

Matt felt the muscles in his arms twitching then screaming. It had started again.

The baseball bat swung at his head and he felt like a house fly, he had so much time. His left had stopped the bat with a crack like thunder and his right fist drove the villain's head so hard, the face wetly crumpled before the head left the body, and ricocheted off the alley wall.

Matt was what they called in the comics a super hero. His costume had been sewn with precision by his Mum, so he was looking cool.

Matt was sat at home watching telly when he got the feeling. It was like Peter Parker's spider sense. He knew when and where people were in trouble. He made some excuse to his Mum about the Internet and sidled upstairs. Even as he went his body was changing. He took his costume out of the wardrobe and quickly got changed.

The woman's scream was full of the fear of evil expectation. She could smell the fetid breath and felt the weight of her attacker. Suddenly the weight was released and a new smell, the smell of fresh arterial blood filled her nostrils. A hand reached out of the darkness and with a kind word helped her to her feet.

The air buzzed with the hum of the radios and the flashing blue lights were giving her a headache. For the fifth time she tried to tell her story to the hard bitten cop.

Rattigan spat into his radio, "goddamn vigilante again." This was the third case this week and it seemed to be accelerating. He put a large pinch of Old Holburn on to the paper, evened it out and expertly rolled the cigarette, licking the gum to fasten it down. Sucking the pungent smoke into his ravaged lungs he sighed to his partner and repeated his utterance like a curse, "goddamn vigilante."

Matt loved his comics, Judge Dredd was his favourite, "I am the law," rang through his very being, so when it first happened, he knew, like he had been expecting it his whole life, and he knew what he had to do. "With great power comes great responsibility," and for Matt the borders between fantasy and reality had always been blurred.

The Pimp felt his rib cage give way. The nutter in the fancy dress suit had hit him so hard it was like been hit by a train, or so he imagined as his legs buckled below him and blood stained vomit spewed down his suit. He loved that suit, left by a punter scammed by one of the girls, and everyone said how sharp it was. About as sharp as the fractured rib that had perforated his liver causing the internal bleeding that was seeping the life force out of him.

Matt felt great with each rescue, or mission, as he liked to call them. It was as if the essence of the villains fed his superness like a street vampire sucking the life force out of his victims. He felt great, and let's face it, he was a goddamn hero.

Rattigan hawked up a mouthful of nicotine stained phlegm and spat at the feet of the reporter. "Goddamn vigilante," he repeated for the dozenth time. The journalist was no rookie, he knew Rattigan's reputation and treated him with a mixture of contempt and respect.

"Rattled because he's doing your job," he taunted, and straight away regretted it as Rattigan gave him the eye. "Piss off punk," Rattigan snarled and the Journo backed off a step.

From out of the darkness, like a striking snake, the fist smashed into Rattigan's head knocking him flat, his ear splitting and exploding with blood.

Matt shuffled into the kitchen handing his blood stained costume to his Mum to put in the wash. "Cup of tea love?" she asked as she leant over to peck him on the cheek, "busy night?"

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Betsy screamed with joy and skittered down the corridor to the nurses station, the abandoned room beeping loudly with the alarm on the life support machine.

Consciousness when it came was clear and sudden. Unbeknown to him, Rattigan had lain in a coma for six long weeks from the massive head trauma he had sustained, but now, he felt great.

The head nurse ran into Rattigan's room to find him standing naked, but for his hospital gown, buttocks showing to all the world, rolling his Old Holborn whilst staring out the window. Feeling her legs buckle slightly, her starched years of training saved her, as she told him to "put that cigarette out right now, Mr Rattigan."

The last thing Rattigan remembered was talking to that goddamn Journo. Betsy, through joyous sobs, filled him in. Punched by a masked vigilante, massive head trauma, and now, a miracle.

Rattigan didn't know what all the fuss was about, he felt great! In fact, it was as if the world had been polished. His vision was fantastic and he could hear a faint conversation at the nurses station, wonder mixed with fear,

"But it's impossible...."

"No one could recover from so much injury...."

Rattigan had had enough. "Stop whining," he snapped at Betsy, "and get me some goddamn clothes."

The Journo was nervous. For the last six weeks he had been the man of the moment. On the scene, his front page story was rumoured to be up for the Pulitzer. Now, summoned to Rattigan's office, he pushed the door open.

"Not so goddamn cocksure now," Rattigan growled between drawn lips, precariously balancing his roll up. He was back on the case. The fact that he had become the Vigilantes latest victim was baffling him. Or that was six weeks ago. Since then there had been another twenty three deaths. In fact, Rattigan was the only victim to have survived.

To the young Journo, Rattigan was now as big a story as the Vigilante. According to the hospital Rattigan had made a complete recovery, "a medical miracle?" He was already playing with his headline.

Seeing he was distracted, Rattigan squeezed his shot glass of bourbon in irritation and it exploded in a hail of fine glass shards. Rattigan, as surprised as the Journo,

but not showing it, threw the remains into the trash. The Journo inwardly gulped. His hand wasn't even bleeding.

"Breakfast!"

Matt heard his Mum yelling up the stairs and went down for his breakfast. Picking up the paper he spat his tea out in amazement. There was a picture of that cop, what his name, Rattigan, walking out of the hospital looking right as rain. Recovering his composure he put jam on his toast as he looked at his suit, freshly ironed on the clothes horse.

Rattigan tilted his hat forward and pulled his collar up as he stepped out of the station back door into the alley and pouring rain. He could feel something was happening, didn't know what, didn't care. "Bring it on you goddamn pansies," he muttered to himself.

Without thought he spun round on the spot, his left arm moving up and back catching the punch on it's inward flight, gliding it past his head as his right fist came round in the same motion and connected with the jaw of the guy in the red costume. Rattigan exulted. Never had he moved so fast or hit so hard. His assailant's head and body shot sideways into the wall of the narrow alley and brick fragments exploded outwards as the wall smashed with thunderous applause.

Rattigan was just a bit too cocky because next it was his turn to bounce off the alley wall. The blow to his ribcage should of shattered it, but instead the punch sent him rocketing within the confined space.

Blue light flooded down the alley as the open mouthed Captains and clerks stood in the rain watching the two titans hammer each other, doing little damage, except to the architecture.

Matt was beginning to panic. What the hell was going on? He had crept silently up on the cop, went to hit him and finish the job when all hell had broken loose. Suddenly the cop was as strong as he was! Wishing he'd had an extra slice of toast this morning, Matt was getting tired. Suddenly he broke off and made a run for it, jumping the gate at the end of the alley.

Rattigan watched him go. Goddamn Vigilante, that was two suits he had ruined. Picking his crumpled hat from the side walk he started rolling a cigarette and shuffled back to the station. Goddamn he needed a drink.

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Rattigan staggered as the slugs hit him in the chest. A good grouping he would think later when he examined the bruising with Betsy. He wasn't wearing a vest. Didn't need a vest. Why waste the budget on a SWAT team, no all they had to do was send in Rattigan. Goddamn Pinkos.

The Pinko was sat at the bar. His face was a nest of activity, full of ticks and grimaces, rodent features, oddly disturbing.

The Girl put the coffee in front of the Pinko and skittered back to the other end of the counter. The Pinko gave her a gap toothed leer and slurped his coffee from the saucer. He'd seen it in an old movie and thought he was the height of cool.

"Give me the goddamn money!"

The round end of the revolver filled the vision of the Girl, terrifying her with its cold metal precision.

Two almighty crashes, so close together, only an audio dilettante would have told them apart, heralded the entrance of a hard bitten cop, trench coat flowing behind in the wind of his passing, hat rakishly balanced on his head, and the masked guy in the red fancy dress costume that looked like his mum had made it.

Matt, having the slight edge in super hero experience got there first and the Pinko's head was slammed so hard into the counter, a horizontal wave of blood shot out in all directions as if he'd slammed a ketchuped burger with the grill pan.

"Goddamn Vigilante," drawled Rattigan as he grabbed his nemesis and threw him like a rocket into the juke box which exploded in a flash of smoke and flames, still managing to beat out that old tune, "I heard it through the grapevine" by Marvin Gaye.

"And, another thing," yelled the Captain to Rattigan. "How in hell's name is the department going to pay for the damage?"

Rattigan just looked down at his shoes and rolled a cigarette. You could be as tough as you like and a super hero, but no one wanted a grilling from the Captain.

"And another thing," he shouted, his face beginning to purple in blotchy rashes, "not only did you trash the place, the goddamn vigilante got away, and the Girl's family is suing the department for a lifetimes care at the local nut ward."

Betsy was in a bit of a daze. She was ironing Rattigan's shirt in front of the TV and she was sure she could smell burning. She looked down and screamed at the sight of the iron smoothing out the back of her hand. The smell was the blackened hairs. She ran to the faucet and shoved her hand under the cold tap. She knew how to treat a burn, she knew first aid. It must be the shock, but there was no pain, in fact, although the hair had burned away he skin wasn't even red. Betsy had her moments, and cautiously she went back to the ironing board, picked up the iron, and gently touched it to her excited palm.

The Journo got the call from his Editor. Some perve predator, well known in the seedier parts of town, was in the local hospital with multiple fractures in both arms and legs. Although his head was in plaster and his jaw wired together, the Journo heard him silently rattle, "it was a broad, a goddamn beautiful broad."

Betsy was fed up.

When was that goddamn Rattigan going to come and get her out?

The hand of the duty sergeant lent through the bars and lit the cigarette held firmly in bright red lips.

They were treating her like a goddamn criminal when she had been fighting for justice, the Metropolitan way. Where was that goddamn boyfriend of hers?

Rattigan was at his wits end. Bad enough dealing with the goddamn Vigilante, now Betsy had gone super, and made mincemeat of some perve from the sticks.

She would of got away with it too, but apparently was so angry at laddering her stockings, she kept smashing the Perve's face into the edge of the sidewalk.

"About goddamn time," Besty purred as she put her lipstick coated butt into the ashtray.

There was an edge to Betsy, Rattigan hadn't seen before, and he wasn't sure he liked it. What in hell's name was going on? He knew one thing for certain, he was going to have to find somewhere to send his shirts.

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