

Mother

I have heard it said countless times that the worst thing for a mother is to lose a child. In my profession—fortunate for my peace of mind but unfortunate for my superiors—I never had much need to write about such topics. The local newspaper of a small coastal town like San Sebertino thrived mostly on stories of sailors, the occasional unfortunate accident of little consequence or announcements about local events of interest only for their informative value.

I do recall, however, having once contributed to a report on a particularly gruesome blood crime—so vividly described that it caught the attention of larger, more prestigious newspapers, momentarily drawing foreign eyes to our little town.

Despite the attention garnered then, there was never much activity or journalistic work in the office—except, of course, in the case of Miss Hubbert. It was then that I earned my right and title as a journalist, at the cost of my own position in that small town. No copies of that issue of *Coastal News* can be found anymore—they have either disappeared, been destroyed, or never saw the light of day. But I have carefully preserved the memories of those months, along with a notebook filled with notes on various events and several photographs of the property with its blackened walls. Even now, despite the chills that run through my body whenever I hold it, I still keep the small glass jar that started it all.

Despite the time that has passed, the authorities have yet to decipher what could have caused such an event and continue searching for possible culprits. But to me, there is no doubt. The disappearance of Miss Hubbert was nothing less than the vengeance of a mother for the loss of her child.

In the year 1898, San Sebertino was undergoing rapid expansion. What had once been a small fishing port had become a thriving hub for cargo loading and unloading, thanks to its favorable location and the coastal topography, which provided great depth just a few meters from the shore. Additionally, the natural protection from ocean waves offered by a nearby mountain—along with an artificial submerged breakwater made of massive concrete blocks—made the city a haven for cargo, ships, and crew. This, in turn, attracted a notable number of merchants, investors, and tourists. Among this influx of new faces was Miss Hubbert.

An Englishwoman of noble class and lively character, Miss Hubbert quickly became a celebrated figure within the community. She arrived as just another tourist, but she soon seemed to fall in love with the beach and the sun. Within weeks, she had acquired a grand beachfront property, filling it with curious and exotic objects from various parts of the world, shipped from her homeland in London.

Miss Hubbert had been married, but a tragic accident had suddenly taken her husband a few years prior, leaving her widowed at the young age of thirty. There are no records of what happened to her husband, but it was known that the

couple had shared a deep and selfless love for general knowledge—especially in the study and classification of species.

Devoted followers of scholars and scientists such as Darwin, the Hubberts had acquired artifacts from all over the world—ancient oil lamps, murals, textiles, and an enviable collection of stones and minerals that any geologist would covet. But without a doubt, the most striking of all her possessions was her collection of taxidermied specimens and skeletons of various animals—including that of a massive African elephant...