

EXTRACT ONE

Fact

In 1912, the collector Wilfred Voynich discovered a selection of ancient books hidden in a chest in Mondragone Castle, Italy. Among the texts was a manuscript written entirely in code. It became known as the Voynich Manuscript.

For a century, academics tried to break the code. But not a single word or phrase in the 246 pages of the Voynich Manuscript has been read.

In 1944 a group of code-breakers working for the US government formed a Study Group to try and decipher the text. They failed. Between 1962 and 1963 a second Study Group was formed. Eventually Americans joined with British code-breakers based at Bletchley Park Mansion. They failed.

So, in 1969, the manuscript was donated to Yale University and registered simply as 'MS 408'. It is kept hidden from general view in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Since that day, the book has remained unreadable.

Until now . . .

EXTRACT TWO : Following the Call of the Code

Smithies peered through the frosted screen door at a man wearing a pair of pyjama trousers tied up with a garish yellow necktie.

'And you didn't feel the need to get rid of him?' Smithies hissed.

Tandi clutched a pile of Manila folders tightly to her and shook her head defiantly. 'No, sir. I didn't feel it polite to "get rid of him". He was, after all, the only one to come.'

'But where are the others I invited?'

'Dead, sir.' She paused. 'Or in prison. And these two here,' she flicked to the uppermost files, 'are in institutions apparently. This one hasn't spoken a word for nearly ten years.'

Smithies grimaced. 'Oh well, Oscar "Sicknote" Ingham will certainly make up for that then.'

'Sir?'

'Never mind.' Smithies pushed open the door and made his way into the board room.

'Oscar,' he said with a fair degree of effort. 'How've you been?'

'Oh, you know, Jon. Never without pain.'

Smithies counted to ten silently in his head.

All things considered the interview went quite badly. Oscar Ingham was enjoying his retirement, hated the thought of working with children and was appalled at the idea of being on the staff of a Code and Cipher School.

'So why exactly did you answer the call?' said Smithies, biting back the urge to also ask why a fully grown man had decided to arrive at a meeting he so obviously didn't want to be at, and hadn't even bothered to change out of his pyjamas.

Ingham reached into his pocket and took out a small container of tablets, emptied two into his hand and swallowed them before speaking. 'MS 408,' he said with an urgency that made Smithies' heart quicken. 'You said there's a new lead.'

Smithies reached into his briefcase and very carefully, as if he were afraid it may turn to dust in his hand, he drew out a small yellowed envelope. Across the back of the envelope was a seal pressed into thick red wax. It showed a bird in flight. A phoenix with wings spread wide. The mark of the Firebird. The seal was broken. The envelope open. And with hands that shook a little, Smithies drew out a folded sheet of paper and laid it on the table.

BONUS EXTRA SESSION TWO



EXTRACT THREE

Brodie Bray stood on the footbridge that spanned the river and waited for her granddad. She knew he'd arrive on his scooter. Not the sort of scooter that looks like a golf buggy and that old ladies with blue curly hair ride at top speed down the middle of the pavement. A proper scooter. A silver one with two wheels and a footboard; that you scoot on. She didn't mind that her granddad rode a scooter. She was just glad he'd grown out of his rollerblade phase.

She rolled up the left sleeve of her jumper and looked at her watch. He was late. She rolled up her other sleeve. Her second watch was set to show the time in New York, America. It was behind English time. But whichever calculations she made to allow for the time difference, Granddad was still late. She kicked a loose pebble with her foot. It rolled across the pavement and then dropped into the river. It made barely a ripple. 'Too small,' thought Brodie to herself. 'Just too small to make a difference.'

She peered down into the water. It looked thick and black like oil, her reflection rising and falling so her freckled nose seemed to grow and shrink. She kicked another pebble. This time a bigger one. The image in the water swirled beneath the weight of the pebble. She waited for the image to settle. But it still didn't look like her. Not the person she saw in the mirror with wild straw-coloured hair that never hung smooth, and a crooked grin where her teeth stuck out a little because she'd sucked her thumb as a baby. This shimmery water version of her looked strangely scary. She kicked one more stone. The largest she could find. The reflection in the water shattered into a thousand pieces.

EXTRACT FOUR

Brodie cut them off. 'This story,' she said. 'The griffin in it was a guardian of light.'
'Could he stretch time, this guardian of light?' asked Hunter. 'Four minutes now. We're into our last four minutes!'

'Shh,' Brodie hissed in exasperation. Something about her memory of the story had sparked an idea and she was sure if she didn't grasp hold of it, the thought would drift away like smoke.

'You all right, B?' Hunter said, lifting his head to look at her.

Brodie sheltered her eyes against the glare of the sun.

'BB?'

'At the end we must return to the beginning,' Brodie said again. The stopwatch said three minutes. 'How d'you get your invite to this place?' Brodie asked.

'Birthday card,' mused Hunter. 'A hundred and seventeen days late.'

Tusia's eyes widened. 'I got a card too,' she said. 'And holes had been spaced under the letters to let light through the message.'

Brodie clapped her hands. 'Exactly. *That* was the beginning. And then?'

'Message in a lamppost.' Hunter grinned, finally cottoning on.

'So at the end we must return to the beginning,' confirmed Brodie. 'And at the beginning of all this was the *light*.' Her pulse was racing. They had two minutes. She looked up at the candle lantern. Glinting in the glow of the single flame was something metal. Brodie peered into the light to see. It was a key.

'I guess it's time to use that ladder again!' yelled Hunter.

Dust lifted from his feet as he ran and the end of the ladder carved a snaking line in the gravel on the forecourt.

'One minute, Toots!' he shouted as Tusia climbed the ladder. 'Fifty-nine seconds. Come on!'

Brodie steadied the base of the ladder. She tried to steady her nerve. A bead of sweat trickled down Tusia's neck and dripped on to the floor of the porch. 'Twenty seconds. We have twenty seconds, Toots!'

The lantern cage swung open. The flame of the candle guttered in the breeze. The key tumbled into Brodie's hand.

She slotted the key in the lock and turned.

An alarm on the stopwatches pierced the air.

But the door of Bletchley Park Mansion swung open wide. They were inside the Black Chamber.

EXTRACT FIVE

The door to the small hexagonal building to the right of the mansion was already ajar and Tusia led the way inside. On the floor was a small wooden trunk. The top of the trunk was patterned. Leaves and flowers carved somehow across the domed lid. There was a small leather handle and straps that ran across the trunk and fastened it shut. And a lock.

‘Shall we?’ whispered Hunter.

They knelt down beside the trunk.

‘You do it, BB. Go on.’

Brodie turned the catch on the lock. She unfastened the leather straps. Then, very carefully, she rocked back the lid.

For a moment it looked like the trunk was filled with shimmering gold. A shiny fabric wrapped around a bundle hidden inside. Brodie’s hands were shaking and her stomach seemed to be pressing against the bottom of her lungs making it difficult to breathe.

She reached into the trunk and lifted the bundle. The fabric fell away. Underneath was a thick bound book. The red leather cover was soft, worn in places, unmarked by any writing or title apart from a small label of unreadable text in the corner. The pages were bulging against a thin cord tied round the leather. She slipped her fingers underneath the loop and loosened the knot. Then she uncurled the cord.

She could feel her pulse throbbing in her neck. Her nostrils were filled with the smell of wood and parchment. With the cord untied, the cover of the unread book flapped open.

This, then, was what her mother had spent years trying to read. The unsolved code her mother wanted to crack. The cipher that had broken full-grown men.

And she was holding it now, in her hands.

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Mr Bray leant heavily on his walking stick and surveyed the pile of scattered photograph wallets that remained on the floor in front of the dresser. He took in a deep breath and then very carefully lowered himself down to his knees. It was nearly dark but he didn’t want to put on the light. Having the light on would make everything too real.

He took the first packet of photographs in his hand. He didn’t have to open it to remember the images inside. The details were written in an untidy scrawl across the label and the scenes themselves burnt on his memory.

He swallowed hard and rested the packet for a moment against his chest. He’d known this day would come and in a way it was all he’d longed for. That his granddaughter could carry on with the task he’d begun and his daughter had continued. Mr Bray tried to reassure himself. He knew it needed to happen. But he, more than anyone, knew the danger of breaking the rules.

He couldn’t help being scared.

BONUS EXTRA SESSION FIVE



EXTRACT SIX: THE BLOOMING OF THE CORPSE FLOWER

Brodie coiled the rope in her hand. It was lighter than before. She glanced at the window, then opened the hatch in the vacuum system, slipped the rope inside the container and closed the door. The container thumped in the tubing like an erratic heartbeat. No one spoke.

When Brodie opened the returned container her fingers were moist with sweat.

There was no need to say anything.

One solitary red ribbon fluttered on the end of the rope.

'I know why we're losing lives,' she said. 'And we have to stop!' Her eyes stung with tears.

Hunter and Tusia said nothing.

'You just never let up. On and on, trying to prove which of you's the most clever, and the point is you both are, that's why you're both here.'

'Now hold on a minute,' interrupted Hunter. 'I'm always fair to you, BB. It's just her I can't stand.'

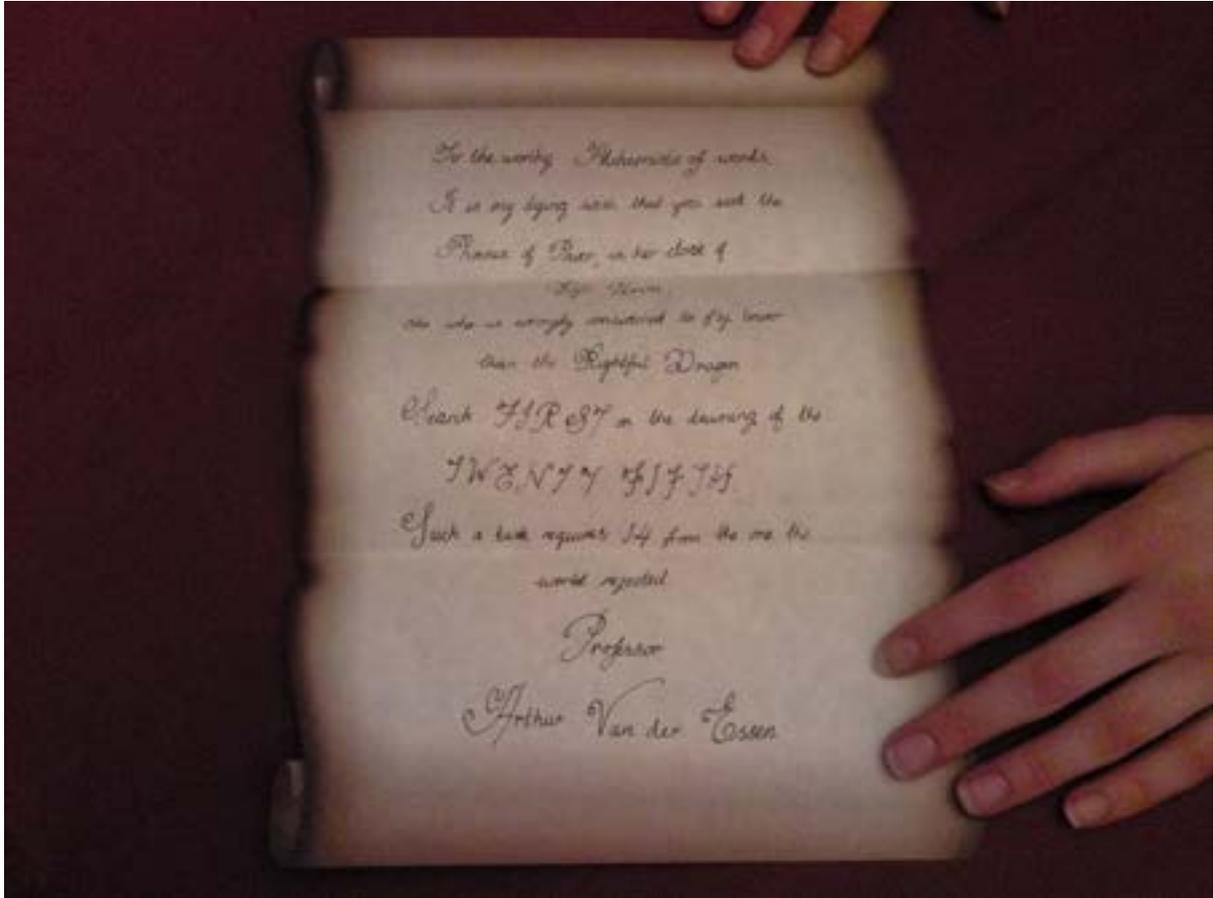
'Well "her" has a name. And it's not T or Toots. It's Tusia.'

Hunter flushed red but Tusia began to grin from ear to ear.

'And you're just as bad,' Brodie continued, causing the smile to evaporate quickly from Tusia's face. 'Hunter's OK and if you stopped for one moment trying to score points off him because he's a boy then you'd realise that. Don't you see?' she said, holding the rope as the single ribbon lifted and fell in the air. 'This must be where they worked! The code-crackers of the past. The Veritas team looking at MS 408. Working together, maybe all through the night, trying to make sense of a mystery. These are their names, look, carved here. If we join the Study Group we sort of take over from them. We sit where they sat. But it's not going to happen, is it? With the rowing and the moaning. That's why we're losing lives.' She lowered her hand once more to feel the shape of the initials on the table. She laid the rope beside it.

There was a long silence. The initials of Study Group members of the past stared up at them. The red ribbon fluttered.

EXTRACT SEVEN



Also include here Brodie's note page from this chapter!

EXTRACT EIGHT

She traced her fingers across the capitalised words. ‘FIRST. TWENTY-FIFTH. First “book”. Twenty-fifth “chapter”. Well?’

Tusia had the copy of Malory and was turning the pages furiously. ‘Here. It’s here,’ she said, holding it out in front of her so the three of them could see more clearly. ‘Book One. Chapter Twenty-five.’

‘And?’ Brodie said, barely able to focus her eyes on the print in front of them. ‘What’s it about?’

Tusia read the title of the section slowly. ‘*How Arthur by the mean of Merlin gat Excalibur his sword of the Lady of the Lake.*’

‘And the scabbard. Does it talk about the scabbard?’

Hunter thumped the page with the palm of his hand. ‘There, look. There. It’s the bit of the story you knew.’ He grinned broadly, and read the words aloud.

‘You are most unwise, said Merlin, for the scabbard is worth ten of the sword. For whiles you have the scabbard upon you, ye shall never lose no blood, be ye never so sore wounded; therefore keep well the scabbard always with you.’

Brodie clapped her hands together. ‘So that’s it then. That’s it. We’ve found a section about the scabbard in the *twenty-fifth chapter* of the *first book* written by the man rejected by the world. We’ve done it. We’ve really done it. We’ve found the section of writing that must have the key to the Firebird Code somewhere in it.’

Hunter was still frowning and pointing at the paper with his finger, his lips twitching as if he were counting in his head. ‘Even better than that,’ he said. ‘We’ve got even closer.’

Brodie waited for him to go on.

‘We’ve found the section of story. I’m sure. The cloak of the phoenix, or the scabbard of the sword. It all makes sense. So now we have to try and use the “handle with care” numbers and somehow fit them with this bit of writing. That must be the thing we need to do next.’

‘OK,’ agreed Brodie. ‘But the bit of writing we’ve found is a fairly long section and the “handle with care” numbers Van der Essen gave us could fit with any of the words in this section.’ Brodie tried hard not to look too crestfallen. ‘But we can narrow it down. If we give ourselves enough time.’

‘We don’t need to.’ Hunter pushed out his chest with pride. ‘We’ve done it already.’

EXTRACT NINE

‘This is a record of all the crazy and dangerous theories that have existed about MS 408,’ he said and his words were hushed. ‘It’s a record of careers lost and reputations ruined. A warning to us all,’ he added.

Kerrith was unsure how to answer.

‘There are some who believe MS 408 is a book of great meaning, a text that will reveal a great secret. There are many who see it as a guidebook to another world in our own if we can only work out the code in which the secrets are recorded.’

‘And you don’t believe that?’ Kerrith asked, her desire for answers overtaking her need for politeness.

‘There are no worlds within worlds, Miss Verman. There’s only what we see around us. What we know to be fact. Chasing after the end of the rainbow is a childish dream. One we should leave behind.’ He stood himself up taller. ‘Our job on Level Five is to clarify tangible, believable truths, not try and catch or bottle shadows.’ He sniffed as if the folder he held was reeking an unbearable smell. ‘They’re all listed here, you know. Newbold and Levitov; that meddling Fabyan woman; even Ingham, Friedman and Bray. Their crazy notions about MS 408 stored for posterity. But that’s where they should remain. Locked away, forgotten, and discredited for the lies they are.’

Kerrith tried to smile.

‘If what you tell me is true and Smithies really has been working on trying to translate the manuscript, then he must be stopped. For centuries we’ve worked to eliminate any study or publication of documents that support belief in fancies and not tangible facts.’ He twisted a silver ring on his finger bearing the mark Kerrith had seen stamped on the copies of MS 408. The same emblem on the carpet. The Director saw her watching. ‘History bears record to the lives of great men and women who’ve done their best to prevent these stories and imaginings being given life,’ he said. ‘I value your commitment to the cause, Miss Verman. It will not go unacknowledged.’ His hand stilled on the ring and then moved to press once more on the cover of the document he held. ‘If the ideas contained in this folder were given public airing there’d be mass panic. Public order would be at risk. If the theories were proved to be true our understanding of what’s real in our world would change.’

Kerrith felt her heart quicken a little. ‘You’re sure the theories are untrue?’ she asked.

The Director rocked back his head to laugh. Then his eyes darkened, almost pityingly. ‘It doesn’t matter whether they’re true or not,’ he said, and each word was spoken carefully as if he were afraid his words would betray him. ‘What matters is that we on Level Five are in control. We are the keepers of secrets, the guardians of mystery.’ He put the folder back in the confines of the secret cupboard and swung the picture back across the door. ‘As members of Level Five, working for the Ministry of Information, we’re in the business of ensuring belief in what can be seen and tested. We’re not here to chase dreams and myths.’

EXTRACT TEN

Brodie tried to take it all in. Pink walls painted with pictures of blue bamboo; statues of Chinese court officials; tiny golden bells hanging all along the top of the wall and great skylights painted with pictures. ‘That’s Lei Gong, the Chinese God of Thunder,’ said Brodie, craning her neck to see more clearly the stained glass of the skylight above her. ‘I think I’ve read in Chinese myth he always had two thunder dragons with him. Look.’

Hunter glanced up. ‘Your obsession with stories may come in handy here.’

There were few other visitors, it being quite late in the afternoon. An elderly woman with a folded pink umbrella was giving an over-wordy lecture to a group of bored-looking tourists. They were bunched round a large mantel clock in the form of Cupid driving through clouds in a chariot, being pulled along by butterflies. Smithies led the way quickly past them, hurrying through the gallery as if mere speed alone would help them find what they looked for. When they came to the banqueting room though, his feet slowed to a stop. Brodie’d been impressed by the ballroom at Bletchley. The long gallery in the Pavilion was certainly quite stunning.

But the Banqueting Room was something else.

A long table ran down the centre of the room, groaning under the weight of plates and golden cutlery. On the window side, the room was decked with gold and red curtains topped with figurines of golden dragons. Huge pictures of Chinese art framed with burnt gold hung on the walls and the ceiling arced above them. The rest of the walls were covered with patterned golden paper showing dragons and stars and planets. But it was the chandeliers hung from the ceiling that caused Brodie to wobble a little as she looked. Appearing to fly free beneath a canopy of leaves was an enormous silver and gold dragon. In its claws hung a crystal chandelier so large Brodie was sure it’d be possible for a grown man to hide in the falls of crystal and not be seen. Around the light, six more dragons reared upwards. Each held another light in their mouth, shaped like overlapping tongues of flame.

‘Now that’s surely what you call elfin Urim,’ said Tusia. ‘Amazing use of the space in here.’

It was a while before Brodie tore her gaze away from the central light and looked around the rest of the room. It was then she saw them.

Suspended in the four corners of the massive hall were four more spectacular lights, each hanging from a glittering star of crystal and gold. Yet above each star, carrying the light on a silver collar tight around her neck, tail spread in flight and wings wide, was a golden phoenix.

Brodie could barely speak. ‘Look. Look.’ She jabbed at Hunter’s arm and he switched his gaze from the central chandelier to the edge of the room. ‘D’you see?’ she said. ‘A firebird in flight.’

She looked back at the dragon chandelier weighed down by the crystal and the gold. Then back at the firebirds as they flew high towards the ceiling, their outstretched beaks almost touching the painted canopy above them.

Suddenly she was aware of someone twitching excitedly beside her.

‘It’s wrong,’ Tusia yelped. ‘The lights are wrong.’

EXTRACT ELEVEN

Above them, Brodie could hear Vernan's footsteps. And she was obviously not alone. At least two other people were with her. With every footstep, a cloud of dust leaked through the cracks in the floorboards and covered their heads. Brodie's nose twitched. She tried to swallow a sneeze and her eyes began to burn.

'Please don't let them find us,' she pleaded silently in her head.

There was a scraping noise. Metal against wood. Brodie guessed Vernan was dragging a chair across the room. Then the sound of china breaking. A shattering of porcelain on the floor above them – the broken statue, she presumed – and new clouds of dust rained between the cracks. Brodie pressed her fist into her mouth as the urge to sneeze grew stronger.

Would it end like this? In a roof space, in the half-light. Hidden and afraid.

She reached out her free arm to steady herself against the ledge and her hand brushed something cold.

She ran the tips of her fingers across it. Metal? A metal box? And then something else. Something warm.

A single feather. Glowing in the half-light. A warm scarlet glow.

Brodie ignored the pacing footsteps above her and scrambled along the ledge. The rope for the pulley caught on her leg. But she didn't stop. She reached out her hand again.

Her fingers curled around the feather.

Then, with the other hand, she lifted the metal box from the ledge and blew the coating of dust from the surface.

The box was the size of a book. Tarnished silver with golden engraving on the top and each side. Her heart pushed against her ribs. Her fingers trembled.

Engraved on the lid of the box, difficult to see in the half-light, but as welcome as a familiar friend, she could just make out the shape of a bird. A firebird.

Hunter and Miss Tandari smiled silent understanding.

Brodie closed her eyes and drew the feather and the box in tight against her chest. She'd found the phoenix.

Her breathing slowed. Her muscles loosened and as she lifted her head she was aware of a shaft of light, bright and strong and bathing her in a delicious warmth.

It took Brodie several seconds to realise that, above her, the trapdoor had swung open wide.

BONUS EXTRA SESSION ELEVEN



EXTRACT TWELVE

Still the woman said nothing. She traced a circle once more with her toe. Then she looked up. 'The manuscript offers nothing but false dreams, Brodie. Now it's time to give it up.' Her voice tightened. 'Pass me Van der Essen's phoenix so we can end this.'

Brodie could barely breathe.

'Pursuing a solution for MS 408 can only end in sorrow, Brodie. You've been tricked into thinking there's some great secret to discover. That's a lie. The book's a fake. Whatever you've found is just another playing piece in the game. An elaborate game. One that's already cost your mother's life.' She stepped forward and Brodie could feel her breath against her skin. The heavy scent of lotus flower swirled around her. 'Hand me what you found.'

Brodie's mind was in free-fall. The manuscript a fake? Tricked? Fooled into caring? Into trying? All for nothing. The ground was sliding like wet sand under her feet but something kept her from falling. She felt the picture of the castle inside the locket burning against her skin. As if the castle built of sand was standing tall in the waves as they lapped around it. The castle refused to fall. And she was holding on to it.

'Perhaps it's all a terrible game,' she said. 'But I've got the phoenix.' She swallowed. 'I'm not going to give it to you.'

'Nice speech, little girl,' the woman laughed and a bead of spit bubbled on her blood-red lip. 'But this is no time for bravery. The game's over and this time I've won. I've got what Smithies wants and he'll walk away the loser.'

She lunged towards Brodie and the silver box she clutched to her chest.

Brodie stumbled backwards. The long metal box tumbled from her fingers as her arm grazed against the jagged wing of an ornate dragon that reared up beside the window. And like a bell ringing out in the silence, there was the sound of metal on stone as the box crashed against the wall.

It bounced on the ground, its lid flung open.

There, resting in the folds of fabric lining, inside the box, was what the search was all about. The codes, the secrets, the quest. Brodie knew what it was as soon as she saw it.

Ash.

Tears of blackened scraps lay like petals on the fabric and the smell of ancient burning rose in the air. A piece drifted on to the woman's hand. She reached with the fingers of her other hand, pale ghost letters from the kiss of the ash still visible against the skin. At her touch they turned to dust and blew away.

EXTRACT THIRTEEN

‘Fire!’ Brodie yelled at the top of her voice.

Hunter scrambled to his feet and Smithies’ glasses wobbled precariously on his nose.

‘Fire!’

‘Where? Where?’ Miss Tandari grabbed a billiard cue from the table and lurched towards the glass fronted alarm on the far wall. She swung the cue through the air towards the glass.

‘No. Wait!’ screamed Brodie.

Miss Tandari froze the swing and tottered. ‘You said “fire”!’

‘I did! I did!’ squealed Brodie.

‘So I should sound the alarm. Evacuate the premises. Lead people to their assembly points.’

‘I mean, we *need* fire. Not we’re *on* fire,’ Brodie yelled, wrestling the snooker cue from Miss Tandari’s hand and dropping it to the floor. ‘The paper,’ she yelled again. ‘It’s so obvious.’

‘Excuse me?’ begged Tusia.

‘OK,’ said Brodie, trying desperately to calm herself. ‘We find a box and we think the secret to reading MS 408 is hidden inside.’

Hunter was nodding frantically. ‘And?’

‘And then we look more carefully in the box we know was hidden in the Pavilion by a professor of codes . . . a very clever man . . . who spent *ages* trying to leave us perfect clues about where this code-book is.’

‘And?’ Mr Smithies was getting frantic now.

‘And, we’re supposed to believe this professor would very carefully hide a piece of paper in the box and just write the name of the sword that went with the scabbard.’

‘Excuse me. Does anyone else think she’s covering the blindingly obvious?’ Miss Tandari said rather meekly.

‘That’s the point,’ snapped Brodie. ‘Obvious! The message *Excalibur* is just too obvious. And you keep telling us this whole search is about looking beyond the obvious, don’t you? You remember Merlin said it to Arthur. In Malory’s poem. Everything’s been about *more* than the weapon.’

‘And?’

‘Van der Essen meant us to look beyond the *sword*.’

‘I just don’t follow, BB.’

‘The writing of the word “Excalibur” is what code-crackers call a piece of disinformation, isn’t it, Miss Tandari?’

Miss Tandari’s dark eyes were widening now. ‘Of course. Of course,’ she blurted.

‘Something written to throw us off track from the real message.’

Smithies’ grin at last was huge, sparkling in his eyes.

‘So where,’ begged Hunter, his exasperation stretching across his face, ‘is the *real* information?’

‘On the paper,’ Brodie said hotly.

She didn’t think it was possible for Hunter to look more confused.

‘That’s,’ said Brodie slowly, ‘why we need fire.’ She made her words clear and deliberate. ‘I think he must’ve used invisible ink. We’ll be able to read it if we heat the paper.’

EXTRACT FOURTEEN

Section A

Friedman's eyes sparkled. It was then Brodie remembered where she'd seen his face before. In the yellowed photograph her granddad had shown her, months ago now, when all this first began. Friedman, and Smithies and her mother. When they were children here. Together. Working on the code. She looked up. It was as if Friedman was remembering too.

'Was that locket hers?' he asked slowly.

'Granddad gave it to me just before I came here.'

'He gave me something once too,' Friedman said, reaching down the neck of his shirt and pulling out a thin chain with a tiny golden key.

'Granddad gave that to you?' Brodie said, trying to hide the surprise in her voice. 'Really?'

Friedman laughed and lowered the chain so the key rested in the hollow at the base of his neck. 'It was your mother's too. Apparently she sent it to your grandfather along with a letter to pass on to me just before she died. Sent it from Belgium, before the accident. She sent something for Smithies, too. Some long strip of paper with holes punched in it. But to me, she sent a letter and this key.'

Brodie narrowed her eyes to concentrate.

'I never got the letter. Your grandfather said there was some problem. But he gave me the key. Said your mother thought it was important for me to have it.'

Brodie felt the exhausted cogs in her mind begin to whirl. 'Why was my mother in Belgium?'

'Van der Essen,' he said matter-of-factly. 'We were sure the Professor had known more about MS 408 and your mother went to check out his things. Spoke to his family.'

'And the accident happened before she could tell you what she learnt?'

'Yes.'

'And the key came from Belgium?'

'Yes.'

'And you don't know what the key's for?'

'Yes. No. I thought perhaps it was just a sign, you know.' His face was colouring in the moonlight.

'A sign of what?' Brodie's voice was rising. 'Brodie. Things were complicated between – well, your mother and me. We had feelings for each other. But I had my difficulties. It wasn't a good time for me. Being accused of madness isn't an easy thing to bear.'

'And you think the key was just a sort of symbol,' she said, her heart racing now so her words fell over themselves. 'That's all?'

Section B

Brodie tucked her hair behind her ears. Connections were firing in her mind. The Veritas logo and the symbol of an elephant holding a key. The importance of never forgetting. The value of the scabbard. 'OK. I get it' she blurted. 'You keep going whatever the odds. But what if I tell you there's another clue? What if I tell you, we found more? I think the key round your neck, the one my Mum gave you, is the answer!'