

## The Mysterious Death of Alice Antonia

By: Alice Antonia

Long past the witching hour, it was so late it was now early, and Detective Carrie A. Dupin of the Richmond PD remained spellbound by the ancient scrap of parchment from the cryptic case file on her desk.

Alice Antonia, 37, was, by all accounts, a recluse. She was a hermit with few friends, even fewer romantic pursuits, and no social life to speak of to remedy either issue. Of her entire family, only her sisters and their partners attended her funeral, as Alice and the rest of her relatives had long since mutually disowned each other over political disagreements.

Despite earning her Master of Arts over a decade ago, she remained a grocery store clerk until death. If she were still alive, she'd tell you that was just so she could pay the bills while she worked on her writing, but the truth is that she had little to show for all that work on her craft, a pile of rejection letters on her computer desk in between overdue bills and printouts of her favorite stories by Edgar Allan Poe and Witold Krull.

She adored Poe, so much so that she rented out an apartment with a window that could see into the lush Enchanted Garden at the Poe Museum for constant inspiration. In spite of her previous failures, her fridge was covered with reminders for the deadlines of upcoming writing contests next to what would otherwise be a lonely group photo taken at Hotel Greene, Alice standing awkwardly with the rest in the decadent lobby bar.

Her body was found in her bedroom. Her mattress and bed frame were overturned into the corner, the rug that previously covered the floor loosely rolled up next to them. Alice was sprawled out in the middle of the room, lying atop a seven-pointed star scorched into the hardwood flooring with some unintelligible script carved in a circle connecting the points and puddles of wax around the rim where candles once burned. In her left hand was an unidentifiable key, and the other gripped a story written on parchment as old as time. The story bore Alice's signature but was composed with stylized calligraphy, despite no evidence anywhere that Alice had ever practiced that art nor a proper pen to do so to be produced from the scene.

"Carrie, you really oughtta give it a rest. There's nothin' there."

"Jerry, you saw her bedroom. Never mind she was searching occult summoning rituals on her computer and this story she was gripping onto. How do you explain that?"

"Yeah, okay. That all is weird, no doubt, but she had a heart attack or somethin'. I mean, it happens every day, y'know? And there was no evidence of forced entry or foul play or nothin'. There's nothin' there."

As Jerry spoke, the detective's face drained of all color. Jerry paused.

"You okay?"

"Jerry, we're having the conversation right now."

"What conversation?"

The detective picked up the ancient parchment and waved it in front of her colleague.

"THE Conversation."

With that, Jerry's face went pale, too.

"Oh. I, uh. Hmm. You, uh, keep workin' on that, then."

As Jerry shuffled off, Detective Dupin read from the parchment in her hand. The story began, "Long past the witching hour, it was so late it was now early, and Detective Carrie A. Dupin of the Richmond PD remained spellbound by the ancient scrap of parchment from the cryptic case file on her desk."