

CROSS OF UNDERSTANDING

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"Good afternoon. Father Patrick MacReady, I presume. I am Police Lieutenant Arthur Jamison."

"Pleased to meet you at last, Lieutenant. The unfortunate Sergeant Robert Johnson and I were friends. He was a great admirer of your ability to solve poetic challenges. He showed me cases that you had solved. Shall we go into the study? What case are you investigating?"

"Right now it is the death of Salvatore Maestri, or 'Big Sal' as the underworld called him."

"Wasn't he implicated in the shooting death of Cabot Henry? According to the newspapers, there was an alleged dispute over territory."

"Maestri had an alibi for time that the shooting took place."

"How did Maestri die?"

"He was found dead in his bed. The autopsy proved that Maestri had been strangled. There was no sign of a struggle. On a stand next to his bed, this envelope was found. Though there is a postmark, there is no return address. Beside the envelope, the following verse was found:

Pained death incurs dilemma. Act now or prized life is dross.
Revenge is not stern answer. How void core where mad lust is.
Oppose instinct of response. End will bow to greater justice.
Forge bonds of restraint. Reinforce trust in pristine Wraith.
Enraged mind roils sense. Professed power is no implied loss.
Stronger hatred inflames. Pressured nature denies true faith.
Sinner, suffer cold remorse. Ask craven soul where menace is.
Endure torments of suspense. You shall dread strange nemesis.
Depressed fool rues offense. Try to understand clue of cross.

"Very interesting, Lieutenant, but why did you come here?"

"Two items, Father. The first was a surveillance report. In that report the officer stated that Maestri had visited your church. The officer hadn't followed him in, so I don't know if Maestri sat down in one of the pews or had taken refuge in one of the booths."

"The law of sanctuary takes precedence. What transpires inside the church is sacrosanct."

"Are you the only priest?"

"Yes."

"Then it would be inappropriate to ask if you had seen or had heard Maestri?"

"Correct. What is the second item?"

"This photograph was found in Cabot Henry's effects."

"This is a snapshot taken of Cabot and me standing in front of St. Dominique."

"Was Cabot Henry your friend?"

"More than that. He was my twin brother. Our mother had died in childbirth. Cabot was adopted by the Henrys, while I was placed in a different foster home. Cabot's path in life led to crime. Mine led to the Church. What are you going to do now?"

"It appears that both cases will remain in the 'Open' file. No solid evidence can be presented to the District Attorney. Though I have a gut feeling that Maestri killed or had one of his soldiers kill Henry, I know who strangled Maestri. The poem told me."

"With Maestri dead, will you arrest his strangler?"

"I will show the poem to the District Attorney. I am a seeker of truth, Father. I leave the dispensation of justice to greater powers."

"Thank you for coming, Lieutenant. Remember, we poor sinners have a compulsive need to confess or to bear our cross in silence."