow streets just for fun... but this time, I must admit, I was helplessly lost.

As I wandered about, I came upon a small square I did not recognise. In the centre stood a fountain.

The strange sculptures adorning it should have piqued my curiosity...

But no. Not a flicker of interest.

Soon, a strange glow illuminated the end of the day — the only shop on the deserted square.

An antique dealer. A sign. A true stroke of luck.

There I found a manuscript.

The parchments looked mummified, as if they might crumble to dust at any moment... and yet they were in surprisingly good condition.

I managed to make out a date.

And a name: Caesarius, 1527.

The title read: 'The True Account to His Holiness Pope Symmachus by Bishop Caesarius and the Subsequent Astonishing Discovery.'

The inspector lowered the page, his gaze vacant.

Then he whispered: "Eleusis... Caesarius... Tibet..."

A puzzle.

And suddenly...

A pattern.

He looked towards the door, the place where she had vanished. His voice grew quiet. Harsh.

“That was no coincidence.”

The Truth of Eleusis

The inspector was still standing in the half-destroyed lobby. The chaos had subsided, yet something remained. A silence that weighed heavier than the noise before.

Slowly, he unfolded the document. The pages were brittle, yet the writing seemed alive, as if it had been written not for the past, but for him.

Excerpt from the document

The Mysteries of Eleusis near Athens were the mysteries of mysteries. Their origin lies in the myth of Persephone – abducted by Hades, the ruler of the underworld.

The earth became barren, for Demeter, the mother, was in mourning. Only when Persephone returned did the world blossom once more.

The inspector frowned.

“Death... and return...”

He turned the page.

The soul’s entry into the realm of death and its triumph over it... This is the central mystery of the initiation.

A cold draught swept through the lobby. Or was it just his imagination?

The descent into the underworld – the katabasis – symbolises the overcoming of the transitory and the awakening of the eternal in the soul.

The inspector paused. His thoughts were racing.

The corpses. The decay.

Too fast. Unnatural.

“They have... descended...,” he whispered.

He read on.

Orpheus descended... Heracles conquered death... Odysseus sought knowledge in Hades...

But true initiation means crossing the threshold of death – whilst still alive.

The inspector felt something tighten inside him. Not fear, but realisation.

“This is no myth...,” he murmured. “This is a guide.”

Another passage. Darker. More dangerous.

Demeter attempted to grant immortality to a mortal by consigning him to the fire. But the attempt was interrupted.

His fingers clenched around the paper.

“Fire... Cut... Scream...”

The images came flooding back:

- the split skulls
- the scream
- the return...

He read on.

The soul does not remain in the body. It can leave it and return. But not without a price.

A noise behind him.

He spun round.

Nothing.

Just shadows.

Back to the text.

The initiate must pass through death to overcome it. But whoever opens the gate... must know that not every soul returns.

Silence.

The inspector slowly lowered the document. His gaze was now clear. Too clear.

“The bodies...”

He spoke it aloud now. “They haven’t decomposed...”

A pause.

“They have returned.”

A distant sound echoed through the hotel corridors.

An echo. Or a scream.

And then he remembered her words: “The Knight of Eleusis...”

His gaze hardened.

“This is no cult...”

He folded the document carefully.

“It is an initiation.”

The hall beneath the ground

The air was heavy. Not just from the smoke, but from something older.

The hall lay deep beneath the city, hewn from stone and blackened by age. Fire burned in iron bowls, casting flickering shadows onto the walls – shadows that moved even when nothing stirred.

In the centre stood the secretary, bound between two pillars. Her gaze was alert, too alert. No longer panicked. Something had changed.

A priest stepped out of the darkness. His robe was not merely old; it looked burnt, as though it had survived a fire that would long since have consumed others. His face lay in semi-shadow. Only one thing was clear: he was no longer human, as the world understood it.

He did not speak, and yet she understood.

The others drew closer. Slowly. In a circle. Their voices began to rise – not singing, but an ancient sound that was felt rather than heard. A pulse. Like a heartbeat. Not hers.

The secretary closed her eyes briefly. A shiver ran through her body. Then... silence. And something happened.

Invisible. Inexplicable. But palpable. The air grew colder, then warm again, then empty, as if something had entered the room or someone had left it.

The priests paused. The leader slowly raised his hands. A sign. And then: a breath. Her breath. She opened her eyes. Slowly. Unnaturally calm.

Her gaze fell upon herself. And she smiled. Not with joy. Not with pain. But... with realisation.

The bonds were loosened. She did not fall. She stood.

One of the priests draped a dark robe around her, heavy and deep red. Like a promise.

The choir grew louder. Now clearer. Now intelligible.

“It has been accomplished...”

“The threshold has been crossed...”

“Hades...”

A pause. Then, as if with a single breath: “...lives among us.”

The secretary looked up. No longer searching. No longer questioning.

And somewhere, far away, in the hotel, the inspector sensed it. Something had returned.

Temple Church – The Archive

Temple Church lay in semi-darkness. Stone arches, a cold floor and a silence that was not empty – but listening.

The inspector stepped through the heavy portal into the archive vault beneath the church. The flickering candlelight illuminated the scene, whilst dust lay on parchments that had not been touched for centuries.

But today something was different.

He stopped and unconsciously brought his hand to his chest. A pressure. A pulse. Not his own.

“She’s still... there...,” he murmured.

The secretary.

Whatever had become of her – a part of her had reached him. An echo. A connection.

He walked on. The archivist had granted him access reluctantly, almost fearfully.

“The documents you’re looking for...” he had said, “...sometimes look back.”

The inspector found the letter, hidden among church registers. Sealed. Torn. Slowly, he opened it.

The letter

To the venerable prelate...

I write to you from Rome, in the year of our Lord 1524.

I, Michel de Nostredame, have discovered a document in the archives of the Vatican Library...

The Commissioner paused. His breathing grew shallower.

“Nostradamus...”

He continued reading.

It is a copy of a report that a certain Caesarius once handed over to the Holy Father. A text that does not want to be read. And yet... must be read.

A draught swept through the room. The candles flickered.

I have copied it out. But I fear... I should not have done so.

The inspector looked up. For a moment, he had the feeling he was not alone.

This text speaks not of religion... but of transition. Of the threshold. Of a gate that does not remain closed.

His thoughts raced.

Eleusis. The bodies. The secretary.

Three years after my discovery, the documents were lost during the sacking of the papal palace. But I do not believe... that they are lost.

The inspector whispered: “They were... distributed.”

He continued reading.

After England’s breakaway from Rome, a group of cardinals used a prophecy to secure their power. They understood... part of the code. But not the key.

The commissioner narrowed his eyes.

“The key...”

At that moment, he heard a whisper. Behind him.

He turned around.

She was standing there.

The secretary.

Unscathed. And yet... not.

Her gaze was calm. Too calm.

“You’re looking for the key...,” she said quietly.

The inspector didn’t take a step back. “What are you?”

A brief smile flitted across her face. “I’ve seen...”

She stepped closer without making a sound.

“Caesarius was looking for it... Nostradamus copied it... and they all overlooked the same thing.”

A pause.

“The text... isn’t the secret.”

The inspector felt every muscle in his body tense. “But what is?”

She slowly raised her gaze. “Its shell.”

Silence enveloped them like a veil. “Where?”

Her answer came like a shadow: “In the wreck... of a Phoenician galley.”

A distant rumble of thunder. Or was it the sea?

“There... the code is carved.”

The inspector understood. Not paper. Not words.

Stone.

“And where is this wreck?”

The secretary took a step back. Her body began to fade into the distance.

“There... where the tides conceal death...”

One last glance. Almost human.

Then she was gone.

The inspector stood alone. With the letter. With the truth. And with a new lead.

“The sea...” He looked up. “Of course.”

The incident in the restaurant

The headline leapt out at him:

“Mysterious death in restaurant.”

The inspector paused. His gaze lingered on the name. He read it twice. Slowly.

The identity of the deceased has now been established. It is the secretary...

A soft sound escaped him. Not surprise, but confirmation.

He read on.

Witnesses report a sudden outburst of extreme aggression. The woman behaved erratically, attacking guests and biting them several times. The situation escalated. She had to be stopped by several shots to the head.

The inspector lowered the newspaper. His hands were still. Too still.

“Stopped...,” he muttered.

His gaze fell to the next paragraph.

The condition of the body remains baffling. Just a few hours after the incident, the body showed signs of advanced decomposition. The post-mortem also revealed that the deceased had eaten a substantial meal that very evening.

A pause.

Then: "That's not possible."

Yet he knew it wasn't the first time.

Forensic Medicine

The smell hit him even before he entered the room. Cold, chemicals and something... sweet. Too sweet.

The pathologist was already waiting. His face was grey. Not from tiredness.

"I've only told the press a fraction of it," he began without greeting him.

The inspector nodded. "Show me."

The pathologist hesitated for a moment. Then he pulled back the sheet.

Silence.

The body lay there. Motionless. Decayed. Too quickly. Too completely.

The inspector stepped closer, his gaze sharpening. Analytical. Almost cold.

"How long?"

"A few hours."

A pause. "Impossible."

The pathologist shook his head slowly. "That's not the most impossible thing."

He reached for his documents, his hand trembling slightly.

"The body...", he swallowed, "...is empty."

The inspector looked at him. "Empty?"

"No organs."

Silence.

"None."

The inspector took a step back. "And she was alive."

"Yes."

“Eaten.”

“Yes.”

A moment.

Then the pathologist whispered: “And moved... as if she were...”

He trailed off.

“As if it were what?”

The pathologist looked at him for a long time.

“Returned.”

Silence.

The invitation

The pathologist reached into his briefcase again. “There’s something else.”

He placed a card on the table. Heavy paper. Old.

The inspector picked it up. An invitation. Sealed. The royal coat of arms.

His gaze lingered on it. “Queen Victoria...”

The pathologist nodded slowly. “A personal invitation.”

The inspector turned the card slightly. The light fell on it differently. And then he saw it. A symbol. Not royal. Not official. Old. Older than the royal family.

His breathing slowed. “That...”

He remembered.

Eleusis.

The temple.

The circle.

“That’s no coincidence.”

Realisation

The inspector slowly put the card back.

“She was invited...”

A pause.

“Not to a reception.”

He looked at the pathologist. “But to the opening.”

A faint sound. Like a distant echo. Or a laugh.

The second layer of truth

The inspector was still standing in the archives of Temple Church. The invitation lay before him, the symbol on it glowing mysteriously. And now... it all suddenly made sense.

“Temple...,” he murmured.

His gaze wandered around the room. The circular church and the Templar tombs seemed to remind him of something.

“Of course.”

He reached for the documents again. Another document, hidden and uncatalogued.

The minutes of the covenant

After returning from the Holy Land... Richard, known as the Lionheart, brought something back to England – something not meant for this world.

The commissioner read on.

The Templars kept it at first... but soon they realised...

It was no relic. It was a key.

His heart beat faster.

“The code...”

A code that allowed the threshold to be opened at any time – for anyone.

Silence.

“Immortality...” he whispered. Or something that looked like it.

Richard himself is said to have understood it. He could see what was to come – not through prophecy, but through access.

The inspector closed his eyes briefly.

“Not a prediction...”

He opened them again.

“Access.”

The Break

He turned the page. The handwriting became more erratic.

He was killed on the return journey. Not by enemies, but by his own men.

A moment of realisation.

“They eliminated him...”

The code vanished, but his knowledge remained.

The founding of the League

Following the schism in Rome, a secret alliance was formed in England. Its aim: to preserve the Code and keep it hidden.

The inspector looked at the invitation again.

“The Royal Family...”

The Crown became part of this alliance. Not out of a lust for power, but out of fear.

Victoria

A new chapter.

Victoria, Queen of England... After the loss of her husband, she opened herself up to the unseen. She sought contact... beyond the threshold.

The Commissioner recalled the reports – séances, whispers in the dark, a kingdom in mourning.

She did not know that the threshold had already been opened.

A cold shiver ran down his spine.

The Munshi

A man came from the East. Abdul Karim.

He brought knowledge older than the crown.

The Commissioner whispered: “India... Eleusis... Tibet...”

Everything came together. He became more than a teacher. He became a guardian.

The Fear

The last section was almost illegible.

The successors live in fear... not of death, but of the return of the key.

A brief pause.

For if the code is deciphered...

The inspector finished the sentence: “...their power will end.”

And then: “...and the truth begins.”

Connection to the present

He looked at the invitation. Then at the door. The secretary, the ritual, the bodies.

“They’ve started it again...”

A thought struck him like a blow.

“Not to preserve it...”

His gaze hardened.

“But to control it.”

High Society

The hall glowed in the light.

Gold.

Crystal.

Perfume.

And beneath it all... something dark. Fear.

London's elite had gathered.

Aristocrats.

Politicians.

Bankers.

And men whose names remained in the shadows.

The inspector entered.

An awkward silence fell over the room as the conversations shifted, like a whisper that suddenly took a new direction.

"You're late."

The voice came from above, full of unspoken gravity.

His gaze fell upon the heir to the throne, the Queen's son.

Silence. An unfamiliar chill hung in the air.

"I was invited," replied the commissioner, resolutely.

A smile, cool and calculating.

"No," said the prince, "you were sought."

Silence. A tension that made breathing difficult.

The truth comes to light

The prince stepped closer; his words seemed to cut like cut glass.

"My mother..." he began,

"...left this world after my father's death."

The Commissioner remained silent, already reeling off the familiar threads of the story in his mind.

“The empire began to crumble,” the prince continued. “Republicans. Assassins. Doubt.”

His voice grew harsher, laced with unspoken threats.

“You believe she withdrew...”

He leaned forward slightly, his eyes a burning expression.
“She has been working.”

A low murmur rippled through the hall.
“She has learnt to hear the voices...
that lie beyond the threshold.”

The inspector nodded.
“Eleusis.”

A faint smile played around the prince’s lips.
“You’re a quick learner.”

The Covenant

The prince raised his glass; the room fell silent in anticipation.
“The Covenant... has existed since Richard the Lionheart.”

The guests listened spellbound, the room filled with unspoken questions.
No one contradicted him.

“We have maintained the balance.”
A pause in which everyone held their breath.
“But you...”

His gaze became sharp, piercing.
“...are looking for the key.”

Silence.

The threat

The inspector replied, calmly but firmly:
“Not me.”

He took a step forward; the room seemed to close in around him.
“Everyone.”

The prince nodded slowly, as if sealing an unspoken pact.
“And that is precisely why...”

His gaze drew the attention of everyone in the hall.
 "...you will find him for us."

The Wreck – The Discovery

The night was black.
 The sea... still.
 Too still.

The inspector stood on the shore; the lapping of the waves was the only accompaniment to his thoughts. Below him lay the entrance to the grotto, mysterious and inviting, as if it held an ancient secret.

He recalled the words of his friend, the Greek Orthodox priest, who had told him about Plato's book. A relic of times gone by. "Where the tides conceal death... It might be worth seeking out this place," the priest had said.

The Descent

With a sharp twinge in his stomach, he stepped into the cold darkness of the water. It was biting and massaged his leg with an icy embrace. The torch cut through the blackness, whilst he heard the sound of the waves only behind him as he ventured deeper into the grotto.

He knew that Gibraltar was not just a geographical point—it was the gateway to more than just hidden treasures; it was a place of secrets for which some were willing to sacrifice everything.

The Secret

Suddenly, he spotted something large ahead of him—a structure. Wood. Ancient. Broken. A galley. Phoenician.

"I've found it," he murmured, his heart beginning to race as he approached the discovery.

The Code

But the planks were not simply bare. Grooves—symbols—not written, but engraved. The inspector ran his trembling fingers over them.

And suddenly:
 An image.
 A sound.
 An echo.

“That’s not text...” His breath caught in his throat.

“That’s... a memory.”

He sensed someone’s presence behind him, a hostile whisper that swept through the grotto like the wind. He knew he was not alone.

The Resistance

“The priest warned me,” he thought. Some people would do anything to hide the truth—including the opponents of his quest, who operated in the shadows. He had to hurry to secure the discovery before his rivals caught up with him.

Something glinted in the water, and without realising it, he had seen the bowl—a round ceramic piece—the **Lazarus Bowl**.

Something lay in the mud. Round. Clay.

He lifted it carefully.

A feeling that surged through him with power:

His heart beat faster as memories of his old friend, the priest, took shape.

“The words remain... even when the voice falls silent...”

As he turned the bowl, a sound rang out...

A sound.

Not in the water.

In his head.

A voice.

Soft.

Indistinct.

And yet... powerful.

The realisation

The inspector froze.

“That... can’t be...”

The voice sounded like a distant song, like the echo of ancient legends. He withdrew his hand; the voice fell silent.

Slowly, he began to understand. “The code...” his gaze returned to the galley. “...is not a key. It is a voice.”

And the bowl... “...is the gateway.”

The decision

With a resolve that shot through him like lightning, the inspector pocketed the bowl.

Not into the light.

Not into the world.

To himself.

“Not for them...” He cast one last glance back into the dark water, where shadows lurked and enemies lay in wait to thwart his plan.

“Not for the Confederation.”

And then, as the weight of responsibility sank in:

“For the truth.”

The first use of the bowl

The room was small.

No windows.

Just stone, wood... and silence that seemed to swallow the shadows.

The inspector placed the clay bowl on the table with a soft clink.

Unspectacular.

Almost innocent.

Yet the air around him began to change.

He hesitated.

His gaze rested on the surface of the clay.

Fine grooves.

Not random.

Not decorative.

“A voice...” he murmured. “Lazar, pòk l’bar!”

Slowly, he ran his finger along the engraving—the touch felt like a blossoming secret waiting to be revealed.

Nothing at first.

Then—

a tremor.

Not in the room.

Inside him.

A sound was heard.
Not audible in the usual sense.
More... felt, as if it had penetrated the deepest recesses of his soul—
like an echo reverberating in the abysses of his innermost being.

His breathing became uneven,
and images rose within him.
Not his own.

Dusty plains.
Fire.
People kneeling.

And then a voice that spoke—

not in words,
but in meaning.

The inspector pulled his hand back.
Silence.

He staggered a step back.
“This is no relic...”

His gaze hardened as he realised the truth.
“It’s a tool.”

Another thought forced its way into his mind.
“And someone... has learnt how to use it.”

The inspector was not alone.
Not anymore.

“You should have left it alone.”

The voice came from the darkness, sharp as a dagger.

The prince stepped into the light, elegant and composed,
yet something restless flashed in his eyes—
a storm that threatened to change everything.

“You used her.”

It was not a question, but a statement.

The inspector did not reply.
The prince stepped closer,
slowly, like a predator zeroing in on its prey.

“My father believed in order,”
he said calmly, as if the words came from another world.
“My mother... in the afterlife.”

A bitter smile played around his lips.
“And I... believe in power.”

The prince looked at the bowl as though it were a precious jewel.
“With this thing...”

His voice grew quieter, barely more than a whisper.
“...you can do more than just hear.”

The inspector interrupted again:
“You can control.”

The prince nodded, the greed in his eyes flickering.
“The Empire is built on illusions.
Loyalty. Faith. Order.”

He took a step closer,
and the air seemed to thicken.
“Imagine... if we could replace them.”

A silence so thick you could cut it with a knife.
“With truth.”

The inspector shook his head slowly,
while the reality of his words hung in the air.
“With coercion.”

A brief pause.
Then:

Movement.

The prince reached for the bowl,
lively and quick as lightning.
The inspector was quicker.
A shove, a violent collision.
Wood splintered, splinters flew,
and the bowl fell—

not to the floor.
 The Commissioner caught it, determined.
 The prince stepped back,
 his gaze had changed.
 No longer just greed—
 Doubt.

The inspector held the bowl firmly.
 “Listen to it.”

The prince hesitated,
 his eyes searching for answers lurking in the darkness.
 Then—**‘Lazar, pôk l’bar!’**

he touched it.

A moment’s hesitation,
 and then:

Stillness.

His body tensed like a bow,
 his gaze went blank.

Images.
 Not his.

War.
 Death.
 Power devouring itself.

And beneath it—
 something else.

Silence.
 Peace.

The prince pulled his hand back.
 His breathing became rapid and irregular.
 “That...”

He looked at the inspector,
 for the first time...
 without a mask.

“That’s not a tool.”

A meaningful pause.
“It is a judgement.”

The prince stepped back.
Slowly, as if freeing himself from a spell.
“I wanted to...” he began—
and broke off.
“I thought... I could control it.”

The Commissioner, his eyes fixed firmly on the Prince:
“They all think that.”

A long look,
which revealed not only words, but destinies as well.

Then—something changed—
the prince sat up straight,
not as a ruler,
but as a man.
“Then no one must possess it.”

The inspector nodded,
the bowl between them was more than an object.

The prince looked towards the door,
then back.
“The old pact... has failed.”

A painful pause.
“We need a new one.”

The Commissioner:
“One that protects.”

The Prince:
“Not one who rules.”

A slight nod,
which bound oath and destiny.
“For the Empire.”
“For the truth.”

The bowl lay between them,
not as a symbol of power,
but as a responsibility.

And somewhere...
beyond the walls of London,
the next echo was already stirring—
a whisper of secrets yet to be revealed.

London – The New Order

Times had changed.

And with it, power.

Edward VII stood at the window, gazing down at the pulsating life of London unfolding beneath him – calm, orderly, seemingly stable. Yet behind this façade, something restless was stirring.

“You still underestimate me,” he said quietly, almost thoughtfully.

The Commissioner stepped up beside him. “That is your advantage,” he remarked with a brief smile.

Old “Bertie”, the bon vivant, the ever-underestimated son. And yet, at that moment, he seemed more than just the amiable uncle of Europe.

Eduard nodded and replied: “Kinship is the most elegant form of control.”

Since Viktoria’s death, everything had shifted. Where she had withdrawn, he had stepped forward – receiving guests, cultivating diplomatic relations, and knowing exactly when to put on a smile.

In the shadows, however, stood the Commissioner – ennobled and invisible, the feared ‘grey eminence’, as they whispered behind closed doors. But they did not understand. He was not power itself. He was the balance.

The old alliance had crumbled, having been too greedy and blind. The new order, however, was different: not a system of domination, but one of preservation; not control, but responsibility.

“You know that we are not alone,” the Commissioner said at last.

Eduard looked at him, the weight of uncertainty in his eyes. “I know.”

A letter lay on the table, sealed and mysterious. The Commissioner opened it and read the memorable sentence: “The balance has been disturbed.” Beneath it was a symbol – not British, but Prussian.

He looked up. “You’ve noticed.”

“Of course,” replied Eduard, breaking a brief silence. “You hoped I would remain what I was.” A faint smile played around his lips. “A fool.”

The Commissioner moved slowly across the room, his footsteps soft. “You know what we have,” he said, glancing at the hidden bowl. “Access.”

Eduard nodded. “Not just knowledge...”

“Interpretation,” added the inspector.

Both spoke at once: “Prophecy.”

Silence spread, and the weight of his words filled the room.

“And that,” said the inspector in a calm voice, “is what makes us dangerous.”

“For everyone,” added Eduard, knowing that they were on the brink of a major change.

The North Sea

The wind blew cold and relentless across the coast. A man stood on the shore, his spiked helmet unmistakable. Beside him, the figures stood in silence, their gaze fixed on the churning sea.

“England...,” he murmured, lost in thought.

A confidant stepped closer. “They have the artefact.”

The Emperor did not reply immediately; a minute of silence stretched like a shadow between them. Finally, he broke the silence: “The Normans... showed us how.”

His voice was calm – too calm. “An island is no fortress.”

He looked towards the horizon, his thoughts wandering far away. “Merely a target.”

“Shall we act?” asked the confidant with quiet urgency.

The Emperor hesitated, a barely visible smile forming on his lips.

“Not yet,” he replied at last, his gaze narrowing.

“But we shall prepare.”

A final sentence, carried by the wind, echoed in the cool air: “This time we are not coming as guests.”

A play on words

London.

A morning like any other.
Or at least... that’s how it should have seemed.

The newspaper lay on the table, hot off the press and still warm. The inspector picked it up as if it were a precious artefact he had been waiting for at a crucial moment. His gaze swept over the headline, his thoughts whirling, before an expression of astonishment settled on his face.

A moment’s reflection. Then a soft snort.
“That... wasn’t part of the plan.”

Edward VII stepped closer, curious and with an authority that filled the room.
“Show me.”

The Commissioner held out the newspaper to him – the Daily Telegraph, as if it had returned from an important mission.

Edward’s eyes scanned the text, and with every sentence the air around him grew heavier. One sentence. Then another. And suddenly—

Silence.

And then laughter burst from him. At first quiet, almost restrained, but quickly unstoppable and full of surprise.
“March hares...?” he repeated, as if the words themselves carried a surreal impact.

The inspector shook his head.
“He wanted to reconcile.”

Eduard, now with a hint of bitterness in his voice:
“And dethroned himself.”

The laughter died away, and the inspector slowly folded the newspaper, as if he were guarding a heavy secret.
“That was... a blow.”

Eduard nodded; the gravity of the situation seeped through the smile that had previously played around his lips.
“A diplomatic blow.”

He let the words hang in the air. It was a pause that spoke volumes.
 “And yet... more effective than any fleet.”

Through the window, his gaze fell upon the Thames below. The waterway was alive; ships pushed forward, a sign of restless movement.
 “They are rearming,” remarked the Commissioner, and it was more of a statement than a question.

Eduard nodded, his gaze reinforcing the meaning of the words.
 “Of course.”

A brief exchange of glances between the two men.
 “Fear,” said the Commissioner.
 “And pride,” added Eduard.

A shadow fell across the room, like the gathering clouds on the horizon.
 “The game has begun,” said the inspector quietly, as if he were already moving the chess pieces before his eyes.

Eduard glanced at the newspaper again, as if it were whispering secrets to him.
 “And he doesn’t even know it.”

The inspector reached into his pocket and pulled out a small card, simple yet meaningful. With a fluid movement, he placed it next to the newspaper.
 Eduard picked it up and read the words on it; a brief smile played around his lips.
“Love from Scotland... Your Nessie.”

Silence filled the room like a heavy fog.
 Then a glance passed between them, no longer amused, but focused and full of depth.

“If words are enough...,” Eduard began thoughtfully.

The inspector interrupted him:
 “...we don’t need weapons just yet.”

A brief, tense pause followed.
 “Not yet.”

Far away, over the North Sea, the clouds were gathering into a menacing grey. And somewhere in the deep shadows of this grey world, a man was reading the same newspaper. And he understood.

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