



THE
GREENWICH

P R O T O C O L

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THE INVITATION

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THE GREENWICH PROTOCOL

Know where you begin.

Know where you finish.

Trust everything in between.

The Invitation

The envelope was waiting on the hall table when Miles Sinclair got home.

It had been one of those rare first days of September that London occasionally throws at you as compensation for the rest of the year, and the last of the sun was still coming through the fanlight above the door, laying a bar of gold across the floor and halfway up the wall. Miles hung up his coat, loosened his tie and dropped his keys into the dish they had been going into for as long as he'd lived there. Then he saw the envelope.

The colour was wrong. Not the usual white of bills and circulars, but thick paper somewhere between ivory and bone, the kind of stationery you probably had to order rather than buy. In the fading light it had turned almost amber. There was no stamp, no postmark, no return address. Just his name, handwritten across the front in dark ink. Whoever had written it had pressed hard enough that Miles could feel the impression of every letter beneath his thumb.

He turned it over. A disc of deep navy wax sealed the back, perfectly intact. Stamped into it was a letter G, with something long and slender running vertically through its centre. A sword, perhaps. Or the hand of an instrument. Or the line on a chart that everything else is measured against. Miles held it up to the light. It was not a mark he knew, and yet something in him recognised it.

There was a note beside it in the handwriting of Mrs Kilmany, his neighbour. She had taken it in yesterday afternoon and let herself in to leave it on the table. A man had brought it round, she wrote. Older, very smartly dressed. He had asked for Miles by name, declined to give his own, and thanked her as though she had done him a considerable favour.

Inside was a single sheet of paper.

1 September 2027
Edinburgh
10:00 GMT

That was it. No explanation. No signature. Nothing to say who had sent it or why. Miles read it again, then a third time, as though repetition might somehow squeeze a little more information out of it. A year away. Whoever had sent this wasn't in any hurry. As he put the first card down, a second slipped from the envelope.

Know where you begin.
Know where you finish.
Trust everything in between.

Miles stared at the words. He knew them. He was certain of it. Not in the ordinary sense, more like knowing a tune before you can remember its name. Something familiar, just beyond reach. Whatever it was did not go away. It sharpened into something unexpectedly close to excitement, and he was halfway across the house before he realised he already knew where to look.

His grandfather's study was at the back. Miles hardly ever went in there anymore. His grandfather had been dead for thirty years, and the room had gradually settled into the stillness that comes when nobody has a reason to disturb them. Everything was exactly where he'd left it, as though the room were waiting for him to come back and finish something.

The pipe rack. The barometer nobody had touched since the funeral. The bagatelle board propped behind the door, its green baize worn pale in a crescent where the balls had run. They'd played on that board through whole summer evenings until Miles reached the age when he decided he was too old for it. He hadn't touched it since he was a young man. He could still remember which brass pins ran true and which sent everything slightly left.

He crossed to the bookcase. Third shelf, eye height. A dark green journal sat untouched among the books, covered in the fine dust that gathers when something has been left undisturbed for years. Miles had walked past it a thousand times. He reached for it without hesitating.

The spine cracked as he opened it. Inside was close, cramped handwriting. Dates. Initials. Abbreviations that meant nothing to him. Some entries ran for pages. Others were a single line. The handwriting changed as the years passed, becoming shakier, less certain.

Miles turned another page and stopped. Near the middle of the journal, where the binding had been forced slightly apart to make room for it, something slipped free. A photograph. It landed face down on the desk.

Miles picked it up and carried it to the window, where the light was better. Eleven people stood on an airfield in front of an aircraft. They had dressed in their finest, as though flying were an occasion in itself. The women wore elegant coats over smart dresses, their hats carefully set, scarves tucked neatly around their necks; one was holding a hand to her hat against the wind. The men wore dark suits and handsome overcoats, their ties neatly knotted and their shoes polished. They looked less like passengers waiting for a flight than people setting off on the adventure of a lifetime.

Nobody was carrying luggage. It took Miles a moment to realise that wasn't an oversight: someone else had taken care of it. The five couples stood close together, the way couples naturally do when they're photographed. And then there was the eleventh man, standing slightly apart on the left of the frame.

Behind them, the aircraft filled almost the entire width of the photograph. It was vast, and silver where the light caught it. Two great wings, one above the other, spanning wider than the frame could hold, and four engines slung between them, propellers still. A long row of small square windows ran towards the tail like a railway carriage.

A steward in a white jacket stood at the bottom of the boarding steps, hands clasped behind his back, patiently waiting for them to finish their photograph so they could board. Miles leaned closer. Beneath the cockpit windows, in flowing script, was the aircraft's name.

Alexandria

He tilted the photograph towards the light. The name meant nothing to him.

It was the faces that held him. What caught him were not the clothes, nor the aircraft, but the expressions. Nobody was smiling in the modern way, performing for the camera. They were trying very hard to look as though this journey was nothing out of the ordinary, and not one of them was managing it. It was the look of a group who had agreed to something and were about to find out exactly what they'd agreed to.

He looked at them a long time. They did not feel like strangers, and he could not think why.

Miles's eyes moved to the man standing alone and stopped. He knew that face. Not as it looked now, but as it had looked decades ago. His grandfather, young and dark-haired, the overcoat a little too big across the shoulders.

He wasn't looking at the camera but beyond it, towards something outside the frame, and Miles knew that expression. Completely certain: the look of a man who knew exactly what was coming, and was waiting for everyone else to catch up.

He lowered the photograph and turned it over.

Class of 1934

Miles stared at the words. There had to be an explanation. Some society. A dining club. A flying club. One of the shooting parties his grandfather had never talked about.

People of that generation joined things. They didn't explain themselves. He told himself that twice, and it sounded less convincing the second time. Beneath the photograph, written in the same careful hand as the journal, were two words.

Reference Maintained

He read the two words again. They didn't sound like a caption, or a joke between friends. They sounded like a report. Something had been maintained, something important enough to record, and now the words were sitting on his desk in the handwriting of a man he'd known for the first thirty years of his life. A man Miles was suddenly beginning to realise he might never have known at all.

The explanations stopped coming. He placed everything on the blotter: the card with the date, the card with the three lines, and the photograph.

The envelope hadn't arrived by accident. Someone knew who his grandfather had been. Someone knew about the journal. They knew exactly where to find it. More than that, someone had been confident enough to send a well-dressed stranger to deliver a date a year in the future. No explanation. Just an invitation.

Edinburgh.
1 September 2027.
10:00 GMT.

Ninety-three years. He sat in his grandfather's chair for a long time, the photograph resting in his hands. One familiar face, and ten more he felt certain he had encountered.

Outside, the last of the daylight disappeared. The gold on the wall had faded without him noticing, replaced by the blue-grey light of evening. Somewhere across the gardens, a door opened and shut. Someone laughed. Miles looked down at the photograph one final time. In the corner of the room the old clock continued ticking, measuring the distance to something. And suddenly, Miles understood. This wasn't an invitation, it was the next step.

Whatever had begun in 1934 hadn't ended. It had simply been waiting for him.



ARCHIVE STATUS

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Further material remains restricted.

The next document will be released when authorised.

REFERENCE MAINTAINED