

**Vigilante**

*By: Megan E. Tripaldi*

*An abandoned office. It appears to have been abandoned in a hurry; papers are strewn everywhere, electronics have been pulled quickly out of walls, chairs are tipped over, and various office supplies litter the area. MAGNAMAN is pushing against a door. He is dressed in a crudely made vigilante costume of some kind; he at least has a mask. BENNIE is waking up from being knocked unconscious. She looks over at MAGNAMAN, confused.*

BENNIE:

Where am I?

MAGNAMAN:

Don't worry, Miss; you're safe for now.

BENNIE:

That didn't answer my question.

MAGNAMAN:

There's no need to panic, you're safe.

BENNIE:

Still doesn't answer my question.

MAGNAMAN:

Don't worry, Miss; it will all be alright.

BENNIE:

Thank you. Very helpful.

MAGNAMAN:

My pleasure.

(She gets up and looks around.)

BENNIE:

Looks like we're in an office building...

(She looks out the window.)

Aaaand we're really high up. Awesome.

MAGNAMAN:

Don't fear, Miss, you're safe with Magnaman.

BENNIE:

Who? Aaah, yes that weirdo-guy vigilante that's been on the news. Your superpower must be being a broken record.

(He ignores her.)

Hey, you know it's no use doing that. A beam fell across the entrance.

(MAGNAMAN keeps pushing.)

Hello? Can you hear me? It's no use.

(He doesn't stop.)

Yo! Megaman! Quit that!

(He stops and looks at her, suddenly sad.)

MAGNAMAN:

Magnaman.

BENNIE:

What?

MAGNAMAN:

My name is Magnaman.

BENNIE:

...

(Resuming his enthusiastic demeanor.)

MAGNAMAN:

Don't worry, miss, I'll get us out of here in no time!

BENNIE:

Please, with that super hero crap. I know you're just a guy in a stupid suit.

MAGNAMAN:

I am a hero, *madam*, I have saved –

BENNIE:

Who? Who have you saved? Just sit down, for chrissakes.

(Beat.)

*Madam?*

(He crosses to another side of the room.)

MAGNAMAN:

Perhaps there is a panel I missed - maybe an air duct I can climb through - ?

BENNIE:

This isn't a comic movie, genius. We're stuck until some nice firefighters come and get us or The Mist blows up the building.

MAGNAMAN:

He won't get away with this, he'll see that –

BENNIE:

What? That you're actually an idiot who has no idea what he's doing?

MAGNAMAN:

I'll have you know that my utility belt –

BENNIE:

Is useless because –

MAGNAMAN:

- has 80 different functioning –

BENNIE:

*Is useless* because it got stuck on the other side of the door, Batman.

(Beat.)

MAGNAMAN:

Um...it's Magna –

BENNIE:

I KNOW.

(Beat.)

Now will you sit down, please? You're activating my anxiety.

(He sighs and sits next to her. They stare at nothing for a few moments.)

I'm Bennie.

MAGNAMAN:

Pleased to meet you I'm –

BENNIE:

Magnaman. Got it.

MAGNAMAN:

Right.

(Pause.)

I have no idea what I'm doing.

BENNIE:

Pardon me?

MAGNAMAN:

I'm sorry, I -

(He takes off his mask.)

My name is Seth.

BENNIE:

Oh, um...

(She shakes his hand. It's awkward.)

Hi, Seth.

SETH:

Look, I'm sorry for all the hero stuff I just -

BENNIE:

It's ok -

SETH:

No it's not. I was supposed to save you and now we're trapped and - what kind of hero does that?

BENNIE:

You didn't get us trapped on purpose.

SETH:

God, I suck...

BENNIE:

No, you don't suck.

SETH:

I do.

BENNIE:

You don't. You're just - you only suck if you don't try. And you tried. So you don't suck. Ok?

SETH:

Yeah...ok. Thanks.

BENNIE:

It's true.

(He smiles at her half heartedly. She gets up.)

God, I've never encountered a superhero with self esteem issues. It's kind of refreshing.

SETH:

Glad I could oblige...

BENNIE:

No, I didn't mean - Ugh, never mind.

(Beat.)

You know I just realized I think I have my purse around here somewhere - I'm pretty sure it came in with me when you threw me to, uh, safety.

(She rummages around.)

SETH:

Sorry, I don't remember. There was a lot of crashing stuff. Kinda distracting. I barely remember throwing you in here, actually...

BENNIE:

No, no, it's ok. I understand. AH! Here it is.

(She comes back and sits down next to him and digs inside.)

Pretty sure I have some mints, tissues - ah! Ha-ha! My cell phone!

SETH:

Great! Can you get a signal?

BENNIE:

Hang on, hang on...

(She presses buttons.)

Aaand, no juice. It's dead. And my charger appears to be missing. Damn it.

SETH:

Well, I'm sure people will be by. It's like you said –

BENNIE:

Yeah, but who knows what The Mist is doing to keep them busy. It's like a war zone outside.

SETH:

Damn him. Just when things start to go good for me that guy shows up.

BENNIE:

Yeah. Because *that's* the worst part about this situation.

SETH:

That's not what I'm saying I just - it got to the point where I felt like I was invincible, you know? I just...then he shows up and is *way* too much for me.

BENNIE:

You thought you could handle it because everything else was going so well and then you realize...you just can't.

SETH:

Exactly. I don't even know what he looks like! I'm being defeated by an invisible man -

BENNIE:

I know the feeling.

SETH:

Really?

BENNIE:

Yeah. Turns out? That's what it means to be a human. Every day we fight off "invisible men" in some way, you know? Demons. You're not alone, Seth.

(They stare at each other.)

SETH:

Well, at least we're not alone in here.

BENNIE:

This is true. So! Turns out I have a deck of cards in this thing.

(She pulls cards out of her purse.)

Wanna play a game of Spit?

SETH:

I don't know how to play Spit.

BENNIE:

Ok, um...The Bomb? It's weird with two people, but –

SETH:

Nope.

BENNIE:

Asshole?

SETH:

Well, that's uncalled for –

BENNIE:

It's the name of a game.

SETH:

...Oh. Yeah, no I knew that.

BENNIE:

Ok, fine Go Fish.



(He stares at her.)

BENNIE:

You're kidding.

SETH:

I don't really play a lot of cards.

BENNIE:

Not even Go Fish? That's like cards 101.

SETH:

I mostly read comic books as a kid.

BENNIE:

I should have guessed that. Here, come on, I'll teach you.

SETH:

I don't know. Shouldn't I be - ?

BENNIE:

What? Pushing on a wall?

(He looks out the window.)

Look, it's really easy, I promise. Come on, what else are we going to do?

SETH:

Ok, fine.

(She deals out the cards.)

BENNIE:

Ok, so the goal is to get rid of the cards you have by matching them up with other cards in the same number. So, let's say you have a two. You need another one, so you ask me, "Do you have any twos?" And if I have one I give it to you. Then you put those aside. If I don't I say, "Go Fish," and you pick up a card from the deck. You with me so far?

SETH:

Sure.

BENNIE:

The one who runs out of cards first wins. Wanna try?

SETH:

I think I can handle it.

(They talk as they play.)

Do all women carry playing cards in their purses?

BENNIE:

Only the smart ones. You never know when you'll be sucked into a seedy underground poker game.

(SETH laughs.)

So, why the name "Magnaman"? Seems kind of...I dunno. What is it exactly that you do? Do you melt stuff?

SETH:

Er, that would be magma. It's like magnet, you know? Magnet-man. Magna-man. Right?

BENNIE:

Uh...sure. If you say so.

SETH:

Well, most of my devices are magnet based. I know an electrical engineer and she made some stuff for me.

BENNIE:

Wow. That's actually pretty cool.

SETH:

Yeah, she was great. Really smart.

BENNIE:

So...you two - ?

SETH:

No! God, no that was not - I didn't even think about –

BENNIE:

Ok! It's cool. Just asking.

SETH:

Yeah. No, she was not...interested.

BENNIE:

Ah...sorry.

SETH:

It's ok. I mean, yeah whatever, it's fine. Long time ago.

BENNIE:

Sure, sure.

SETH:

So, what's your story?

BENNIE:

My story?

SETH:

Sure. I mean, do you have, um, hobbies, pets...a secret identity?

BENNIE:

A secret - are you asking me if I'm also a - ?

SETH:

Yeah, I don't know, sorry. That was stupid.

BENNIE:

No it's cool –

SETH:

I don't know how to do small talk.

BENNIE:

Ha, it's fine. Really. And, if I did have a secret identity, why on earth would I tell you? Technically 'Bennie' would be my secret identity if I were –

SETH:

True. That's true. You'd be a...great hero.

BENNIE:

I don't know about that, but at least I follow the code of conduct. I feel like there are at least a few more qualifications though.

SETH:

Of course.

BENNIE:

So. Why a vigilante?

SETH:

What do you mean?

BENNIE:

Well, why not be a non-corrupt cop? Why not a fireman? Or even a soldier? Why do you have to fight crime this way?

SETH:

I don't know...I mean, I've always been kind of a superhero / fan –

BENNIE:

Nerd.

SETH:

Fan.

BENNIE:

Sorry.

SETH:

So, yeah I just - everything else felt limiting, you know? I admire those who can thrive in the shadows and still turn out good. Still *do* good. And just because you're part of a system doesn't mean that you're automatically a hero. It doesn't mean you're automatically good. I mean look at all the bad that happens within our society, all the corruption, the abuse of power. And, you know I wanted to make my own name for myself. Magnaman - I know the name is stupid, but I needed that flair. I needed something memorable.

BENNIE:

So you wanted to be loved? That's it?

SETH:

Not at first, no.

BENNIE:

So what happened?

SETH:

I guess it comes off as kind of, I don't know, self-obsessed, but I just wanted people to know that I was helping them; that I could help them. All that other stuff just happened by accident. It's stupid...

BENNIE:

It's not stupid. You wanted to be the face of good. There's nothing stupid about that.

SETH:

I never thought of it that way...

BENNIE:

Yeah, well. Glad to help. You know, if it were me I'd just be nameless. A shadow. All the pomp and the fame...that doesn't interest me. People would never know what hit them.

SETH:

Wow. Hey, that's a great name.

BENNIE:

What is?

SETH:

"The Shadow."

BENNIE:

Yeah? Hmm... "The Shadow..." It is interesting.

SETH:

It's mysterious. Classic. Yeah, I really like that.

BENNIE:

But it's taken.

SETH:

Is it?

BENNIE:

Yeah some obscure Marvel character from way back when.

(SETH just stares at her.)

What?

SETH:

I just - that was so beautifully nerdy.

BENNIE:

Well, that's me. Bennie Berwick, resident spewer of obscure comic facts.

SETH:

So your last name is Berwick?

BENNIE:

Um...yeah.

SETH:

Sounds vaguely familiar. Do you have a sister?

Um, nope. Only child.

**BENNIE:**

Huh.

**SETH:**

So, um...what's yours?

**BENNIE:**

My what?

**SETH:**

Your last –

**BENNIE:**

Right! My last –

**SETH:**

Name, yeah.

**BENNIE:**

Of course, right. It's, um, Arden.

**SETH:**

Seth Arden. A.K.A. Magnaman. Very nice.

**BENNIE:**

Not nearly as comic-booky as Bennie Berwick. Are you sure you're not a superhero?

**SETH:**

Absolutely sure.

**BENNIE:**

Bennie Berwick. A.K.A. The...Spewer?

**SETH:**

BENNIE:

Oh god, no. No, no. Don't ever say that again!

(They laugh. There is a moment between them. Before anything can come of it there is an explosion outside.)

Oh my god!!

SETH:

Get down!

(He gets up and moves to the window.)

The hell was that...

BENNIE:

Can you see anything?

SETH:

Just a lot of smoke. Something must have detonated. God, this -

(He kicks a piece of rubble.)

BENNIE:

Hey, hey it's ok. It's going to be ok -

SETH:

How do you know that? Do you realize what's happening? The Mist is winning! And I'm trapped inside here! You know he didn't come out of the woodwork until after my image went public? Did you know that? *I'm* the one that brought him out. *Me*. God, I'm so -

BENNIE:

Seth. That's not -

SETH:

Why? What does he want from me?



BENNIE:

I –

SETH:

What did I do? I have done nothing to hurt anyone!

BENNIE:

No?

SETH:

Ever!

(Pause.)

BENNIE:

You sure about that?

SETH:

What?

BENNIE:

I mean...maybe. *Maybe* you did.

SETH:

Bennie –

BENNIE:

Maybe The Mist is someone from your past. Your childhood, maybe? Someone you upset?

SETH:

That's not possible.

BENNIE:

Why not?

SETH:

You can't really upset anyone if you don't have any friends.

(Beat.)

BENNIE:

I'm almost certain you can.

SETH:

That doesn't - why are you saying all this?

BENNIE:

People hold grudges, Seth; it's just how things go sometimes. Something that can seem quite small at the time will fester over years and turn into something...rather unpleasant.

SETH:

What are you - ?

BENNIE:

Sometimes Seniors can be so cruel to the lower-classmen. Ever experience that, Seth? Oh, I know you have. You have wedgies and weekly beatings written all over you. But guess what? You weren't the only one.

SETH:

What does this have to do with - ?

BENNIE:

So you're going through school, doing your everyday thing, dodging your tormentors, just trying to get by. Then someone of like-mindedness, someone who is going through the same struggles befriends you; you make them feel special, like maybe, just maybe there's more to the world than getting your books knocked out of your hands on a daily basis. Maybe there's a chance...but then once you get close enough it's ripped away in a humiliating twist that, let's be honest, you should have been expecting, because why on earth would someone so great want to be with a freak like you?

SETH:

I don't know what you're -

BENNIE:

Cut to many years later. When your life is on the line, when everything seems so dire...they don't even remember you. Even when you tell them your last name.

(Beat.)

SETH:

Oh my god.

BENNIE:

Now he gets it.

SETH:

Benjamina Berwick...

BENNIE:

I prefer Bennie.

SETH:

I - how did you - ?

BENNIE:

Funny how I've changed, but you? Apart from actually getting some muscle definition you look just the same. I recognized you right away.

SETH:

Bennie, I - that was over ten years ago...

BENNIE:

My, how time flies.

SETH:

I - I'm sorry, I didn't realize -

BENNIE:

No? Well high school boys never realize how horrible they are until after the fact.

SETH:

I'm sorry...

BENNIE:

Are you? For what, Seth? What could you be sorry for?

(He looks at her. Her tone gets much darker.)

I want you to say it.

SETH:

I'm - I -

BENNIE:

Can't even get the words out, can you? Does that mean you're ashamed of what you did? Of how you *humiliated* me? Let's see, maybe you've forgotten. I'll refresh your memory. I was a Sophomore, you were a Senior. You asked me to Prom, I had assumed because you liked me. Well, you know what they say about assuming.

SETH:

Bennie -

BENNIE:

You pick me up, you get the corsage. It's proving to be a magical night, a real teenage dream, I tell ya. Then what happens when I get there? You disappear. You're nowhere to be found. I go outside and what happens? I'm jumped by a group of girls who beat the living crap out of me, tear my dress, steal my corsage, and leave me there. When I can finally stand up I see you...with your hand up Sarah Gormer's dress.

(SETH looks at the floor.)

No friends, huh?

SETH:

I - I didn't know they - I liked her for all of high school, I never had a girlfriend, I didn't think -

BENNIE:

And then when you found out what happened you did nothing. You were so shocked and outraged, but you still did *nothing*.

(SETH puts his head down. BENNIE is near tears.)

I would have let you do anything to me. I was in love with you. If you had asked me I would have done...

(He goes to her. She pushes him off.)

And now, here we are.

SETH:

But how - ?

BENNIE:

Ask yourself this question, you seem to be a smart-ish guy. Why do you assume The Mist is a man if you've never seen him? Hmm? Why assume a man; that's very sexist of you.

SETH:

You - you're not. You can't be.

BENNIE:

Can't I?

SETH:

God...how - ?

BENNIE:

Spewer of obscure comic facts.

SETH:

I'm so sorry, Bennie...I'm so, so –

BENNIE:

Oh, well everything's fine now! Great! I'll call this whole thing off!

SETH:

Please, don't do all of this. If you have a grievance to settle, do it with me.

BENNIE:

Oh, I plan on it.

SETH:

These people are innocent –

BENNIE:

You know, I could give the whole “nobody is innocent” speech right now, but to be honest? I don't really care. Beauty of being the villain, Seth: we're allowed to be evil. And I have to tell you, it's really fun.

SETH:

I was seventeen! I was stupid!

BENNIE:

Yeah, tell me something I don't know.

SETH:

You don't think I've felt bad for that? You don't think I didn't care about you?

BENNIE:

How could you? You just left me there –

SETH:

I was scared. You were my only friend and once I realized what I'd done, I - Bennie I never forgave myself for that. And I couldn't face you afterwards, not knowing what I had put you through. It's partly why I started doing this. I felt like I had to atone for what I did.

(BENNIE looks away.)

I know there is nothing I can say. I know you're hurting and I know it's entirely my fault. I want to fix this. I want to start over with you. Please...

(He turns her towards him.)

BENNIE:

How - how do I know you won't just do the same thing?

SETH:

I guess you just have to trust me.

BENNIE:

Seth...

SETH:

Please just stop this. We can fix it together.

BENNIE:

You really think we can?

SETH:

I really do. I'm not the same person I was, Bennie.

BENNIE:

I -

(SETH kisses BENNIE. They stare at each other for a few moments.)

Neither am I.

SETH:

What?

BENNIE:

You think I did all this because you broke my heart in high school? Do you really think you're that important?

SETH:

Bennie -

BENNIE:

I have bigger plans than getting revenge on my ex. You're just an obstacle.  
Besides -

(She stabs him in the stomach and whispers in his ear.)

I'm over you.

(SETH falls. BENNIE slowly stands, wiping the blood off of her knife, pulls a mask out of her purse, and puts it on. She looks out the window at the chaos and smiles.)