

Gary's Liquor Store

A Public City story

Kevin pressed his clawed, wiry fingers further into his coat as he walked down the cold, frozen street. His thick fur did well to keep the drifting white snow off his skin, but the cold still had a bite to it.

As another gust of wind cheekily attempted to blow off his hat, he burrowed his long rat-like face into the warm embrace of his woolen scarf. "*Not far to go,*" he repeated to himself, dreaming of the heavenly neon oasis of the liquor store he was wandering to so late at night.

Ahead of him, a gorgeous young couple clung to each other looking as though if they were to let go, the whole world would collapse. Kevin watched them silently, a faint smile daring to flicker at the edge of his mouth. The sheer power of their love was intoxicating. But he wouldn't allow the smile to grow further, though, for he knew what would soon happen next.

As the couple grew closer, they noticed who walked towards them. Like a spell had been suddenly broken, their laughter and smiles faded into frightened looks of disgust and they hurriedly crossed the street, the man putting himself between he and Kevin in a protective fashion.

Kevin knew this dance, he'd been here before. People see a rat-man walking down the street towards them in Lower City and presume the worst. Fair enough, he would probably do the same if their roles were reversed, especially if he had a partner as lovely as that. He burrowed himself deeper into his winter-clothing and kept walking, trying not to look murderous.

Soon the great walls of falling snow parted and the gentle glow of 'Gary's Liquor' burst through, as if encouraged by the gentle call of angels. "*Thank fuck,*" he mumbled to himself.

Kevin pushed open the frosted glass door, and a welcoming bell sounded above him followed by a not-so welcoming grunt from behind the counter.

“Woah, woah, woah! If you’re lookin’ for trouble you’ve come to the wrong place, pal! No rat is gonna rob Gary!”

Gary was a disgusting, overweight bald man with a voice that sounded like gravel being kicked by a disgusting overweight bald man. Kevin could smell his unwashed underarms from across the store, an unfortunate side effect to having a rat’s nose.

“I’m not looking for any trouble, sir, I’m just here to buy my booze and be on my way,” Kevin replied. Yep, done this dance too.

“Yeah? And why don’t I believe you? You look like a filthy rat to me! The last filthy rat that came in here I beat with a broomstick so much I couldn’t beat it no more!” Gary snorted.

“A little hurtful,” Kevin thought to himself.

“I assure you, sir, despite my appearance my money is just as good as anyone else’s.”

“Yeah well be quick about it. I don’t want your rat stink scarin’ off my customers!”

Kevin wanted to yell back and say, “*By the emptiness of this store, I think it’s safe to assume your stink has already done that you judgmental fat fuck,*” but he held his tongue. He learned long ago that it’s not worth it.

So, he began to scan the aisles, wandering up and down debating what to buy. As depressing as it seemed, ‘whiskey or vodka’ was one of the biggest decisions Kevin had to make in his life these days.

Soon, however, another man burst through the door. He kicked it in so fast the bell barely had time to announce his entrance.

The man wore a black leather jacket with large metal spikes running down the spine, matching his spiked leather boots and black, spiked skull mask.

He stormed up to the counter, a terrifying ball of fire launching from his glowing red hand, impacting behind the counter and blowing a violent hole in the wall.

“EMPTY THE REGISTER, NOW!” he yelled at Gary.

“Hey pal, take it easy!” Gary snapped back, strangely unshaken for this turn of events.

The skull-faced robber hadn't noticed Kevin yet. Though it was not an official super-power, he had the uncanny ability to hide when trouble was around. When you're a small, universally loathed rat-man, this skill develops quite naturally.

"HURRY THE FUCK UP, MAN! I DON'T GOT ALL NIGHT!"

"I'm goin', I'm goin'! Geez, you in a rush or somethin'?"

Kevin stared at the glistening bottles on the shelves, and then at the front entrance. It was wide open. Gary was distracted.

The rat-man sighed to himself, sounding almost disappointed, "*Maybe next time...*"

He might not have any super powers, but he did have something that was generally just as good. From a holster tucked away inside his coat, Kevin produced a small, yellow taser gun which had been quite crudely pulled apart and taped back together. Whilst the skull-faced robber was still preoccupied with his spoils, he crept up silently behind him, pointed his weapon and pulled the trigger.

In instant the robber was on the ground, shaking violently and screaming in pain. A normal person might not be able to hear the sickening crackle coming from the cables over the noise of the screams, but Kevin could. Standard taser guns weren't generally enough to take down your average Lower City super-powered thug, but certain modifications had been made to this particular gun making it quite effective against the denizens of the night. Something Kevin was immensely proud of.

After an irresponsible amount of tazing time, Kevin finally let go of the trigger, almost smirking. Almost. Next, the spiked robber could react and throw another fireball around the room Kevin grabbed the nearest glass bottle and smashed it over the guy's skull as hard as he could. He sat there, on his knees, gaping for a comical extra few moments, before finally slumping down. The trickles of blood seeping through cracks in his skull mask suggested that this particular wannabe criminal might not be getting up for some time.

Nonchalant, Kevin peered up from behind his scarf to see Gary paralyzed with shock. "D...did you kill him?" the store owner panted, wiping sweat from his brow.

"No," Kevin replied calmly, "but you might want to call an ambulance."

“Yeah I’m sure I’ll get right on that.”

And that seemed to be that.

Back to business then.

The rat-man picked up a replacement bottle for the one he smashed and scanned it intently. Whiskey...the choice had practically been made for him.

“I think this will be suitable tonight,” he said politely, placing some cash down on the counter as he made his way to the door. “Keep the change. Put it towards fixing your wall.”

As Kevin was pressing his claws against the glass door to push it open, the voice came from behind the counter again. This time, however, it was a much friendlier type of gravel. “Hey, pal...you’re alright,” Gary called out, pausing slightly afterwards, “...for a filthy rat!”

The rat-man pushed his way through the door, the bell cheerfully jingling goodbye. “*I’ll have to remember this place,*” Kevin thought to himself as he breathed in the polluted frozen air again, “*It has a particular charm about it...*”