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Short
Tall
Tales



SHORT TALL TALES

The Key That Should Not Turn

By Father Miguel Serrano



“The Key That Should Not Turn”

PART I — The Key in the Drawer

They say the key was never found.

It was always there.

Sheriff Tomas Ortega first noticed it on a morning that felt wrong before it began. The sun came up slow over Mesilla, like it was thinking twice about the day. Inside the office, everything sat where it should—papers, badge, revolver.

Except the drawer.

It was open.

Ortega didn't remember opening it.

Inside, resting on top of a stack of old case files, was a key. Gold—but not bright gold. The kind that looks like it's been buried, then decided to come back.

Two letters carved deep into its head:

CB

He picked it up.

Warm.

Not like metal left in the sun. Warm like it had been held.

“Collins,” Ortega called.

The deputy stepped in, took one look, and shrugged. “Probably been there a while.”

“It hasn't,” Ortega said.

Collins laughed. “Everything's been here a while.”

Maybe that was true.

Still... Ortega locked it away.

Top drawer. Same place.

That night, he checked again.

The drawer was closed.

The key was gone.

PART II — The Lock That Wasn't There

The key came back.

That's the part people don't like to talk about.

No one saw it return. No one admitted to moving it. But there it was again—same drawer, same place, like it had never left.

This time, Ortega didn't touch it.

Elena Vargas did.

She walked in like she already knew what she'd find. Didn't ask permission. Didn't say a word. Just opened the drawer and picked up the key.

Her hand tightened slightly.

“You feel that?” Ortega asked.

Elena nodded.

“Like it’s waiting,” she said.

“For what?”

She looked toward the holding cells.

“Not for what,” she said. “For where.”

That’s when they saw it.

At the far end of the cell wall—where there had only ever been adobe—there was a **keyhole**.

No frame. No crack. No mark around it.

Just a perfect, dark opening in the wall.

Collins stepped closer, ran his fingers along the surface.

“Was that there before?”

No one answered.

Because they all knew it hadn’t been.

Elena turned the key in her hand.

“You don’t find doors like this,” she said quietly.

“They find you.”

PART III — The First Turning

Midnight.

That's when they chose to do it.

Not because it was smart—because it felt right. And in Old Mesilla, that's usually the same thing.

Ortega held the key.

The station was silent. Even the boards underfoot didn't creak. Like the building itself didn't want to interrupt what was about to happen.

“Last chance,” Collins said.

Ortega nodded.

Then he stepped forward.

The key slid into the lock without resistance.

No scrape. No hesitation.

It fit like it had been made for it.

He turned it.

The wall opened.

Not into another room.

Not into anything they understood.

It opened into desert.

But not *their* desert.

The sky was wrong—too dark, too deep.

The horizon didn't end, just faded into something that felt alive. Shapes moved out there, slow and deliberate, like they had all the time in the world.

And in the distance...

Something rose.

Not fully.

Just enough.

Enough to know it was watching.

Elena stepped back.

“That’s not a place,” she whispered.

“That’s something else.”

The wind came through the opening—not cold, not warm—just heavy.

Like it carried memory.

Ortega didn't wait.

He pulled the key back and slammed the door shut.

The wall sealed instantly.

Gone.

No mark. No keyhole.

Nothing.

Only the key... lying on the floor.

Cold now.

Dead cold.

PART IV — The Name No One Gave It

After that night, things changed.

Not in ways you could point to.

But in ways you could feel.

The wind started coming from the wrong direction. Dogs barked at nothing. People forgot things they shouldn't forget—and remembered things they never lived.

Father Serrano was the first to say it out loud.

“There are places older than time,” he said. “And rulers older than those places.”

Ortega didn’t ask what he meant.

He already knew.

The next time he held the key, it wasn’t warm.

It pulsed.

Slow. Steady.

Like a heartbeat.

And in that moment, he understood something no one had told him:

The key didn’t open the door.

It **announced it**.

Somewhere far beyond Mesilla... beyond desert, beyond memory...

Something had felt that turn.

Something that ruled without crown or throne.

Something that did not need to be seen to be obeyed.

They would later give it a name.

Not because they understood it.

Because they feared it.

PART V — The Scorpion King Watches

No one saw it arrive.

That's how you knew it had.

The desert beyond the door—the one that shouldn't exist—shifted after the first turning. Not violently. Not all at once. Just enough that what had been still... wasn't anymore.

The shapes moved closer.

And the one that had risen?

It rose again.

Higher this time.

Long enough for a silhouette to form—vast, jagged, crowned in something that wasn't

light but acted like it. Beneath it, the ground seemed to bend.

Not break.

Bend.

Like it recognized authority.

Back in Mesilla, the key began to change.

It grew heavier.

Harder to hold.

The letters—**CB**—darkened, as if something inside them had started to burn.

Elena was the only one who didn't step away from it.

“He knows now,” she said.

“Who?” Collins asked.

She didn't answer right away.

Instead, she looked toward the horizon—though nothing was there to see.

“Whatever rules that place,” she finally said. “It felt the door open.”

Ortega frowned. “We closed it.”

Elena shook her head slowly.

“No,” she said.

“We closed ours.”

The End or the Beginning?



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