

A Hero's Award

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The sunlight dims the streetlights as people emerge from below. An older woman steps onto the sidewalk immediately lighting up a cigarette. Her fierce eyes dart to the people who swarm around her. Her fitted business skirt and blouse clings to her figure as she steps along the pavement. She walks hard as if she was extinguishing a flame with every stomp. She strolls up to a glass door and the doorman quickly opens it.

"Good morning, Mrs. Paulette," she doesn't give the doorman a second of her busy day. Her high heels echo

throughout the large office. Mrs. Paulette's phone rings. She slides her shiny nails into her coach briefcase and raises the tiny phone to her ear, as she steps onto the elevator.

"Mrs. Paulette?" she pauses, "Well, get on it, then! I want to be the first one on this story! Hustle, or you can find your place at the unemployment line like all the others!" She steps out of the elevator into a large room filled to the edges with cubicles. As she walks through the noisy workers, she's greeted continuously until she reaches her office at the end of the strip. She shuts the door and places her briefcase on the desk. She walks over to the window wall and ganders out at the end of a beautiful sunrise. There is a rapid knock at the door, "Come in!" a small delicate girl steps inside, "Well, what is it Danni?"

"Um, regarding the story—"

Mrs. Paulette walks behind her desk, "Get on with it."

"Well you got it. Here's all the information," Danni takes one step and leans forward the rest of the way and places a folder at the edge of her desk as if she was afraid of catching something from Mrs. Paulette.

Mrs. Paulette wraps her fingers around the folder and smiles down at it hauntingly, "Perfect," She looks up at Danni, who still stands just passed the doorway staring at

the ground, "And you're still here why?" she opens the folder and sits down in her throne. Danni is out the door quicker than a frightened bunny.

A young girl bursts into the street from the subway station below. She breaks out into full sprint. She holds her backpack over one shoulder as she dodges bystanders that are too slow for her today. She spies a luxurious banquet hall up head. The girl reaches in her bag as she runs and fights with the stuff inside. A worker at the nearby coffee shop steps out into the sidewalk. She crashes into him and shoves him and the fresh tray of bagels into the wall.

"Ay! Watch it Victoria!"

Victoria looks over her shoulder and yells back to the man, "I'm late!"

The man lifts his chin to yell out, "Yeah? What else is new?"

Victoria ducks into the street next to the hall and slips in the small alley between the back entrance and the fence. She stops, just shy of the door and pulls out a maroon shirt and name tag. She takes off her black jacket and slips the shirt over her white tank top. She pins the nametag on the fabric and taps quietly at the metal door.

Her chest heaves with every breath she pumps out of

her. She steps back and glances down the alley. She notices a couple large black trucks at the abandoned warehouse. She squints to get a better look, but the door whips open to reveal a very large and very angry woman.

"Victoria!"

"I—"

"Enough! Get to your damn post. Now! We are touring this place in an hour!" Victoria steps into the entrance and as she walks away the door lightly grazes the lock. The boss stops short of the back stage door, "Are you forgetting something?" Victoria looks down at herself, before she realizes what her boss is referring to. She turns around quickly and opens the door again. She grips the handle and rips the door towards her to slam it into the lock. She walks back to the woman with a skip in her step.

A news van races up to a large hotel. It whips into a tiny space between two utility trucks. Mrs. Paulette steps out onto the sunny sidewalk. She admires the grand banquet hall with her bug-eyed sunglasses. Her cameraman fights with the equipment as he rounds the end of the van. She looks back at him and groans out in annoyance before she says, "Come on Hank. We haven't got all day," Mrs. Paulette walks up to the front steps. An overly, muscular man steps

in front of them, Mrs. Paulette halts quickly.

"No one allowed inside."

"Excuse me? Do you know who I am?"

"Ma'am I don't care. No one allowed inside."

"Ugh," she shuffles through her purse. She pulls out a piece of paper and she hands it to the guard. He glances down at it. She shakes the paper in front of him, "Well..." The security officer unfolds the piece of paper and scans over the letter.

"That's a nice piece of paper," Mrs. Paulette removes her glasses and the cameraman steps slightly backwards.

"Look you sad sorry excuse of a security officer. I have an exclusive tour of this hall, and you sir need to move the hell outta my way!"

The officer looks her up and down unsatisfied with the woman. He bites the inside of his cheeks and lifts his walkie to his mouth and quietly says, "Your vulture is ready to scour the nest."

"Let her inside please."

"Right this way madam," the security officer leads Mrs. Paulette and her lackey up the stairs. Mrs. Paulette glances up at a large crane that raises a covered object over their heads.

Inside the magnificent foyer, Mrs. Paulette's eyes

widen with excitement. The large lady waddles up to her,
"Good Morning! Welcome to Felicity Banquet Hall!"

"Ah, yes. You must be Jacquetta. Your security officer
out front a real piece of—"

"Mrs. Paulette, I assure you he will no longer be a
problem," she walks behind her and places her arm an inch
away from her lower back and ushers her forward, "Now let's
get you your coverage," Jacquetta guides her out of the
front area. Behind the desk Victoria sticks out her tongue
and makes a stink face behind the lady's backs.

"Vicky," a young girl giggles, "That's not Felicity's
proper behavior," she scolds her friend as she walks up to
her.

Victoria laughs, "So, Cammie, what the hell happened
this morning?"

"I'm so sorry, Madam Jacqueen intercepted me. There
was nothing I could do."

"Yeah, yeah, it's okay," Victoria looks up at the
clock, "ugh, 8 more hours."

Jacquetta pushes open one side of the grand double
doors, "And this is our Grand Hall," the women stop just a
few feet inside an enormous auditorium. The elegant
chandeliers hang above each table closest to the stage. The
rows seats are blessed with miniature tables and ritzy head

rests.

Mrs. Paulette studies the room with amazement, like a little kid at Disney, "Speechless. This is brilliant."

Jacquetta smiles boastfully and says, "Well, as you see the back part of the auditorium is for the viewers. The front is for the nominees. She leads her into the center of the room and turns around, as she continues, "And above us are for the A-listers. Only the elite stars will have this luxury," Jacquetta peers over out the corner of her eyes and smiles at Mrs. Paulette's excitement, "You want to see?"

"Do we?" Jacquetta leads them through a small door in the back of the hall. They walk up a hidden staircase and into the balcony area. The cameraman shoots the view from atop of the hall. Mrs. Paulette takes it all in, "By God, Jacquetta this is impressive," Mrs. Paulette looks over at another door in the center of the balcony, "What is that to?"

"Oh that is just the door that leads up to the control room. This year will be presented live. Our specialists are very thrilled about this first time live event."

"This Awards show is going to be legendary," Mrs. Paulette overlooks the hall one more time before Jacquetta leads them back down the stairs. They walk into the front

lobby again, "Well thank you so much for this exclusive."

"Our pleasure," they shake hands and Mrs. Paulette and her cameraman walk back out the doors.

"Get a shot of this," The cameraman raises his equipment and records Mrs. Paulette in front of hall.

Inside a grungy apartment, two men decked out in all black hover over a table. One of the men bends over and lifts a large duffle bag onto the table. The other man reaches inside and pulls out a sick looking semi-automatic gun. He cocks the trigger back and aims at the trashcan. He pops the bullet out and nods in approval. He exchanges a smug smirk and turns his attention over to the small television in the corner.

Mrs. Paulette is in front of the hall. The construction crew is in the back raising a large sign to the top of the building. The man nods at the TV and the other man crosses his arms and stare harshly at the screen, "Hello ladies and gentlemen. Behind me you have the fantastical Felicity Banquet Hall where in just a few days there will be celebrities and stars walking on these very steps; on this very special, live event. We are about to take you through an exclusive tour through these elegant halls so stay tuned. Also don't miss an interview with the one and only pop sensation, Ms. Catty Carmichelles. She

will take us first hand through the preparation process she endeavors for a high class awards show like this one."

A few other men walk into the room. They carry food and more duffle bags. They hand out fast food bags to the other men. One of the men bites down on his taco and laughs spraying the floor with pieces of meat and cheese. He chucks the rest of his taco at the screen, "Rich bitches," he walks over to the boarded up windows and peeks out the cracks and says, "Come on boys let's get everything in order, before Robin gets here."

Victoria closely stares down the seconds' hand on the clock. As soon as the hand reaches the twelve and jumps up from her chair and signs herself out on the computer, "See ya tomorrow."

"Bright in early for the rich, spoiled, and privileged."

Victoria winks at her friend and walks through the kitchen double doors. The hustle and bustle of the kitchen catches her slightly off guard. She scans the staff for someone. She snags one of their shirts and yanks them in front of her, "Hey where's Pablo?"

"I don't know. In the back, maybe," Victoria lets him free and sneaks behind the chiefs. One of them tosses a thick piece of meat on the grill. Flames gorge themselves

with the juices and wraps around the plump meat. Victoria inhales the enriching smells of the seasonings before she rounds the corner. She spies a tall skinny man, who hovers over a large pot in the back, "Hello Pablo."

"Hola, como estas?"

"Great, do you have anything extra for me today?"

Pablo looks around; he places the ladle on the counter next to the stove and wipes his hands on his apron. He motions her to follow with one finger. He leads her to a trashcan. Pablo looks around and checks the coast again, just as he places his hand on the lid the bathroom door whips open and smacks the trashcan.

"Oh sorry Pablo," the staff worker says. His eyes silently question Victoria, but he doesn't care enough to ask about it.

Pablo reaches in the can and pulls out two shopping bags stuffed full. Victoria opens the bag and breathes in the delicious smell, "Thank you so much, Pablo. I owe you big."

"No worries chicka. Just get this home," Victoria smiles warmly at Pablo and lightly touches his upper arm and walks past him out the back door in the kitchen.

She stuffs the bags in her backpack and walks swiftly through the city. She makes her way through the shopping

corner, but when she rounds the corner she sees the sidewalk crowded with paparazzi and celebrity obsessed fans. She scans the crowd for a way through. She walks widely around the horde. A security guard stops her and pushes her into the mob. She tries to object, but the hysterical crowd sucks her right in. She is elbowed and pushed as she fights her way back out. The furor of the girls grows and she's shoved to the curb in front of a slick black car.

The backpack rips from her shoulders and thrown to the side. She scans the ground and eyeballs it as fashionable shoes trample it. The blood inside her begins to boil; she's had enough. She grabs a girl's hair and tosses her backwards. She clears a path to her backpack and sees a girl kick it to the side. Victoria rips the girl's purse from her shoulder and kicks it across the street, "How the hell do you like it!" She swipes up her bag and shakes it off as she walks away, "Stupid girls."

Victoria walks out around a corner and like flipping the light switch off she is in the worst part of town. Graffiti and boarded up buildings replace the bright streetlights and colorful signs. Victoria glances around quickly before she slips underneath a loose board into a condemned apartment building.

The stairs creak underneath her feet as she climbs the stairs to the fourth floor. She makes sure she doesn't touch the dirty walls or the trash on the floor. She knocks quietly on the door and listens for movement. She hears something large shuffle across the floor and she moves the small table next to the door aside and reveals a small hole in the wall.

Victoria tosses the backpack in the hole and crawls in after it. She stands up in a small, single room. She dusts herself off and stretches. Four little kids race up to her and tackle her back to the ground. Victoria slowly falls backwards, pretending to shout out in defeat. They giggle and give her a big, bear hug, "I have something for you guys, but I got trampled by a heard of moose so I don't know what shape it's in."

The kids play fight over the backpack. Victoria walks over to the cell phone on the pile of clothes. She picks it up and makes a phone call, "Hey. Yeah, is everything all set?" she pauses, "yeah, I'm going to late probably. People are mobbing the streets," she pauses again, "Yeah, I know. I'm sorry," Victoria hangs up the phone and plops down on a make shift bed.