

IN COLD LIGHT

by Duncan Ley

-SCENE EXCERPT-

A room. Seated at the only table is LAMORI. He wears a dog-collared shirt, pants and black shoes. A white polystyrene cup is before him. Parts of the rim have been torn off. Absently, LAMORI throws the torn bits into the cup. There is the wooden table and the chair LAMORI is sitting on, and two extra chairs, a bench with polystyrene cups, a full water jug and full coffee pot, ashtray, wiping-up cloth and a portable tape recorder. There is a lined wooden rubbish bin in one corner, and a wooden box.

The one door opens¹ and out of the shadows the INSPECTOR enters. He is dressed in blue trousers, a shirt, perhaps a plain tie. His sleeves are rolled up. He holds a black folder and a silver pen.

INSPECTOR Sorry to have kept you waiting. (*checking his folder*) You're Father Christian Lamori?

LAMORI (*standing up*) Look, I've been waiting here for over half-an-hour.

INSPECTOR Twenty-seven minutes.

LAMORI Excuse me?

INSPECTOR You've been waiting for twenty-seven minutes.

LAMORI Oh.

INSPECTOR Like some coffee?

LAMORI No.

INSPECTOR (*going over to a coffeepot and pouring some coffee into a polystyrene cup*) We've good coffee here. Sure you won't have some?

LAMORI Very well.

INSPECTOR How do you take it?

LAMORI Just black. (*the INSPECTOR hands him the cup. LAMORI tastes the coffee*) It's cold. (*he catches a good look at the INSPECTOR for the first time*)

INSPECTOR Probably been sitting here awhile. (*he notices LAMORI looking*) Something the matter?

LAMORI No. Sorry, it's just you look familiar. You weren't a student of mine? (*INSPECTOR smiles slightly, shakes his head, opens his folder and starts writing a few notes*)

INSPECTOR Some people have that look, don't they? Anyway, sorry to have kept you waiting. Been a busy evening.

LAMORI I was told the Inspector would be seeing me.

INSPECTOR Yes.

LAMORI You're the Inspector?

INSPECTOR Yes.

LAMORI Oh.

¹ The door, if at all possible, should open and close as if automatically, without the Inspector ever touching it. All he need do to exit is walk towards the door, and should open, then close behind him once he has exited.

INSPECTOR Something wrong?

LAMORI Forgive me, but you appear very young, for an Inspector.

INSPECTOR Appearances can be deceiving.

LAMORI I imagined someone older, that's all.

INSPECTOR You find it unusual? A young man in a position of authority?

LAMORI No, I... well, it's different.

INSPECTOR No different than your elders addressing you as 'Father'.

LAMORI Look Inspector, I realise you must be a busy man, and I have great admiration for your line of work. (*the INSPECTOR ceases taking notes*) But will this take long?

INSPECTOR Shouldn't think so. Just need to ask you a few questions.

LAMORI Tonight? Couldn't this wait 'til tomorrow? It's just I have a school to run, Inspector. I have essays to mark.

INSPECTOR Yes, you're the assistant headmaster, aren't you?

LAMORI Yes, at Saint Matthew's.

INSPECTOR Saint Matthew's, yes. Excellent reputation, I believe. You been there long?

LAMORI Three years.

INSPECTOR Three years? Not long, then.

LAMORI When you work seven days a week, three years is a long time.

INSPECTOR Very amusing.

LAMORI I wasn't trying to be amusing, Inspector. Could you start asking these questions? I want to go home, to my bed.

INSPECTOR No-one waiting in it for you, I hope. (*pause*) Sorry. A little joke.

LAMORI Please, I am rather tired this evening, and-

INSPECTOR -Why are you so tired? (*LAMORI shows his annoyance*) I'm only asking.

LAMORI I'm just annoyed at being summoned for an interview in the middle of the night.

INSPECTOR Sorry for the inconvenience. Just thought you'd be willing to help.

LAMORI No – look, please don't misunderstand me. Of course I'll help. Just that it's rather late, I'm tired.

INSPECTOR (*producing a cigarette case and a lighter*) Mind if I smoke?

LAMORI If you have to.

INSPECTOR Sure you don't mind?

LAMORI No, it's fine.

INSPECTOR I don't really enjoy smoking, you realise.

LAMORI May I ask then why you do? For the effect?

INSPECTOR Yes, actually. And because it's one of those things we aren't meant to do. It's one of my little forbidden pleasures. *(removes cigarette and puts it in his mouth)* You ever smoked, Father?

LAMORI No.

INSPECTOR *(goes to light cigarette)* Never?

LAMORI No.

INSPECTOR You're lying. *(removes unlit cigarette from his mouth)*

LAMORI What makes you say that?

INSPECTOR Intuition. It's a talent I have. I know when people are lying to me. *(he replaces cigarette in case, and places case and lighter on the table)*

LAMORI Is that why I'm here? So you can accuse me of lying?

INSPECTOR You've complained about everything else. "Coffee's too cold. It's late. I'm tired. Can't we do this tomorrow?"

LAMORI I believe in getting to the point, Inspector. If you find something disagreeable then why not just say so?

INSPECTOR So you don't find smoking disagreeable?

LAMORI Well, I-

INSPECTOR You don't, because you didn't complain about it. So I assume you've smoked before.

LAMORI Inspector, could you-

INSPECTOR Does that unnerve you, Father?

LAMORI Excuse me?

INSPECTOR Does that unnerve you? The knowledge that if you tell me a lie, I'll know.

LAMORI Should it unnerve me?

INSPECTOR Do you lie often?

LAMORI No.

INSPECTOR Good. You shouldn't, given your profession.

LAMORI Inspector, could you please tell me why I'm here?

INSPECTOR Are you nervous?

LAMORI Why on earth would I be nervous?

INSPECTOR You keep rubbing your finger with your other hand. *(he demonstrates what LAMORI has been doing unconsciously since the INSPECTOR entered)*

LAMORI I'm not nervous. I have no reason to be nervous. Just tell me what you want!

INSPECTOR We'll get to that. Please, take a seat.

LAMORI I'd prefer to stand.

INSPECTOR It was not a question, Father. I'm telling you to sit down.

LAMORI I will not sit down! I don't know whom you're used to dealing with in here, Inspector, but I will not be spoken to like that!

INSPECTOR Is that right?

LAMORI Yes Inspector, that is right. I have a spotless reputation in this community. Now, I'm more than willing to co-operate with your inquiries, but I find it totally unnecessary for you treat me like some itinerant beggar.

INSPECTOR You find it unnecessary?

LAMORI You heard me, Inspector.

INSPECTOR Well then, I thank you for your willingness to co-operate, but when I tell you to sit down, Father Lamori, you will sit down. (LAMORI *sits*. The INSPECTOR *goes to tape recorder, presses a button*)

LAMORI (*motioning to the tape recorder*) You're recording this then?

INSPECTOR Ever been married, Father? Before the priesthood, I mean?

LAMORI No.

INSPECTOR Ever got close?

LAMORI Once.

INSPECTOR Tell me about it.

LAMORI No. It's none of your business.

INSPECTOR Fair enough. You've been a priest for how long, Father? (*checking his folder*) Eighteen years?

LAMORI Yes.

INSPECTOR You finish a degree in Literature when you're twenty-one, then two years later decide to become a priest.

LAMORI Why is this relevant?

INSPECTOR Surprising.

LAMORI What is?

INSPECTOR For four years you study a wide field of literary texts, then devote the remainder of your life to only one.

LAMORI Too much knowledge can destroy the soul.

INSPECTOR And a little learning is a dangerous thing.

LAMORI Could you answer my question?

INSPECTOR Why this is relevant? I just want a little background.

LAMORI Why do you have a file on me, Inspector?

INSPECTOR It seems you're a popular man, Father. At least with those involved with the school. (*he reads*) "A firm but kind taskmaster, an expert teacher of Literature, a – oh dear – a 'dedicated practitioner' of pastoral care."

LAMORI Where did you get that?

INSPECTOR You recognise it?

LAMORI From the school's last evaluation. I ask you again, where did you get that?

INSPECTOR An excellent report, Father. Accurate, is it?

LAMORI I believe so.

INSPECTOR You're a man of dedication, then.

LAMORI The school and God are my life.

INSPECTOR So if someone threatened your role in the school, what would you do?

LAMORI Threatened my... at the school? I don't think so.

INSPECTOR Hypothetically speaking.

LAMORI I'm not going to sit here answering hypothetical questions for your amusement, Inspector. I waited in this room for twenty-seven minutes and then you walk in and treat me as if I've got something to hide. It's late and I'm tired. I therefore ask you to stop playing with me, and tell me, directly, why I am here.

INSPECTOR Three days ago, I received information from a man, highly distressed. He thought someone was going to kill him.

LAMORI Am I meant to know this man?

INSPECTOR He's a teacher at Saint Matthew's.

LAMORI Good God. Who is it?

INSPECTOR I'm afraid I can't tell you that.

LAMORI Why not?

INSPECTOR Can't tell you that either.

LAMORI But if he's a member of my staff I have a right to know!

INSPECTOR No, you don't. And the problem I'm facing is that this man has since disappeared.

LAMORI Disappeared?

INSPECTOR Vanished.

LAMORI Why wasn't I informed of this earlier?

INSPECTOR Because you couldn't be found either.

LAMORI Are you insinuating something?

INSPECTOR You wouldn't know where this man is, would you?

LAMORI How could I possibly know where he is if you haven't told me his name?

INSPECTOR Do I need to?

LAMORI It's no use trying to trick me, Inspector. I honestly don't know whom you're talking about.

INSPECTOR This man told me some very disturbing information. Information about your school.

LAMORI What information?

INSPECTOR The name of the person whom he thought would kill him. (LAMORI *realises the INSPECTOR considers him as the man*)

LAMORI Oh, this is ridiculous!

INSPECTOR What's so ridiculous, Father?

LAMORI I would never kill someone.

INSPECTOR Because you're a priest?

LAMORI Because I have no reason!

INSPECTOR And if you had a reason?

LAMORI Are you accusing me? Don't think you can intimidate me with some glib word-play, Inspector. Are you accusing me?

INSPECTOR I haven't accused you of anything.

LAMORI I want a lawyer. I want a lawyer present.

INSPECTOR A lawyer? Why would you need a lawyer? I only want to ask you a few questions. You can go home after that. To your bed.

LAMORI I see where this is going. I want a lawyer. It's my right to have one.

INSPECTOR I understand that.

LAMORI You will deny me my rights?

INSPECTOR Of course not.

LAMORI Then I would like a lawyer present, please!

INSPECTOR I fail to understand why, Father. I only want to ask you a few questions.

LAMORI I... your questions worry me. I'm a suspect, am I not?

INSPECTOR Possibly.

LAMORI Am I, or am I not a suspect?

INSPECTOR I'm sure you've nothing to worry about.

LAMORI How can you say that?

INSPECTOR Well, you're innocent, aren't you?

LAMORI I want a lawyer present.

INSPECTOR Then I will arrange one for you. The problem is, Father, as you know, we're rather isolated here. The nearest lawyer is some distance away.

LAMORI Then I'll wait.

INSPECTOR I'll have to send someone.

LAMORI Just make a phone call, for heaven's sake!

INSPECTOR We're having slight difficulty with the phones at the moment.

LAMORI I don't believe this. I'm prepared to wait. Send for a lawyer.

INSPECTOR Alright. *(the door opens and he goes out. LAMORI waits for a moment, then picks up one of the extra chairs and places it next to him, ready for his lawyer. He then sits back down. Eyes the cigarette case. Waits. Too-casually his hand slides towards it, picks it up, examines it, puts it back down. Waits. Snatches the case, opens it, goes to take a cigarette out. At that moment the door opens and the INSPECTOR enters)* There you are, Father. All arranged.

LAMORI Thank you. *(the INSPECTOR chuckles)* You find this amusing? *(the INSPECTOR points to the chair)*

INSPECTOR It's... well, it's nothing really.

LAMORI What's so funny, Inspector?

INSPECTOR Well, you figure someone thinks you want to kill him, and the first thing you do is shout for a lawyer.

LAMORI Is that unusual?

INSPECTOR Frankly, yes. *(picking up the lawyer's chair and placing it somewhere else)* I would've expected anger, denial, disbelief.

LAMORI I feel all of those things.

INSPECTOR Really? You're not showing them.

LAMORI Why should I?

INSPECTOR Usually when people suppress their emotions they're hiding something. Are you hiding something from me, Father Lamori?

LAMORI I cannot answer that. I don't know what you're looking for.

INSPECTOR Because if you are, I can assure you I will find out what it is.

LAMORI You strike me as a very confident man, Inspector.

INSPECTOR You probably think I'm arrogant.

LAMORI I do not know you well enough.

INSPECTOR I'm no more arrogant than you are, Father. After all, what profession could be more arrogant than the priesthood?

LAMORI I find that quite insulting, Inspector.

INSPECTOR No insult. Just an observation. I mean, isn't there a certain arrogance in the assumption of divinity? A scientist must prove his theories in order for them to be accepted as fact. Now, I can't ever remember the church proving there is a God. Seems rather presumptuous to me.

LAMORI Religion is not a science, Inspector.

INSPECTOR Then how can you be so confident in your beliefs?

LAMORI Faith, Inspector.

INSPECTOR Indeed. Faith. The answer to all unanswerable questions. You take confessions, don't you? Being a priest. That must be trying. Having to sit there and listen to the masses pour out their sins, day after day, hearing their sordid little fantasies just so they

can feel repentant. Listening to it – doesn't it all build up inside you? All that sin. Make you feel... well... unclean?

LAMORI No.

INSPECTOR Oh. I thought it would.

LAMORI Like yourself?

INSPECTOR Excuse me?

LAMORI You feel unclean a lot of the time, don't you? Oh - no great deduction on my part. I mean, you have a difficult job. When you work in the gutter part of you will remain in the gutter. That's not an original line, you understand? I just read it somewhere.

INSPECTOR I had to listen to a man once – not here, it was... somewhere. It was a long time ago. Now, this man worked for a large charity. He attended church and each week put one tenth of his income into the collection box. A well-liked man and a model citizen. This man confessed to me he raped women. Not only that, Father, afterwards he would kill and dismember them. And he told me all this as if it was as natural to him as blinking. Now, what part of "When you work in the gutter part of you will remain in the gutter" applies in that instance?

LAMORI Maybe you should attend confession. It might help expunge that dirt you feel.

INSPECTOR No, I don't think so.

LAMORI You do not believe in God?

INSPECTOR I don't believe in the sanctity of confession. You see, sometimes I think we've got it all wrong. That people forgive too easily.

LAMORI I think forgiveness is best left to God.

INSPECTOR Ah. Text book answer.

LAMORI Would you mind if we waited without talking?

INSPECTOR Have it your own way. (*he gets up and walks around, stretching his arms, hums something tuneless and indistinct*) You think that man would be going to hell, Father? (LAMORI *sighs*) Indulge me. Let's say this man hadn't committed these crimes. Only thought about them. We've all done that, haven't we? Thought about hurting someone, fantasized about it even. So this man – let's say he planned these acts, fantasized about the rape and murder of women, but never actually committed them. Would he then, when he died, go to hell? What do you think?

LAMORI If he confessed these thoughts to God, and was repentant for them, he would receive forgiveness. If he did not, then his thoughts are sin, like any other.

INSPECTOR But come on, surely there's a difference between the contemplation of sin and committing a sinful act?

LAMORI The sinful act is only the display of existing sin. If a man is excessively vain but does not have the opportunity to parade his vanity to others, he still remains vain.

INSPECTOR So you're saying in the eyes of God there is no difference between just thinking about murder and actually committing it. Always refreshing to hear the views of a priest.

LAMORI Are you finished being clever now? May I sit here in silence? Or would you like to continue this superficial theological debate?

INSPECTOR Is that how you talk as an assistant headmaster? Belittle your pupils without raising your voice? Very effective. (LAMORI *does not rise to this bait*) Not one for idle chit-chat, are you?

LAMORI I like silence.

INSPECTOR What do you like about it?

LAMORI There's a certain sense of peace in a silence.

INSPECTOR And peace is important to you?

LAMORI Peace is important to all of us. It allows us reflection and contemplation.

INSPECTOR So you would prefer to just sit here, in silence?

LAMORI Yes.

INSPECTOR Fair enough. (*he sits in a chair, opens his folder, and fills out some form, taking his time. When completed he casually removes the form from the folder, holds it up, and slowly tears it into long strips, one strip after the other. LAMORI tries to hold his patience, but in the end cannot*)

LAMORI How long do you think he might take? The lawyer.

INSPECTOR Oh, an hour. Maybe two.

LAMORI That long?

INSPECTOR He has to shower first. Get dressed. You know how lawyers are about their appearance. (*holds up a strip of paper to his neck, imitating a dog collar*) Much like priests.

LAMORI I don't find that amusing.

INSPECTOR I wasn't trying to be amusing. (*screws up all the paper strips into a ball*) It's just I've never seen a shabby priest. Or lawyer for that matter. (*throws the paper ball into the bin*) You see, people are far more willing to trust a person who has a sense of neatness about them. Especially if they wear a uniform.

LAMORI We don't have uniforms.

INSPECTOR Oh come on! You are identified walking down the street by that collar you wear! That's a uniform. And don't you find that a good dog-collar adds that extra authoritative air?

LAMORI The problem you have, Inspector, is that I know exactly what you're doing.

INSPECTOR Oh?

LAMORI Ever cooked a good steak, Inspector? Before you place it in the pan you must first tenderize it. You need to provoke the meat into releasing its juices. Just tap and prod and probe while you're waiting for things to heat up. Tap. Prod. Probe.

INSPECTOR Hmm, rather a sexual metaphor, for a priest. And come to think of it, why the priesthood?

LAMORI For myself? There are many less fortunate than ourselves, Inspector. I believed I had much to offer people. God's work is a noble following.

INSPECTOR Then why not work for a charity? Or become a social worker? Or are they not noble enough professions for you?

LAMORI You know Inspector, you're not as clever as you think you are. You see, I lied to you before.

INSPECTOR Oh?

LAMORI Yes. I actually do think you suffer from arrogance.

INSPECTOR You think I should respect you because you have a white collar around your neck.

LAMORI I respect your authority. I don't think you respect mine.

INSPECTOR Father, you have authority over small boys.

LAMORI You are trying to provoke me.

INSPECTOR Like a good steak. Is it working?

LAMORI No, it's not.

INSPECTOR Now I wonder what you'd do to a pupil of yours who spoke to you like I've done? Would you send them out of the classroom? Would you have them visit your office later, alone, after school?

LAMORI Why are you trying to provoke me, Inspector?

INSPECTOR I wonder what you'd do to me in that office of yours, Father Lamori?

LAMORI Just what are you insinuating? (*standing, he has clearly had enough of this*) I am not a criminal! Don't think you can treat me like one!

INSPECTOR Good. You can be provoked. Now tell me what you did last night.

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