The One Man Band

By: Jakob Andersson

Hank picked up the piece of folded newspaper from the inner left pocket of his heavily worn 1980s, black leather trench coat. It was raining outside where he stood and he had to make sure that he’d deciphered the message correctly before the cold drops of water turned the wrinkly ad into a lump of wet, colored paper. He’d never done this before, at least not alone, but he was confident in the abilities and good judgment his hectic life had brought him. The so-called “ad” he’d found in the newspaper last week had caused him quite a lot of trouble recently. Clearly the ad had been composed by an amateur and thus wasn’t too hard to figure out. However, to the untrained eye, it looked as innocent as a kitten frolicking amongst daisies on a hot summer day. Hank didn’t see a kitten; he saw it for what it really was.

Hank slowly approached the old wooden door a couple of feet ahead of him. Amongst the muffling sound of the heavy rain, the sound of his firm knocking made for a surprisingly blunt sound that sent chills down his spine. *Why so jumpy today?* Hank thought, suddenly aware of his own reaction. He was almost done.

He could hear faint footsteps from within the old house. He held his breath as the footsteps suddenly stopped on the other side of the door. The tiny peephole, drilled through the door, went dark and two shadows could be seen right below the bottom of the door.

“Whatever you’re selling, I ain’t buying!” the man roared through the thick door that separated Hank from him.

“I have your bass guitar, and I’ll sell you lessons afterwards for fifty bucks an hour…Tony.” Hank didn’t know if he’d finally found the man they simply referred to as, “Tony” but from where he was standing, he couldn’t possibly think of any one else being behind that solid wooden door. Click. The door creaked open.

“This is it,” Hank whispered to himself.

How he’d first come by this mysterious ad in the local newspaper Hank could barely remember. Maybe it was because of the recent beatings he’d taken or because of the means he’d used to remedy the pain that resulted from them. It had been a hard couple of days, that’s for sure.

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“One cappuccino please!” Hank said. The waitress took his order, smiled and politely walked away to inform her coworker of his request. She was wearing red, high-heeled shoes to work today which heavily contrasted the black and gray Vans the rest of the employees wore as demanded by their employer. He liked her. The waitress promptly returned with his cappuccino, set it on the table, and asked politely,

“Do you have a punch card with us?” A couple of seconds later, Hank realized that she had spoken and quickly rummaged through his right rear pocket of his jeans.

“One more time and I get a free coffee,” Hank said proudly, handing the waitress his punch card. She used her silver clipper to punch a star shaped hole in his card. He now had six of them.

Hank gazed through the star shaped mark on his card, much like a child would use an empty toilet paper roll as a telescope. Through the card, he saw the newspaper lying in front of him and noticed a seemingly normal ad on the front page: WANTED! I am looking for a bass guitar. Possibly an amp, possibly a lesson. Tony. 303-909-0567. (8/26). Hank looked away, froze, then looked back at the ad with wild eyes. He knew what it meant. It was all code that he’d dealt with countless times before. Everything had hidden meanings. It wasn’t an ad for an instrument, it was a drug deal gone wrong. He didn’t see phone numbers, instruments and dates in front of him. He saw GPS coordinates, zip codes, weights, time of arrival, and routes to avoid suspicion.

Hank frantically paid for his drink, ripped the ad out of the newspaper and hurried out of the café. Breathing heavily and almost running to his car, he noticed two large men following him. They knew.