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“Anonymous”

That morning he got up early, feeling hungry. Still barefoot and half asleep, he walked toward the kitchen.

His was a peculiar apartment. He lived in an attic at the end of a long staircase that snaked up the back of the house. The steps were so narrow they made you suspect that perhaps you were just abnormally large. You could easily slip and fall.

And another thing, the stairs vibrated suspiciously with each step, which along with the rickety iron handrail gave the impression that using it put your life in constant danger. Since his postman wasn't gifted with daring, not even on the job, he used to leave his outgoing mail with his neighbor's, in a small box cemented onto the wall outside the first floor apartment.

He liked living there where nothing could bother him, not people nor noise from the street. I wouldn't say that where he lived could be considered a real home, at least in the strictest sense of the word. It was more like a cube squeezed inside of the four walls. To the left of the door, another smaller cube served as a bathroom with such tight quarters that you wouldn't think a human being could use it.

At the end of a rectangle with pretensions of being a hall, was the living room/bedroom/kitchen. At first glance what you noticed was a hot plate on a table littered with stacks of plates, silverware, a glass, a mug with pencils, a photograph frame with the sultry, enigmatic profile of Michèle Morgan, all covered by a fine layer of dust. The daybed was also the sofa. On the wooden walls hung photographs of other actresses, a few playbills, and a movie poster.

When they told me the news I tried to reconstruct the events, putting myself in his place. I started with the little I could guess about him, having known him for such a short time. We worked in the same office for four months, both of us as typists. I don't think

that our jobs gave us much opportunity to get to know each other. Still, I believe I can put together what happened during the days leading up to it...

That first morning he got up early. Turning on the hotplate to make coffee, he was astonished to discover a small white envelope that had been slid under the door. He was surprised that someone had taken the trouble to bring it up. He picked up the envelope and read: "Mr. Juan Ugarte Ruedas," in a shaky, uneven script.

He immediately ripped open one of the ends and took out the letter, which in the same penmanship as the envelope said:

Name: Juan Ugarte Ruedas. Age: 34 years. Identifying Marks: a small scar behind his right ear, the result of a childhood fall. Preferences: likes to read in bed, while drifting to sleep imagines the ins and outs of a trip to France that he cannot afford. Detail: yesterday, around eleven p.m., he got a slight cut on the index finger of his right hand while trying to open a can of preserves.

Anonymous

This intrigued him. This person who sent the letter, what was he after? What kind of joke was he trying to play, signing it "Anonymous," as if that weren't already obvious? On the other hand, how did Anonymous know all those things about him? He tried to remember if he had shared those particular details with anyone; but he couldn't recall.

The next day, which happened to be October 13, he received another mysterious letter. Like the other one, it was dated and written in a crooked, tremulous cursive, and it said:

Father: Regino Ugarte, coffee grower. Mother: Silvia Ruedas, prostitute. The former is dead; the latter ran off when you were nine years old, falling into a life of depravity; you don't know where she's gone and you don't want to know. Education: self-taught since you were fifteen years old. Fears: worried that others can read your thoughts.

Anonymous

Every day he received messages from Anonymous, with minutiae about his past, his daily life, and his innermost thoughts. Information that only he, or someone with ESP, could have known. That possibility wasn't what terrified him, but rather the thought that in reality the man was using a simpler and more direct method of investigation. That is to say, that Anonymous had him under constant surveillance.

Anonymous's letters had begun with divining his desires, went on to lay bare his fears, and illuminate his past. Perhaps they would even venture to predict his future. This unnerved him. To read things like: "yesterday you didn't manage to sleep at all," "today at lunch, you almost told your friend everything, but you held back thinking that maybe he was the one sending the letters," "you have decided not to open any more of my letters, but you can't help yourself; as you see, you have opened this one," "your work was not up to par yesterday, you can't stop thinking about me," that would be enough to scare anyone.

Then Anonymous sent him three letters in a row that said the same thing: "You fear a threat." On the fourth day it changed to: "I know that you haven't opened any of my letters for several days. This is the next to the last one, so therefore you will read it; tomorrow you will know what the threat is. Anonymous."

When it came down to it, he thought that he wouldn't have the courage to read the last letter. But he just had to find out what the threat was, and he hoped against hope that somehow this would let him escape it, so in the end he did open it, where he read:

You will die tomorrow.

Anonymous

Faced with such a message, he realized that he didn't have any choice but to go to the police. Since he didn't know how he would die, or where, or when, he couldn't avoid his fate. He took the anonymous letters to the police station and was put under constant

watch. He continued working as if nothing was the matter and, that night, around eight o'clock, he got home.

He went to bed feeling more relaxed. He went to sleep quickly. Perhaps he planned another trip to France. The next morning he was found dead in front of his apartment, his body lying in the doorway. There was an opened envelope next to him and a bloody letter in his right hand. The message contained only one word, "Now," and was signed "Anonymous." The veins in his arm had been slashed open. The blood had flowed down the stairs. No one had noticed him until the downstairs neighbor became aware of a red trickle beneath his shoes.

The initial police inquiries produced no results. Nevertheless, at my urging a consultant has compared the handwriting of Anonymous with that of the deceased. Their essential characteristics coincide.

This morning, I found a small white enveloped on the mat just outside my own front door.