

# Never Trust A Thief

by Foster Trecost

## Never Trust a Thief

### 1.

John Dearborn wore a tailored suit. His jacket allowed an ideal amount of starched white sleeve to extend from beneath the cuff, his trousers flowed like windblown wheat. He was polished like his shoes and his hair as black. No one would have guessed he was a thief.

He left bank counters to those with more immediate needs. He no longer stole for himself, but was paid nicely to steal for others. Legitimate circles of wealth accepted him and perhaps an attempt at balance, his charitable offerings were generous. His residence reflected his worth, but only in address. Inside, a minimalist approach pervaded; his most precious possessions were hidden from sight.

“Good morning, Mr. Dearborn.” A uniformed employee opened the door.

“Morning, Sam.”

The crisp morning had John looking forward to a walk, but the walk could wait. Though he avoided questions, he asked one to the doorman: “How long you lived here?”

“All my life. Seventy-two years.”

“Ever want to move?”

“Not anymore, but when we were younger, after the kids.”

“Any regrets?”

Sam had many. “No, no regrets.”

John accepted the lie and began his walk. A few blocks later, he bought a newspaper. A block after that, coffee from a street cart. Another, and he stopped to gaze through a gallery window. And he was convinced someone was following him.

In the nearest café, he bought a coffee and carried it to an empty seat, feigned interest in the paper, and waited. The wait would not last long. “Mr. Dearborn?” The voice was hushed, but not hushed

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enough. John sipped his coffee without acknowledging the man who called his name. In such situations, he never answered to his name in public.

"Mr. Dearborn," he said again, "I would like to hire you."

Without looking, John raised a finger to his lips. He did not know how they found him, but there were rules. He drew a large swallow, exaggerated his approval, then another, finishing the cup. He scribbled a note on a napkin, tucked it under the empty cup, and left.

*You found me once. If you wish to hire me, you can find me it again. But if it's in public you'll have exhausted your final chance.*

2.

John kept a small office in a mid-town building. The sign said Search Consultants International, a legitimate business. Those looking for work came without the call of advertisement and John sometimes wondered how they found him, too. On this day, secretary Sally had scheduled five appointments. His intercom crackled and she announced another arrival.

"Is this a more suitable location, Mr. Dearborn?" It had been five days since the café encounter.

"That depends," John answered. "What would you like to discuss?"

"As I said, I wish to hire you."

"Okay. Let's start with your name."

"Vance Crawford."

Not bad, John thought, for a fake name. "What would you like me to do?"

"Your reputation is quite good. I'm interested in your ability with safes."

It was always safes. Though he was one, John disliked criminals. Still, he listened. It was not necessary to like his clients, only to steal for them. "Go on," he said.

"How good are you?"

A question not needed, John's answer came quick. "I'm the best. There's not a safe in the world I can't open."

Vance smiled at what he hoped to hear and asked the next question. "A Strafford?"

"Yes," said John. "I can crack a Strafford."

"A Devonshire?"

"Yes," he said again, allowing his tone to reveal irritation.

"An Allenton?"

And with this Vance had his full attention. "Yes, I can crack an Allenton." Few could.

Vance took a deep breath in preparation for the most important question, the question that balanced the outcome of their conversation: "Blindfolded?"

"Excuse me?" John heard correctly, but failed to understand.

"I've no doubt each of these safes would pose not even the slightest obstacle to a man of your talent...with eyes open. My question is can you crack them with eyes closed?"

John deliberated and his suspicion showed.

"I realize this seems unusual," said Vance, "but I assure you, we have our reasons."

John thought a moment more, then said, "The Strafford, yes. The Devonshire, yes."

Vance held his breath. These were merely decoys. He was only interested in the Allenton.

"The Allenton...no."

"No?"

"No. It can't be done. Not blindfolded."

Vance maintained composure. "I'm disappointed to hear that. We were willing to pay a substantial fee."

"I don't give refunds. And while I'm unsure of the circumstances, I wouldn't be able to help you. I would fail and I don't need failures on my resume. However substantial the fee, it wouldn't be worth it."

"If you're concerned about working in the dark, I assure you it's the only way."

John said nothing.

Not ready to give up, Vance produced a card that contained a number. "You can leave a message here if you change your mind."

John had declined only one job. He knew the target and refused to steal from a friend. He needed the money then, but did not need it now. Still, he asked, "How substantial?"

"We're willing to start negotiations at two hundred fifty thousand."

With that, the meeting was over.

"Good day, Mr. Crawford."

**3.**

"Good evening, Mr. Dearborn."

"Evening, Sam." John had no time for talking. After the elevator, he walked to his apartment. Once inside, he strayed from his standard routine; wine was not poured, nor were his clothes changed. The stereo stayed silent and he failed to light a candle. Instead, he walked to his bedroom and found a bandana. In the den sat a wet bar, custom-made, crafted with dark leather trim. Three mahogany panels adorned the front, the middle one hiding an Allenton Deluxe Home Security Vault. "Why would he want me to pull this job blindfolded?"

He affixed the bandana across his eyes and attempted what he imagined to be impossible. After three hours, numb fingers and a still-locked safe proved him correct: the Allenton could not be opened without eyes the same...or could it?

**4.**

"I have Vance Crawford on the line, returning your call."

John spoke with an earned air of confidence. "I'll do it. My fee is five hundred thousand."

"Your reputation is quite accurate."

"Then you expected the doubled fee."

"I did, and I'm prepared to pay it. Half up-front, half upon completion."

John smiled at this oft-employed bluff. "And I'll be happy to crack half the combination."

"That's a lot to put on the line. Work with me, John."

"I'll work for the full fee, in advance. These are my terms."

Vance paused for effect and said, "So be it. Five-hundred thousand. Up-front." John could not see that Vance was smiling. "But from now on, I make the rules. Everything you need to know will be told to you in time. Good day, Mr. Dearborn."

"Good day to you, Mr. Crawford," John said back, smiling himself.

## 5.

The note arrived Friday afternoon:

*Do you like high school basketball? The city championship is tomorrow night. Don't miss it and pay close attention to the final score.*

John was not amused. The contest pitted Madison against Park, and he arrived at the half. When it was over, the final score looked like nothing more than a final score: Madison 67, Park 64.

"What am I supposed to do with this? Madison 67, Park 64." Nothing. "Madison 67," he said again, and this time, something sounded familiar. "Madison 67!" And he understood. He left the gymnasium just as Vance Crawford placed a briefcase, hidden beneath several bags of refuse on the corner of Madison Avenue and 67th Street.

When John arrived, he knew he was in the right place. He also knew he was being watched. "Very clever, Vance!" he shouted.

At home, he opened the briefcase. Inside were five hundred bills, each containing three zero's, and a short note:

*Central Park West and 72nd. 6:00AM*

"Six hours," John thought, and said again, "Very clever." Preparations had begun, but were still incomplete. He would be ready, but not without help. His phone rang. It was the front desk. "Mr. Dearborn, I'm sorry to bother you so late, but you have a guest. Her name is Sally Anderson and she insists you are expecting her."

"I am. Please, send her up."

## 6.

The next morning, John decided to walk. At the instructed intersection, a limousine stopped. The door opened from the inside and John climbed in. The windows were blackened and for a moment, he could see nothing. Once his eyes adjusted, he saw three

men, but only recognized one: Vance Crawford. "I hope you enjoyed the game, John."

"I didn't."

"The fact you're here tells me you found the package."

John nodded. "You knew that already."

"True," said Vance. "Meet Eddie and Jim. They'll be assisting."

His questions would be answered in time, so he opted not to ask.

"Eddie will get us inside. Jim's for the alarm. And we all know why you're here." Everyone nodded. "You, John, are the star of our show. Once we arrive, you'll have to wear these. He was handed what looked like an ordinary pair of sunglasses. They were anything but ordinary. "These fit like most, except they lock from behind, so they can't be removed."

John asked his first question. "Sunglasses? You call this a blindfold?"

"Please, try them on."

He did and found they fit like any other pair, but when Vance pressed a button on a hidden remote, a bright light flashed behind the lenses and rendered him sightless. He tore the glasses from his face. "What the hell?"

"They're completely harmless, I assure you. I'll skip the techno-talk, you wouldn't understand anyway, but this will be your blindfold and no one will know you're wearing one. Once inside, I'll lead you to the safe. You will be given all the time you need. After it's opened, we'll be gone in five minutes. Understand?"

John nodded.

"You'll then be released to a neutral location."

"And if something goes wrong?" This, he had to ask. It was expected.

"As long as you open the safe, nothing will go wrong." The ominous tone did not frighten John. He was sure the safe would be opened.

The limousine stopped and Vance asked, "Everyone ready?" John was given his glasses. He did need not ask where they were and would not have been answered if he had. Vance affixed the glasses

so that they locked, a bright flash, and John could not see. "What are you doing?" he asked.

"These are ear plugs. Trust me, it's better this way. Walk naturally, I'll guide you." John's heart pounded, but not for the job he was about to pull. Rather, for the job he would pull next.

Vance removed an earplug. "We're going to wait here for a few minutes," he whispered. "Everything's fine."

John nodded and the earplug was replaced.

"We're in," said Eddie.

Vance positioned John in front of what he claimed to be an Allenton. "Please, begin." John inhaled through his nose. Vanilla. He definitely smelled Vanilla. And he smiled.

7.

The limousine pulled away and John's glasses were removed. "You were wonderful! Brilliant! And it only took twenty-two minutes. I can't believe it, twenty-two minutes to crack an Allenton. Blindfolded!" Vance was euphoric.

"Did you find everything you hoped?" asked John.

"Everything and more. A whole lot more."

"Perhaps I should have asked for six hundred thousand?"

The three men laughed. "And I would've paid it."

The limousine traveled much further than before. When it stopped, Vance said, "This concludes our agreement. You've been paid and so have we. You're free to go."

John looked at Vance for a final time. He would not see him again. He neither said thank you nor bid farewell. He exited and watched the limousine speed away and imagined them laughing as it did. They were.

"Very clever," John thought. It would take an hour by cab, once he found one, to get home, if that was where he was going. But it was not. Not today. Not ever again.

"The Plaza Hotel," he said to the driver. An hour later, he asked front desk attendant. "Do I have any messages?"

"Just one, Mr. Dearborn."

*Okay John, you're all set. I don't know what's in there, but that suitcase sure was heavy. Is everything okay? I'll see you Monday. Sally.*

John would not see her Monday. He had asked her to do one thing: deliver a suitcase from his apartment to the Plaza Hotel. He was being watched, or would have done it himself.

"I have a piece of luggage in the vault. Could you retrieve it?"

"Of course. One moment, please."

John waited, but not nervously. Soon, the attendant lifted the heavy bag onto the counter. In his room, he changed clothes, poured a glass of wine, and turned on the stereo. He then lit a vanilla candle, his favorite. Inside the suitcase lay the riches of his profession. He had opened many safes for many people, but always kept something for himself. Never trust a thief. Beneath the jewels, neatly stacked and in large bills, lay five hundred thousand dollars. Beneath that were passbooks to his many bank accounts. There was also a plane ticket. Europe awaited. He had grown tired of the city. He did not want to be seventy-two, wishing he had left, and once Vance realized he had stolen a cache of worthless counterfeit jewels and five hundred thousand dollars of worthless counterfeit money, the city would not be big enough to hide.

He prepared four packages. Sally, Sam, The Children's Advocacy Center, and The Elderly Relief Fund would each receive twenty-five thousand dollars. He then thought of Vance. John could not resist leaving a note hidden in the counterfeit money:

*A brilliant idea, hiring me to crack my own safe. Next time, adjust your pricing. You only paid so much because you knew you'd get it all back. I must give you credit, not paying ensured I could only put the money in the very safe you had me open. My safe. And I was right, an Allenton can't be cracked blindfolded. I left it open.*

