

Giada Ferro

KATE WATSON
CRIME IN THE LIBRARY

To My Parents,

Because since my childhood, they have been able to make me love reading.

*Every day newspapers testify that the most serious occupation of men is always
killing other men.*

Francesco Burdin, *Un milione di giorni*, 2001

DEATH SEARCHES

On a cold winter evening a man was walking across the 5th Avenue up to the corner of 42nd St. A taxi left him a few blocks before, where he got out for not imply his destination. He walked toward the lights, still on, of the New York Public Library, that promised warmth and shelter from the bitter cold of that season.

Entering he felt immediately a pleasant feeling of warmth, while his cheeks began to turn red for the difference in temperature between the inside and the outside. He gave a nod to the doorman who repeatedly slapped the finger at his watch as if to say: "Hurry!"

The closing time would come soon and there were not many visitors around. Without delay he went to the archeology section, his steps that echoed in the silent corridors. Now he rarely visited the library, all he needed was already in his personal library, but when he was younger he spent there whole days for many years. For this reason, now he had no doubt on the way forward.

Despite his age, he advanced quickly through the maze of shelves, sometimes running other limping. He folded a couple of tourists and readers, but he didn't deign them of a look. Under normal circumstances he would greet politely, but that day he had no time to lose. Actually, he won't ever have in future, he was perfectly aware that his days were numbered. So he ignored the warning that intimated him to give up the search, on pain of death. For one reason or another he would die the same, the question was: "Who would be: the disease or the man of the threat?"

However, he could not stand the idea that his research would end, not after so much work and so much effort. Someone else will follow his footsteps and that someone will be the last loved one he had in the world. That was why he was there: to leave a clue on the way forward. One clue that only the right person will be able to interpret. He turned the corner that led to his destination and, absorbed in his thoughts, he bumped into someone. A man of uncertain age, rather tall with a beard too haphazard and blue eyes. He didn't dwell on the details, he was in a hurry. He mumbled an apology, ready to continue on its way but the man stopped him saying - He is Mr. Johnson, well-known archaeologist and discoverer of many ancient relics, isn't him?

- Yes, of course. Here I'm ...

- Allow me to introduce myself - said the stranger, holding out his right hand where a particular gold ring stood out. Mr. Johnson shook the stranger's hand feeling a sudden sharp pain in the palm of his hand. *Ah, the oldness*, he thought. - My name is John Smith and I attend ...

- I'm sorry I'm in a hurry - said before running to slip in the archeology department to browse the wanted book. While he went on with the search the image of those blue eyes haunted him. He was sure he had already seen them. Meanwhile he had found a folded piece of paper in the middle of the pages of the book. He opened it, reading a few lines written. It was crossed by a shudder, while his mind remembered the ring and the eyes. And when he realized her heart began to beat too fast, his hands began to shake violently and the air in the lungs to fail him. *After all these years*, he thought. He collapsed on the reading table plotting with her nails a few words on the pages of the book hoping that someone would notice the grooves. Writing he noticed the black bruise on the palm of his hand and thought of the thick, similar to a sting, tried shaking hands with the stranger. The last thought before he died was that now he had the answer to his question, the man of the threat had arrived before the disease.

CRIME IN THE LIBRARY

A ringing phone rang in the silence. Another phone ringing. Silence. Kate Watson answered in the middle of the third ring. - Ready? – her sleepy voice highlighted the fact that until a few seconds before, she was sleeping soundly. The woman looked at the alarm clock on the nightstand: it was the three o'clock in the morning. Who could be at that hour?

- Kate? - the voice at the other head of the phone seemed familiar, but she didn't recognize it immediately – I'm the inspector Alec Stewart. I would not bother but ...

How not?, thought Kate. It's only the three in the morning, who is asleep at this hour?

- Don't worry, just tell me.

- There's a new murder case I would like to bring to your attention. I'll wait you at the police station as soon as possible.

The phone call ended before she could reply or ask for more information. Kate stretched herself yawning. She has been investigator for many years, but she didn't get used to the phone calls that woke her up in the middle of the night bringing news of deaths, rapes and violence of all kinds yet. In New York City crime never slept and as a consequence neither she.

With a sigh of resignation she got out of bed to prepare herself for another day of work.

...

In twenty minutes Kate came to the police station where the inspector Alec Stewart was waiting for her with two cups of coffee in his hands. Without wasting time on small talks, the inspector accompanied her on the scene: The New York Public Library.

The New York Public Library (NYPL) is the third largest library in North America and holds an impressive number of volumes. It is privately operated by a no-profit association with a public mission, operating with public and private funding.

They crossed an infinite number of rooms and finally arrived in the department of archeology.

- It's a very unusual case, doesn't it?

Kate nodded looking at the corpse lying sprawled on a table, his face supported on an open book: seemed to be asleep. She read quickly the title of the book, that didn't remember her anything particular. Apparently there was no sign of violence, no blood. The victim was an elderly man, with a long white beard, wearing a tweed suit and gold-rimmed spectacles with round lenses. *A strange man that doesn't go unnoticed*, she thought. - Do we know something about his identity?

- Not yet. He was undocumented.

- And I suppose there aren't deponent ...

- You're right. – said Mr. Stewart – He was found by the night watchman during the regular inspection tour.

- How did they not notice it before? – asked Kate.

- Because this is a little-used room and the shelves full of books prevent cameras to shoot this corner. And then, didn't you see how big is this place?

Kate thought about how it should be walking along those corridors, through all those rooms every night just to make sure it was alright. She thought how it must have been to find a corpse and be crossed by a thrill while wondered if the murderess was still there ... She shivered involuntarily and suddenly found herself to complain the night watchman. Kate gave a last look at the victim's face. She had the impression of having already seen it. She squinted and bit her lower lip, thinking – For the moment all we can do is waiting for the analysis of forensic ...

POISON

- Poison.

- Poison? – Kate, doubtful, looked at the response of the forensic, looking away from the corpse lying on one of the numerous beds of the morgue.

- Yes. It's a rare type of poison that kills its victims slowly and without that they can notice it. The symptoms, such as a fast heart beats and the sudden lack of oxygen, appear only when it is too late to do something. It doesn't leave obvious outward signs except for one small bruise at the point where it was injected.

The forensic Megan Bones showed her the purplish bruise in the palm of the victim's right hand.

- How could he obtain it? – asked Kate, focusing her cold blue eyes on those warm and brown of Megan. The two women were so different as to represent two opposites. Kate was quite tall and slim, pale skin, ice-blue eyes and long, straight, black hair that reached to the waist, while Megan, shorter, had tanned skin, brown eyes and curly reddish hair.

They have started their careers together and know each other for a lifetime. Kate had full confidence in Megan and in her suppositions, while Megan admired her for her insight (intuition) and his stubbornness in wanting to solve each case at any cost.

- In many ways ... - replied the woman.

- For example with a brooch?

- Yes, of course. But also a pen in which the ink was mixed with poison, a letter opener or something like that ... but these are only suppositions.

- Yes but your suppositions are often correct! – Kate smiled at her friend – If you think about something else, let me know! Meanwhile I will control if near the scene of the crime there were some object that could correspond to the description of the murder weapon.

- Ok ... but, Kate?

- Yes?

- Tell me, how is working with Stewart?

The question caught her unprepared. Alec Stewart had recently replaced the inspector Anderson, who had retired less than two weeks before. Now Kate Watson and Alec Stewart started to work together. The man was a little older than her, he must be about 35 years old and at first she had judged him too inexpert to replace the old inspector. Actually her feelings of aversion depended on the fact that she had hoped until the last to get her the post of inspector. Having witnessed Anderson in almost every case, and having solved many of them she thought she deserved it. However reading his impeccable curriculum and observing the shocking number of solved cases she had to change his mind and to set aside the resentment. It cost her to admit, but he was really a great investigator. However, the rivalry was far from extinguished.

- Well, not bad - answered with a face expression of feigned indifference. - But he hasn't the Anderson's experience and ...

- Ah, but stop it! - scolded her friend - I've also read his resume. The fact that he is so good doesn't diminish your ability and your brilliant intuition. You should remember it!

- But stop lecturing me, Megan! – said Kate raising theatrically her eyes to heaven. She was amazed that Megan knew her so well. Then she turned and walked out of the morgue.

DAVID JOHNSON

Kate sipped her third coffee of the day, staring at the blackboard on which they use to take notes about progress in investigations. It was almost completely empty, the murderess leaved no traces. He was so meticulous as to suggest an illness. After all, it wasn't so strange, view of the age of Mr. David Johnson. Already, the victim was professor Johnson, well-known archaeologist whose life was full of discoveries and findings of important ancient artifacts.

Kate wondered how she didn't recognize him immediately. The professor came from New York and she remembered that she was present in some of his conferences, when she was still studying for a degree in archeology. She began that road on the advice of his father, who was a historian and was also able to make her enthusing to that subject. Then his father was murdered, the case never resolved, and she realized that wasn't her vocation, so she started devoting herself to the study of criminology.

Mr. Johnson, despite of his advanced age, had never retired. *The work was his life ... and probably also the cause of his death*, she thought bitterly.

- Do we know if he was working on something special, before his death? Maybe a new discovery? - she asked, calling on Stewart that seemed ready to drown in the pile of papers that perpetually occupied his desk and many of the available shelves.

- Unfortunately, no - he said appearing between the stacks of documents and passing a hand through his blond hair as he usually do. - But, in my opinion, the answer is in the book that he was consulting at the time of death.

The Thamopilis' papyrus, repeated to herself and herself. Despite of his good knowledge on the subject, she wasn't sure of what it was.

- I'm going to do a research on this papyrus and I'm going to examine personally the book as soon as the scientific analysis will be finished.

-Ah, here it is! - exclaimed Stewart, waving a piece of paper marched from a pile of notes - It seems that Johnson wasn't working alone, but with ... Sarah Collins!

Kate frowned dubiously - Strange, I always heard the name of Johnson accompanied by that of Benjamin Fray ...

- In fact it's with him that Johnson came to his most important discoveries. Then something must have happened, because they cut the ties one another.

- It must be something serious to prompt them to separate after so many years of joint work. We should investigate on him, but first let's see what Sarah Collins has to say us!

SARAH COLLINS

Sarah Collins sat in front of them with shocked look, silent tears streaming down her cheeks.

- We're sorry about bringing you this news – said Stewart - We didn't know that he was her grandfather ...

She ran a hand over his eyes in a vain attempt to dry the tears - Forgive my reaction, but I was very fond of him. He was the father of my mother, he grew up me among the books and he has been able to convey me his passion for archeology ...

Sarah didn't correspond at all to the idea that Kate got of the assistant of a famous archaeologist as Johnson. Before to know she was the nephew, Kate imagined a middle-aged woman and now, seeing the young twenties, with blond hair and blue eyes who looked innocent and bewildered, Kate was very surprised. – I don't want to seem heartless, but I have to ask you this question. Where were you on the evening of the 21st of December?

- I was here with my mother. We were decorating the house for Christmas and making preparations for the Christmas Eve. I really cannot imagine that someone would want him dead. How did it happen?

- Poison. Someone, who was in the library on that day, must have injected him without he could notice it. Anyway, he didn't suffer much, if that can take comfort to you. He would suffer more dying because of the disease that consumed him.

Sarah stared at her with a questioning look - What disease? He never mentioned anything like that.

Kate was about to reply, but Stewart anticipated her, shooting her a dirty look. He knew better how to deal with people, and she was often too direct so she let him speak. - The medical examiner, in addition to the poison, identified a serious lung disorder and a special case of arthrosis. It seems he was not at all well, he had no much time.

- How stupid I was to not notice it! I should send him to a doctor, but he hated them and dismissed each of our concern with a shrug. He said that when his hour would come, the death would find him anyway ... and he was right! - Sarah burst into tears again and detectives waited patiently for her to calm down. - We are really sorry, but we should make you a few more questions if you want we'll find the murderess – resumed Stewart – Have you got an idea of why he was at the public library? Was he working on something new lately?

- We were working together - she whispered through her tears - Recently, in the world of archaeologists, there was talk about an ancient Egyptian artifact. He decided to follow a runway, he said that would be his last discovery, and then he could die in peace.

But death found him before, thought Kate. – And did this artifact have something to do with “The Thamopilis’ papyrus”?

- Of course! - exclaimed the other woman almost shocked perhaps by the fact that she didn't know - It was the same papyrus, but how do you know that? It would be a secret ...

- Well it was the title of the book that the professor was referring to before he died.

– Are you sure? Here at home we have a whole library with lots of books on the subject, unique copies and precious volumes. In addition, recently we had ordered new texts. I doubt he really needs to go to the library.

Kate and Alec exchanged a questioning look, probably thinking the same thing.

And then why Johnson was right there?

* Questa voce è di pura invenzione

THE THAMOPILIS' PAPYRUS

Kate quickly typed the keywords to search on her personal computer. She was determined to find out all about the elusive papyrus. Immediately the "home" of Google left space to search results. There were a lot of results, but Kate chose, without delay, this one: **"The Thamopilis' papyrus" - Wikipedia* ***. The page that appeared was the following one.

The Thamopilis' Papyrus

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia

 [Disambiguation](#) – If you are searching *"The papyrus of Thermopylis"*.

The Thamopilis' papyrus, which authenticity is disputed ^[1], it is an impressive [papyrus](#) attributed at the eponymous Egyptian scribe who wrote it between [2000 B.C.](#) and [1800 B.C.](#)

It has never been found, but it is spoken in many other Egyptian and Greek papyri.



Content [\[edit\]](#) [\[edit source\]](#)

The papyrus, according to sources found, contains the directions to seven Egyptian tombs underground, never discovered before, in which were deposited treasures of inestimable value.

In the first two or three columns, there would be the directions on the geographical position of each of the seven tombs, followed by advice on how to overcome deadly traps placed in their defence. In columns IV and V, instead, there would be an accurate and detailed list on the riches contained in the graves.

The imperfect coincidence of sources relating to the storage location of the papyrus and its contents, as well as the place and time of writing, has led researchers to doubt his actual existence.

At last it was clear what it was. Meditating on the importance of such a discovery, Kate went back to search results her eye fell on particular one: *"Interview to archaeologist Fray: The Thamopilis' papyrus"*. Amazed by that incredible luck, she clicked rapidly on the written, waiting impatiently for end of loading of the web page. *Here at last!*, she exclaimed to herself and herself when it was ready. Reading Kate was nervously biting her lower lip.

The article dated shortly before and carried an interview where Benjamin Fray declared his intent in undertaking the search for the mysterious papyrus.

The archaeologist illustrated briefly the characteristics and history of the papyrus speculating and quoting some sources and then conclude by saying: "We are a step away from the most important archaeological discovery of the century, and nothing will be able to hinder us!"

Here is the No. 1 suspect and the motive for the crime, thought Kate. *I have to warn Stewart.*

POST SCRIPTUM

Alec went straight to the morgue, feeling a sudden drop in temperature from the outside. He shuddered, and for a moment he thought to install a better heating system, but he immediately dismissed the idea. When, as in this room, people had to do with the corpses, it was essential to maintain low ambient temperatures. This is why he could not complain.

He left Kate to carry out a research on the 'Thamopilis' papyrus and he was eager to know if the analysis of the book, found at the crime scene, had given their results.

Megan Bones, intent on studying something under a microscope, had not noticed his presence, so he cleared his throat before speaking – Do you have the results of the analysis of the book, Dr. Bones?

The woman spoke without taking her attention from work – It depends on who asks them to me ...

- We didn't know yet. I'm the inspector Alec Stewart and ...

Hearing his name Megan immediately gave him her attention - Ah, Inspector, I finally got the pleasure to meet you - she said, taking off momentarily one of the latex gloves she wore to offer him her right hand.

Alec shakes it - It's my pleasure. Kate spoke to me very well about her, Doctor.

- Of course, of course. I don't care pleasantries, so go straight to the point. Are you here for the analysis?

Alec nodded, following Megan in one of the latest generation of machines that filled the room. The woman showed him some pictures of the book on which the fingerprints were highlighted.

- Unfortunately nothing new. In all this chaos of impressions there are only those of Mr. Johnson, and other too old or too incomplete to help us. The same is for the piece of paper that the professor must have found in the pages of the book. The only thing that maybe can help you is what it says, that is "Ave atque Vale", a Catullus' sentence, which translated from Latin means ...

- Hail and farewell - completed Alec trying to conceal his disappointment. He hoped for some positive turning point in the survey, some clue that would allow him to go ahead with the case.

- Maybe that phrase had a particular meaning for the victim. The murderess wanted to be recognized by Johnson before killing him. The murderess wanted to be recognized by Johnson before killing him. It is as if they had a score to settle and the murderess wanted to let him know that he had lost and let him die with this awareness ... – supposed Megan.

Alec frowned - Where do you want to end up, Doctor?

- Well, analyzing the book, the fingerprints are not the only thing that I've found – on the woman's face hovered a half-smile of complacency and satisfaction. She showed him another picture of the book open to the page where they had found. The only difference was that now you could read an inscription. - The murderess is not the only one to left a message – Also Johnson had done it, tracing with nails of the grooves on the page.

Alec could not believe his eyes and his ears. Then there were some clues worthy of this name! Squinted and read aloud – "L 3, S 7, T 13. PS: Find BF. ... It looks like a code, and ... wait a moment! Post scriptum: find BF? Benjamin Fray?

- Elementary Watson! – exclaimed the woman - Oh, no. I was wrong. I kept this for the Kate!

Alec laughed, moving already toward the exit. - I'll keep it in mind, Doctor!

Now he absolutely had to warn Kate. Before going out he heard the woman's voice saying - Call me Megan!

INTERROGATION

- Stewart?

But where has he gone?, thought Kate. She searched him all over the police station, through the hallways, offices and rooms for interrogation, but he seemed disappeared. There was still only one place to go to find him. She turned into the corridor leading to the morgue, bumping into someone and that someone was Stewart. - Kate, I was looking for you.

- What a coincidence, me too.

- ... *We must talk with Benjamin Fray!* – they exclaimed together – *But how do you ... ?*

- Ok, stop speaking together! – said Kate - What have you discovered?

- Bones found a message that Johnson has left us shortly before his death. It is a kind of code followed by: "Find BF".

- Benjamin Fray? Even my research has led me to him. - Kate told him briefly what she had discovered - So we just have to interrogate Fray ...

...

It wasn't difficult to find the archaeologist. Coincidence or not he was in New York for two weeks for work. He had followed them to the police without resisting and now he was sitting in front of them in the interrogation room: a small and aseptic room, with a mirror on the wall behind them and a table provided with three chairs as unique décor. Benjamin Fray was younger than Johnson, graying hair, well-made beard, cold black eyes. Surely he was aware of why he was there and he was trying to understand if he was accused of something or not.

- Where were you on the evening of the 21st of December? – Stewart began without beating about the bush.

- I was sleeping in my flat here in New York.

- Is there anyone who can confirm that?

- Am I accused of something? - the archaeologist clasped his hands on the table and leaned forward slightly. He seemed calm.

- Not for now. This is a simple interrogation, restricted to answering questions. You should simply answer questions.

- Unfortunately, no. And if you're going to ask me if I killed Johnson, the answer is always the same: No.

Kate interjected - Tell us about your relationship with him.

- Merely professional, or so it was before our paths separated. As certainly you know, we worked together for many years. We were a very good team. Then one day we had a fight because of a trifle, it wasn't a good time for anyone, and we cut ties one another. I didn't hear news from him until they told me of his death. It was then that I realized that I would not have ever had the opportunity to make peace with him. I will regret for the rest of my days.

There was a moment of silence and then Stewart asked – Does this sentence, "Ave atque Vale" means something for you?

Fray seemed whiten and a shadow crossed his eyes, but he shook his head.

- And what do you tell me about this? - Alec held out him a slip of paper, where it was written the mysteriously code. Fray grabbed him blankly, as lost in a distant memory. - And how could I not recognize it? In the past I've had to do every day, but now I'm not the best person to ask. If it is what I think, Johnson's grandson has the answers you seek.

LIBRARY CODE

- Here it is. This is the book you're looking for. - Sarah handed her a thick, old and worn tome. The headline was: "Egyptians Mysteries".
- As soon as you have shown me that code I immediately recognized the filing system of our family library: 3rd Library, 7th Shelf and 13th Tome.
- Apparently Fray was right. Kate commented perusing the book, and coughing because of the dust. There was a bookmark, a sheet folded into three. Kate opened the book to that page and read the title without surprising: "The Thamopilis' papyrus."
- And this? What is it? - Alec grabbed bookmark and opened it. – Oh, yes! It seems that Johnson has also left us a letter.
- Really? - Sarah asked curiously - For who is it? What does it say?
- It's for Benjamin Fray - said Alec. The disappointment was evident in the eyes of Sarah, but she didn't have time to comment because Alec began to read.

Dear Benjamin,

When you read this letter, if it will be ever delivered to you, I'll be already dead.

I want to take this opportunity to right the wrongs done, forgive and ask for forgiveness for the words spoken, words that built a wall between us, a wall I intend to break down with this letter.

I forgive you, but above all I ask for your forgiveness and I hope that the letter of an old man now dead will be enough. However, this is not the only reason why I'm writing you.

I recently undertook the research of Thamopilis' Papyrus, just like you, from what I heard.

It is because of this, I have received explicit threats and I suspect about someone we both know.

As you might guess knowing my stubbornness I've ignored them, but I don't want you think I've wasted my life. I would have died anyway because of illness. So I deliberately ignored the threats, to allow Sarah to finish what I started.

And here we come to the second reason why I'm writing this letter. This is a request, one last favor, I ask in the name of our former friendship. Contact Sarah, tell her everything, including this letter and help her. My last wish is seeing you working together to arrive at the destination: the Thamopilis' Papyrus. Don't let anything block you!

And the third and last reason is a warning: if that someone who threatens me will get my death, he won't stop and he will eliminate anyone who is on the trail of the papyrus, so be cautious, but above all protect Sarah.

Ave atque Vale.

After reading Sarah burst into tears. Still *that* sentence, thought Kate. *Ave atque Vale. It must mean something, maybe it refers to the killer. That isn't Fray. It must be someone who still we don't know ... But who could he be?*

- We have to put Fray under protection - she suddenly said – Tonight!

UNDER PROTECTION

- Yes, of course. Don't worry, inspector. I am safe in my apartment, I don't need protection. - Fray was at the phone with the Inspector Stewart. It was late evening and he was sitting with his legs crossed and his feet on the desk, watching absently some notes on his research. When he answered the phone he was surprised to hear the voice of the detective, it was late and he didn't expect any phone calls, let alone by the police.

- Well, for tonight. Since tomorrow he will be under protection. - The inspector's voice brooked no argument. Benjamin hung up with a sense of amazement and happiness. It was as if someone had lifted a boulder from his chest. Not only because he had been removed from the list of suspects, but also because Stewart had mentioned a letter that Johnson had left him.

He was about to get up and go to bed when he noticed a post-it on his desk that he didn't remember to have left. Reading it, he shuddered: Ave atque Vale.

Suddenly he heard the sound of a door slamming and a shiver went down along the spine, while a black terror gripped his icy fingers around his heart.

...

Kate sat in the passenger seat next to Stewart, They were returning to the police station. Outside the window, the bright city lights lit up the streets crowded with cars and taxis.

She was brooding over the latest happenings and she couldn't shake off that bad feeling that she brought with her from the discovery of the letter.

Stewart's cell phone rang – Keep and answer, please - he said.

Kate took the phone out of the hands of Stewart – It's Fray - she said, feeling that sense of uneasiness growing inside her - Hello?

Silence. He heard activate the speakerphone and the archaeologist's tense voice - Stephen ... lastly you came.

For a moment she didn't understand. Who was Stephen? Then she realized that he must be the Johnson's murderess and he is going to reap its next victim.

- Stewart, we have a problem. - despite of the awareness of what was happening not many blocks away her voice was firm and determined - Alec looked at her questioningly.

- Do you know Fray's address?

- Yes, but ...

- Well, because that is where we are going. Let's get moving or tonight we'll have another victim.

Alec didn't delay any further. He turned on the siren and in a few seconds they were darting along 42nd Street.

AVE ATQUE VALE

Stephen stood in front of him, leaning against the jamb of the door with a gun in his hand and a crazy expression on his face.

- Stephen ... - he said - lastly you came. I was waiting for you ...

Hoping to not get noticed, Benjamin put the phone, in hands-free mode, on the shelf under the desk. Detectives Stewart and Watson would have heard everything and maybe they would arrive in time to save him, but he had to take time.

- Don't call me by that name! - hissed the other stiffened.

- Why not? After all, it's your first name.

- No, that was the name by which Johnson called me. I repudiated it centuries ago. Call me Anthony Valenti, like my father.

Benjamin's gaze lingered over the ring engraved with the initials "AV". It was his family ring and beyond to bring the initials of his father, it wanted to remember a famous Catullus' quote: Ave atque Vale.

- Okay Antony. Did you know I immediately recognized your signature "Ave atque Vale"? But I didn't say anything because I hoped to be wrong.

- Be wrong about what?

- On the fact that you killed David Johnson, your teacher and mentor. At first I didn't want to believe it, but who else could it be?

- Good, I have to compliment. You've changed a lot since you worked with Johnson: now you can do two plus two - said Stephen ironic and with a hint of hysteria in his voice.

Benjamin didn't let the offense trouble him and kept his voice calm.

- You're also changed much since you were a young graduate take by Johnson under his protection. The greed and lust for glory have changed you. You just wanted to see your name written on every archaeological discovery, you weren't interested in the progress. I understood it's your fault if David and I had a fight. He didn't want to believe me, he didn't believe in the evidence and he didn't follow my advice by staying away from you. He realized too late who you truly are. What isn't clear to me is: why did you do it? Why did you kill him?

Stephen began to tremble of anger - I was fed of living in his shadow! I would stay forever just his assistant, so I left him. But he continued to haunt me, doing his discoveries ever before me ... And when he gets on the trail of Thamopilis' papyrus I had to stop him. It was the only possible solution, do you understand?

But Benjamin understood something else: Stephen was completely out of his mind, his lust for glory had led him to madness. He tried to approach without making it even more nervous.

- And then ... did you find this papyrus? - asked cautiously.

- I'll resume the research later when I have deleted you and Johnson's grandson. - Stephen raised his gun pointing it at Benjamin.

- Wait. Before you kill me, tell me how did you poisoned Johnson. I'll take your secret to the grave.

Stephen turned his ring between his fingers. - It was easy to insert a small needle poisoned in the engraving of my ring. Then it took just a handshake. Satisfied now?

Benjamin nodded, he didn't know anything else to invent.

- So ... Ave atque Vale, Benjamin Fray.

...

Kate and Alec were running up the stairs of the building where Fray lived when they heard the echo of the sound of a gunshot.

- Let's get moving, hoping it's not too late! - exclaimed Stewart removing the safe from the gun and continuing to run. Kate did the same following him.

Now their main priority was to save Fray, provided that he was still alive, so they couldn't wait for the reinforcements. They came to the door of the apartment and found it ajar.

Alec silently mouthed the words - *On three we go ...*

Kate nodded that she understood.

- One ... Two ... Three!

Together widened the door and rushed in. Kate was just in time to see Fray lying on the ground, bleeding from his shoulder, at the foot of the murderer. It was hard to miss the target at that distance, had to be able to move to the side when shooting, avoiding a fatal blow.

Kate stood behind the assassin just outside the door of the study, while Stewart hid flattening himself against the wall.

- Drop the gun or I'll shoot! - yelled she.

The other, surprised, turned slowly with the arm with the gun still raised.

- Drop it!

The man smiled, but it was a smile that didn't contagious the eyes of frosty a blue, and made him look like a grimace: it was the smile of a madman.

- You won't shoot me ... - he said taking a step forward. When the arm went to be outside of the door Stewart, who was standing nearby, dropped over it, with how much force can be, the butt of the gun disarming the man and then knocking him down with a punch in the face.

The murderess fell down spitting blood, but Kate held his gun pointed at him until Stewart handcuffed him, then picked up the weapon on the ground, she rushed over to help Fray, while Alec was calling an ambulance.

The man on the ground was very pale and this highlighting the red of the blood. He breathed difficulty, Kate tried to stop the bleeding. She felt his heartbeat weak but steady and she said to herself that he would survive.

- Do not worry, the ambulance will be here soon ...

The other could whisper a faint "Thank you."

- No, thank you. Now we have the murderess and all we need to throw him in jail until the end of his days.

SIX MONTHS LATER

Kate sipped her usual morning coffee. She was at the police station with Stewart. They worked together on a new case: a triple murder. This time it was a serial killer and they were following him for days.

At one point she heard Alec calling her from the next room. She reached him and saw that he was watching the TV. There was news program.

Stewart turned and smiled – Come here and listen, Kate.

At that moment the operator of the newscast was announcing the next service, whose title was familiar. Then on the screen appeared the image of a young blonde woman with proud and happy blue eyes, followed by a man much older than her with graying hair and beard well done as usual.

A smile appeared on Kate's lips, while the interviewed girl appeared saying - *I'm Sarah Collins and this is Benjamin Fray. We're pleased to announce the discovery of Thamopilis' papyrus!*