

Following orders

Guillaume Ryder

They had not contacted him for a month. The nightmares had disappeared, he could even sleep without pills. Sunday promised to be so great. How could he have guessed?

They met in front of their favorite donuts store, the one where he had seen Maureen the first time. But this was an old story, he was about to spend a good time with his colleague and friend. The match was his only concern now, especially with a baseball fan like Lester. The guy was truly amazing: he remembered each date, name, and face of all players since his first match, when he was six. Dixon really enjoyed listening to him and his encyclopedic knowledge.

At the halftime, Lester suddenly stopped talking about the game:

— Do you remember this poor girl they found shot in her apartment, about one month ago?

— Yes of course, answered Dixon much faster than he expected to. His internal brain alarm beeped. He tried to use a more casual tone, pretending to be watching the halftime show: Did they finally solve the case?

— No, not yet. But this morning I saw her picture in an old newspaper, and I'm sure she has come to our office. I remember her face perfectly. I think we should check the register, this may help the inquiry.

Dixon could not help but flinch. Lester was about to compromise his cover, he was obligated to report it.

As soon as he returned home, he did his daily report. Obviously, this would have consequences. He was compelled to notify any unusual event, any potential threat, and he had resigned himself to do it promptly. Anyway, they always end up by knowing what happened. They watched him closely, he was now certain. So he had no choice. They would not have hesitated to kill him if he had failed to report such a security leak. They had to remind him only once; it was enough to understand.

The answer came out quickly. Dixon leaved his room, locked the door, and descended the stairs, slowly. There was no hurry: they had not ordered to do it immediately. Lester lived only a few blocks further, he made the way by foot.

His friend welcomed him with enthusiasm, talking passionately about the marvelous match they had just watched. He did not even ask about the motives of Dixon's visit. The TV was on, he was reviewing the match analysis. Dixon increased the volume but kept standing. At Lester's question he answered that, sure, he would appreciate a beer. Lester got not enough time

to take a bottle. Dixon lowered his gun, muted the TV. Before leaving, he made sure to close the fridge: nobody should suspect that the victim knew his killer. Lester had to be murdered by some angry people of the office, this was the plan.

Back home, Dixon put a stool in front of the huge cupboard facing his bed, climbed on it, and took a shoebox carefully placed out of view. He put back the gun and the gloves in it. Then, and only then, he did a quick debriefing, for them to know that all had been done as they wanted. They already knew, he was sure, but this was the procedure. He had to follow it to the letter, any digression would be punished. The scar left by the cigarette burn on his chest reminded him every day.

The following morning, at the Police Department, an employee of the firearms registration desk did not show up. Nobody would ever notice that he had been killed with the same gun than Maureen McBride. The one he had stolen from her after he had erased her firearm registration record.

Why did they do that? Why did the voices in his head want him to destroy the life of everyone he loved? Why did they force him to follow orders, and made him self-mutilate?