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Trans-Europ-Express

By Alain Robbe-Grillet

- Hi Jean, hi Michelle.

- Hi.

It's a terrific train.

- What's this? - We should set a film on a train like this.

Yes, why not?

We could call it "Trans Europ Express". It's a good title.

- Fine. What's the story?

- Drug trafficking.

Something exciting, with fights, violence, rape, you know.

- Good, let's start at once.

You have your tape-recorder?

- I'm ready.

- Here we go.

At the Gare du Nord in Paris, a drug trafficker receives from his accomplice a suitcase with a fake bottom in which he is to transport from Belgium a few kilos of cocaine. Then he boards the Trans-Europ-Express going to Antwerp.

But the police, always on the alert, have followed our man.

Hardly has he entered his compartment, he is attacked by three policemen armed to the teeth.

Here let's remind ourselves that drug trafficking represents a not insignificant part of the national revenue, some 0,17% of the total of import operations carried out by private companies...

- I need a suitcase.

- Certainly, what type?

The trafficker model, with a false bottom to hide the drugs.

Just kidding.

THE MAN WHO DIED FOUR TIMES.

I'm sorry, are you waiting for Father Petitjean?

No, I know that he is not back from his trip yet.
I have some news of him.
Petitjean is drinking beer at the station bar.
Thank you, but beware of false news.
Is he crazy, that one?
What is he looking for?
- Didn't you recognize him?
- It's Trintignant.
Of course. What about using him for your film?
- Yes, for instance.
- What name will you give him?
- Elias.
- Isn't there a better name?
- No, I'm sorry, his name is Elias.
- His first or last name?
- It's a nickname.
- But what's his name in real life?
- In real life I don't know.
- That's a good start.

To recap:

has an empty suitcase.
- Why did he buy the sugar?
- The suitcase was too light.
- He's taken nothing else for the trip?
- No, he didn't have the time.
He left on sudden orders.
- Whose orders?
The trafficking organization.
But do drugs really get transported in this way?
- Obviously, if that's what's he does.
- Who?
Elias.
- So what next?
- Where was I?
The other suitcase.
"At the Gare du Nord in Paris, a drug trafficker receives from an accomplice in exchange for the suitcase he's bought

an identical suitcase with a false bottom to transport from Belgium several kilos of cocaine."

And then?

Then he boards the train and looks for a quiet seat.

Who is this girl with the glasses?

Must be an agent of the rival gang sent to steal the suitcase.

But why? It's empty.

Yes, that's true.

- What is she looking for?

- The coke, can't you see?

But that's impossible.

You just said that he was going to Antwerp for the pickup.

She probably does not know that.

The rival gang should know in which direction goes the trafficking.

So she is not from a rival gang.

She is an amateur detective...

- And where has he gone?

- I don't know, the bathroom.

Why would she search his suitcase in the first place?

OK, let's forget it.

Passports, please.

Thank you, madam.

Thank you.

It's equally absurd for her to steal the suitcase.

Why would it interest a rival gang or a detective or anybody else?

So she must be a kleptomaniac, a train thief.

She took the suitcase by chance, not knowing about the fake bottom, and she has nothing to do with the drug trafficking.

Shall we continue?

This stolen suitcase story doesn't work and it gets us nowhere.

OK, as you like.

And the cocaine is also
off the mark.

In Antwerp it would sooner be
diamonds.

A diamond is created in three

main stages:

cutting, shaping and polishing.

The cutting is done with discs
glazed with powdered diamonds.

The shaping is achieved by
rubbing together

two freshly cut diamonds.

Abrasives are used for polishing.

There are 4 kinds of diamonds: brilliant,
briolet, pendloque and table.

Let's compromise. I keep the drugs
and abandon the theft of the suitcase.

- Would you like to sit here?

- Yes, thank you.

- Where do we begin?

- The customs part.

Belgian customs.

Anything to declare?

Elias safely arrives in Antwerp
with his trick suitcase.

He moves fast.

I want a room, please.

Are you going for a walk?

It's a very interesting town.

You must be waiting for

Father Petitjean.

No, I know that he is not back
from his trip yet.

If you want news of him, be at 8
sharp tomorrow at Zeuter Terrace.

Could you give me an advance on
what you owe me?

If you have no use for the scarf,
give it to me.

Are you looking for something,
sir?

Will you buy me a drink?

- You are not very talkative.

- I'm in a hurry.

Liar, you've been hanging around
for a quarter of an hour.

- That's why I am late.

- Where are you going?

- Who was the guy you spoke with?

- A vice cop.

He asked me if I have seen any
prostitutes around here.

- And you, what do you do for a living?

- I'm an assassin.

- Professional?

- No, amateur.

Semi-professional, actually.

- You're funny.

- You don't believe me?

I do. Why can't there be
funny assassins?

Do you know who that guy is?

He is also a vice cop.

No. He is an actor dressed as
a cafe owner.

Do you want to go to my place?

I'm good, you know.

- No, I'm not interested.

- What interests you then?

Rape. Only rape.

All right. But it's more expensive,
naturally.

- Why don't you wait in the window,
like others? - I'm not a whore!

I am a nice girl from a good family.

You came with me to tune the piano.

Open your purse.

Give it to me.

Did you have fun?

It wasn't bad. You fight a bit too
much, but still not bad.

- You're fairly good-looking.

- Thank you.

- Are you from Paris?

- Why do you say that?

Your jacket has a Paris label.

- When did you notice that?

- Just now when you took it off.
What are you doing in Antwerp?
Sightseeing.
Why did you give that man
your scarf?
I'm a travelling salesman.
You don't trust me.
I could be useful.
I know lots of people here, in
all kinds of occupations.
- What's your name?
- Jean.
Mine's Eva. Do you like it?
That guy you gave your scarf to,
I know who he is.
He sells coke.
In your place, I'd be careful.
They are not straight, that gang.
They hire couriers and then they
give them to the cops to avoid paying.
I'm not interested in those tales.
They guy lost his scarf and asked me
if it wasn't his that I was holding.
He explained where he lost it.
Alright. Good for your.
But if you want to get in on
a serious deal, just tell me.
Don't forget the name - Eva.
Is that your wife? It's the time
for the wife photo to come out.
Is that enough?
There is something absurd here.
Why does your Elias receive
fragmentary orders,
from meeting to meeting,
never getting anywhere?
No, it's easy to understand.
He is a new agent.
The organization wants
to test him first.
So they watch him carefully before
trusting him with the goods.
- And the whore subplot? What is
she doing there? - She is not a whore!

She's a maid at the hotel.

- Not that one.

The girl he met in the street,
the one who took him to her place.

She is not important.

He has some free time,
so he goes upstairs with a girl
he saw in the window.

- But she wasn't in the window.

- How come?

She was in the street, right?

In any case, that changes nothing.

- "Why aren't you in a window?"

- I am not a whore!

I am a nice girl from a good family.

You came with me to tune the piano."

It's 8 o'clock, sir.

As soon as he got up he went

to the river

following his instructions from
the day before.

Is he taking his suitcase this time?

He thought about it, but came to the
conclusion that no one told him to.

- So what's he doing there?

- He doesn't know.

He goes because he was told to go.

Bring me a beer.

Another coin, sir, and I'll order

a Mass for your salvation.

Excuse me, do you know if

Father Petitjean is here?

It took you an hour and 28 minutes.

Good morning.

My name's Frank.

- Was that a test? - Of course.

I could have been at the station yesterday.

- And the result?

- Your time is good.

In an hour you'll change hotels.

- To which one should I go?

- It makes no difference.

- Then why change?

- For the sake of changing.

You'll leave your hotel in
Rue du Pelican,
with the suitcase empty and your
things wrapped in a parcel.
You'll arrive at the new hotel
with just the parcel,
having left the suitcase in a
locker at Central Station.
You'll give the locker key to our
agent whom you'll meet at five
at the Waggon Cemetery that's
at the end of Dock Five.
It's #319 to 321.
Got it? Repeat where.
- Where.
- Good.
I forgot something.
If by chance you run into
difficulties,
you must not use your gun.
- Then why did you give it to me?
- That will be explained later.
Thank you.
- I said thank you. You're not going?
- No, sir. You're the one who's going.
Custom control.
Right.
Good.
Passport.
- What are you doing in Antwerp?
- I'm a tourist.
- And the ropes?
- Sailboat.
- Yours?
- A friend's.
- His name?
- Jean.
- And you?
- What about me?
- Where are you staying?
- Hotel.
- Address.
- Miropeikan straat.
- We'll check.

- Too late.
- Why?
- I'm leaving.
- Going where?
- Paris.
- Tonight?
- We'll see.
- See what?
- Train schedule.
- And the suitcase?
- The locker.
- Empty!
- Empty!
- What's this?
- A gun.
- And this?
- A chain.
- And this?
- Razor.
- And this?
- A comb.
- And this?
- Toothbrush.
- And this?
- And this?

Enough fooling around, my boy.

You're caught.

Now tell us everything nicely.

Since you're a new accomplice who has been led into this unawares, you'll come to no great harm.

If you help us, we are even prepared to forget everything about you.

But I don't understand.

You must have confused me with someone else.

Stay here, we'll take care of you.

What are you doing here, sir?

- As you see, I am packing.
- Fine. Goodbye.

Hi. What are you doing here?

- Are you taking the train?
- I'm checking the schedule.
- Do you want me to pick you up?

- Why not. - Wait and see.
- Are you all alone, darling?
- Yes.
- Did you just arrive?
- Yes, I just got off the train.
Do you want me to show you Antwerp?
It's a strange place.
A place for twerps, they say.
You must be tired.
Want to stop by my place?
- Will you be a good girl?
- Oh yes, sir.
- You'll let me do what I want?
- Something special?
- Something a bit bizarre.
- Like what?
What's this?
Can't you see, it's a box.
- What for?
- My razor.
Why isn't it here?
Must have fallen out.
There is a mark inside.
Like something else was there.
- What?
- I dunno. A gun.
You know, you should buy a suitcase.
It's convenient for carrying things.
For a tourist especially.
Do you like it with me?
The problem is, you are too much
accustomed to being abused.
I should have hurt you.
Or made you believe I was going
to kill you.
Yes, but I'd have called for help
and you'd have been arrested.
You don't want the police
poking into your affairs.
What affairs?
You know, I have something
to propose to you.
That guy with the white scarf
gave me an idea.

Don't you know someone who
calls himself Frank?

- In Antwerp?

- Yes.

No.

Because there's a nice reward
if you lead the police to this man.

I think you go to the movies
too much.

What do you want from me?

Only the locker key, as planned.

Why all these games?

- To see your reaction.

- And the result?

Your reaction was correct.

And if I had fired?

You'd have had a bad report.

And you'd have been dead.

Your gun is empty.

Your friend Eva removed the bullets
an hour ago.

- One of your agents?

- Certainly. What did you think?

She suggested that I should sell you
to the cops and work for another gang.

I know. It was part of the test.

Correct response.

And the two guys who searched me
at the station?

Also our agents.

And correct reactions again.

But because of the gun you still
have one point against you.

And if I had followed the girl's
advice and turned you in?

Try it and see.

I might be waiting for the goods
just to go into business for myself.

You haven't graduated yet.

What about his things? The pajamas,
the toothbrush, where are they?

I don't know, probably left at
Eva's place.

But wasn't Elias supposed to move

to another hotel?

Maybe he did that and
left his things there.

No, I don't think he did.

He didn't have the time,
he stayed too long at Eva's.

And then he had to rush to that
appointment at the port,
to deliver the locker key.

So maybe he had the parcel with him,
like when he left the first hotel?

No, I don't think so.

When you shoot the scene, you have to
know whether he has the parcel or not.

In any case it is now too late.

You are probably waiting for
Father Petitjean.

Because if you like, I can
give you news of him.

When you make your report to your
boss who calls himself Frank,
tell him that if he plans to spy
on me until tomorrow's train,
he can take his suitcase of coke
to Paris himself.

- I've seen you before somewhere.

- Yes sir.

- Are you keeping an eye on me too?

- No sir.

It's not Father Petitjean
who sent you here?

- Answer me!

- I don't know, sir.

- What don't you know?

- What you're talking about.

- What's your name?

- Mathieu.

- Where have I seen you before?

- At the cafe yesterday.

You had a beer and bought a card
from a blind man.

- Right. - But the blind man was
obviously faking it.

- Why would he do that?

- To sell his cards, of course.
- What's in the parcel?
- Stuff.
- What kind of stuff?
- For sleeping.
- Don't you have a home?
- I am looking for an hotel.
- Here?
- No, not necessarily.

There are no hotels here, you know.

You could sleep at my place
if you like.

- You live alone?
- Yes.
- Your parents are not in Antwerp?
- No.
- Where are they?
- In Paris. At home.
- Are you from Paris?
- I was. Not anymore.
- I am from Paris, too.
- I know.
- How did you know?
- You can feel it, no?

It's Frank who told you, isn't it?

- Tell me!
- I don't know.
- What don't you know?
- What you are talking about.

If you want to sleep at my place,
it's that way.

Right. So you can better
keep an eye on me.

So a guy steps out of the shadows and
takes off his glasses. It's the boss.

Jean doesn't understand and says,
'That's not smart, I could have shot you.'

And then the boss takes the bullets
out of his pocket.

Jean checks, and his gun is empty.

It's the beautiful spy who did that.

- Then what? - I don't know.

That's where it was left.

I'd like to know the rest of the story.

We don't have that in Belgium.

Look. I'm going to France and then I'll come back here.

- When?

- I don't know.

- You won't come back.

- I'm telling you I will.

- You won't bother to tell me what happened. - I will.

I swear.

- Nice weather for travelling.

- Yes, nice weather.

The key is in your left pocket.

Fine. Since when?

Since about 3 minutes ago.

Your man last night... The one who followed me after we parted.

None of ours followed you after that.

Really? I thought differently.

Thank you for your trust.

- Did you notice something?

- No, just an impression.

- I see spies everywhere now.

- Did you speak to the man?

- No, I was able to lose him.

- So did he follow you or not?

No. In fact he didn't.

"Elias now knows that he encountered a real policeman.

The man with cigarette did not

belong to the organization

and from Elias's own lips he

heard the crucial words:

Father Petitjean, the suitcase

with coke, tomorrow's train,

the boss who calls himself Frank.

Naturally, the man with the cigarette

was there when the train departed.

Every policeman was probably

on the alert.

Elias is now ready to jump from

the moving train

or to defend the precious

suitcase with his gun."

So Elias was arrested
at the frontier.

In fact, no. To his great surprise,
nothing happens.

He arrives in Paris unmolested,
which worries him even more.

Following his orders, he checks in
the suitcase at the Gare Du Nord
and goes home after having posted
the luggage ticket.

- Hello. Elias?

- Yes, who is this?

PO Box 345. I have the suitcase.

Test completed.

Now we can trust you with
the real merchandise.

What do you mean? And yesterday?

No, that was just powdered sugar.

A test to confirm that everything
was under control.

- Hello?

- Yes, I'm listening.

You'll part tomorrow morning.

Same route. Anything to report?

No, nothing to report.

Why didn't he tell his bosses
about the policeman who spotted him
and to whom he stupidly revealed
everything?

I don't know. Maybe he was afraid
of bad marks, or something more serious:

they could have considered him a
traitor for not telling them earlier.

But there is still time for them
to change the links of the chain
which are known to the police.

Yes, but the first one to be
eliminated is surely Elias himself.

And then, he is unhappy with Frank
and the others for all those tests.

Perhaps he also wants to return
to bring Mathieu all those
magazines that he promised.

- And why the policeman...

What's his name? - Lorentz.
Why did this Lorentz left
Elias alone?
He probably knew that the first time
the suitcase would be empty.
It must be standard procedure
in that business.
And your Elias goes quietly
to the slaughter?
So it seems. Here he is, anyway,
arriving back in Antwerp.
And here again he leaves the
trick suitcase in the locker.
And here is Officer Lorentz,
resuming his surveillance.
- How does Lorentz know which exact
train he'll take? - No idea.
Maybe Elias also revealed that
at the port.
But Elias himself did not know
about the second trip.
The second trip may have been
planned well beforehand.
But Elias told Mathieu that he
didn't know when he'd be back.
For security reasons, no doubt.
I mean... Are you taking a walk?
Yes, right. A walk.
I'm saying that's a nice scarf
you have.
I know a man who wears one
exactly like that.
It's pure silk, isn't it?
The man's a priest,
his name is Petitjean.
- You know Father Petitjean?
- Of course, I know him well.
I also know him well.
But I haven't seen him in a while.
They tell me he is travelling.
- That's right.
He left on a trip.
If we want news of him,
we go to Cafe l'Ocean,

just across from the customs.

Thank you.

Have a nice walk, young man.

- Goodbye.

- Goodbye.

- Are you waiting for Father Petitjean?

- He is not back from his trip yet.

- What are you looking at?

- Nothing.

You are probably waiting for

Father Petitjean.

No, I know the priest has not...

et cetera et cetera.

If you want news of him,

you have to come to my place.

I forgot something.

Back in two minutes.

Wait for me.

There. I forgot to buy this.

Couldn't it wait?

Of course...

But I was afraid I'd forget.

And then, it was for you, you know.

And what message do you have
for me from Father Petitjean?

Ah yes, you have to go

to Kattendaig dock,

Cailleseche 6 at five pm.

- Cailleseche 6 at 5 pm?

- Yes.

You didn't tell me you were
working for Frank.

I thought you'd guessed long ago.

Take your dress off.

Get on the bed.

Stay like this.

You didn't tell me you worked
for the police.

You also thought I'd guess?

No, I swear that you have an
appointment at the docks.

Mr Frank will be waiting for you,
and he'll explain everything.

About the suitcase

and your return trip.

Sure.

And about the cop
you gave the key to.

- What key?
- The key to the station locker.
- The one you stole from my pocket.
- But when?

Just now.

You remember?

Before you went downstairs.

- I went to buy some perfume.
- I was watching from the window.
- Please untie me and I'll explain.

I'm going to strangle you.

I'll tell you everything!

It's not my fault!

That policeman, Lorentz,
he forced me to do it.

It's true that they will be at the docks,
but I honestly thought you'd guess.

No, listen, I have
more things to tell...

Too late.

Please.

Here, I brought you these.

I'm staying here.

Are they looking for you?

I don't know.

Is it serious?

You can stay,
nobody will find you here.

I have to go to work.

One thing is not clear. If Elias had
given the key to the middle man
then Eva couldn't steal it
from his pocket.

But she gave the key to Lorentz
when she went downstairs.

- So what shall we do with the
other scene? - Take it out.

Excuse me, sir. Are you perhaps
waiting for Father Petitjean?

No.

I know that he is not back
from his trip yet.
Hello, Headquarters? This is Lorentz,
give me Wermul.
Is that you? Come immediately to
Rue du Chateau 26.
Yes, Eva's place.
She's dead.
Strangled.
That Elias, is he still
under surveillance?
You lost him?
Right.
Yes, I'll wait for you.
Hello, La Metropole?
This is Inspector Lorenz.
Have you gone to press yet?
Good. Now, scrap page 9
and insert the advertisement
for Cabaret Eve.
You still have it?
Yes, the one with the woman in chains.
And then add the following
news item. Here's the text...
Elias has disappeared.
Put three men on it.
The guy who calls himself Elias,
where is hiding?
You know very well.
Answer carefully. The man who
just arrived from Paris.
Are you sure?
Police.
Give me the kid's address.
Watch this place.
STOP PRESS.
PROSTITUTE STRANGLED BY MANIAC.
EVE WITH HER SENSATIONAL

NEW ACT:

He went into the Cabaret Eve.
"Ladies and gentlemen,
welcome, and we wish you
a good trip

which will take us 2 hours
and 30 minutes,
travelling at 124 km per hour."
Nice show, isn't it? Would you like
to go backstage, sir?

"Ladies and gentlemen,
the Trans-Europ-Express
from Paris is arriving at
platform No 3
and will be leaving immediately
for Amsterdam."

DOUBLE CRIME IN ANTWERP.

We could make it into a film,
if you want to use Antwerp.

But drugs and Antwerp
do not sound right.

Everybody knows they are more
involved with diamonds here.

In any case it's impossible.

Those true stories
are always boring.