

# American Heroes

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Dad came to my room, visibly distressed. He didn't need to tell me it was time for 'a talk' - his heavy deep breath and his eyes avoiding mine were already a dead giveaway.

"Dan", he said.

"Who is Dan?" I asked.

"Penny."

"Yes?"

"I... we need to sort things out for Thanksgiving."

"Then get to the point" I said.

"It oughta be a happy family reunion, don't you think?"

"Get to the fucking point!"

"Why are you swearing? I've said nothing to anger you."

"Because you're beating around the bush and trying to guilt me. Aren't you? And you called me by my deadname. Don't think twice I don't know where this conversation is going."

"I'm only asking you to be considerate for one day and not make things awkward for the family."

"Oh I'm the one being inconsiderate now? You insult me with your misgendering and deadnaming and *I* am the inconsiderate one?"

"Why can't you just calm down and listen?"

"I'll fucking calm down when you apologize for using my deadname!"

"I'm sorry, Penny."

"Alright. Now what was it you wanted to say about Thanksgiving?"

"I know you don't like it, and I'm not saying it's ok, but you being what you are would make things awkward for everyone."

"It's not my fault they are transphobic!"

"It doesn't matter who's at fault. You can't deny the fact that you wearing a dress and a wig to the dinner would make everyone feel awkward, can you?"

"And you can't deny the fact that me pretending to be a boy would trigger my gender dysphoria, can you?"

"Thanksgiving is not about you. We all have to compromise a little to make it a happy day for everyone."

"A little?" I shouted. "You call extreme gender dysphoria *a little* compromise? Don't you understand? It's fucking torture for me!"

"For one day. Please. I'm begging you."

"I'd rather kill myself."

"Please, Penny. I know how important this gender thing is to you, but not

everyone understands it. Please.”

”You can't guilt me into giving up my identity! Nor can you bribe me! Or coerce me!” I shouted and then I snapped. ”You're gonna take away my laptop? Well fuck the laptop!” I screamed and threw my macbook onto the wall. ”You gonna take away my phone? Here!” I aimed at dad's head, but missed by a few inches and hit the wall. ”What are you gonna coerce me with now, fucking terf? Take your rifle and shoot me? Well fucking shoot me then, even that would be better than denying who I am!” I kicked down a nightstand and toppled my table. I saw tears in dad's eyes, and that made me even more furious. ”You guilting coercing psychopathic narcissist fundamentalist terf!” I shouted and marched out of the room.

”Please, Dan, we love you”, he whimpered. But I knew that was a lie. He had never loved me; he only loved the idea of having a son.

I hastily put on whatever winter clothes I could grab, and slammed the door behind me. I ran a mile, enraged, only wanting to smash things. Then I started crying and ran another mile, wishing I was dead.

On the bridge over the Missouri River I got exhausted. I was scared that my dad would come after me or call the police. I gazed upon the icy water and contemplated jumping. It would hurt like hell, and there was a high risk of being rescued. Fear hit me, and I slouched to the nearest gas station to collect myself.

What had I done? There's no recovering from my fit of rage. I could live without the approval of my family, but I had cut myself off the online community that was my only source of validation. Maybe I could jump when it gets dark and nobody can see me. Or perhaps I could jump in front of a truck like Leelah Acorn.

”Hey, this ain't no homeless shelter.” Spoke a voice.

”What?” I said.

”You either buy something or you leave.” Said the gas station clerk.

I got scared that he might call the cops who would then return me home – or worse – bring me to a mental institution. I ran and walked and slouched for God knows how long, until I couldn't take it anymore and collapsed on a truck depot by railroad tracks. It was dark and cold, and I was too tired to think. I crawled under a trailer to hopefully fall asleep and die from the cold.

I must have lost consciousness for a brief moment, because I winced awake and hit my head on a tire. The anger that drove me here was fading away, quickly giving way for fear. I was afraid of my dad, the police, junkies, rapists, and whatever might loom in the dark.

I got off the truck depot only to see a police car in the distance, and quickly turned around and ran across the lot and the railroad tracks. I tripped over and hurt myself, but got up and kept on running until I reached a safe-looking parking lot by the main avenue. It was hopeless – as soon as I caught my breath, the cold Dakota winter bit into my bone.

I hated God and His Son and His transphobic religion, but I saw no other option than to pray. I prayed that God would end my miserable life, or turn the winter into summer, or transport me to Arizona or anywhere warm. I prayed that I would fall

asleep and wake up without my male genitalia and fundamentalist family.

While I sat there on the dirty snow praying to God, I was illuminated by a bright light. It did not come from a choir of angels, but the headlights of an antique Lincoln. A longhaired redneck stepped out of the massive land yacht and approached me.

"Hey girl, you alright?" He asked.

I was stunned. It didn't matter to me that he was a dirty looking piece of white trash and a stranger to me; he had called me *a girl*. In this moment of despair, he really was the saving angel I had prayed for.

"No", I said.

"You got any place to go?"

"No."

"Well you gotta go somewhere warm. You on withdrawal?"

"No."

"You need an ambulance?"

"Please no!" I screamed.

"You're shivering. We gotta get you outta here. Please let me give you a ride." He said.

"I'm scared." I said.

"Of course you are. A young girl like you shouldn't be wandering around in a shady part of the town. I can't leave you here."

"Will you call nine one one if I stay where I am?"

"To prevent you from falling prey to junkies? Of course I will."

"Then I'll come with you."

The longhaired redneck's old Lincoln reeked of tobacco and sweat, but it was warm inside and the cushioned seat was so comfortable. Before I noticed, I had fallen asleep.

I woke up to Merle Haggard singing on the car stereo. It was still dark outside, and I had no way of telling where we were.

"Are you going to rape and murder me?" I asked.

"You're awake. Look, girl, if I frighten you, just ask me to stop the car and I'll let you hitch another ride."

"Why did you save me?" I asked.

"Because you were in danger." He said.

"Where are we going?"

"Grand Forks. If you're running from the law, I can take you to the Canadian border."

"What's your name?"

"Dick."

"I'm Penny."

"Thanks for saving me, Dick."

"No need to thank me. Thank God who guided me to you."

"Did your parents hate you too?"

"Huh?"

"Your name is Dick."

"It is. You running from your parents?"

"Yes."

"Thank God."

"What?"

"Thank God I picked up a runaway kid and not a fugitive. Now I don't have to fear getting robbed in the middle of the prairie." Dick said.

"Hey! It's me who should be afraid of you!" I said and I laughed. He smiled. I began to feel as relaxed as it was possible in those bizarre conditions.

"I got some bourbon in the glovebox if you need to reel off", Dick said.

He didn't need to tell me twice. I was running away from home and possibly the authorities, in the middle of nowhere, riding on a strange redneck's old rustbucket. It wasn't one of those situations you'd want to encounter while sober.

Dick was a nice fellow, but nevertheless I was a bit surprised when I woke up in a bed and not dead on a ditch. My stomach hurt and the nasty smell of burnt bacon didn't help.

"Dick!" I shouted.

"Penny Lane" he answered from the kitchen.

"Where am I?"

"At my Grand Forks home. Need to use a phone?"

"Hell no. Keep me away from tracking devices. You got anything to cure my hangover?"

"I sure do. You got tolerance for benzos?" Dick asked.

"The only pill I'm on is Estradiol." I said.

"In that case a single pill of Klonopin will give you a nice and long sleep. I got them on the nightstand drawer. You want me to bring you a glass of water?"

"Yeah sure, thanks." I said and searched through Dick's drawer. I don't know which one of us was more irresponsible and stupid: me for getting into his car, or him for keeping a Colt in the drawer within my reach. We really were a pair of gullible fools, that much we had in common.

The next time I woke up, it was dark again. Dick was sitting in a dirty armchair watching Nascar on TV. My hangover was gone, but mentally I was a trainwreck. I was thinking of my family, my future, Thanksgiving and my situation, and I wept.

"Dick"

"Penny"

"I'm scared."

"It's ok my little prairie rose. You want another Klonopin?"

"Can you hold my head when I fall asleep?" I asked.

"Of course. Can I hold your hand?"

"You're the sweetest dick I've ever met."

I woke up to another day, having completely lost track of time. Dick was not

beside me, the TV was off and nothing was burning in the kitchen.

"Dick!" I shouted. No answer.

I thought of him and holding hands with him and realized that it would likely end up being the last happy moment in my ruined life. I would spend the rest of my days confined to an institution, being nothing but a burden to those around me. I pulled open Dick's nightstand drawer.

Will Dick ever forgive me for splattering blood and bits of skull all over his bedroom walls? It felt so wrong. Having him save me from junkies and frostbite only to find my dead body in his bed.

Well, it's his own fault for bringing home an insane tranny. The gun's barrel tasted like blood when I placed it on the roof of my mouth.

"Penny what the hell are you doing!"

"I'm sorry, Dick."

"Is that how you wanna leave this world? To be ridiculed as a forty percentager?"

"There will be no happy life for me. I'm sorry, Dick."

"I ain't saying nothing 'bout no happy life, Penny. I'm just saying there are better ways to die."

"Like overdosing? Sure, give me all the pills you got."

"No no no, nothing like that. You can become an American hero if you want to."

"What the hell do you mean?"

"I've got two AR-15's. Ilhan Omar is attending the friday prayer in a Minneapolis mosque tomorrow."

"Wait, tomorrow is friday?" I asked.

"It is." Dick said.

"So today is Thanksgiving." I said and began to cry. I put down the Colt. "I'm such a failure. I'm a total piece of shit. I ruined it for everyone."

"You want me to take you home? You can still make it before the evening." Dick asked.

I nodded.

"You live in Bismarck, right?"

"Mandan."

"We'll be there before six PM."

We drove through miles and miles of prairie, and all the time I just sat there and cried. I was thinking of my depressing future in a mental hospital, my parents disowning me, and all the dysphoria and misgendering I would have to endure. Nobody had ever validated my identity as much as Dick. Even if the folks at home were happy about my return, they'd welcome me back as their *son*. And I can understand them. I got on hormones too late and I'll never get rid of my male facial features. Even if I got bottom surgery done, I'd still have my receding hairline and five o'clock shadow. I would always hate my life, no matter what.

"Dick"

"Penny Lane"

”Turn around.”

”Huh?”

”Turn the car around. Let's get back to your home and load the rifles. Let us show those goat fucking towelheads that we will never forget nor forgive. Let us give those fucking sandniggers a taste of their own medicine. I want to see Ilhan Omar and her gang of terrorists bleed all over the American soil they are trying to invade. Let us kill every filthy mudslime we can, and may their souls forever burn in hell. They are enemies of freedom and liberty. God bless the United States of America.”