

CRESCENT

ACT ONE: THE CATACOMBS

Rome's busy streets introduce us to workers, tourists, chaotic traffic, and religious pilgrims look up at the Vatican in reverence.

MEET ELIJAH (male, 28), a Sanpietrino - an elite artisan on a large team that maintains the Vatican's complex buildings and installations. Elijah heads toward the Vatican, ready to work for the day, picking up his daily newspaper from CASTOR (male, 60), who runs a stand in an edicola (a hexagonal vending unit) just outside the walls of the Vatican.

Elijah heads through the church as tourists and locals pray. He stops and offers a small prayer. He wistfully moves through the busy cathedral and disappears through a back door, leading him into the hidden corridors of the infamous church.

Elijah grabs keys from a small office and heads down to the necropolis, the ancient catacombs that hide buried history the public doesn't usually get to see. With a flash light in hand, he unlocks gates that look like jail doors.

The atmosphere is dark and creepy, but Elijah shows no fear - he has done this a thousand times before.

He reaches a dimly lit, stone-lined corridor and replaces a bulb in a light fixture. He flicks the switch, and the light fizzles to life. He packs his tool bag and starts heading back up toward a less damp environment.

As he opens a gate, a PRIEST and a YOUNG BOY push past him, heading down into the darkness. The priest nods politely at Elijah, the young boy trailing behind him with a modern lantern in hand.

In a passing comment, the priest tells Elijah that the boy is crazy for history and that he has brought him down here for a personal tour. Elijah nods silently and watches as the two head farther into the dark catacombs. He leaves the gate unlocked and heads back up.

The priest beckons the boy over to an etching on the wall gently caressing it with his finger. He instructs the boy to do the same. The boy nervously reaches out the wall with his trembling finger. The boy turns to see the priest make an inappropriate gesture and moves toward him.

The boy grabs at his chest, where a small stone figurine in the shape of an ancient griffin hangs from his necklace. He squeezes it tightly.

The necklace falls to the floor.

We get closer to the idol. A drop of sweat lands on it. And it jumps, as if the floor has been shaken.

The priest jumps back, startled by the noise.

It's an earthquake.

It intensifies.

The priest is knocked back onto the floor. Now sensing an opportunity, the boy runs off down the corridor toward his freedom. The priest, dazed, gets to his feet and finds it difficult as the walls shake around him.

Stone and debris fall to the ground and cover him with earth and dirt. All the lights go off.

The earthquake stops.

There is silence.

He fumbles in his pockets for his flash light and drops it into the darkness. The silence is terrifying. He breathes heavily with fear.

A noise comes from the end of the corridor - a sound like wood twisting and snapping. He reaches down, now desperate, for his light.

The torch is found, and the priest points it down toward the corridor, toward the noises. Something moves. But what is it?

The priest looks at the wall where his hand is resting. It is covered in moss. He rips it away in shock and rubs it off furiously, like it was covered in a hundred spiders.

The noise again. He points his light back down the corridor. He calls out.

PRIEST

Who's there? Show yourself!

Nothing. Just silence.

He steps forward to point the light source further down the corridor. Out of nowhere, a twisted, root-like hand comes out of the dark and grabs his throat.

The light is dropped.

Fade to black.

ACT TWO: THE CHOIR

The next morning, Elijah leaves his apartment. The sun is out and the city is full of colour. A NEIGHBOUR (female, 50), sweeping the steps outside his apartment block, offers him morning greetings. She passes on her condolences for the accident at the Vatican - which Elijah hasn't a clue about. He makes his excuses to leave and hastily heads to work.

Outside a side entrance, police and emergency services gather.

Elijah approaches a POLICEMAN and inquires about the incident. He finds out about the death of the priest he saw the day before in the necropolis - there was an earthquake that caused the walls and ceiling to collapse around him, killing him instantly.

He asks the policeman about the young boy that was with him, and he is told there was no boy found. Just the body of the priest.

He makes his way in, pushing past the emergency workers, and manages to get down into the incident area deep under the Vatican.

Ignoring all warnings about the dangers of heading down into the corridors, he sneaks past everyone and finds himself alone in the corridor he was in the day before.

As he turns the corner - a surreal and terrifying spectacle reveals itself.

In the centre of this dark and ancient place lies the priest. He lies upon a pile of rocks, twisted roots and vibrant moss. His arms are spread out like a crucifixion. It resembles a Renaissance painting.

Impossible to describe with words.

Not making any sense.

Unworldly and morbid - and at the same time, beautiful.

Elijah leaves, confused and upset. As he ascends, he crosses paths with one of his superiors, a CARDINAL (male, 65). The Cardinal asks him why he is down here in this dangerous place. Elijah explains that he was the last person to see the priest - alone with a young boy.

The Cardinal dismisses the claim and tells him that affairs of the Church must remain private, and that a young boy would not be allowed down here without his consent.

Elijah heads back up, more confused than before.

What happened to the boy?

Is he okay?

Is he safe?

Castor sits at his edicola, bathing in the sun, greeting his regulars. He carefully tidies all the newspapers when something catches his eye - the headline:

"PRIEST DIES IN FREAK EARTHQUAKE UNDER THE VATICAN."

The photo of the incident, of the priest lying there amongst the earth and roots, reminds him of something. He has seen this scene before.

He heads inside and grabs a book from his collection, sitting on a messy shelf covered in till receipts and general behind-the-counter clutter. The cover reads CRESCENT in an old typeface. The book is old - at least 150 years old.

He flips through the pages, searching for the image. There, deep in the heart of the book, is a hand-drawn medieval illustration of a man covered in roots and earth, almost buried under the weight of it all. It bears a striking resemblance to the newspaper photograph.

Elijah drives through the streets of Rome, carefully navigating tourists who cross at will, a coffee in one hand. A boy runs out in front of the car. Elijah slams on the brakes, the coffee spilling everywhere. He looks up to curse the boy - and recognises his face. The boy from the catacombs.

The boy bolts down a side street. Elijah calls out for him to stop, but the boy has no plans to wait around. Elijah pulls over and pursues the young lad through the back streets.

The boy eludes him for a moment, but Elijah - a man of precision - finds him before he can abscond. Holding the boy by the arm, he asks whether he is all right after the earthquake. The boy denies the incident ever happened. Then he makes a comment about the priest that unsettles Elijah.

Shaken, Elijah loosens his grip. The boy wrestles free and disappears into the city.

Elijah grabs a newspaper from Castor's news-stand. He reads an article about two priests dying in a fire in Ireland. Four children managed to escape unharmed through a window. Castor makes a comment to Elijah.

CASTOR

It seems the earth is punishing the
sins of the many. Perhaps the Church
is in trouble. What do you think,
Elijah?

Elijah nods politely and heads off without comment. He is a man of God, a man of the catholic church. There is no room for pagan ideologies and dark magic in his life.

Elijah kneels at the altar, the boys' choir singing behind him. He prays to his God. As he finishes his prayer, he feels eyes peering at him from afar. The Cardinal and two other priests seem to be talking about Elijah. It feels uncomfortable, all of a sudden. He decides to leave.

He heads out of the church, passing the choir as their voices fill the space. Just before leaving the church, he catches a glimpse of a choir boy hidden around a corner, out of sight, cleaning a spot of blood from his white vestment.

The boy is clearly upset, desperately scrubbing at the stain, trying to erase it from existence.

Uncomfortable, Elijah leaves quickly, back to his work - where he is in control.

ACT THREE: SONG BIRD

Elijah arrives back at his apartment and is met by his neighbour as she busily sweeps the pathway. She tells Elijah someone was here and left a small parcel outside his door. He thanks her and, intrigued, heads up to his apartment. On his doormat is a small brown parcel box. He picks it up and heads inside.

Coffee in hand, he sits on his balcony. He carefully opens his mystery delivery to find a handwritten note.

'Deep down, deep into the earth my
roots go. Draw up Earth Mother power,
she will help me grow. Rise up, fill
me, give me life, strengthen me, A
mighty tree, nourishing power from
below.'

It is not signed. No indication of the person who wrote it. He reaches deeper into the box, pulling out a necklace.

The necklace itself is made of natural materials - no refined silver or gold to be found here, just simple cord and a stone emblem. A small stone figurine of a griffin. It has a pagan essence to it. Earthy and warm. It is hand-painted in a beautiful eggshell blue. About the size of a small coin.

As Elijah turns it over and feels its contours, a breeze picks up. It swirls petals onto his balcony. Colourful blossoms swirl and dance around his head, and he is overcome with a warm feeling of love and nature.

The wind settles and the blossoms dissipate. There, sitting on the ledge of his balcony, is a beautiful bright yellow bird. Elijah has never seen this species before. It is unique.

The bird starts singing and chirping. It's mesmerising. The song transports him to a dreamlike state. Elijah reaches out, confident that he can touch this glorious creature.

The bird flies away.

Elijah is left standing, surrounded by a circle of blossom, like a protective circle on the floor around him.

Elijah heads down to see Castor - a man who obviously has some basic knowledge of pagan symbolism. Castor is intrigued by the necklace. He grabs it and suggests it is an ancient protection against evil. Castor recommends that Elijah wear it, as it is a beautiful piece of art and it may help protect him against bad things.

He thanks Castor for his help but informs him that his cross will never leave his neck. His faith lies in the church.

ACT FOUR: THE DEN

Elijah walks the beautifully manicured gardens of the Vatican. He carefully maintains the fine pieces of outdoor seating and benches that follow the contours of the pathways and tree lines.

As he meticulously cleans a bit of garden furniture, he hears a song he recognizes - the bird from his balcony. He stands up, searching for its location. He follows the sound of its song down the garden's pathways. He finally spots it on a wall. It flies over to Elijah, perching on a nearby branch. It chirps at him, as if begging him to follow.

The bird flies away, over the wall, still singing its song. Elijah decides to follow the creature outside.

The creature leads him down through the busy streets, flying from tree to tree and lamppost to lamppost. Elijah is connected to this bird somehow and must follow its trail.

Elijah finds himself in a quiet part of the city. The bird guides him into a courtyard. Apartment balconies surround him, and the sound of people busy watching TV and hanging out their laundry fills this residential space.

The bird perches on a ground-floor window ledge.

Elijah moves closer to the bird. It remains still as Elijah gets closer and closer. The bird taps on the window, indicating for Elijah to look inside. Elijah confirms the bird's instructions before the bird flies away.

Elijah peers into the window and sees two young boys playing video games on the TV. Lying around them on the floor and sofas are clothes. The boys seem happy as they fight each other on screen. Then someone new appears in the room, an adult. A priest. They lock eyes through the window.

Elijah runs off, avoiding confrontation. He throws up in an alleyway.

It's very clear on what that place was.

ACT FIVE: BRIDGE OVER WATER

Elijah starts to walk through the city. Upset and lost, he wanders the street trying to make sense of what he has just seen. He finds himself down by the river. He follows its snaking body, oblivious to all around him.

As he passes under a bridge his path is blocked by a dark figure ahead of him. He then turns around to see two tough-looking security types blocking his other exit.

They have followed him here.

This is not good.

He is in danger.

The Cardinal steps out from the shadows. His expression is severe. He speaks of privacy, and of what will happen now that Elijah has seen. He demands that Elijah get in the car and come back to the church for further discussion.

Elijah knows what will be done with him if he gets in that car.

Elijah informs the Cardinal that he will tell everyone about the atrocities they are covering up and they will all be locked away for a very long time.

The security guys move in to apprehend Elijah. The light disperses around them, putting them into near darkness.

Elijah looks to the bridge wall and sees moss appearing and spreading like veins toward the security team. We hear a bird sing. Elijah recognises that song instantly. It goes completely black.

When the daylight reappears, the two brutes are pinned against the wall, covered in moss. Roots wrap around their legs, arms and faces. They have been destroyed by these natural elements.

The Cardinal is in a state of disbelief and shock. He steps back, scared by the sight in front of him. The wind picks up and the yellow bird flies towards him, squawking as it makes a beeline for the Cardinal. The old man's heel finds nothing, and he plummets into the river below. Pulled under by the strong current, he is washed away. Without trace.

Full daylight returns, and there is now only a faint shape of the two brutes on the wall, with light moss and natural stains. Again, erased from history.

Elijah removes the cross from his neck and throws it into the river. As he walks back, he pulls out the griffin necklace and places it around his neck.

Castor is busy greeting his regulars at his newsstand. The camera moves behind the scenes, into his edicola.

There, hidden in a corner away from public view, is a newspaper clipping pinned to the wall: "Young choir boy commits suicide on Vatican trip."

Underneath is a makeshift altar, full of small pagan idols, moss, yellow feathers - and the book, Crescent.

THE END