

The first rays of the morning were shining through the gaps of the curtain. The weather was cloudy and humid. Nature was alive with the rain and there was an earthy smell outside. Santiago was used to always getting up early. Due to his profession he had to constantly think, put things in order and solve them like a puzzle. So on Tuesday at 5:00 am, he woke up early as usual. But this time, he woke up early, not to work, but because it was an early travel time. He had a murder in front of him that he had to solve. 2 days ago, a letter came to his house asking him to solve a murder. The murder took place in a mansion in Birmingham, England, and he had bought a plane ticket from Dublin to Birmingham at 9:00 am. As in every murder, his accomplice, assistant, and friend Joseph would accompany him this time. He got up, washed his face, shaved, styled his chestnut hair, and put on the suit his servant had prepared the night before. His suitcase, cane, and hat were ready as well. Since the climate was the same, he wouldn't experience too much change in weather at least. He went downstairs, sat at the dining table, and had his breakfast, consisting of the classic English breakfast plate. However, he didn't have much of an appetite. After eating a bit, he took his migraine medicine and instructed his servant to bring down his suitcase. He didn't forget to take his notebook, which he never separated from in any murder case.

His driver dropped him off at a cafe near Dublin airport. The weather was still the same, just a slight drizzle. After getting his suitcase, he sat at a table in the cafe. They always met Joseph at this cafe. While waiting for Joseph, he ordered a tea and lit a cigarette. Santiago didn't usually smoke a lot, but he did when he had a trouble he couldn't quite fathom. And here he was, in the same state of unrest. He opened and read the letter again. It said:

Dear Mr. Santiago Lewis,

Please forgive me for troubling you, Mr. Lewis. I learned about how successful a detective you are and how renowned you are through a friend of mine. My hands and feet are trembling as I write this, I am in a state of great surprise and sorrow. Last night, I found my father lying on the floor in the corridor. He must have hit his head somewhere because it was bleeding. I immediately called an ambulance. My brother and I rushed him to the hospital, but he couldn't be saved; he passed away in the hospital that night due to a brain hemorrhage.

I assume you understand why I am telling you all this, Mr. Lewis. I do not believe my father died due to any accident. If we could meet in person, I would be honored. This way, I will have the opportunity to explain everything in more detail. I am at a loss about what to do and I am in need of your help.

Yours sincerely,

James Griffiths

October 15, 1963

The address of the mansion was written under the letter. He was just about to close the letter and put it in his pocket when Joseph arrived:

"Did you start the investigation without me, love? Bravo!"

They shook hands and hugged. Santiago,

"Would I ever start without you? I just read it again. How have you been? It's been a month since we last met." Joseph,

"Well, until this morning, I was good for a month. Then it started again, early wake-ups, restless minutes, question marks."

"Oh, you've gotten too used to comfort. If you don't want to, Mr. Joseph, I can handle it myself."

"It was just a joke. You know how much I enjoy playing detective with you. But I wonder what kind of case awaits us this time."

"It wasn't detailed in the letter, but it's an elderly man. His son wrote the letter. He suspects it's a murder. We'll go and find out who lives in that house, how their relationships are, how the incident occurred..."

"He must have been a wealthy man, no doubt."

"I don't know, Joseph. Anyway, let's not dwell on it now. How was Paris?"

"Perfect! Rosaline loved it. We visited everywhere. She had been wanting to go for a long time, she missed it. But of course, the air here is different, I missed the air of Dublin."

"Don't worry, you'll enjoy Birmingham plenty too." He checked his watch. It was past 7:40. "Let's get going slowly, we'll barely make it." Joseph,

"Yes, the traffic around here gets crazy at this hour!"

Santiago and Joseph had met at university. They were both in the same department, English language and literature. Santiago would write occasionally whenever he had the chance, sometimes a novel, sometimes an article. But being a detective had always been his dream, and he had been working as one regularly for 6 years now. Joseph wasn't particularly interested, but he enjoyed helping his friend. Currently, Joseph was working as a writer in a publishing house.

They arrived at Dublin airport and boarded the plane. They reached Birmingham in about 2 hours. Since it was autumn, the weather in England was gloomy, and it was raining. Joseph had arranged a hotel for both of them. But Santiago wanted to go and meet Mr. James as soon as possible. Santiago,

"I'm heading to the mansion, can you take care of my suitcase and my room?"

"Sure, I'll take a little nap. It's been a while since I woke up this early."

"Joseph, don't fall into a deep sleep. I might need you at any moment. Try to stay awake." Joseph by puffing,

"Understood, England will be the death of us."

Santiago gave Joseph a judgmental look. Joseph understood immediately that he needed to keep quiet. He nodded helplessly, picked up the suitcases, and set off for the hotel. Santiago, on the other hand, hailed a taxi and went to the mansion.

The mansion was enormous, a magnificent building from the Victorian era. It was made of bricks and had a large garden with big oak trees. Santiago saw a man in the garden, tending to the grass. He entered through the iron gate and he said,

"Excuse me, sir. Is this the Griffiths mansion?"

The gardener turned around. He sized up Santiago from head to toe and then he said,

"Yes, whom were you looking for?"

"I am Detective Santiago Lewis. Mr. James Griffiths called me and asked me to come."

The gardener's demeanor softened a bit, "Ah, welcome, Mr. Lewis. I apologize. Please, come inside." Santiago,

"Thank you." They went inside. The door opened directly into a huge hall. After seeing the inside of the house, Santiago was starting to agree with Joseph. This family really seemed to be a wealthy one. It was very clear that the mansion would be inherited by Mr. James, and at the same time, Mr. James had inherited it from his own family. The servants inside the house were working diligently. A middle-aged servant immediately directed Santiago to the hall. Santiago asked,

"Is Mr. James in the house?"

"No, but he'll be here shortly. He knew you were coming."

Alright, I'll wait, he said.

He sat in a chair the color of sherbet, waiting. He observed the house as he waited. The inside was furnished with Victorian-era furniture. It was decorated aesthetically, but the style, being old, felt a bit too somber to Santiago. He heard footsteps and turned to see a beautiful woman entering the hall. The woman smiled and said:

"Hello, welcome. You're Detective Mr. Santiago, aren't you? My father mentioned your arrival."

"Nice to meet you. Yes, I'm Santiago Lewis. My condolences."

"Thank you. We're all very saddened, devastated. My grandmother hasn't left her room for days, she's distraught. She keeps saying 'My Colton, he can't leave me, he's the strongest man in the world.'"

"You must be Mr. James's daughter."

"Ah, I'm sorry, I forgot to introduce myself. Yes, I'm his daughter, my name is Emilia."

"Nice to meet you, Mrs. Emilia. As a detective, I'll need to take your statement as well. If it's alright with you, while you're here, and if you have no objections, may I ask you a few questions until your father arrives?"

"Of course, go ahead."

The girl wasn't tense. She was warm and ready to answer questions.

"Do you live here with your family?"

"No, I actually live in my own house. But I come here every week. We're a very close-knit family."

"What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a nurse. I started working this year."

"Who lives in this house then?"

"My mother, father, brother, grandmother, and grandfather used to live here. But my grandfather is no longer with us."

"You have a brother, I assume."

"Yes, I have a 19-year-old brother named Felix. He's at school right now, but he'll be here in the evening."

"Does he live here or with you?"

"He lives here." Santiago was taking notes,

"How long have you been here?"

"I arrived five days ago. I stayed for one day and then went back to my own house."

"I understand. Have you noticed any peculiarities or suspected anyone in the house in general?"

The girl became more serious. "No, Mr. Santiago, I would never suspect anyone in my family. Our servants are also devoted to us with loyalty. I told my father, but I couldn't get him to listen. I just can't understand why he thinks this way. I truly believe my grandfather passed away due to a late-night accident. He was already old, 72 years old. Couldn't he have lost his balance at night and somehow passed away?"

"It seems your grandfather was a wealthy man, isn't that so?"

"Yes, he was a businessman, but he came from an established family. My father is now running the same business, he took it over."

While the girl spoke, Santiago was taking notes of everything she said. He then asked again with insistence, in a more serious tone, "So, in recent days, has there been anything, even small, that caught your attention?"

The girl hesitated for a moment, but then said no, still with the same seriousness.

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Emilia, for taking the time to speak with me. Depending on how the events unfold, we may need to talk again."

Smiling, Emilia replied, "Of course, I'll try to help as much as I can."

"Where is your mother, by the way?"

Just then, Mr. James entered the room. Santiago and Emilia stood up. "I'm sorry for keeping you waiting. Welcome, Mr. Santiago."

"Nice to meet you. How are you?"

"I'm trying to be okay. The peace in our home was shattered all of a sudden after my father's tragic loss. The next day we had his funeral. But my mother is the most devastated. She doesn't leave her room."

"I'm very sorry for your loss, Mr. James. Your letter was quite brief, so it's hard to grasp the full extent of what happened. If we could talk privately, it would be very helpful."

Mr. James looked at Emilia and signaled her to leave. Emilia understood the gesture and exited the room.

"We spoke a bit with your daughter. She believes you're unnecessarily worried and that your father truly passed away due to a tragic accident."

"At first, I thought so too, of course. Until I noticed a few things."

"I'm listening, Mr. James."

"It's been three days since my father passed away. Saturday night. I don't know if Emilia told you, but about 1 kilometers away from us, my brother, my sister-in-law, and my nephew live in a mansion. Maybe you've seen it on your way here."

"No, I didn't see it. Your brother also lives here, then?"

"Yes. This is a wooded area. There are a lot of trees between our houses. It's normal not to notice it."

"Could you provide me with information about your brother and his family, Mr. James?"

"Of course. My brother's name is Isaac. He's a bit careless, which is why I took over my father's company. He didn't care much about the business. We don't get along as well as I do with my father. After university, he tried to start his own company with his friends, but it didn't succeed. Now he gives private piano lessons. Our minds work a bit differently. That's why we've never been very close. His wife's name is Gabriella. They were madly in love with each other. But she's a bit of a troublemaker, that one. Their daughter's name is Lily, she's 18 years old.

Santiago continued taking notes. "So, Mr. Isaac isn't on good terms with you and your father, is that right?"

"He's a bit lazy, so my father always favored me. We're not on bad terms, but we're not blood brothers. We don't see each other much, usually, but we visit back and forth since our houses are close."

Why do you live so close to each other then?

"Both houses are considered an inheritance from my father. He always said he wanted to leave these places, but he never could. I was happy living here. Until my father passed away... I want to leave this place now too."

"Do you suspect your brother?"

Mr. James hesitated. He was uneasy.

"Unfortunately, yes."

"And his wife?"

"I suspect they're working together. To get their hands on my father's inheritance."

"You mentioned noticing a few things, Mr. James?"

"Ah yes. If you'd like, I can show you around the house; you'll get a better understanding.

If you don't mind, please."

They left the hall and headed towards the stairs. As they climbed, Mr. James said, "I got up from bed to get a drink of water one night. Myself, my wife, my father, and my mother all sleep on the same floor. Felix and Emilia's rooms are one floor below. Our rooms face each other. The doors were open. Usually, the doors are always closed. I went to the end of the corridor, then went down the stairs to go to the kitchen, right here. And there he was, lying on his back." He pointed to a painting on the wall. "In the shock of the moment, I didn't pay much attention to my surroundings, but I noticed that this painting on the wall was crooked the next day. When I straightened it, a bloodstain was revealed. It's clear that someone struggled with my father, and that person slammed my father's head into the wall. It doesn't seem very convincing for something like this to happen spontaneously."

"Is there any evidence that your brother entered your house?"

"The window of my parents' bedroom was slightly ajar, but I don't know if they left it that way before going to bed. My mother is probably inside; should I tell her to come out?"

"No, please don't bother her. I'll look into it later."

"Alright, Mr. Santiago."

"Other than your brother and his wife, is there anyone inside or outside this house that you suspect?"

"We don't have any bad blood with anyone we know. I don't owe anyone, and nobody holds a grudge against me. My father is the same way; he has no enemies. Our servants, gardener, and driver have been working in this house for years, they're loyal. We pay their salaries regularly."

"Your daughter said the same. How many servants are there in the house?"

"Three."

A woman came down the stairs and approached them and said,

"Hello, I'm Audrey." Santiago,

"Nice to meet you, ma'am. I'm Santiago Lewis."

"We've heard a lot about you, Mr. Santiago. Welcome. My husband believes that my father's death was a murder, and I share the same belief."

"How did you wake up that night, Mrs. Audrey?"

"I woke up when my husband shouted, and then I saw my father lying on the floor."

"What time was it approximately?" James,

"When I looked at the clock before leaving our room, it was 3:36."

Santiago continued to take notes. "Why do you think your father woke up at such a late hour?" James,

"Sometimes he can't sleep, so he wanders around the house."

"I see. Mrs. Emilie mentioned that your son Felix would come in the evening. I believe he's still at school, is that correct?" Audrey,

"Yes, he hasn't arrived yet."

"May I take a look around the house if you don't mind?" Audrey,

"Of course, go ahead."

Santiago spent about half an hour exploring all the rooms, but he couldn't find any unusual evidence. He couldn't enter the grandmother's room, as she was still inside.

Mr. James and Mrs. Audrey escorted Santiago to the door. James,

"Thank you very much for coming, Mr. Santiago. What happens now?"

"I will come back in the evening, this time with my colleague. If it's convenient for you, we'd like to talk to your brother, his family, and Felix as well. We'll decide on the next steps based on how things unfold." James,

"Whatever you think is best, Mr. Santiago. Goodbye, sir."

Santiago left the house and returned to the hotel. It was 2:00 PM. He knocked on Joseph's door. Joseph opened the door, looking sleepy,

"Is that you? What did you do? Were you able to find out anything?"

Santiago entered the room and sat in front of the mirror. "Yes, I found out everything. I've taken notes of it all" he said, handing his notebook to Joseph and briefly recounting everything he learned. Joseph,

"This woman Emilia seems completely innocent."

"She seemed that way to me too. But let's not jump to conclusions. Tonight, we'll meet with her brother, his family, and Felix. You'll come along as well."

"Alright. But the killer could really be Mr. Isaac and his wife. The man may have been jealous of his brother. Besides, he didn't even have a proper job. He couldn't have asked for a better opportunity to inherit. His wife may have influenced him."

"I don't know, Joseph. The killer might turn out to be someone we never expected. I'm starving like a wolf. Let's go eat, then head to the mansion."

They had dinner at the hotel's restaurant. The food wasn't bad, but for Santiago, Irish cuisine was something else. After dinner, they took a short stroll in Birmingham. It was drizzling, but the air was filled with oxygen. It was a wonderful evening for a walk. They walked to the mansion, and when they arrived, it was 7:15 pm. They rang the doorbell. Joseph said,

"Wow, the house is really beautiful." Santiago,

"But not much beauty resides within."

The servant opened the door. They entered. In the living room, Mr. James, Mrs. Audrey, Mrs. Emilia, a young man, another man, a woman were sitting. They all stood up when they saw them enter.

Shaking hands, Mr. James said, "Welcome, Mr. Santiago, please have a seat."

Joseph gave a slight nod and introduced himself. They all sat down.

"I believe your mother is still in bed," Santiago said. Mrs. Audrey replied:

"She doesn't speak, eat, or drink. But you can go in and check her room."

"If it's not a bother, I'd like to see. It would also be an opportunity to offer my condolences," Santiago said. The man he just met said:

"Hello, Mr. Santiago, I'm Isaac Griffiths, James's brother."

"Hello, Mr. Isaac, pleasure to meet you." Turning to the others, Santiago asked, "Is there a room where I can speak with Mr. Isaac alone?"

Mrs. Gabriella said, "I'm his wife, and I'd like to be present. Please talk to both of us," and hastily jumped in.

"Let's talk to Mr. Isaac alone first, and then I'll speak with you, ma'am," Santiago said with determination.

The woman tried not to show any signs of distress, but it was clear she was tense. She understood they were under suspicion. Mr. James directed the three of them to the sitting room

on the upper floor. He closed the door. It was a small, charming room. They sat on opposite couches. Santiago was about to start speaking when Isaac interjected.

"Mr. Santiago, I can guess more or less what you're going to say. But I swear, I have nothing to do with my father's death. We're the only acquaintances living near this house; we don't really have any neighbors. So, it's understandable for me to be suspected. James probably told you that our relationship wasn't very good. But regardless of the reason, I'm not a person who would deliberately harm my father. I haven't even been able to shake off the impact of this loss yet. In the past, I never offered him any share in the company or any inheritance, and I certainly won't now, nor do I desire to." Joseph and Santiago looked at each other. Joseph asked,

"Where were you on Saturday, Mr. Isaac?"

Mr. Isaac was getting angry. Santiago,

"Mr. Isaac, we are obliged to question everyone, everyone. Please don't take it personally. My only request is that you provide clear answers to the questions we ask. If you have no connection to this incident, your cooperation will greatly assist us in resolving the matter smoothly.

Mr. Isaac had softened a bit, but he still felt tense, constantly rubbing his hands together. He began to explain:

"In the morning, I had a piano lesson with a student at 11. I taught until 12:30. After sending my student off, I went out to get some fresh air. I usually do this activity at least three times a week. I enjoy wandering around aimlessly. I toured around Birmingham for about 3 or 4 hours. Around 4:00 PM, I picked up my daughter Lily from school and brought her home. I had dinner with my family. Joseph asked,

"Did you consume any alcohol?"

He hesitated. "What does it matter? Are you going to blame me or not?" Joseph insisted,

"Mr. Isaac, we need to know every detail, please."

"I had a bit, but only after dinner."

What did you have?

In a slightly embarrassed tone, like a naughty child, he said, "Whiskey."

"So, you had only a little?"

Isaac replied tensely, "Yes, just two glasses."

Santiago took notes. Isaac was becoming increasingly tense. Santiago asked,

"And then?"

"I sat for a while, went out to the balcony for a cigarette around 2 in the early morning, and then went back to bed. That's all."

"When did you learn about the death?"

"James called me at 5 in the morning. He told me that my father had been taken to the hospital but couldn't be saved. As soon as I heard, my wife and I went to them." Santiago,

"Thank you for taking the time to share this. Could you please call your wife?"



Isaac left the room, and his wife entered. Santiago,

"Welcome, Mrs. Gabriella. Please have a seat."

The woman was trying to appear calm, but it was evident she was tense. Joseph,

"Could you tell me what you did on Saturday, Mrs. Gabriella?"

Of course, I can tell you, she said, trying to adopt a confident demeanor. "After sending my daughter to school in the morning, I slept until noon. Then I got ready, which took about 2 hours. After that, around 2:00 PM, I met up with my friend. I returned home at 5:00 PM. After having dinner with the family, my husband and I sat for a while and had some whiskey. Then I went to sleep." Santiago,

"So, you learned about the death in the morning, is that correct?"

"Yes, that's right. We were very saddened."

Santiago detected a hint of mockery in her voice. He took notes of what she said, thanked her, and asked her to fetch Felix.

Felix entered the room. He had a poker face. Santiago,

"Hello, Felix. How are you?"

"I'm fine, thank you. And you?"

"I'm good, thanks. I called you here to ask you a few questions, if that's alright?"

"No problem, you can ask whatever you want."

"Great. Where were you on Saturday, Felix, and what were you doing?"

"I went to school early in the morning, got out around 4, spent some time with my friends, then came home around 7. I had dinner, studied, and went to sleep." Joseph,

"All the way until morning?"

"Yes."

"How did you find out about your grandfather's death?" Santiago,

"I heard my dad's voice. Then my mom's. My sister and I went up the stairs together and found him lying in a pool of blood in front of the mirror. Then he was taken to the hospital." Joseph,

"Did you notice anything that caught your attention, anything that made you suspicious?"

"No. But the house was very cold that day."

They looked at each other for a while. Felix got up and left the room. Santiago and Joseph were slightly taken aback. Santiago had taken notes of what the boy had said.

Joseph: "What are you thinking?"

Santiago: "It's hard to say. There's no substantial evidence, no real leads, just floating suspicions."

"To be honest, I didn't like that Felix one bit, I'll tell you that much."

"Truth be told, I didn't like his demeanor either. He seemed like he knew something."

"What does he mean by 'the house was very cold'? Is he trying to say that they killed my grandfather and left the door open?"

"It's possible, Joseph."

"You're just saying 'it's possible' to everything. Give me some insight, for heaven's sake!"

As they were discussing, shouts came from outside. They looked at each other, then hurriedly left the room. The voices were coming from the upper floor. They rushed up.

Everyone had gathered in Mr. Colton and Mrs. Natalie's room. The women were crying, and everyone looked helplessly at the elderly woman. She was dead.

Her face was pallid, and her pillow had fallen to the ground. Santiago realized she had been smothered.

Joseph told everyone to step aside. Santiago quietly checked the woman's pulse and breathing. There was no movement. He whispered to Joseph, "The killer is here." Joseph looked slightly alarmed. He turned around and examined each person one by one. Without drawing attention, Gabriella pulled Santiago aside.

As you pressed Isaac, Felix said "I'm going to the bathroom" and went upstairs from the living room. When it was my turn to be questioned, I went upstairs. You already kept me brief. After leaving the room, he was coming towards the stairs, but not from the direction of the bathroom, but from the direction of the stairs leading up. You told me to call Felix and I told Felix that you had called him, and then he went into the room. So I went downstairs."

Santiago grew more serious. He searched for Felix with his eyes but couldn't find him. He went down to the living room, he wasn't there. He went up one floor, to his room. He was swinging at the end of the rope, hung by the lamp. Santiago said, "Oh my God, he's hanged himself." He didn't know what to do, so he went to the boy. He found an envelope on his desk. He opened it and this is what was written:

Dear Griffiths Family;

If you are reading this letter that I wrote, it means I am already dead. I am a killer. I have an uncontrollable desire to kill that I could never understand the reason for. Up to this day, I have killed 7 people. I killed 4 people from my school, and the other 3 I saw on the street and deemed them worthy of death. The die is cast. I can't hold myself back. Nothing gives me pleasure like killing. I couldn't help but think how killing one of my family members would be pleasurable. I cried, cried infinitely. I told myself, 'You must stop now,' but I couldn't get them to listen. That's why I decided to kill the family member furthest from me, the one it would make the most sense for to die; my grandfather.

But there was a hitch. At night, while struggling with him, my grandmother saw. I have to finish her off too. Otherwise, my business is over.

I don't want to kill anyone else in my family. The solution to this is simple, to kill myself.

Take care of yourselves.

Felix

He heard Joseph calling him: "Santiago! Where are you! Santiago!"

He walked out into the corridor. Joseph was trying to get everyone downstairs. They met on the stairs. Santiago stuttered:

"Mr. James, Mrs. Audrey... Y-your son F-felix hanged himself. In his r-room..."

Upon hearing that Felix had hanged himself right after Mrs. Natalie's death, his parents lost themselves. Santiago and Joseph didn't allow anyone to enter Felix's room. The servants were instructed to lock the room. His mother, father, and sister were crying, screaming, constantly asking how. Santiago read the letter aloud to everyone. Their son was mentally ill. But his family had never been able to notice. In the letter, he confessed to killing 7 more people, maybe even more. The locations of the bodies were unknown.

Both of them were buried, but the family couldn't recover. Mr. James wanted to move, but Mrs. Audrey had lost her sanity. Emilia wanted to move as well. They moved to Bristol a month after the incident. Mr. Isaac wanted to support his brother, but Gabriella wanted to distance themselves because they had been accused in Mr. Colton's murder. So they moved to Lavenham.

After the incident, Santiago and Joseph did everything they could. They also attended the funerals. After the funeral, they walked back to the hotel. Joseph said:

"Wasn't England enough for you, do you think?"

"It really turned out that way. I want to escape to Ireland immediately."

"Well, you didn't really contribute much to solving the murder, Felix handled everything, you didn't even break a sweat."

"Is it the time for jokes, Joseph? It was such a tragic event. May God give them all strength. It's the first time I've encountered such a situation."

"Aren't they all different from each other anyway?"

"But it's the first time things progressed without me. Just 19 years old... A 19-year-old killer."

"It was a clumsy murder. This is how it naturally goes."