

A HEROES OF HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD ONE SHOT

UN-AMERICAN

Glen Michigan watched the stretch of boulevard in front of Mann's Chinese Theatre from his office above. Though nothing could ever *really* stop the wave of tourists lapping at the starry shore, they were giving the costumed superheroes the widest berth possible.

Truthfully, he was still coming to terms with the fact that three men who he considered, if not friends at the very least, good work colleagues had been involved in everything *60 Minutes*, and Fox News, and even the Britain's *Dispatches* programme was claiming. Illegal bare knuckle boxing, he could believe that of Ricky. Solicitation, he could believe that of Stu, and as for Brian... he found it unbelievable that anything stronger than a DUI could have ever occurred at his hands. Yet when Gwen broke down in his office, he knew it was true.

A gaggle of shadows gathered just beyond his door. He could see the shadow of their feet on the floor. Several of the "Hollywood Heroes" were clocking off early, not that there was much for them to clock off from. The door crept open, Glen adjusted himself in his seat and feigned surprise.

'Bill, what can I do for you?'

'That's us taking off now, G.' replied Daredevil as he removed his cowl.

'Good luck today.'

'You sure you don't want to come with?'

'It's best that I don't.' His response drew a tennis rally of inquisitive eyes amongst the group.

'You should be there, Glen.' General Zod snapped. 'Gary's coming and he's leaving at the end of the week. This is important.'

'I know.'

'So why not get up off your ass and show some support?'

'Because they're letting me go, Neil.'

When the shit gets bad Senior Management made sure it flowed downhill. The fake superhero business was no different. Glen had been sitting on his termination notice for a fortnight. After the arrest of three of the street's most

“iconic” performers the complex’s administration looked to avoid any issues with the comic book powerhouses. Central to that avoidance was wrapping up the on street entertainment and releasing any full-time staff directly associated in the entire mess.

‘Sorry. I didn’t know.’

‘What are you going to do?’

‘I’ve a few ideas. Maybe get back into writing.’ Glen’s resting stress face was absent.

‘Well, we’re off to Sacramento. Wish us luck.’

‘Be lucky, gents. Drive safe.’

Gwen tried to time it that she left the parking lot *before* the rest but getting out of her costume and into her civilian clothing took longer than she had thought. She caught Bill’s eye as he crossed the wasteland. He smiled, and she momentarily hated him for it.

‘Hey you.’ he said.

‘Hey.’

‘You given anymore thought to coming along with us?’

‘Not a moment.’

‘Your presence there would *really* help our case.’

God-damn it, Bill.

‘My family is dead, Bill. I can’t think of this shit right now.’

‘I’m sorry. I just thought... they’re trying to punish all of us because of what Ricky, and Brian, and Stu did. I just thought we needed to show them that we’re not all like that. That we’re decent...’

‘Jesus-Fucking-Christ, Bill! Stop! You’re preaching to me like you’ve been preaching to everyone that would listen. I don’t care. I come here to make money because I have to. If this god-damn street dropped into a sink hole I wouldn’t fucking miss it. My sister was murdered by someone who worked here. Someone I thought was my friend. This might be a First Amendment thing for you but it’s personal for me.’

‘I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to...’

‘I know you didn’t. Look, I have to go. I hope you get the result you want.’ Gwen dragged herself in behind the wheel of a cheap run-around she had bought. The meds she had been prescribed made her feel like she was wading through syrup on a daily basis. Pulling out of the parking lot, she pointed the old banger towards West Hollywood and her evening engagement.

Detective O’Hara’s partner had given Gwen a lead on a support group she thought might prove beneficial. Gwen had taken the details as a nicety; with every intent on tossing them until she *blew up* on someone who cut in front of her at In & Out Burger. After being bailed out by Dalton, she punched the digits and booked herself in for SPAVE, an unfortunate acronym for the Support for People Affected by Violent Encounters.

The first two weeks Gwen played a game in her head. Guess the statistic. She’d mentally go around the table and attempt to pin-point what happened to

who before they *shared with the group*. Assault, Domestic Abuse, Rape, Rape, Gun Crime. Was it racist to assume the Asian man was a victim of gun crime because he *probably* owned a Seven-Eleven? Probably.

'My story's a little different.' a meek little bird of a woman said. 'My husband and I were *totally* in love. We'd been together for nine years. Married for four, and every day was like our honeymoon. Then one day...'

'Yeah, I knew I knew you!'

'Let her finish.'

'... one day I came home early from a work retreat. Joel, that's my husband. Joel was... he was...' a quick line of nose lube ran down her nostril as she battled valiantly to hold back the tears.

'It's ok, Mary. Nobody's here to judge you. We're all here for you.'

We're all here for you, the group said in unison much to Gwen's surprise.

'He had *killed* her.'

Gwen flinched.

'He cut her up.'

Gwen began to shake against the cool metal of her chair.

'He ate them. He ate them all.'

She shot up out of her spot quicker than a pecker at a brothel. Holding it back with the palm of her hand, Gwen rushed to the bathroom as her stomach violently unleashed her three square per day. As she hit the cubicle the dam broke and suddenly the cool white porcelain was sprayed in carrot and stale water. She hurled again. Each time she thought of what had happened it brought more guts to the surface.

'You ok?'

'I'm fine.'

A pair of hands took hold of Gwen's flame red hair. Their fingers were small and lady-like.

'Sorry if I upset you out there.'

'You didn't. I'm fine.' She ran the sleeve of her jacket along her mouth before pushing passed the good Samaritan and throwing some water in her face.

'You know, sharing *really* does help. I've seen you here the last few weeks I've been, and you're still something of an outsider.'

'I'm only really here for the coffee.' The Widow pushed by her associate, exiting the bathroom. There was a queue of curious bystanders. She saw the same look on their faces as she saw the day it all come out on Hollywood Boulevard. The day 40 Batmen rushed the LAPD. The day she'd been reliving in her head ever since.

In the cool Hell.A night, Gwen lost herself for a moment. If she got in the car she was going home. *Where else is there to go?* she thought, with no real answer. Crossing the alley she flashed her ID at a semi-slumbering doorman on her way into *Ray's Bar*. The place used to be a bowling alley and in a lot of ways still was. Gutters ran the length of the dance floor, the lane furniture remained, even the finger food was served in reclaimed bowling shoes.

'Whiskey, four fingers and keep them coming.'

The barman poured deep for her.

A TV played on the top spirit shelf. Its volume barely qualifying as a whisper. CNN played the business news. A lot of old white men in whiter than white shirts with black hearts trumped on about "hard times" like they'd ever had to tighten their belts. The feed cut away to Sacramento's State Court House where legislators and protesters came together like a delightful beef and pube stew.

'Could you turn that up?' Gwen asked.

The barman obliged, and poured her another deep whiskey.

Gwen watched unblinking as the TV projected Daredevil, Thor, and Wonder Woman across the world.

California's State Senate have been hearing testimony today from leading comic book companies DC and Marvel in relation to the proposal to ban the wearing of superhero likenesses for solicitation. Representatives from Hollywood Boulevard's collective "The Hollywood Heroes" have been in attendance and have requested that their recommendations be heard prior to this going to the floor. Hollywood Boulevard has been rocked recently by the revelation that three of its street performers were involved in the armed robbery of the Santa Monica branch of Bank, USA and the murder of the Corrigan family, LAPD employees Ronan O'Hara & Claudette Dreary and their very own Spider-Man performer, Colin Spence.

Bill appeared on camera, sans Horn Head. 'The main point that we'd like to get across to the law-makers is that *this* ban on costumed heroes working Hollywood Boulevard will *only* impact on the innocent. Children will not be able to meet their heroes. We won't be able to make a living... effectively they'll be making redundant close to thirty people... but most importantly it tars the hard-working individuals with the same brush as those who committed these terrible crimes. They just as easily could have been postmen but you're not going to outlaw UPS.'

Despite herself Gwen smiled. Bill had an intelligence that invited a warm response.

'The issue here is whether we're going to let corporations run rough-shot over our First Amendment right. What they're trying to accomplish here is un-American. Plain and simple.'

The screen abruptly cut to sports as a second barman returns the TV remote to its spot by the register.

'Hey, I was watching that!'

'Now you're watching *the Kings*. I'm tired of hearing about that god-damn case.'

Gwen's temper snapped before she even had a chance to turn red. She hurled her glass at the TV, shattering the screen and sending the picture to static.

'HEY, WHAT THE FUCK?!'

'*The Kings* can eat my dick!'

'YOU'RE FUCKING CRAZY! GET THAT CRAZY BITCH OUT OF HERE!'

The doorman approached. He was barely five-foot but had a neck wider than a porthole window.

'Get your fucking hands off me!' snapped Gwen, yanking her wing free of the bomber-jacketed rent-a-cop.

'Ma'am, one way or another you're fucking leaving.'

'WHY WOULD I WANT TO STAY IN THIS FUCKING SHIT HOLE?!' the red-head spat as she stumbled from her stool, pushing the pint-sized warrior off her. She had dealt with bigger men than him. She'd out-lived Ricky Barnett. That murdering fuck...

Suddenly she was on the street, no clue how she got there or even *where* there actually was. She'd tried her hardest not to think of that Hulking maniac but his name was like an earworm. It danced in circles around her consciousness.

Ricky Barnett.

Ricky fucking Barnett.

What kind of sick bastard could murder your family and then slip into your bed? Gwen shuddered at the thought of his touch. She felt guilty for feeling like he'd raped her. She was, at the time, a consenting adult but how could she have known? Knowing now, with the 20-20 of an eagle every moment with him in her life felt like a rape. She felt sick to her stomach. Ashamed. Powerless. Abused. Cheap. So, so fucking cheap. First Stu, then Ricky... how could her taste in men be so wrong?

'I'm not a bad person.' Gwen cried into the night.

Someone had to be. Did she corrupt Stu, or did Stu corrupt her? Which one of them was responsible for Ricky? And Brian?

Blinded by her tears, Gwen staggered out into the midst of traffic. Horns *blasted* as brakes screeched before a Yellow Cab pulled up beside her. The driver popped the front passenger door.

'You ok, sweetie?' said the female driver.

Gwen climbed into the cab, pulling the door shut and bringing to an end the orchestra of Pacific Avenue horns.

'Where to?'

'I don't know.' Gwen admitted.

'First time in a cab?'

A terrible idea presented itself to Gwen's mind. So terrible she felt compelled to see it through. 'Take me to Walnut Lane.'

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