

Nom De Plume

All are evil. All are bad. He keeps repeating these sentences, his creed, as he steps through the glass sliding doors. He fixes his hood over his head and walks further into the train station that is packed to the brim with people. All of them probably worming their way back to their homes. Reuniting with their family, equally corrupt as they are themselves. All are evil. All are bad. No one is to be trusted. Everyone is evil. Everyone is bad. He must be sending off looks of pure hatred judging by the way he sees people staring at him with wary, cautious and sometimes downright scared eyes.

Focus. 'Everyone' is not your target today. Think specific, think aimed.

He smoothes over his thoughts and face and goes check the schedule board: her train still arrives at 16:31. No delay. Yet, that is. Unfortunately, train schedules aren't always as exact and perfectly smooth as they promise to be on the website or on the big ever-changing board in the station hall. Hopefully this one will be.

The station clock says 16:24. He checks his watch, a digital 32kHz crystal one, accurate to the hundredth of a second: 16:22:57.. Stupid public clocks. Never accurate, never precise. If he would to work as precise as they did, no one ever would get what they deserve...

Anyway, even when basing his judgment on the imprecise public time machine, he's still too early. Seven and some seconds, 55 to be exact. Now key is to remain out of people's focus. Remain unnoticed. Blend in. He focuses on this new immediate goal and finds a empty spot on a bench not far off. Sitting down, he merges with the scenery. Just as planned, just as expected.

His cell phone starts vibrating in his pocket, as he reaches for it, his fingers brush past a cold smooth metal object, but quickly find their intended target. As planned. Unlike the phone call, unplanned. Unplanned and very much unwanted.

'Yes?', he quietly but distinctly says.

'Is it done yet?' She sounds nervous, unsure.

'No, I told you the time when it was going to be done. Call again at 17:05, it will have been done and I'll be able of talking at that time.'

'Okay', she says, then disconnects.

He checks his watch again, 16:27. About time. He rises from the bench and cuts into the traffic of human bodies going left towards the 7th platform, then breaks away and mounts the stairs towards the 8th. Being the middle of December, it's already dark out. He doesn't mind. The fluorescent tubes over the platform that envelop the place provide a mysterious hue. He likes it. He immediately spots and moves to a location that provides coverage as well as a perfect overview on the situation. Almost no one is on this side of the platform and even though that's fine, he prefers big masses. They make things easier, weird as that may sound. He likes big masses. He likes blending into them. The thrill of doing bad stuff under the eye of so many people and still get away unnoticed.

There's the train. Right on time. He smiles in appreciation of its punctuality. When the rail vehicle finally reaches a zero mile an hour speed, he narrows his eyes and his hand automatically

dives for his pocket. Now it's time to work. This is the part he hates most about his job, the actual deed itself. Not because of moral reasons, hell no, they all deserve it. More because this is the most uncertain part, the part most likely to shift. One different move than what he has planned, has expected and he has to change the entire course of actions. Ad hoc. He hates that. He prefers it when things go as planned. As expected. But you can never tell in advance if it's going to be like that or not.

The doors open and a wave of bodies comes crashing over the platform. It's a crowd. He mingles in with the stream, moving against them, yet keeping a low profile. Not before long he has her spotted. Anna, that's her name. She looks like a sheep. Disoriented and looking around for a familiar face. A face that will never come, she gets *him* instead. The flaxen short hairdo she's sporting has strange qualities in the fluorescent platform light. It's almost as if there's an aureole about her. An angel sheep. But looks don't fool him. All are evil. All are bad. Why does this one in particular has to die tonight? He cannot remember the reason. Oh well. He doesn't really care anyway. He never does. They all deserve what's coming to them, no matter what they say. All people are evil. All are bad. Too bad he only gets to kill that few of them.

Focus. It's time to act. Now, before the crowd disperses. He needs the compressed state the platform's in right now. With calculated steps and deliberate movements he gets closer and closer, until they're mere inches apart. Hunter and hunted.

Then, the wolf strikes. And right before he flicks the knife upwards, he stares right into her eyes and grins a grin that makes his teeth glow in the fluorescent lights. The next thing he sees is a look of uncomprehending terror lighting up in her baby blue eyes. Innocence, but not to him. *All* of them are evil. *All* of them are bad. She's nothing but another commission. And good riddance. She's just like all the other. Knees failing, her body slowly lowers itself on the platform, hands grabbing her abdomen. It is going to be a painful death, slow and agonizing. But efficient and being a pro, he always knows exactly where to hit for a sure, inevitable death. He finishes his business and prepares for flight.

The mass around her comes to a sudden halt as they get insight in the scene passing right before their eyes. A few screams are released into the early night air as he disappears into the crowd, invisible once more. Another job well done.

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'Yes?'

'It's done.'

'Good. I'll meet you at the designated time and place, then you'll get your money, make sure you bring the evidence I asked. Evidence that she's dead. I need to know for sure.' He grins as he recalls the solitary body part in his pocket.

'Oh, I've got evidence all right.' He snickers shortly into the phone, but the connection's already cut.

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The docks are empty, clear. As is to be expected. Then at the end a black Porsche appears, almost invisible without its lights on. It stops not far away from him and the smoothly purring engine is shut off. Not long after a brown-haired woman, small and slim, tightly dressed in a black two-piece steps out of the car. With small, insecure steps, as if she's walking on heels for the first time, she approaches him.

'So you're the famous *Crowdie* then?' she says, a slight tremble in her voice.

'That's the name I go about with.'

'Your nom de plume then.' A nervous little laugh follows.

'Whatever. Here's your evidence.' As he throws the cut-off bloody stump of finger (sky-blue, shiny fingernail included) a look of pure disgust arises upon the woman's face.

'So you cut her?' she asked still staring at the sad leftover piece of finger on the ground.

'I stabbed her.'

'In the back?'

'No, right while looking into her eyes. That's my approach. I like direct hits, no cowardice moves, but straightforward. Death is straightforward, why shouldn't the ways of killing be either?'

'Good point, but very risky. Especially in crowds.'

'Yes, well. It's my style.'

'Well, crowds may be your style, they're not mine. But I am direct, though', she says with a voice as steady as steel. For a second he looks up at her rather surprised and he sees her marble teeth light up in a mouth disfigured into an evil grin. Then his eye moves lower and catches the reflection of moving silver, caught in the moonlight. A second later he feels a burning ache spreading from the centre of his abdomen. He looks down and sees an alien hand attached to his stomach, a dark stain rapidly expanding around it. He gasps and tries to catch a breath, but at that time a new epicentre steps forward. This time it's his heart she went at. Very much surprised his eyes shoot up towards hers. It all occurs so unexpected. Unplanned.

'You knew too much', she says, very much self-assured. '*Knew*', past tense already. Even when dying, the irony of the situation isn't lost on him. A professional killer getting murdered himself for knowing too much stuff he cannot even remember, he doesn't even care about. And along with the irony also comes an epiphany. He realises that there never was any unsure, frail woman. This calculated, determined one had always been hiding below the surface. Just like he hides behind the masses, behind crowds. Or used to. He wouldn't much longer, he knows that much. How can he have been fooled by an act? A simple act?

She bends over and rips the knife out of his stomach with a violent twist. He wheezes and moans. She moves away, turning her back on him and slowly – tauntingly almost – bends over to pick up the piece of finger. Her in this position would be a huge turn on if he weren't dying. She puts it away in a handkerchief and wipes her hands clean with the same one. Without a single glance backwards she swiftly mounts her car and drives away. Disappearing out of sight almost soundlessly. He sinks towards the ground and smooth facial flesh meets unyielding, scruffy

pavement. He is gasping air like a fish by now, still overwhelmed by the pain and surprise. He hates surprises. They aren't expected. Not planned.

'All are evil. All are bad' are the last words he manages to utter. They escape into the midnight air in small puffy clouds, then fade into nothingness. They fade into the black icy air. As is expected of them. As is planned.