

I am a professional.

This means something different to a good amount of people, but what it means to me is that when I get a job, I finish it to a tee. I do what I'm told to do. I don't attribute my own ideas, my own perspectives, my own beliefs to it unless I'm told to do so, I don't improvise nor get creative with my approach unless I have been given the go-ahead to do so. I don't ask questions, I don't ask for details, I don't ask for reasons. I don't let personal feelings affect my performance, and most of all, I don't get greedy.

There are different names for what I do, and the most common is burglar, but I do think such a term is rather limiting. I prefer to view myself as a courier--a deliverer of goods. The way I obtain such goods is a matter in itself, but what matters to me and what matters most to my client is that I can deliver on what was promised. Inheritance money that somebody's been cheated out of, I can get that; a car wrongfully impounded, I can get that; a sex tape somebody's boyfriend planned to release as revenge porn after a messy breakup, I can get that too.

My parents always told me that if you do what you love for a living, you'll never work a day in your life. Though I appreciate the sentiment, and understand what they were trying to say, I can hardly agree. I love my work, but it is work. It is not a pastime nor a hobby, it is a responsibility, and is meant to be treated as such, with care and delicacy. The fact that I love what I do, able to meet the needs of others with the simple rearrangement and relocation of goods, is what makes me understand that there is no other way but to treat my profession with the respect it requires. And today is no different.

The job is simple--an unfaithful girlfriend whose misadventures had brought an end to what was a four-year long relationship. The client had been more than sure to give me the

proper details as though to ensure I had no misgivings about what I was doing. They'd been high school sweethearts who, though not together formally, had a certain unspoken fondness for one another that did finally go spoken once attending the same university. However, four years of dating and even living with each other in off-campus housing later, it'd seemed that the 'her' in the relationship had taken to other interests. One uncivil confrontation about it later, his bags were packed and waiting for him on the driveway, and the house was no longer his.

The contract was mine when he had gotten me to agree that he was in the right.

It was bad practice to disagree with my clients. At least to their faces. I wouldn't tell him the truth, which was that I had no opinion, but I would tell him what he wanted to hear. And what he wanted to hear was that he was in the right, and I would bring him what was his.

Opinions get in the way. Opinions set the mind of a courier on abstract concepts of "justice" and "fairness" rather than on the confines of a job. They are distractions, nothing more, and so I've since abandoned them.

A grocery list of tasks had accompanied my acceptance of the job, but I could complain as there was more than satisfactory payment awaiting me upon a job well done. I would do what was asked of me. I wouldn't be in this profession if I wasn't willing to do whatever needs to be done.

The locks to the house had been changed, unfortunately though not unexpectedly. It'd been a month since the two had split. I generally prefer when people get in touch with me before they've had time to mess things up on their own, but most people are prone to emotion. It's easy to do something rash in the heat of a moment, and such includes apparently walking a thin line between confrontation and assault.

He told me that he wished to be in constant contact with me as it progressed. It's a strange request, and not without reason. There are those who hire me who seek to wash their hands of the entire endeavor once I take the contract. I can respect that. Then there are those who consider themselves as much a part of things as I am, and so wish to stay in constant touch to ensure nothing is missed or forgotten. I am not insulted, offended, or besmirched.

None of it matters.

I am a professional. A professional is prepared regardless of the job, and regardless of the client.

I text the client when I am outside the unlit house and send him a picture of the house from my phone as he'd requested.

It was marked as "read" instantly. Even at 2:30 in the morning, an uncommon hour to be awake for civilians, he was on top of things, and so quickly enough responded with, "I want you to go in." The location is confirmed, the go-ahead is given, and so I proceed.

The front door not an option on account of the changed locks and door alarm that the client had warned me about. I opt for the window instead. It's locked, but there are no security systems in place: alarms I may need to worry about or otherwise.

It's a simple clasp lock. These are hardly ever secure, rather simple to trick into opening if you just apply the right upwards momentum. And indeed, like other windows of this type, it's loosely secured, and so easily to nudge up and down, progressively raising the clamp to an upwards position before "unlocked."

The room of the house I enter into is the kitchen, lightly stepping onto the marble counter before closing the window behind me, more than confident, however, that it will prove to be my way out as well.

I know from the brief overview the client gave me that there are a number of things from the kitchen that he wants returned to his possession, including but not limited to a pressure cooker, the cutlery, and some decorated plates. It would be easiest for me to get started here, but the client instead sends a text message to me that says, “I want you to go to the living room.”

While it would be easier to start with the kitchen and slowly work my way inwards, the wants of the client are my own wants as well. They may have assigned their own order of priority, and so I abide by it perfectly.

I go to the living room, and am met with a text that says, “I want you to take back what’s mine.”

I know what that entails. I was given the list.

I slowly unzip the first of my duffel bags and begin packing it with the scattered items from the living room that belong to the client: an Amazon firestick, a PlayStation 5, Nintendo Switch, and a deck of cards on the coffee table that apparently is of sentimental value. I ask the client by text if he wants me to take the television set, a nice flat screen model that I estimate is around 4 feet wide.

To my surprise, however, he responds, “I don’t want the TV.”

If he doesn’t want it, then neither do I. As such, I collect that which he **does** want until another message comes from him, asking, “Does it look like somebody else has been around?”

I hadn't been on the lookout for that. I hadn't been told to be, elsewise, I would have. It was never too late to start, however, and so I start paying attention. It's difficult for me to be able to know for sure what had been my client's, and what hadn't, and so I verify my findings with him. Whether it's a picture of a masculine-appearing coat hanging over an armchair, or that of the opened fridge, it is enough for there to be a moment of hesitation from my client before he responds, "Okay."

It is difficult to ascertain what his "okay" is indicative of, whether it means that much of his stuff has remained untouched, his ex-girlfriend has quickly settled into a solitary life, or is indeed seeing another.

My mind does not dwell on it. It already is a concern for my client, and it need not be one for me. It's why I'm good at what I do. I keep the interests of the client in mind without any of the emotional or mental baggage, and so I now move on to the kitchen, texting the client that I am done with the living room.

He doesn't respond immediately, likely still processing the information from earlier. I take the moment of silence to clear the kitchen of that which was asked for: appliances, cutlery, ceramics, and all.

It is when I am offloading the first of the duffel bags outside of the kitchen window that I finally receive another message.

"Did you get the stuff from the kitchen?"

I respond with affirmation.

"I want you to go to the dining room."

I go there, and collect a woodworked bowl that had been a creation of my client's back in his high school shop class. It is packed away in the second duffel bag alongside a collection of decorative placemats that'd been a Christmas gift from him to her.

The response times of my client have grown longer. Often, I am left standing in the dark waiting for minutes while the 'read' indicator slowly shifts to a moving ellipsis indicating he is typing before going still for minutes more.

I am not afraid of being caught. I never have been before, and have no reason to believe I will be now. I can hear when somebody is waking up and stirring out of bed before even they are aware of it. I'd only had one close call before, and that was on account of a pet dog that the client had failed to mention.

But the resident of this house is a heavy sleeper, and the only pet I need worry about is a small leopard gecko that sits in a medium-sized terrarium located in the hallway that leads to the bathroom and two windows.

Its name is Basil, as made clear to me when I'd been corrected into looking for a lizard rather than an herb by a clarifying text message from the client after five minutes spent plundering the kitchen on a second go.

The little thing is asleep, but wakes up at the sound of its terrarium lid being raised, letting out a deep though silent yawn as it pokes its head out from beneath its sheltering rock. I retrieve a pet carrier located next to its shelf and place the lizard inside before stuffing the whole of the carrier inside my bag as well. It wouldn't be a long journey for the little creature. I am confident it will be more than fine, and so too is the client who makes no issue with my confirmation of its status.

“I want you to go to the bathroom,” he says now.

I make my way there, collecting what I remember to have been on his retrieval list: toothbrush, hairdryer, towel, razer set, and shampoo.

In stark contrast to earlier, when each test message had been a wait of numerous minutes in the making, the client wastes no time in telling me, before I am even done with the bathroom, “I want you to go to the bedroom.”

I finish up quickly enough, and am there.

I see her lying underneath the covers. She is fast asleep, her breaths few and far in between, her heart rate no way over fifty.

“I want you to get my clothes,” the client tells me.

A stark divide had been created in the “his and hers” closet, and so identifying what belongs to my client and what belongs to her is no trouble. Shirts, jackets, pants, belts, ties, socks, and undergarments are all packed away soon enough in the second duffel bag, spilling considerably into the third and last.

I am not concerned, however. After fifteen minutes spent clearing the closet and dresser, I am confident that what belongs to my client has been obtained, and that the day is slowly coming to an end.

We’re not quite done yet, however, as there is still the matter of the safe that rests next to the bed, doubling as a nightstand for a lamp, charging phone, and a glass of water filled to the halfway point with water, the other half lacking in all but empty air. I’d known about it before

coming here, and so had come prepared for this moment now, when the client tells me, “I want you to open the safe.”

I set down my bags, ready for the possibility that this code would have been changed as well, but another message tells me to try others.

“Try ‘042318,’” the message reads. It’s their anniversary, he tells me immediately after. If the code is wrong, there will not quite be an alarm, but still a harsh chirp from the machine that may very well wake the woman sleeping beside it. The easiest option would be to simply crack it my way. It’s far from a complicated machine, and I know I am more than capable, but my instructions are otherwise. They are to try the code.

The wishes of the client are my own. I can’t afford to agree or disagree. I am a professional.

So, I enter the code, and unlike the door, or its attached security system, this one seemed to have stayed the same, and so it clicks open with no noise greater than a magnetic click.

Inside are a number of possessions: jewelry, important-seeming documents, passports included, cash, and on a shelf of its own-

“Do you see the gun?” my client texts me.

A beretta APX hand pistol. I respond to the client that I see it.

“Is it loaded?” he asks.

It is, a thin layer of dust covering it implying that it has gone untouched since last he’s handled it, and quite clumsily at that. At the very least, the safety is on. All the same, I tell the client what I see.

There is a pause before he tells me, “I want you to take the gun.”

I do what he asks of me, and am inches away from setting it inside the final duffel bag before another message comes in.

“I want you to shoot her.”

I don’t quite believe right away that I am correct in my interpretation of what I’d just read, and so I read over it again. The message does not change. ‘I want you to shoot her.’

He wants me to shoot her.

I’m a courier. At worst, a burglar. I’ve never killed somebody before. The demand written out in six simple words still seems completely and absolutely foreign, as though they don’t quite fit together in a way that makes sense. This remains the same even as a follow-up text is sent after, saying now, as though not made clear before, “I want you to take the gun, and I want you to shoot her.”

“I want you to shoot her until she’s dead,” he finishes.

I’m a courier. A burglar. I’m not a killer. Nobody has ever asked me to kill. Not until today. It’s not something I do. I retrieve things for people, I get them what they want, but I don’t kill.

So why haven’t I let go of the gun?

In one hand is my phone, its screen near blinding me, and in the other, a loaded handgun that I am being ordered to fire at a woman sleeping in front of me.

Even now, I am quiet. I make no noise. I never do. And she hasn’t stirred an inch.

It is dead weight to ask, in my profession, if somebody deserves what my client asks me to do with them. It is an unnecessary hindrance to ask myself if they deserve to have a certain something taken from them, if they deserve to have their home broken into, their information and possessions robbed from them. It gets in the way of doing my job.

But still, as I look upon her face, partially obstructed by strands of loose brown hair, I wonder, if only for a moment, if this is what she deserves.

Of course it isn't. I don't agree with what she'd done, sure, and had felt no qualms with taking back with what was my client's by right, but that hadn't mattered. I hadn't bothered to stop earlier tonight, or any other time, if what I was doing was in the right. Granted, it was easier to work when I felt like there was a reason to what I did.

But now, I struggle to search for a reason.

And it's slowing me down.

I am a courier. I deliver goods, I deliver information, and I delivered what a client wants. Today, the client wants me to kill somebody. What the client wants, I want, be it information, a possession, or justice. What justice is doesn't matter to me. It matters to my client. It's not for me to decide, but for them.

I'm an extension of their will, and what they want done. It's not about money, it is not about doing the right thing, it's about upholding that which makes what I do what it is.

It is about the client. It is about the job. There is nothing else.

And I am a professional.