

The Cézembre Conundrum

The Cézembre Conundrum
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The Cézembre Conundrum

Chapter 1

A Celebration Turned Somber

The sun cast a golden hue over Tamorán Beach as the Talossan flag fluttered proudly in the breeze. Citizens from across the globe had journeyed to Cézembre to partake in the annual festival celebrating their unique heritage.

Among the attendees was Dr. Elinor Presteir, a distinguished linguist and esteemed member of the CÚG. Her recent proposals to modernize certain aspects of el glheþ Talossan had stirred both admiration and controversy.

As night fell, lanterns illuminated the island, and the air buzzed with music, laughter, and the aroma of traditional Talossan cuisine. Dr. Presteir was scheduled to deliver a keynote speech on the evolution of the Talossan language.

However, when the time came, she was nowhere to be found. A search ensued, leading to a secluded grove where

her lifeless body was discovered, a rare Talossan coin placed delicately in her hand.

The joyous festival atmosphere dissipated, replaced by shock and mourning. The Cort Pü Inalt, recognizing the gravity of the situation, dispatched Investigator Marcus Lucéu to unravel the mystery that now shrouded the island.

Chapter 2

The Arrival of Investigator Marcus Lucéu

The ferry from Vuode cut a silver path across the Bay of Cézembre, slicing through the morning mist like a knife through marzipan. Onboard, Marcus Lucéu stood at the bow, collar upturned against the salt wind, his expression as unreadable as the Ziu’s most obscure legislative footnotes.

He was not a man given to flamboyance. In his early forties, Lucéu wore a modest grey suit, slightly rumpled from travel, and carried a leather briefcase that had once belonged to his grandfather—a former magistrate of Talossa. He believed in process, in logic, and above all, in details. His detractors accused him of lacking imagination. His supporters called him incorruptible.

He'd been summoned by a brief but urgent communique from the Cort Pü Inalt:

Mysterious death of Dr. Elinor Presteir. High-profile. Political implications likely. Proceed with discretion. Authority delegated in full. Report directly to the Cort. Do not involve provincial constables unless necessary.

—S: Seneschal Niclas Ventrutx

As the ferry docked, a young Cézembrean official—Caspàr dal Nuot—stood waiting with a badge clipped to his lapel and worry etched into his face.

“Sir Lucéu?” he asked, extending a hand. “Welcome to Cézembre. I’m your local liaison.”

Lucéu shook it without enthusiasm. “Good. Let’s get to work.”

They moved briskly through the narrow streets of Port Cézembre, past shuttered festival stalls and black crepe ribbons fluttering in the breeze—signs of mourning. Despite the public grief, there was also tension in the air, like a harp string pulled just a bit too tight.

“Who found the body?” Lucéu asked as they walked.

“A student named Miroslav Piccard. He was assisting Dr. Presteir with her linguistic presentation. Found her near the old semaphore tower—dead for maybe an hour. Coin in her hand, no obvious sign of struggle.”

“No witnesses?”

“Not directly. But a few said they heard an argument earlier that evening, near the grove. Could’ve been lovers. Or politics. Or both.”

Lucéu raised an eyebrow. “You sound skeptical.”

Caspàr gave a sheepish smile. “With Talossans, the line between politics and romance is... porous.”

They arrived at the scene: a ring of olive trees surrounding the remains of an 18-century signal tower. The grass had been trampled by investigators, but the outline of the body was still faintly visible in the dew.

Lucéu crouched, eyeing the spot where the coin had been placed.

“A cinquëu del regipäts, no?” he asked, glancing at Caspàr.

“Indeed. Issued in 1995 during King Robert I’s golden jubilee. Rare. Symbolic. Certainly deliberate.”

Lucéu stood, brushing the dirt from his trousers. “So, our killer has a flair for the ceremonial. Tell me more about Dr. Presteir.”

“Linguist. Member of the CÚG. Pushed for controversial reforms—simplification of verb endings, replacement of some historical spellings. She had her supporters... and her enemies.”

Lucéu nodded. “We’ll need a list of both.”

They returned to the small administration building that had been turned into a temporary operations center.

Inside, a corkboard had been set up with photos and notes, and several officials pored over reports and transcripts.

Lucéu took a seat and opened his briefcase. He pulled out a fountain pen, his ledger, and an envelope addressed in neat, cursive Talossan.

Inside was a letter. From the victim.

To whomever receives this,

If anything should happen to me during the festival, it will not be an accident. There are those who wish to silence the voice of change. I have made enemies, yes—but none, I thought, who would kill. I may have been wrong.

Do not let my death be in vain.

—Elinor Presteir

Lucéu looked up at Caspàr.

“She knew,” he said quietly. “She knew she was in danger.”

Chapter 3

The Circle of Suspects

The conference hall at the Hôtel d'Antreuça was quiet now, a shadow of the vibrant gathering it had been just days ago. Banners of Talossa's royal blue and white still hung, but they drooped like wilting flowers. The festival committee had officially postponed all further events. A quiet sorrow had settled over the island, made heavier by suspicion.

Investigator Marcus Lucéu stood at the head of a long table, facing five individuals seated before him like pupils in a disciplinary tribunal. Each had been close to Dr. Elinor Presteir in one way or another—professionally, politically, or personally. Each had a motive, however faint or concealed.

Lucéu placed a hand on his leather case. “Thank you for coming. I realize the circumstances are... unwelcome. But Dr. Presteir's death cannot be brushed aside as

misfortune. She believed she was in danger. Her letter, addressed to this investigation, makes that clear.”

The group exchanged quick, nervous glances.

Lucéu gestured to Caspàr. “Mr. dal Nuot will take notes. I’ll ask you each a few questions. This is not an interrogation. Not yet.”

He turned to the first: Professor Sibran Arosçeu, a gaunt man in his sixties with silver-rimmed spectacles and a voice like dry leaves.

“Professor Arosçeu,” Lucéu began, “you were a fellow member of the Comità per l’Útzil del Glheþ. Your views on the language reforms differed from Dr. Presteir’s, did they not?”

“They opposed hers,” Arosçeu corrected. “She wanted to flatten the grammar. Remove historical particles. Eliminate our lovely double consonants. She said she was preserving the language—but it was destruction in disguise. We argued, yes. I made no secret of my disapproval. But I would never—” he faltered, adjusting his glasses—“never kill over it.”

Lucéu studied him. “Did you meet with her the night she died?”

“No.”

“You weren’t seen near the grove?”

“I was in my room, working on a counter-paper to her presentation. You may ask the hotel staff. They brought me coffee around ten.”

Lucéu nodded, but made no comment.

Next, he turned to a tall woman with sharp features and eyes like a hawk. Madóra Ventrutx, the Seneschal's cousin and a high-ranking official in the Ministry of Culture. Her relationship with the deceased had been tense.

“Ms. Ventrutx,” Lucéu began, “you’ve publicly criticized Dr. Presteir for what you called ‘a politicization of philology.’ What did you mean?”

She sat straighter. “Elinor made enemies not because of what she changed in the language, but how. She used reform as a lever—whipping up populist support among younger Talossans who wanted the language to be easier. It was more than scholarly. It was a grab for influence.”

“Influence?” Lucéu asked.

“She was organizing her own bloc in the Ziu. Preparing to launch a new political party, I believe. Language was just the bait.”

“Did you speak to her that evening?”

“No. I had already left the grounds. I was having dinner with Senator Téirno in Port Cézembre.”

Lucéu made a note.

Next came Miroslav Piccard, the young student assistant who had discovered the body. Pale, nervous, and barely twenty-three, Miroslav looked like he hadn't slept since the night of the murder.

“Miroslav,” Lucéu said gently, “tell me what happened that night.”

“I was supposed to meet her at the tower around nine,” he said, voice trembling. “She asked me to bring her notes for the presentation. When I got there, she wasn’t answering her phone. I found her lying in the grass, the coin in her hand. At first, I thought it was some ritual. A speech gimmick. Then I saw her face.”

“You were close to her?”

“We worked together all summer. I respected her. She was kind. Brilliant. She was going to recommend me to the University of Abbavilla.”

“Did she mention any threats?”

He hesitated. “Once. About two weeks ago. She said someone had tried to intimidate her. An anonymous message. A warning not to attend the festival.”

“Do you still have it?”

“She kept it. Said she didn’t want to ‘make drama’ out of nothing.”

Lucéu’s eyes narrowed. “We’ll need to find that note.”

The fourth person in the room sat in a sharp black suit and wore an amused smile: Raoul Siervicül, an independent journalist and outspoken critic of both the monarchy and the Ziu. He had written several scathing essays about Dr. Presteir—though always in the name of satire.

“Mr. Siervicül,” Lucéu began, “you once called Dr. Presteir ‘the Duchess of Diphthongs’ and accused her of intellectual tyranny.”

Raoul shrugged. “I write. I provoke. It’s my role.”

“You were seen near the grove that night.”

“Was I? It’s a free island.”

“Did you speak with her?”

“I may have. She didn’t appreciate my column about her ’linguistic imperialism.’ But we argued often. Verbally, I mean.”

“You were known to carry a replica of the *cinquëu del regipäts* as a kind of token.”

He grinned. “You’ve done your homework. I do carry one. But mine is in my wallet, right here.” He produced it with a flourish. “Not missing, you’ll note.”

Lucéu didn’t smile.

Lastly, a quiet man with a receding hairline and a gentle demeanor: Brother Andreu dal Cjef, a member of the Talossan Society for Language Preservation, a group that leaned conservative but rarely entered political frays.

“Brother Andreu,” Lucéu said, “you were once one of Dr. Presteir’s strongest supporters. Then something changed.”

Brother Andreu nodded slowly. “I believed in her. We all did. Until she betrayed our trust.”

“In what way?”

“She wanted to rename the O’Mallory Declensions as ’simplified cases.’ Remove their historical roots. She told me Talossan needed to ’shed the weight of invented tradition.’ I told her she was shedding its soul.”

“Did you meet her that night?”

“No. I stayed at the abbey. I was preparing for the morning prayer.”

Lucéu leaned back.

“Thank you, all,” he said. “You may go, but remain available for further questioning. No one is formally accused. Not yet.”

As they left one by one, Lucéu remained seated, drumming his fingers against the table. Motives swirled like autumn leaves: ambition, ideology, jealousy, revenge. But only one was enough to kill.

“Someone,” he muttered, “spoke to her that night. Someone who knew her well. And someone who brought a coin with meaning.”

Caspàr looked up from his notes. “Where do we start next?”

Lucéu closed his ledger with a snap. “With the coin. And the letter she never meant for just anyone to find.”

Chapter 4

The Coin and the Chronicle

The coin lay in the evidence envelope, its polished surface catching the light like a wink from history. Marcus Lucéu held it delicately in his gloved fingers, turning it over again and again.

Cinqueu del Regipäts. Five livres, minted in the summer of 1995, under the reign of King Robert I. The obverse bore the royal crest—crown, sword, and scroll—while the reverse showed a phoenix rising from a book, the motto: “Per la Limba, Per la Naziun.”

“For the language, for the nation,” Lucéu murmured. “A symbol of rebirth.”

Caspàr leaned against the wall, arms crossed. “Rare. Ceremonial. Mostly in the hands of collectors or officials.

That one's been cleaned—recently. Whoever left it meant for it to be noticed.”

Lucéu nodded, eyes scanning the coin under the magnifier. “But there's more. Look at the edge.”

Along the milled rim, something caught the light—a faint scratch, almost deliberate. Caspàr squinted. “Is that... a letter?”

Lucéu adjusted the lens. “Two. E.P.”

“Elinor Presteir's initials?”

“She marked it.” He looked up. “Either to claim it... or to warn us.”

He set the coin down and opened his notebook. “We need to find out who else owned one of these. I want a list—collectors, CÚG members, ministers, anyone with access to ceremonial tokens. And we need her personal effects. Letters, notebooks, drafts. If she kept that threat note, it'll be there.”



Hours Later — The Hotel Room

Dr. Presteir's suite at the Hôtel d'Antreuça was neat, almost too neat. Everything had been placed carefully, as if staged. Her bag rested on a chair. A festival program lay

open on the desk. No sign of struggle. No spilled coffee. No papers torn in haste.

But Lucéu had trained his eye not for violence—but for absences.

“No laptop,” he muttered. “She was preparing a keynote. Where are her drafts?”

Caspàr opened the wardrobe. “Suitcase is half-empty. No phone either. She wasn’t mugged—her jewelry’s all here.”

Lucéu lifted the desk blotter and found a folded sheet of pale blue paper underneath. Carefully, he opened it.

Elinor,

We warned you once. Stop speaking. Stop writing. Stop changing what you don’t understand. If you insist on playing with fire, don’t be surprised when the phoenix burns you.

—A Friend of the Language

Lucéu stared at the words. “Threatening. But theatrical. The phrasing is... literary.”

“Could be a scholar,” Caspàr said.

“Or someone pretending to be one.”

Lucéu read it again. Then again. He felt the pattern in the words: the precision, the rhythm. Almost like a verse. He turned to Caspàr.

“Do we have access to the archives of El Tamlaltzün?”

“The cultural newsletter?”

“She used to publish short essays there. If I’m right, we’re dealing with someone who reads her work closely—someone who thinks they know better. This isn’t a killer

acting on impulse. It's someone trying to 'correct' a mistake."



Evening — The Archives

In a narrow room beneath the Cézembre Cultural Center, they found what they were looking for: bound issues of *El Tamlaltzün*, going back a decade. Lucéu flipped quickly through the past year.

"Here," he said, tapping a column. "A Proposed Reduction of Retroflex Conjugations."

He skimmed it aloud. "She argues for the removal of archaic forms derived from non-native phonology. Draws fire from traditionalists. See these replies—Arosçeu, Andreu dal Cjef, even Ventrutx. Heated words."

Caspàr pulled out another issue. "Here's something... interesting. She wrote under a pseudonym too—'Sibilla d'Urđ.'"

Lucéu turned sharply. "What?"

"Look—letters section, last autumn. Sibilla d'Urđ critiques 'the fetish of grammatical nostalgia.' The style matches her own. She was hiding in plain sight."

Lucéu smiled faintly. “Even in death, she’s teaching us something.”

But then he stopped. His eyes narrowed as he flipped to the next page. There it was again—a letter, unsigned, replying to Sibilla d’Urđ:

You may dress rebellion in velvet footnotes, but it remains rebellion. One cannot separate Talossa from its tongue. It was born from invention. Invented traditions are still traditions. Mock them, and you mock the kingdom itself.

Lucéu underlined the phrase: “velvet footnotes.”

“That,” he said, “was also used in the threat note.”

“Same author?”

“Very likely.”



Late Night — Back at the Office

Lucéu sat at the long table, surrounded by evidence bags, photos, printouts, and notebooks. He sipped black coffee, staring at the profiles of the five main suspects.

They all had motives. They all had opportunity. But only one wrote like this. Only one spoke with the same cadence.

He flipped back to his notes from the interviews, searching for a phrase.

There it was.

“She was shedding its soul.”

And again:

“One cannot separate Talossa from its tongue.”

Lucéu drew a circle around both quotes. His pulse quickened.

He pulled out another envelope: an older letter from Dr. Presteir to the CÚG, regarding pushback from a specific member.

Brother Andreu is steadfast. And sincere. But I believe he sees me not as a colleague, but as a heretic. He fears not only change—but what change implies. He once told me that killing a tradition is the same as killing a person.

Lucéu exhaled slowly.

It was time to speak to Brother Andreu again.

Chapter 5

A Confession in Silence

The abbey sat atop a wind-swept cliff, its stone façade etched with centuries of sea salt and silence. A quiet refuge, even now, when suspicion clung to the island like fog. Brother Andreu dal Cjef tended its garden, his hands among thyme and rosemary, as if untouched by the storm gathering around him.

Investigator Marcus Lucéu approached with quiet steps. Caspàr stayed at the gate—on Lucéu’s request. This conversation needed to be undisturbed, direct, and unclouded by performance.

Brother Andreu looked up, eyes serene. “Good evening, Investigator.”

Lucéu nodded. “I’d like to speak with you. Not as an officer of the Cort Pù Inalt. As a man seeking truth.”

Andreu wiped his hands and gestured to a stone bench beneath a lemon tree. They sat in silence for a moment, the wind whistling gently through the branches.

Lucéu began without preamble.

“I believe you wrote the anonymous letter to Dr. Presteir. The threat.”

Andreu did not flinch. “You believe correctly.”

The calm admission hung in the air like a suspended bell note.

“Why didn’t you deny it?” Lucéu asked.

“Because threats are not crimes. Not in Talossa, not in most courts of language. I warned her not to desecrate the sacred. I warned her because I feared what would come if she continued. But I did not kill her.”

“You used the phrase ‘velvet footnotes.’ The same as in your reply to El Tamlaltzün. The same as in the threat.”

“I am a creature of habit,” Andreu said with a wan smile. “My metaphors wear familiar shoes.”

Lucéu regarded him for a long moment. “Why did you write to her anonymously, if you believed your warning to be righteous?”

Andreu looked away. “Because she would have mocked it. Because truth is rarely received in the voice it needs. Sometimes it must arrive in disguise.”

Lucéu nodded. “Fair. But the coin—do you own one?”

Andreu shook his head. “No. I always found the coins to be... ornamental. I do not traffic in symbols. Only words.”

Lucéu studied his face for cracks. Found none.

“But you did see her that night.”

This time, Andreu hesitated.

“Yes,” he said eventually. “I saw her on the path by the olive grove. We spoke.”

Lucéu’s heart beat a little faster. “What about?”

“I begged her—again—to reconsider her speech. She was polite. She listened. But her eyes had already moved on. She had made peace with being a martyr, Marcus.”

The use of his name startled Lucéu.

“I didn’t tell the truth before,” Andreu continued. “Because I feared it would cast me as the villain. But you already knew, didn’t you?”

“I suspected,” Lucéu replied.

Andreu stood and brushed dust from his cassock. “But I am not the villain. Nor am I the hero. Elinor died because she threatened the wrong person’s legacy. Someone who had more to lose than just ideas.”

Lucéu rose, brow furrowed. “Who?”

Andreu looked past him, toward the sea. “I don’t know. But if you want answers, you’ll need to ask the wrong question. Who stood to gain if Elinor wasn’t there to speak? Not just ideologically. Politically.”

Lucéu’s mind began to churn. Ventrutx. Arosçeu. Even Miroslav?

He stepped back. “Thank you for your honesty, Brother.”

“One last thing,” Andreu said. “Elinor once told me that the only true language is courage. I believe that now more than ever.”



Later — The Town Archives

Night had fallen. Lucéu returned to the cultural center, drawn by something he hadn't yet understood—an itch in the back of his mind that hadn't stopped since reading Elinor's letter.

He flipped through the festival program again. Her keynote was to be the final address. But the slot had been reassigned—after her death—to none other than... Madóra Ventrutx.

He checked the scheduling logs. The change had been requested that morning, hours before Elinor was found dead.

Lucéu's breath caught.

She hadn't died at 10 p.m., as originally believed. She may have died earlier—while the festival still bustled, while no one would notice her absence.

Which meant someone knew she'd be gone.

He grabbed his coat and turned to Caspàr, asleep on the couch in the corner.

“Wake up,” Lucéu said. “We’re going to pay the Seneschal’s cousin a second visit.”

Chapter 6

A Voice Behind the Curtain

It was past midnight when Marcus Lucéu and Caspàr arrived at the Hôtel Régipäts, the grand villa that served as both accommodations and unofficial headquarters for the highest-ranking Talossan officials during the festival. Madóra Ventrutx's suite overlooked the sea, the golden lamplight glowing through her window like a beacon—or a warning.

A steward opened the door after a knock.

“She’s expecting no visitors,” he began.

“She’ll make an exception,” Lucéu said with quiet certainty, flashing the seal of the Cort Pü Inalt.

Upstairs, Madóra stood beside a bar cart, pouring a glass of amber brandy. She was dressed not for sleep but for

strategy—a deep burgundy silk robe over tailored slacks, her expression carefully composed.

“To what do I owe the honor?” she asked, offering no seat.

Lucéu didn’t wait for invitation. “You requested the final keynote slot before Dr. Presteir’s death had even been announced.”

She sipped her drink. “I anticipated the possibility.”

“You don’t anticipate sudden deaths at academic festivals.”

“You do,” she said calmly, “when the person in question is warned multiple times to stand down, and refuses.”

Lucéu stepped closer. “So you admit there was more than one threat?”

“I didn’t say I made them.”

“No—but you knew of them. Knew they had merit.”

Her eyes flashed. “She was destabilizing decades of cultural consensus. She wanted to recode not just language, but identity. The reforms would have rendered half the Royal Lexicon obsolete. People would have lost positions. Prestige. Influence.”

“So someone silenced her,” Caspàr said from the doorway.

Madóra turned slowly. “If I wanted her silenced, gentlemen, I would have out-argued her. In front of the entire nation.”

“You don’t strike me as a woman who tolerates uncertainty,” Lucéu said. “But you miscalculated. You assumed she’d fold under pressure. When she didn’t, you pivoted. Took her spot. You even started rewriting her legacy before the body was cold.”

“I preserved her legacy,” Madóra snapped. “By ensuring her final ideas weren’t twisted into some martyr’s propaganda.”

Lucéu pulled a printed copy of the festival’s internal logs from his coat. “You made the request for the keynote slot at 5:43 p.m.—hours before the body was found. How did you know she wouldn’t show?”

The silence stretched. Madóra sat slowly, brandy in hand.

“Because,” she said finally, “someone told me she wouldn’t.”

Lucéu leaned in. “Who?”

Madóra’s voice lowered. “I received an anonymous message. One sentence: ‘The Sibyl will not speak.’”

Lucéu exchanged a glance with Caspàr.

“Sibyl,” he said. “Sibilla d’Urð—Elinor’s pseudonym.”

Madóra nodded. “At the time, I assumed it was metaphor. But it was more than that. It was... final.”

“Do you still have the message?”

She walked to her desk and retrieved a folded note from beneath a stack of policy papers. It was written by hand—bold, blocky strokes, clipped punctuation.

Lucéu took it gently.

The Sibyl will not speak.

The succession is clear now.

Let the mother tongue be spared.

The pen pressure was heavy. The last line underlined twice.

“That’s not a warning,” Caspàr said. “That’s a claim.”

Lucéu nodded grimly. “A claim of inheritance. Someone believed that by silencing her, they were protecting the language’s ‘line of succession.’ Like a royal heir defending a throne.”



Back at Headquarters — An Unexpected Visitor

At three in the morning, sleep was a distant idea. Lucéu was piecing timelines together in his makeshift war room when Caspàr stepped in, eyes wide.

“There’s someone here,” he said. “Someone who says they know who really killed Dr. Presteir.”

Lucéu stood. “Who?”

Caspàr opened the door. And in stepped Miroslav Piccard—pale, drenched from the rain, hands trembling.

“I lied,” he said immediately. “That night—I wasn’t just delivering her notes. I was meeting her for something else.”

Lucéu motioned him inside. “Tell us everything.”

Miroslav sat, soaked coat clinging to his shoulders. “She’d discovered something. A forgery. A set of documents attributed to the First Founders of the language—a kind of early manifesto that justified keeping the most obscure grammatical structures. She told me they were fabricated.”

“Fabricated?” Caspàr echoed. “By whom?”

“I don’t know. But they’ve been cited by the CÚG and the Cultural Ministry for years. She said if she presented the truth, it would cause a linguistic schism.”

Lucéu’s eyes narrowed. “So this wasn’t just about grammar. This was about legitimacy.”

Miroslav nodded. “Elinor planned to reveal it at the keynote. She said, ‘If I speak, someone will fall. Someone very high up.’”

Lucéu felt a chill trace his spine.

“Do you still have those documents?” he asked.

“I took photos,” Miroslav said, pulling out a damp but functioning phone. “They’re here.”

Lucéu scanned the images. Handwritten scrolls. Stamps of authenticity. But subtle inconsistencies: ink tones, archaic phrasing that was too perfect, too stylized. One of the dates was out of range by twenty years—an anachronism.

Someone had built a house of cards atop a lie.

“Elinor uncovered the original sin,” Lucéu whispered.
And someone had killed her for it.

Chapter 7

The Architect of Truths

It was nearly dawn when Marcus Lucéu left the Hôtel Régipäts, Miroslav's images printed and sorted in his satchel. The streets of Cézembre were still, the ocean whispering somewhere beyond the shutters. And yet, beneath the silence, something stirred—truth waking up.

Lucéu stopped by the harbor wall, looking out at the fog crawling over the sea. Behind him, Caspàr leaned against a lamppost, sipping cold coffee from a paper cup.

“She was right,” Lucéu said, not turning. “The documents are forgeries. Slipped into the archives sometime in the early 2000s. Whoever did it had access, skill, and the motive to protect tradition at all costs.”

“And now we have proof,” Caspàr said.

“No,” Lucéu replied. “Now we have danger. Whoever forged those documents didn’t do it for academic glory. They did it to secure control—of language, of culture, of power.”

He turned to Caspàr. “And if they’ve done it once, they’ll do it again. Or worse.”



Morning — Wittenberg Council Chambers

The marble chambers of the Wittenberg Council echoed with footsteps as Lucéu entered. He was not there for politics—but for evidence. The original copies of the disputed scrolls had been cited in at least three policy speeches by a single figure:

Seneschal D. Volfand Arosçeu.

Tall, dignified, rarely seen without the emerald sash of his office, Arosçeu was the very model of Talossan permanence. He had been Seneschal for nearly a decade—a record in a kingdom famous for instability.

Lucéu stepped into his office without waiting for permission.

Arosçeu looked up from his desk with a flicker of annoyance. “Investigator. This is irregular.”

“So is murder,” Lucéu replied. He tossed the photos onto the desk. “Recognize these?”

Arosçeu glanced down, then slowly removed his glasses.

“Where did you get these?”

“From Dr. Presteir. By way of her assistant. She was going to expose the forgeries you’ve been citing for years.”

Arosçeu’s jaw clenched. “I cited them in good faith. They were verified by the Office of Linguistic Heritage.”

Lucéu leaned forward. “That office was created by you, Seneschal. Staffed by your appointments. She found multiple errors—a falsified royal stamp, anachronistic forms, and even a misplaced verse from the 1997 hymnbook. These weren’t just overlooked. They were planted.”

“I would suggest,” Arosçeu said coldly, “that you be careful with accusations you can’t prove.”

“Oh, I can prove it,” Lucéu said. “But I don’t think you wrote the forgeries. You don’t have the style. The language is too... emotional.”

Arosçeu blinked. “Then who—”

Lucéu dropped a new photo onto the desk. A page from the 2003 Talossan Review, co-authored by two names: one familiar—Arosçeu himself. The other?

“Rexh Paltra-Zelmar.”

Caspàr, from the door, filled in the gap. “Now known as Ventrutx.”

Arosçeu froze. “Madóra?”

Lucéu nodded slowly. “She ghostwrote the linguistic justifications for half your policies. She forged the scrolls, planted them in the archives, then cited them under your name. You thought you were quoting tradition. You were quoting her.”

Arosçeu sat down heavily. “My God..”

“She wanted control. Not just of government, but of memory. Language is history in Talossa. Whoever controls it —controls everything.”

Caspàr stepped forward. “Dr. Presteir saw the cracks. She traced the forgeries. She planned to speak.”

“And someone silenced her,” Lucéu added. “To protect the illusion.”



Evening — The Gala

The closing gala of the Cézembre Festival was a swirl of glitter and ghosts. Music drifted from string quartets. Attendees in green and gold sashes danced, laughed, toasted absent friends. And Madóra Ventrutx stood in the center of it all, radiant in deep emerald, as though she had not a care in the world.

Until Marcus Lucéu approached.

“May I have this dance?” he asked.

She tilted her head. “What a curious time to flirt.”

“I find truth dances best at the end,” he said, and led her to the floor.

They moved to the rhythm of an old Talossan waltz, the kind sung in dialects half the kingdom had forgotten.

“You planted those scrolls,” he said quietly, holding her hand.

She didn’t answer.

“You wrote them in your twenties. You thought no one would ever notice. Then Elinor did.”

Still no answer.

“She didn’t just threaten your legacy. She proved it false.”

Now, at last, Madóra’s lips parted.

“She didn’t deserve to destroy something so beautiful.”

“You call it beautiful. I call it a lie.”

Madóra’s smile faded.

“And if I said yes?” she whispered. “If I said I did it—would you arrest me?”

Lucéu’s expression didn’t change. “I’d start with that. Then I’d ask why.”

She stepped back, breaking the dance. Her voice rose just loud enough to reach the nearby guests.

“She was going to tear it all down. Language, lore, meaning. She wanted us to sound like bureaucrats. I gave us poetry. She gave us checklists.”

“She gave you truth,” Lucéu said.

“No,” Madóra whispered. “She gave me fear.”

The room had gone quiet now. Caspàr appeared behind her. A pair of uniformed officers moved in from the wings.

Madóra Ventrutx closed her eyes. Then extended her wrists.



Later — Lucéu’s Journal

The investigation closed today with Ventrutx’s formal confession. She claims she did not mean for Dr. Presteir to die—but confronted her in anger. The confrontation turned physical. A fall. A cracked skull on a stone step.

She panicked. Hid the body. Sent the anonymous message to Arosçeu to secure her place at the keynote, knowing the show must go on.

She thought she was preserving a dream. She ended a life instead.

And yet... one cannot help but wonder. If the lie gave the kingdom meaning, was the truth a mercy—or a revolution?

Time, perhaps, will decide. As it always does in Talossa.

Chapter 8

A Language for the Dead

The wind moved gently across the fields of Cézembre, stirring the olive branches and wild marjoram. From the steps of the old lighthouse, Marcus Lucéu watched the sunrise touch the abbey stones in gold. The island had begun to exhale again, the tension of the past week slowly fading—but not forgotten.

A quiet figure approached from behind.

“I thought I’d find you here,” Brother Andreu said, hands folded within his sleeves.

Lucéu nodded without turning. “It’s strange. She was trying to build something better. And now all that’s left is ashes and silence.”

Andreu stood beside him. “Not silence. Not really.”

They watched the horizon for a time.

“Elinor’s papers?” Lucéu asked.

“Archived. The Royal Talossan Library has them now. Miroslav’s insisted on a full review of the linguistic corpus. Quietly, but thoroughly.”

Lucéu gave a faint smile. “The great reckoning.”

“Or the great revision,” Andreu said softly. “We’ll see.”

One Week Later — Elinor’s Memorial

The hall was simple. Unadorned. A wooden dais, rows of chairs, a table bearing a sprig of thyme, a coin, and a folded green sash.

People spoke, softly, carefully, like dancers learning new steps. Miroslav read from her unfinished keynote—fragments of fierce, clear prose. Arosçeu, chastened, offered a rare statement of humility, acknowledging “errors institutional and individual.”

When Brother Andreu stepped up, he said nothing at first. Then:

“The mother tongue is not a fortress. It is a field.

It must be tilled, tended, questioned—and sometimes burned.

And when it regrows, it will do so with the memory of every hand that touched it.”

There was silence. And then applause—quiet, unforced, true.



Later — A Letter

Days after the memorial, Lucéu found a letter in his coat pocket. No postmark. Just his name, written in an unmistakable hand.

He opened it on the ferry back to the mainland.

Marcus,

If you are reading this, I suspect something has gone wrong, or very right.

Either way, you will understand, by now, the danger of sacred things.

I do not hate Madóra. I pity her. She loved the language so much, she couldn't bear to see it evolve. That kind of fear wears the mask of nobility. It sounds like preservation. But it is only another way of hiding.

Promise me you won't let them rewrite it all.

Not just the grammar. The memory.

With affection,

—Elinor

Lucéu closed the letter. Folded it into his notebook.
And let the silence stretch across the sea.



Epilogue: In the Margins

In a narrow archive in Péngöpäts, a file is quietly restored to the public catalog. It is unsigned, unpublished, and written in both modern Talossan and its oldest dialect. The title reads:

“Against Immortality: A Treatise on the Living Word”

The final line is scribbled in pencil, as if added in haste:

Languages do not die. They molt.

And someone—no one remembers who—adds a simple footnote below.

† She spoke. We listened.



End of Part I.