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Written by Craig Robertson

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MURDERABILIA

Craig Robertson



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'Every man has to have a hobby'

– Ed Gein, American murderer and
grave robber who made household
objects from human body parts.
He gave the reply when asked
why he'd done what he did.

Prologue

We saw her the minute she stepped inside, thinking herself so clever just for being there. It must have taken all of two seconds for her to switch from smug to scared. The unwarranted confidence spilling from her like blood from a slashed wrist.

Coming in here is like entering a maze with all the lights turned off. We're here, waiting for her, watching her stumble around in search of us. She's sure we're inside but now she's afraid because she realises she doesn't know where she's going. Us? We can see in the dark.

This is our place. Us and people like us. She, on the other hand, is an intruder.

She's just blundering around, pushing buttons, hoping for the best. She's treading on mines and traps every step she takes but she's too stupid to even notice.

She is inside the most dangerous place on the planet and she doesn't know it.

This is the darkest place you can imagine. She'll find that out soon enough.

We don't mind her coming looking because it was

inevitable that someone would eventually do so. We do resent her misplaced confidence, though. We object to her cheek.

Someone must have given her a key, because there's no other way in. This place is impenetrable without an invitation. Governments have tried and failed to get in – and stay in – here. Experts in terrorism, fraud, money laundering and people trafficking have spent millions trying to be inside. Representatives of every significant branch of law enforcement have done the same. It remains beyond their reach.

This is a place where people are actively working to have a world leader assassinated. Where you can buy or sell children. Or guns or drugs. Where you can have someone killed or abducted, provide a new identity or the opportunity to disappear. And us? We deal in murder.

In this place you will find anything you want and everything you fear.

Welcome to the dark web. Good luck trying to get out again. Good luck trying to stay alive.

CHAPTER 1

Thursday, 21 April 2016

A Glasgow railway station on a cold April morning is a lonely place to die. It's a pretty soulless place to wait for a train, too.

Not even the promise of sunrise offers much hope of chasing away the chill and putting heat into their bones. They're all sleepwalkers, lumbering from foot to foot and shivering as they await their train north.

Nathan watches them with amusement and contempt, seeing the same old dance ready to repeat itself. Unsociable bastards, the lot of them. They barely look at each other, instead staring at the electronic noticeboard high above Queen Street's concourse, willing the platform number to appear. They all know it will soon say platform seven but, no, they need the proof before their eyes.

They need to actually see it change before they'll allow themselves to shamble through the barriers and get on board in search of a seat to themselves. It's always the same.

He looks around and doesn't see any familiar faces, but they're all recognisable in their own ways. There's the guys in the suits stuffed with self-importance and trying to hide whisky breath with packets of mints. There's women in sharp two-piece numbers, clutching laptops, newspapers and handbags, their collars turned up against the morning air. Then there's the rucksack crew in walking shoes and fleeces and three days of stubble, all ready to sleep until somewhere north of Perth. There are teenagers in hoodies, night-shift workers heading for their beds and a few who look like they missed the last train and are being poured onto the first one instead.

There are holdalls and suitcases, sports bags and shoulder bags and there are plastic bags that clink with fuel for the journey. They're all here, cold and weary and ready to go. All waiting for the platform number to become the magic seven.

Nathan isn't any different. He's keen to get going, too, and frustrated at seeing the four-carriage train just sitting there but not being allowed on board. Come on. It's bloody freezing out here, just finish whatever it is you have to do and let us inside.

It isn't six o'clock yet but there are maybe fifty or sixty people waiting and doing the cold-feet shuffle. Some of them are hugging plastic cups of coffee, others are rubbing their hands and blowing out air that fogs in front of their faces. All just looking at the board and waiting and . . .

There. The digital numbers flash and change and, sure enough, it's platform seven. About time. You can almost hear them all think it. Everyone moves.

Here we go, the same old nonsense as they get on. Look at them pretending not to hurry but desperate to get there before anyone else, quickening their step in the hope of a seat with a table and no neighbours, ready to put down bags or newspapers to mark their territory and, above all, eager to be facing forward. Oh, and his personal favourite, the selfish sods that sit on the outside of two seats to stop anyone else sitting beside them. People are pathetic.

There they go, moving to the far carriages in the hope that they will be empty and they won't have to look at anyone else or have their space invaded. And God forbid they might actually have to talk to another human being. Train passengers may be the most unsociable bunch on the planet. Nathan despises them and maybe that just makes him as bad as they are.

He shakes his head as he watches them go to the far end and smiles, knowing they won't be able to get the peaceful commute they seek. It's like a plane load of tourists all flying to the same deserted island in search of paradise. It just doesn't work out the way you want.

He gets into the first carriage. It will do him just fine.

There's still four minutes to go and the seats are filling up around him. A young Chinese couple get in the seats in front and he can hear their low chatter, doubtless complaining about the cold. A large guy sits down across the aisle and spends a couple of minutes noisily stuffing a jacket, a coat, a scarf and hat and a duffel bag into the overhead space.

It's 05.55 and the doors are closed. One minute to go until the first train stretches and yawns and lurches out of

Glasgow towards Aberdeen. The guard on the platform looks like he's just fallen out of his bed, hair dishevelled and eyes bleary. He takes a final scratch at his beard and a last look at the clock before raising his flag and blowing his whistle. 05.56. Time to go.

The train rocks and moves and the carriages are reluctantly forced to follow. The Chinese teenagers move their heads together and kiss. All the antisocial bastards in their individual little neighbourless seats breathe a sad wee sigh of relief that they've secured some room for themselves.

They slide down the right-hand side of Queen Street's walls, a low rumble as they take their leave. The nose of the train enters the tunnel under the city's streets and leads them slowly into blackness before remerging just moments later back into the mist-shrouded break of day.

He hears the first scream, or maybe it's the second. It's distant but unmistakable and ripples back through the carriages in waves. The people round him hear it, too, and there's instant confusion and panic. The young couple in front are straining forward to hear and the large guy opposite is standing as he tries to see what the hell is going on.

The screams are closer and louder and multiplied. They're not rippling back now, they're flowing. It's a tsunami. Shouting and obvious panic from up ahead.

Then a screech and a sudden stall that sends everyone back in their seat as the train slows dramatically. He knows someone has pulled the emergency cord and stopped the beast in its tracks. The brakes are on and they are only inching forward now.

The screams become deafening. The screams are from the carriage in front and from his.

Everyone is looking at it. The blue latticed bridge up to their right. The bridge and the naked body that's hanging from it.

He pushes his face to the window, frosting the glass with the sudden explosion of his breath. The man's head is slumped forward, choked at the neck, but they can all still see his eyes bulging, wide and terrified but lifeless. His arms are by his sides and two dark streaks of red run from his chest down across the white of his bare flesh. It's blood, streaming down his torso and thighs.

From around him, Nathan hears familiar metallic clicks and looks up and down the carriage to see people on their mobile phones. They are photographing the body that is swinging from the rope.

The Chinese girl has her head buried in her boyfriend's chest but, even as she does that, he is snapping away. Click. Click. Click.

They don't know what else to do. They scream and they photograph. They are horrified and bewildered and disgusted but they click and click and click.

Nathan takes a photograph too. He takes several. However, he isn't as shocked as everyone else is to see the hanging body. Nathan put him there.