

Double Tap

by Michael Olsen

Characters: CRAWFORD, 20s (M)

DOLMAN, 20s (M)

BAXTER, 40s + (F)*

Baxter could be played either by a man or a woman, depending on cast availability, and they could be any age between 40 and 60 as long as the steel is there in the performance. The only alteration to the script would be to use "sir" where "ma'am" is used.

In the darkness we hear the sound of rain, and above it—the Waltz from Masquerade by Khachaturian. Slowly the lights come up on a gloomy room. There is a large table downstage, with a couple of chairs on one side. Half sitting/leaning on the edge of the table is Crawford. He is dressed in trim black clothes. He is meticulously polishing a very ugly looking pistol. There is an ashtray beside him with a couple of stubbed out cigarettes. There is a small black book on the table, plus a handful of bullets, along with an envelope, a Polaroid camera, a small knapsack, and a portable CD player playing the Khachaturian. Dolman enters, brushing off the rain. He's wearing a tuxedo and carries an envelope similar to Crawford's. Crawford stops the music. Crawford can't see Dolman.

CRAWFORD: Don't move.

DOLMAN: What is it?

CRAWFORD: Let me guess what you're wearing.

DOLMAN: Alright smartarse.

CRAWFORD: You're in your tux, of course.

DOLMAN: Of course. We graduate in an hour.

CRAWFORD: You have a little handkerchief in your jacket pocket, but you've been playing with it for half an hour to get it to stand up straight.

DOLMAN: Only ten minutes.

CRAWFORD: And not to forget the white carnation, because you think it helps make you look like James Bond.

DOLMAN: Well it does!

CRAWFORD: And the cigarette case. The only thing your father ever gave you. It's in your

pocket as well. Am I right?

Crawford turns around, smiling without mirth.

DOLMAN: Showoff.

CRAWFORD: Always pays to keep track of things.

DOLMAN: What's with the music? Wouldn't have thought you were the classical music type.

CRAWFORD: It's Khachaturian. The Waltz from *Masquerade*.

DOLMAN: Khacha—what?

CRAWFORD: He was a Russian composer. Reminds me of you, actually.

DOLMAN: Me?

CRAWFORD: He didn't know what he wanted out of life for quite some time. He only graduated from the Moscow Conservatory when he was thirty.

DOLMAN: Bloody hell. I'm not that old.

Dolman tugs at the bottom of his jacket: the suit is a little too tight.

DOLMAN: You got anyone coming?

CRAWFORD: 'Course not.

DOLMAN: What do you mean "course not"? What about your family?

CRAWFORD: They're already here.

DOLMAN: Really? Where? You didn't say—

Crawford holds up his pistol and starts loading the bullets.

CRAWFORD: It's like what Baxter said: "My father is the gun, and my son is the bullet."

DOLMAN: Cute. I thought you said in O. Week your family lived in the country.

CRAWFORD: People said a lot of things in O. Week. I remember you raving about some twins you spent New Year's Eve with.

DOLMAN: That was true!

CRAWFORD: That was the ecstasy speaking.

DOLMAN: Yeah well at least I've got someone coming tonight.

- CRAWFORD:** Do tell.
- DOLMAN:** My sister.
- CRAWFORD:** I didn't know you had a sister.
- DOLMAN:** Ha! Gotcha! There are some things about me you don't know.
- CRAWFORD:** So what does she think about your impending new career?
- DOLMAN:** How should I know?
- CRAWFORD:** She does know what you've been doing for the past year.
- DOLMAN:** She thinks it's a management course.
- CRAWFORD:** I suppose you could call it that, if by "management course" you meant the art of effective and efficient targeted elimination. *(Pause.)* You'll have to introduce us.
- DOLMAN:** I don't think so.
- CRAWFORD:** Why not? I'll be on my best behaviour. Promise.
- DOLMAN:** Yeah right. *(Pause.)* Are you gonna wear that gun?
- CRAWFORD:** Nice touch, I thought.
- Pause. Dolman walks around as if trying to calm himself down, breathing deeply, but it's fruitless. Finally:*
- DOLMAN:** I know why you asked me here tonight.
- CRAWFORD:** Yeah?
- DOLMAN:** It's good to be together. Supporting each other. Tonight of all nights.
- CRAWFORD:** Something like that
- Pause.*
- DOLMAN:** Do you have yours?
- Crawford holds up his envelope which is identical to Dolman's.*
- DOLMAN:** Are you nervous? Stupid question. Of course you're not nervous. You're excited. The last assignment. Pass or fail. Do or die. This is what it's all come down to. You want to put all that training into practice, see if you really can bump someone off.

- CRAWFORD:** That's right.
- DOLMAN:** You can't wait to get out there and start working.
- CRAWFORD:** I've already been fielding a few offers, actually.
- DOLMAN:** Already?
- CRAWFORD:** Already.
- DOLMAN:** Who?
- CRAWFORD:** I can't tell you that.
- DOLMAN:** You're bullshitting.
- CRAWFORD:** I shit you not. Middle East, Eastern Europe, South East Asia. There's plenty of work out there for us. You've just got to go look for it. I've even got an agent.
- DOLMAN:** I thought you'd be freelance.
- CRAWFORD:** I don't know enough about the market. You need someone out there who's got connections.
- DOLMAN:** And then you'll go freelance.
- CRAWFORD:** Yeah. Be nice to have a portfolio to show people.
- DOLMAN:** What? A "Greatest Hits Photo Album?"
- CRAWFORD:** I like the sound of that.
- DOLMAN:** You're not just cold, Crawford—you're sub-arctic.
- CRAWFORD:** I like the cold. Remember what Baxter always used to say? The worst thing that can happen is a sweaty trigger finger.
- Crawford goes back to polishing his pistol. Dolman plays with his handkerchief a moment.*
- DOLMAN:** Nice piece. I never use a big one like that. Something smaller, like a Beretta. *(Pause.)* What's with the camera?
- CRAWFORD:** Graduation photo.
- Dolman nods, slowly striding around the room, showing off his tux.*
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- DOLMAN:** You like? Never thought I'd get a chance to wear it on this course, but here we

are. Feels a little tight under the shoulders, though. Guess I've put on a pound or two.

CRAWFORD: You should have lost two pounds.

DOLMAN: Are you just wearing that?

CRAWFORD: (*holding up the passport*) I'm leaving straight after graduation.

DOLMAN: Where you going?

CRAWFORD: You know I can't tell you that.

DOLMAN: Where the job is?

CRAWFORD: What do you think?

DOLMAN: Wow. (*Pause.*) I thought with weather like this they'd close the airport.

CRAWFORD: They can't close it forever.

DOLMAN: Bloody awful weather, though, isn't it? I heard storms on the coast killed seventeen people. Just like that. A huge storm, just wind and rain blowing across. Who'd have thought it, huh? Shame we can't control the weather. Just zap a target with a lightning bolt or a big hailstone. That's the way to do it.

CRAWFORD: You'd like that, wouldn't you? Remote control. Distant. You haven't learnt a thing from the course.

Crawford snatches up the book on the table and throws it at Dolman.

CRAWFORD: I bet you don't even know the Rules.

Dolman thumbs through the book.

DOLMAN: The 9 Rules of Assassination. 'Course I know them. (*Dolman tosses the book back to Crawford.*) Why do you suppose there are only nine? Why not ten? That's a nice round number, and you're always getting things in tens, like the Top Ten. I mean, look at the Ten Commandments.

CRAWFORD: You're a dickhead. You've just got to know them, that's all.

DOLMAN: And live by them.

CRAWFORD: That's right. If you need any more rules you make them up as you go along.

DOLMAN: I know them.

CRAWFORD: Really?

- DOLMAN:** Of course. Test me.
- CRAWFORD:** Alright. What's Rule #4?
- DOLMAN:** Um, “when you engage the target, never underestimate them.”
- CRAWFORD:** That's Rule #9, and it goes: “Never worry about the target underestimating you, just you underestimating the target.”
- DOLMAN:** Alright alright I gave you that one. What's Rule #5?
- CRAWFORD:** “No women, no kids.”
- DOLMAN:** Is it? I thought that was—
- CRAWFORD:** What about Rule #1?
- DOLMAN:** Don't tell me. I know this one. I know this one.
- Pause.*
- CRAWFORD:** Well?
- DOLMAN:** Um—
- CRAWFORD:** “Never miss.”
- DOLMAN:** That's right. “Never miss.” Funny. I thought it was—
- CRAWFORD:** Why did you do the course, Dolman? In the year book—if they had one—you know what they'd write under your photo?
- DOLMAN:** What?
- CRAWFORD:** Expendable.
- DOLMAN:** Yeah well it wouldn't have been so tough if Baxter wasn't always on my case.
- CRAWFORD:** In that position you have to be on everyone's case.
- DOLMAN:** Yeah, but from day one I was singled out.
- CRAWFORD:** Baxter had to establish who was boss. You just happened to make that stupid remark about how the light was shining in your eyes. You could have said anything and you still would have been picked out and made an example of you. I admit a thrashing was pretty severe, but it got everyone's attention.
- DOLMAN:** (*Sarcastic*) Gee, it's all coming back to me now. You had a few run-ins too, didn't you, especially on the gym mat. You just wouldn't stay down, would you? You had to keep getting back up like you could still win.

- CRAWFORD:** One day I will.
- DOLMAN:** Yeah, well I'm the one who had to clean up the blood.
- CRAWFORD:** Nose still feels a little funny.
- DOLMAN:** Fuckin' asshole.
- CRAWFORD:** Baxter's a professional asshole. Do you think we're going up against Little Bo Peep out there? Security's improved so much over the last 20 years. You need to be top notch to get your target.
- DOLMAN:** Bullshit. One high-powered rifle is all it takes. One shot, one kill.
- CRAWFORD:** Weren't you listening when Baxter was talking about Kill Theory? Double tap is the way to go every time. (*Miming the shooting*) Bang bang. Confirm the kill every time. It's the only way to guarantee your pay cheque.
- DOLMAN:** Yeah well after the hell we went through I definitely want some payback.
- CRAWFORD:** Hell? It was fun.
- DOLMAN:** Fun? There was no fun. The course was a nightmare, the food was bloody awful, the only women around could probably beat the shit out of me—and to top it all off, we're cut loose without any support at all. No career planning whatsoever.
- CRAWFORD:** What are you talking about? There was a seminar just last month on breaking into new markets in Africa.
- DOLMAN:** I must have missed it. When was it on?
- CRAWFORD:** You probably slept through it. It was on at 8:30 in the morning in Lecture Room D.
- DOLMAN:** I didn't know!
- CRAWFORD:** You fell asleep during the ballistics lecture last week.
- DOLMAN:** Don't we already know enough about bullets?
- CRAWFORD:** Can you ever know too much?
- DOLMAN:** Well you'd be the one to answer that.
- Crawford smiles.*
- CRAWFORD:** We're not talking about guns, grenades or knives. We're talking about a way of life, Dolman. We're talking about the air you breathe, the food you eat, the

clothes you wear. Everything that makes you who you are becomes focussed in the tip of a bullet. It's the art of living so that you can do the job and still make the 9:10 flight to Bahrain.

- DOLMAN:** Is that the flight you're catching tonight?
- CRAWFORD:** Dolman.
- DOLMAN:** It's not training, Crawford. It's indoctrination.
- CRAWFORD:** If you like. It feels like Day One, Year Zero, doesn't it?
- DOLMAN:** I feel like a lab rat who's finally found the exit. *(Pause.)* It's gonna feel funny being out on our own. No classes. No training. No nothing.
- CRAWFORD:** No-one bothering you. No-one telling you what to do.
- DOLMAN:** Scary.
- CRAWFORD:** Exhilarating. They must figure we're big enough to look after ourselves. I went to see Baxter about it actually just before.
- DOLMAN:** And?
- CRAWFORD:** Wasn't in.
- Pause.*
- DOLMAN:** Why the hell do you suppose Baxter's in here teaching and not out there making a killing if you know what I mean?
- CRAWFORD:** I heard something big went down in the Gulf War. Forced retirement. Wound up here.
- DOLMAN:** There's no comfort in that. If I never hear the name Baxter again I think I could just about die a happy man.
- CRAWFORD:** *(shaking his head)* You really didn't understand, did you?
- DOLMAN:** What's to understand? Underneath that sadistic little rottweiler exterior is an even more vicious littler rottweiler dying to tear you to shreds.
- CRAWFORD:** Baxter's a professional, through and through, trained to train us to be the best. The Organisation has to make sure that we can do a job and get away clean. We use all our cunning, all our skill, all our knowledge of the world, and we should be OK. Hell, we should be better than OK. That's why they have this last test. They've gotta know, I suppose, that we can make the grade. Standards have to be maintained. As Baxter says, you can't let amateurs loose out there.

DOLMAN: Shit.

CRAWFORD: What's the matter?

DOLMAN: I'm not ready.

CRAWFORD: 'Course you're ready.

DOLMAN: I mean, look at me. Jesus. Why did I get dressed up even? I'm not gonna run around and try and bump someone off in this get-up.

CRAWFORD: You've always gotta think curve ball. Always.

DOLMAN: Shit.

CRAWFORD: That's the first thing I learned when I got here. Remember that so-called fire drill? And the doors were locked? And the smoke started coming in?

DOLMAN: Remember Simpson? He died from smoke inhalation.

CRAWFORD: He was way too slow.

DOLMAN: And what about the others over the past year? Reynard, Thompson. Can't forget Colston.

CRAWFORD: Well, an arrow through the neck is a very slow way to go, especially if it doesn't hit the jugular.

DOLMAN: How did you know what to do in that fire?

CRAWFORD: Instinct. That's the 2nd Rule of Assassination: "When all else fails, you will always have instinct."

DOLMAN: I shat myself when that smoke started coming in.

CRAWFORD: I loved it. I knew from that moment on, we were on our own.

DOLMAN: The way you shot open that door!

CRAWFORD: I was on a high. I was exactly where I wanted to be, doing exactly what I wanted to do. I knew then that I could take anything they threw at us. Anything. The theory, the fighting, the weapons. I'd know it all. I'd beat them at their own game. I'd win every time.

DOLMAN: Even on the gym mat.

CRAWFORD: Even there, because defeat is only another name for a victory you didn't win.

DOLMAN: Huh?

- CRAWFORD:** Nothing is defeat, only what's in yourself. What you bring to your own experiences.
- DOLMAN:** And what did you bring to that time Baxter whipped you on the assault course?
- CRAWFORD:** (*chuckling*) They're still there.
- DOLMAN:** Show me.
- CRAWFORD:** Dolman!
- DOLMAN:** Don't go all coy on me now, Crawford. Let's see. Come on.
- CRAWFORD:** Alright.
- Crawford pulls up his top and shows Dolman a series of scars that wrap around the edge of his body.*
- CRAWFORD:** I like to think they remind me that we're all flesh and blood.
- DOLMAN:** Baxter'll be there tonight. At the ceremony.
- CRAWFORD:** We'll all be there.
- DOLMAN:** Funny, I haven't seen Ruxton around anywhere. Have you?
- CRAWFORD:** I saw her yesterday. Why?
- DOLMAN:** I tell you what I'd like a piece of that.
- CRAWFORD:** Just because she's the only woman in the course! She's not worth it. Really. She's too loud, especially in bed. I like them quiet and breathy.
- DOLMAN:** You've—um—you've had her?
- CRAWFORD:** In a manner of speaking.
- DOLMAN:** Shit. Is anything happening there then? Anything serious?
- CRAWFORD:** No. Why?
- DOLMAN:** I thought I might—you know—try my luck.
- CRAWFORD:** If you don't mind the smell!