

Thisis A. Pseudonym, possibly the most undisciplined girl in the city of Albany, New York (unless, of course, you considered her cruel friend Anda). If you knew her well enough (which everyone did, because it was almost impossible to live in Albany without having Thisis or Anda steal something of yours, or make you buy drugs, or perhaps something worse enough to send you to jail), then you'd sometimes be able to figure out when she was preparing something dreadful.

Unfortunately for the girls, Imso Rich of 101 Oak Boulevard, Albany, was one of those people. The only difference with him was that he *always* seemed to know when the girls (nicknamed the "Minute Muggers" by the police, because they always executed their schemes rather quickly) had a plot in mind. A retired lieutenant officer of the New York Police Department, lots of people knew that Imso was not a man to be played around with. He always had a cell phone on hand, equipped with direct lines to all divisions of the Police Department. However, Anda didn't know this, and being the older of the 2 girls, she was the one to craft all the decisions and control the items they stole. Thisis was already notably unhappy, and she became even more miserable when Anda suggested that they spend their subsequent days pickpocketing in the wealthy regions downtown (which is not a brilliant idea, but Anda hadn't been to school since 4th grade, and she had no idea how much trouble she could get into).

Carefully, Thisis reached into the pocket of her jacket and extracted the hot pink pocketknife that she always carried wherever she went. Revolving on the heels of her stolen black Nike® sneakers, she sprinted toward Anda, who was putting graffiti on the new shopping mall a couple yards away. As Thisis jogged, she severed a purse strap, pickpocketed every teenager within 3 feet of her, and even managed to take an old man's Yankees cap. Finally reaching the mall, Thisis handed Anda the items she had obtained. Anda let out a maniacal scream, flipping through the cash with her filthy hands. Little did she know that inside, Thisis was screaming also. Anda had made her into such a cruel person, and Thisis was ready to yell at Anda, but she dared not to make a sound. She knew perfectly well that Anda would pull one of her two guns if she did. That was Anda. If anything disappointed her, she'd draw a gun and it would all be over.

Thisis's trance was broken when a hand slapped harshly over her mouth. "You see that?" Anda whispered, so quietly that her voice got lost in the whistling of the breeze. She had a sharp nail extended, pointing towards the parking lot directly in front of them. "Hmmm? What?" Thisis was very confused, as always, when she was around Anda. In fact, she really wasn't confused; she was just pretending to be that way. She wanted Anda to think that she was more stupid than she really was, because she snuck off to Albany High School every day without permission.

Anda smacked Thisis hard, shooting her familiar glare in the process. Holding back tears, Thisis glanced towards the scattered cars in the parking lot. Her eyes were immediately drawn to the richest guy in town, the one that owned the Quick 'n' Save stores. Him! And he was totally unguarded (unlike usual), emerging from a shining black limousine. Thisis's heart jumped sky-high. That guy's wealth could provide them with everything they needed to live! However, the other half of Thisis, her brain, was having

doubts. How would they get close to the guy? He had that cell phone for protection that he always carried. It had never failed him before, and it wouldn't anytime soon. Occupied in a hidden disagreement, Thisis's feet were glued to the ground. She didn't even blink as Anda advanced towards her soon-to-be fortune, her trustworthy pistol sticking out of her pocket. She reached delicately into the man's suit pocket and withdrew his wallet, her brown hair touching the man's arm for a faint second. The man reached up, attempting to swat the bug that had never been there. Right at this moment, Thisis snapped back to the modern world. She noticed Anda stealing the man's wallet and felt a rush of anger.

"Anda!" Thisis shouted, not caring at all that she was putting her friend in grave danger. Anda flinched and tripped over her untied shoelaces, causing the wallet to fly high into the air. Flailing her arms and screaming loudly, Anda dashed towards the wallet, which had switched directions and was plummeting towards the cement. The man (Thisis promptly remembered that his name was Mr. Rich) was staring in disbelief, thinking that that weird teenage girl doing that crazy dance step was quite familiar. Thisis instantly chose not to move. If she wasn't spotted, then she would finally be able to live on her own! All their belongings would be hers! Thisis shook the thoughts out of her head again and concentrated on the scene going on in front of her. By this time, Mr. Rich had Anda in a tight headlock and was clutching his cell phone in a pudgy hand. As Mr. Rich pressed the number 1 on his phone (which was the emergency line to the head of police), Anda wriggled out of his grasp and wrenched her rifle out of her pocket. Amazingly, Mr. Rich had been focusing merely on his cell phone. Not knowing that Anda had escaped, his eyes were squinted, trying to read the numbers on the miniscule screen.

Thisis dashed towards the scene. She didn't bother thinking about the past or the future; she was concerned about only Mr. Rich and his money. She hopped and yelled, waving her arms wildly in the air. Their attention drawn to Thisis, witnesses were completely oblivious to Anda as she pulled the trigger.

Abruptly, the day was interrupted by a deafening gunshot. Mr. Rich's eyes glazed over and he slumped to the floor. When she was certain that her newest victim was down, Anda dug hungrily through the man's suit. Disappointed when she uncovered nothing, she grabbed the bulging leather wallet and the diamond ring on his finger and then dashed to her car. She didn't know that she was leaving behind a group of bystanders that were slowly converging on Mr. Rich's motionless body, and Thisis, who had witnessed the whole event.

Again, crazy thoughts were making their way into Thisis's head. Frantically trying to shove them out, she flipped open her own cell phone and dialed 911. The following minutes passed by very suddenly, and Thisis didn't even remember talking with the police, or seeing where Mr. Rich disappeared to. The next thing she remembered about that afternoon was a furious Anda being forced into a police car. Finally trapped, Anda could do nothing but glare, eyes blazing and uttering her favorite curse words (just to be halted by an officer) as Thisis ran away.

Jumping for joy, Thisis hurried towards the apartment. Everything was hers now! She wouldn't have to live on overcooked potatoes and boiled eggs anymore! As Thisis ran

down the street, she was halted by an unexpected realization. There was likely someone trailing her, but if it was true or not, she didn't know. It seemed that a single golden eye, one that she had seen before, was watching her at that instance.

Trembling, Thisis slowly turned around.

"Who's there?" she called. No mortal was perceptible, so Thisis raised her voice and called again. A reply seemed to stalk her, one like a presence of guilt. It was one of those little voices in her head telling her, You should have stayed there. Helped Mr. Rich. Seen if he was still alive. But this wasn't like a regular voice in her head. Normally, they were weaker, more timid. Somehow, this voice *actually* felt real.

Unexpectedly, a strong hand firmly placed itself over her mouth. Thisis screamed, attempting to fight away the attacker. Soon, she found that she was in the exact same headlock Anda had been in. Thisis attempted to keep screaming, but she was stopped when her captor bent down and whispered into her ear.

"You! Do you have anything to do with that girl back there that tried to murder me? Huh? Answer me!"

Thisis gaped in doubt. How could she ever trust this guy? The one that she thought was dead for sure? She then realized that Mr. Rich had loosened his grip slightly. He was watching her intently, as if waiting for a decent answer. Thisis ran through her mind hastily. What did he want?

Thisis forced Mr. Rich's arm off her neck and stood up, brushing accumulated dust off her shirt. "I'm Thisis A. Pseudonym, former assistant of that girl that just tried to kill you," she stated.

Mr. Rich's expression turned into one of pure terror as he slowly backed away. "Are- are you here to kill me?"

Thisis shook her head. "Nuh-uh. You caught *me*, remember? And anyways, I didn't even wanna be Anda's assistant. I mean, both my parents are dead. They, like, killed themselves or something, so I had nowhere to live. That left me to wander around this here alley one day, starving and tired, and then Anda suddenly came out and offered me a place to stay. I shouldn't have accepted, but I was so tired that my legs could barely hold me up. So I let her take me in. And guess what? I was forced into drug dealing by that idiotic weirdo. She made me do all this other bad stuff too, like steal stuff and shoplift, and I was supposed to kill you, I think, but I couldn't do it so she did it instead. But how did you survive? I've never seen anybody survive Anda's wrath. Ever." Her reply was a bewildered look from Mr. Rich. Observing his face closely, she didn't notice the girl slipping silently behind her, a piece of off-white rope extended towards her neck. The last thing she remembered was collapsing on the cement with a faint memory of being hit on the head with a solid club of some sort.

When Thisis awoke, she was lying in a bright pink bed surrounded by tons of teddy bears. Rubbing the bump on her head, she sat up, sending bears soaring everywhere. On the cherry bedside table lay that day's unread newspaper, illuminated by a faint glow coming from the lamp beside it. Thisis stretched over the mound of stuffed animals to pick up the newspaper and was stunned to see a grimy Anda gaping back. The caption above the picture read, 'Notorious Criminal Escaped from County Jail'. Not bothering to look at the article below, Thisis began to panic. She didn't want to hear anything about

her ex-friend anymore. Just as she got ready to rip the newspaper, Mr. Rich walked in, trailed by a delicate girl and a fluffy poodle with a giant bow. The girl was holding a silver plated breakfast tray loaded with the most delectable items Thisis had ever seen. The girl daintily placed the tray on the bed and gave Thisis a small smile, revealing gleaming white teeth. "Hi," she said. I'm Verrie." Meanwhile, the poodle dashed around the bedroom on stubby legs, dismantling quite a few teddy bears and howling as he went. Chasing the crazy dog and somehow managing to catch him, Verrie grinned at Thisis and skipped out of the room.

Mr. Rich pulled up a ruby red stool and sat down beside Thisis. "Sorry about all of that," he said as soon as he was sure that Verrie was out of hearing range. "She's been a bit, well, self-contained ever since her mother died, just a year ago. Doesn't normally talk to other people, just pays attention to that poodle of hers."

Thisis immediately grasped that she was in the same spot as Verrie. Both her parents had disappeared after the downtown shopping mall caught fire, and the police had listed them as 'dead' on the records they kept of the incident. Thisis, then 12, inherited a pleasant house and plenty of money. Claiming that her next-door neighbors were her parents (they fed her and took care of her), she was very content with her life- until she learned that her family's previous caretaker had moved in down the street. Fired from the Pseudonym's residence a year ago for filching valuable antiques, the caretaker had devoted his life to getting his job back. Thisis was so frightened that she didn't tell her neighbors that a robber was nearby. Consequently, while she was out at the Pine Tree Theater with her friends, the thief stole into the house and hacked into her computer. He wiped out Thisis's bank account, seized all the cash he could find, and drove far away to somewhere in the West. Thisis returned home to discover that she had no way to pay for the house. She decided to run away instead of waiting for the orphanage to arrive at the front door.

Thisis's mind was instantaneously wiped of all her previous thoughts, including what she had read about Anda in the paper. She threw the blankets off and tramped through the mess on the floor. It was time for her to get out of this crazy place, where girls played with disgusting dogs and everyone would be killed, and back to her own home. As Thisis reached the top of the staircase, Mr. Rich was suddenly standing behind her. Wrapping an arm around Thisis's shoulder, he said, "Thisis, how about this? You can stay here tonight, and sleep in the extra bedroom- it's a 30-minute drive to your apartment. Anyways, it's almost 9:00; you're never going to make it home in time. I'll drop you off at your school tomorrow- Albany High, right?"

Thisis decided that Mr. Rich had a good point. If she went home, then she'd have to spend 2 hours cleaning up the mess that Anda had left. Then she'd have to get to bed around 10:00, and the next day was school. "Yeah, sure," she reluctantly agreed. "But you have to take me to my school tomorrow. You'd better, or else."

The next day, Thisis woke up early, unable to stand being trapped in Mr. Rich's house anymore. Laying on the foot of her bed were a pair of skinny jeans, a white tank top, a hot pink shirt with random black words in an alien language, a half length denim jacket with short sleeves, and some Converse with chewed up shoelaces. Probably Verrie's clothes, she thought. When Thisis had squeezed into the clothes (which were a bit too

small), she dragged herself down the stairs to the kitchen. A cup of orange juice and a plate of scrambled eggs and French toast were set down in front of her. When she was halfway through consuming her breakfast, Mr. Rich appeared, trailed by a man wearing a tux and white gloves. His chauffeur, Thisis assumed. "It's time to go!" Mr. Rich announced. "School's going to start soon! Let's hurry so we aren't late!"

When they arrived at Albany High, Thisis stepped out of the limo and tripped over the long jeans. Pulling herself up, she began dusting dirt off her shirt and trying to make the tons of grass stains go away (unsuccessfully). Then, a boy that Thisis had never met before emerged from behind the fence. His pals were gathered around, snickering silently at Thisis. The boy kept his eyes on Thisis as he elbowed the friend closest to him. Reddening slightly, Thisis forced a small smile and headed towards the gym door. "Hey, are you new?" The boy was suddenly standing directly in front of Thisis. "Um, no," she stammered. "Are *you* new? I've never seen you here before. Who are you anyway?"

The boy shooed away his friends, who slunk away with frowns. He replied, "Nah. I've been here a while. Never seen you either. My name's Hott. What's yours?" They began talking with each other, asking questions from about their age to who their past friends were. Thisis was having a great time, and then...she noticed a girl, slouched over slightly. She was lurking around the field, wearing a dark black hood, and glaring at everything in sight. Thisis got a glimpse of a lock of oily brown hair hanging out of the jacket, and the bloodshot eyes shining from the hood troubled her...

To be continued...