



Source: John F. Burns, 'Shiite cleric ends absense from Iraq with fiery speech', *New York Times online*, 26/05/07.

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He often talked out loud to himself and this habit had caused him to be isolated in a small hot and airless office at the end of a hallway in the central police station. He mopped his brow.

The sign on the pimpled glass of the wooden door read—Detective Jorge Alonso Vargas, Department of the Investigation of Antiquities Theft. Two young policemen were standing to attention in front of the Detective's untidy desk. These two policemen had been awarded to his department by the new government of Ospina Perez, so said the letter handed over by the taller of the pair.

'How generous!' said the Detective sarcastically, throwing down the letter. 'It's only taken them two years to read my urgent report.'

Lifting the files to recall their names, the Detective dismissed them, 'Well, Cordoba and Ruiz, go down to section four and obtain all the things you need. That will no doubt take a week, so see you back here then.'

Once they had saluted and left, the Detective said aloud, 'Young, stupid, impressionable. Wonderful! I give them a month before they're as rotten as the rest. That will leave me and the Kaiser again and that suits me fine!'

'The Kaiser' was Policeman Hesse, a German whose family had migrated before the war in Europe had broken out. He was fluent in several European languages and even played piano—an educated type which was attributed to his being a Jew. He was small and dark with a big nose, so most people thought he was simply an Indian. The Indian look suited the department's purposes for they had many necessary dealings with Indians in their work. The Kaiser, ever studious, learnt local Indian languages to boost his understanding of the Indians for his reports. Well-mannered, modest and quiet, the Kaiser was everything the Detective was not. The Detective teased him by calling him the Kaiser, but he was impervious to such taunts.

They shared a love of detail, together for hours scouring texts and maps, coming to similar conclusions. It was as if their minds were one when following the scent of a crime. The Detective and the Kaiser even spent Sunday afternoons at the Kaiser's apartment. The Detective's house was always crowded and he found no peace amidst the noise of many children. The Kaiser had no children and as he was a meticulously tidy man, there was no argument as to the best location for their Sunday investigations.

And so, after the morning mass, the Detective kissed his wife affectionately on the forehead, and without fail, said, 'The old pots call! See you this evening.' Each time, she would think he wasn't such a bad man after all.

The 'old pots' were stolen cargo recovered by the police from ships impounded in the Caribbean ports, ancient cooking pots and implements of the local gold-making Indian tribes. The Kaiser had perfected a dating technique for the 'old pots' which he had discovered after many years of tireless searching. He named his technique *The Mirror* and he claimed it was more accurate than the

reputable method of carbon dating. The police, considered ignoramuses by the scientists of the Geological Institute, were told firmly that they had no entitlements to the carbon dating machines. The Kaiser reassured the Detective that they had no need of carbon dating since *The Mirror* was more accurate.

*The Mirror* was a complicated method of pastes, pot particles, pollen analysis under a heavy and ancient microscope, and, when cross-referenced with the Indians' stories, it gave the Kaiser and the Detective an accurate date for each antiquity.

Never doubting *The Mirror* technique, the Kaiser then visited local Indian groups to verify the age of each piece. The poor Indians, Muiscas, Calima, others, looked on longingly, dreading to touch their heritage, lost to them for centuries and now in their hands only to be lost again to the colonisers. The Kaiser trusted the Indians more than all the paleontologists in the world. They returned his trust of their deep knowledge by telling him things they would tell no other outsider.

On this particular Sunday, the Detective and the Kaiser were talking idly as they worked. A phone clanged in the hallway. The Detective looked at the Kaiser whose eye was over the lense of the microscope. 'Are you going to answer that?' he asked. The Kaiser said nothing. The Detective stomped into the hall and lifted the receiver. What he heard at the other end caused him to drop the phone and run into the sala. 'El Lago station has our gringo friend, Miller!' The Kaiser lifted his head as if still in a dream.

Miller was the head of the most insidious gang of antiquities thieves across the two continents, the bane of the Department of Investigation of Antiquities Theft, and the most frequent visitor to the Detective's nightmares.

The Detective was donning his hat and coat, repeating the message to wake the dreaming Kaiser, when suddenly the Kaiser leapt towards the hallway, yelling, 'We must interrogate him immediately!'

The mind of the Kaiser spun with questions he would ask Miller. The Detective was stuck on thinking that if they could successfully imprison Miller and his gang, it would improve his chances of getting more men, a new office with a window, and even, official recognition of the Kaiser's beloved *Mirror*.

The heat of the day was intense as the two policemen ran to catch a trolley-bus. Wiping sweat from their brows simultaneously, they laughed triumphantly together, 'Miller!' The trolley-bus rumbled on down towards El Lago.

Back in the Kaiser's apartment, the heat from a candle burning under a flask of lime paste burst its glass. As it shattered, the glass knocked over the candle and the flame caught hold of the Kaiser's heavy leather-bound notebook and all that it contained.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Miriam Taylor Gomez.*