

TACOS AT THE WARREN

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. THE WARREN - NIGHT

ASHELL (Cheerful, 30s) stands in the rain in front of The Warren. She HUMS AFTER YOU'VE GONE as ROWELS (Determined, 30s) walks towards her.

ASHELL
Glad you could find the place.

ROWELS
Did you doubt me?

ASHELL
No, of course not. Shall we?

Rowels offers Ashell his arm. She takes it and the two enter The Warren.

INT. THE WARREN - NIGHT

A BELL DINGS as Rowels and Ashell enter a warmly lit cafe. Behind the counter, under a BLACKBOARD MENU, ANNIE (worn out waitress, 20s) stands up straighter.

ANNIE
Hi, welcome in.

ROWELS
Good evening.

ASHELL
Hello! Could you give us a second?
We're dining in.

ANNIE
(Yawning)
Yeah. Take your time.

ROWELS
(Under his breath)
You can order whatever, it's my
turn to pay.

ASHELL
Always the charmer. Alright, could
we have 2 orders of chicken tacos?

ANNIE
Anything to drink?

ASHELL
Just water please.

Annie rings up their total on the ELECTRONIC CASH REGISTER.

ANNIE
Okay, your total is 25 even. Our register is acting up so I'll come by with your bill later. Is that alright?

ASHELL
Fine by me, thank you.

Annie hands Ashell a NUMBER CARD and turns away. She walks through a door behind the counter.

ANNIE (O.S.)
Keri! I've got an order.

Ashell and Rowels sit at a table by the window. Ashell removes her COAT as Rowels removes his SCARF.

ASHELL
So, what do you think of the place?

ROWELS
It's... quaint. Cozylike. Then again, you were always better at choosing more homey meet up spots.

ASHELL
Well as far as views go, nothing beats that kapeleia in Athens.

Rowels reaches across the table and takes Ashell's hand.

ROWELS
I never could get you to like olives, could I?

ASHELL
No. It's such a shame, too. You made them for me, not that the Athenians knew that.

ROWELS
Yeah, they were under the impression that my present was for them.

ASHELL

To be fair, we both looked a little different back then. I can see where their minds went.

Annie walks over and places TWO PLASTIC CUPS in front of Ashell and Rowels. She fills each with WATER FROM A PITCHER. Ashell and Rowels quickly let go of each other's hands.

ANNIE

Here folks, your food should be right out.

ASHELL

Thank you.

Annie leaves. Rowels sits up straighter.

ASHELL (CONT'D)

I wish our meetings could just be this. Reminiscing and waiting for food.

ROWELS

I remember you saying something like that back in '45.

ASHELL

And you at the turn of the 20th century. Well, no matter. The ultimate topic's always the same.

ROWELS

Humanity. When I called this meeting, I made it clear I was against their continued existence. Are you still for it?

ASHELL

Naturally. I would love to know what changed your stance.

Ashell sits up with her hands folded on the table.

ROWELS

You of all people should already know that.

ASHELL

Come on, you know the rules. You can't just have claims without anything to back it up.

Rowels extends his hand towards an OLDER TV mounted in a nearby corner. The screen FLICKERS TO LIFE and IMAGES START TO FLASH.

BEGIN MONTAGE

- Politicians at packed rallies.
- Masked officers beating protesters in the streets.
- Children crying, unable to find their families.
- The aftermath of a hurricane.
- An active war zone.
- Ice cap melts.
- Wild fires.
- Packed hospitals.
- All of humanities' cruelties from the last 10 years.

END MONTAGE

ROWELS

Do you deny it?

ASHELL

Of course I don't. It'd be foolish to deny the evidence of your own eyes. But we've seen this all before, Rowels. Countless times.

ROWELS

Yes, but it's accelerating. Every year their cruelty grows exponentially. You do realize that our last official meeting was less than 30 years ago?

ASHELL

Yes, I was the one who called it.

Rowels balls his hands into fists.

ROWELS

Then... why? Why do you defend them, Ashell? Why have you decided to tolerate their wickedness? Has your heart finally become numb to the suffering they put us all through?!

Ashell unfolds her hands.

ASHELL

Of course not. Nor will it ever.
Never mistake my defense for
acceptance of their wrongdoings.

ROWELS

But why then do you defend them so?
Why now?

ASHELL

For the same reason I did when the
first atomic bomb was dropped. And
the same reason you have defended
them in the past.

Ashell takes one of Rowels' hands and massages it out of a
fist.

ASHELL (CONT'D)

I won't deny that humans commit
atrocities every day. However, to
condemn them all for the actions of
some is neither right nor fair. You
know this.

Rowels opens his mouth but Ashell continues.

ASHELL (CONT'D)

The truth, that you have pointed
out to me countless times, is that
most human beings are neither fully
good or bad. That morality as we
see it is a gradient and every
person alive has the capacity for
either side. Or have you forgotten?

Rowels closes his mouth and shakes his head.

ASHELL (CONT'D)

I'm not even talking about the big
cruelties or large acts of
generosity seen by millions. Look
there, what do you see?

Ashell gestures towards Annie, who stands behind the counter
on her PHONE.

ROWELS

A tired, inattentive waitress. She
probably just wants to go home. I
don't blame her.

ASHELL

Sure, but you and I both know
there's more to it than that.

ROWELS

Show me.

Ashell reaches under the table and pulls out a NOTEBOOK. She flips it open and lays it on the table, facing Rowels. She places one hand on the corner of the page and extends the other towards Annie. Slowly, WRITING APPEARS ON THE PAGE.

The page now shows a text exchange between Annie and LUCY.

LUCY (V.O.)

You shouldn't have to pick up extra
shifts just for my sake.

ANNIE (V.O.)

Don't worry about it. It's not your
fault you got sick!

LUCY (V.O.)

I know, but you work late as it is.
I worry about you, ya know?

ANNIE (V.O.)

You're sweet, but don't worry.
Tonight there's just a sweet
couple, plus Keri's here. It's not
like I'm completely alone. I'll be
home soon, I love you <3.

Rowels picks up the notebook. He rubs his thumb near the words "I love you".

ASHELL

Well?

ROWELS

It's small.

ASHELL

It is.

ROWELS

Only the two of them would ever
know about it.

ASHELL

Of course. But if there's even a chance that one person could do something like that for someone else-

In the kitchen, KERI RINGS A BELL. Annie turns and picks up TWO PLATES OF CHICKEN TACOS. She brings them to the table, grabbing the number card. Rowels closes the notebook.

ANNIE

Here you go folks. Sorry about the wait.

ASHELL

It's okay, thank you very much.

Annie leaves. Ashell eats her tacos. Rowels hesitates, then picks up a taco and nibbles it. He takes a bigger bite. Ashell chuckles through a full mouth.

ASHELL (CONT'D)

That's another thing I've always liked about humans. They're always so creative about food.

ROWELS

They've been like that since before the olives.

ASHELL

I know, but I still like to think they get some of it from you.

Rowels smiles.

ROWELS

Maybe.

ASHELL

So, what do you think?

ROWELS

I think... you've made your point. With my old argument no less.

ASHELL

Well, there's a reason it works so well every time.

Ashell puts her taco down and finishes her water.

ASHELL (CONT'D)

Do you want to take these to go?

ROWELS
To my place or yours?

ASHELL
You decide.

ROWELS
Mine it is then.

Rowels turns around and waves to Annie

ROWELS (CONT'D)
Excuse me, miss? Could we please
get some to-go boxes?

ANNIE
Oh, yeah. Of course.

Annie grabs TWO TO-GO BOXES and A RECEIPT. She hurries over
to the table as Rowels pulls out his WALLET.

ROWELS
The total was 25 even, right?

ANNIE
Yes sir. I'll go grab our card
reader.

ROWELS
No need.

Rowels starts counting BILLS. Ashell discreetly knocks her
empty cup onto the floor.

ASHELL
Oops, sorry about that.

ANNIE
No worries, I got it.

Annie stoops down and grabs the cup.

ASHELL
Thank you, Annie.

ROWELS
For everything.

ANNIE
No probl-

Annie stands up straight. The tacos, to-go boxes, Ashell,
Rowels, and all of their possessions have disappeared.

All that is left is a large, neatly stacked PILE OF DOLLAR BILLS. Annie stares at the table, then at the cup in her hand.

ANNIE (CONT'D)
H-Hey Keri?

KERI (O.S.)
Yeah?

ANNIE
Can you come out here for a second?

Annie picks up the pile of money.

EXT. THE WARREN - NIGHT

Through the window, Keri walks up to Annie. Annie gestures at the table as she counts the money...

In the rain, Ashell's voice HUMS AFTER YOU'VE GONE.

FADE OUT: