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The Lone Stranger

by Michael Moriarty, Actor and Columnist

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The Lone Stranger had been very famous at one time. Still was recognized by the masses, due to an endlessly syndicated TV series that kept him forever fixed in the mind of the viewing public. Now he was something of a has-been. For the last eight years, he had wandered the vastness of Canada - from Halifax to Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary and now Vancouver. Through increasingly dangerous circumstances, he had been obliged to escape and hide in a town nestled in a valley in the Rockies. There he became acquainted with a very gifted man from the Caribbean, whom he occasionally called "Pronto."

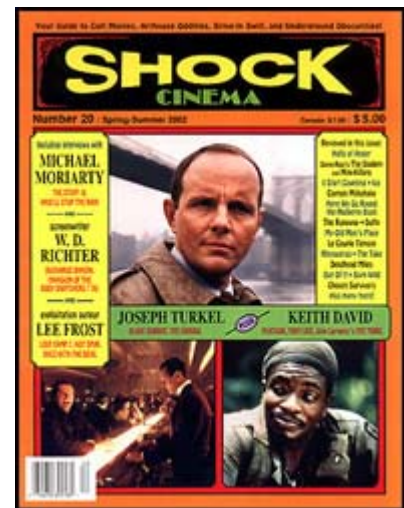
One night, the Lone Stranger ventured foolishly into the night by himself. He met Pronto in a bar. While conversing, the Lone Stranger sensed menacing presences behind him at the next table. He turned to see a band of five young desperadoes in their twenties. The venom in the utterances and malevolence in their eyes were unmistakable.

"Look this way toward me," said Pronto. "Don't look in their direction."

At that point, the Lone Stranger, who had been drinking heavily that night, went into an alcoholic blackout - a trance state not unlike sleepwalking. One walks and talks without being able to remember what is happening.

Lo and behold, the next thing the Lone Stranger knew was that he was waking up in a hospital emergency ward. Standing before him were two of his dearest friends. He learned from them that Pronto had also been taken to the hospital, having tried to intervene on behalf of the Lone Stranger and been punched for his efforts.

"They all thought you were dead when they found you," the Lone Stranger was told, time and again.



Michael Moriarty was recently interviewed in Shock Cinema Magazine's Spring-Summer 2002 edition

With no rooms available in the hospital, the Lone Stranger and his two friends decided to leave that very day. With the Canadian and American press all over the story, the Lone Stranger was hidden in a nearby community. There he began to heal. However, he realized that he would never be the same man again. His equilibrium had been severely damaged by the beating. Two of the assailants were arrested and jailed for a night or two and charged with aggravated assault.

In the ensuing months, there were various versions of what had happened to him. In his confusion, the Lone Stranger assumed that someone from his past had sent what he called the Hyena Pack after him. The local police disagreed. He was told that on the same night, the Hyena Pack had been on a rampage and had assaulted another man at another bar. They were known in law enforcement terms as "recidivists" - galloping in and out of jail as if it were their favorite watering hole.

A few months after the Hyena Pack's assault, the Lone Stranger and a friend were blindsided in another bar.

The local law enforcement agents then told him: "We cannot protect you and we suggest you relocate."

Ah, thought the Lone Stranger, I'm living out the plot of Gary Cooper's *High Noon*!

The Lone Stranger pondered the question - "Do I run or do I stay?"

Having neither money nor influence in the community, the Lone Stranger concluded that the only weapon he had to defend himself with was his fame.

"With that," said the Lone Stranger to Pronto, "perhaps I can make the Hyena Pack infamous." The gang's leader had a very wealthy and influential father in that town. Big Daddy had obviously raised his son to be a very spoiled and violent brat. Local law enforcement officers told the Lone Stranger that the family had a crack lawyer and perhaps the trial shouldn't happen, as the verdict would be a foregone conclusion in favor of the defendant.

So? "Get out of town!," the Lone Stranger was advised.

He balked, for he had begun to make real friends in this town under the snow-capped mountain peaks. Except for the beating, he was living a wonderful life.

And, he wondered, would it really be better in any other town? He decided to sleep on the question for a few days.

One morning, it hit him - he was unable to get any paying work. Since he was falling into debt, he wondered if making the town infamous would lengthen his unemployment. His fame, however, had given him work in scores of towns and cities all over the world. He was not depending on the small, western village for employment. Yet the world now knew about the beating. The entertainment industry was reluctant to hire the Lone Stranger, since many suspected that his injuries had thoroughly debilitated him.

He then decided to sleep on the question for another day. He awoke to the news that he may have three possible job offers in three distant places. If only one of them became a reality, the Lone Stranger would not entirely be at the mercy of the local community.

However, he had yet to make up his mind concerning his plan to plunge the locals into an ocean of fame

they'd rarely experienced. The Lone Stranger had been famous for more than 30 years and was acquainted with the affliction of notoriety. The townies were not and the discomfort they might feel would mirror the frustration the Lone Stranger felt when they figuratively told him, "°Don't let the sun set on you in this town, boy!"

In the eyes of many of the locals, the Lone Stranger had become a 5,000-pound gorilla. Why the eccentricities of this famous loner should so disturb a small town was something the Lone Stranger could not fathom. However, it was now the reality of his life. He doubted if anything would change, but he was tired of running from the nightmare of his own fame.

Pronto had loaned the Lone Stranger a book by Anthony de Mello entitled *Awareness*. To the very isolated man, the book had a central theme - enlightenment and spirituality depended on the depth to which an individual accepts and surrenders to his or her aloneness. It said that we are all doomed to aloneness in one way or another and that the reason for this was to increase our awareness. If we learn to know ourselves with increasing depth, only then can we truly know others.

The Lone Stranger, after hours of solitude, concluded that de Mello was right. A new contentment rose in him, an almost blissful surrender to what fate might hold in store for him. The menacing faces of certain townsfolk no longer disturbed him.

Saying prayers of faith and gratitude to God for what he had been given - an extraordinarily rich life of love and adventure and recognition - the Lone Stranger was prepared for anything the future might bring him.

A friend in Ottawa suggested that the Lone Stranger share his *High Noon* with the masses and write an essay called *The Dark Side of Canada*. The Lone Stranger thought the title too one-sided. He didn't want to leave out what he loved about that nation: the miracle of how Canadian individuals, some utter strangers, had shown up to save his life. The Lone Stranger called them "Canadian angels." In his distress, pain and poverty, he had learned more about the mystery of the universe than he ever had before in all his years in show business.

Awaiting a prosecution trial of the Hyena Pack (which might never happen), the Lone Stranger concluded that he must forgive. However, he also knew that peace without justice was impossible and that forgiveness without first rebuking the offenders was empty. So, with all of that in mind, the Lone Stranger sat down at his computer and composed a piece, which he finally entitled simply *The Lone Stranger*. ***

Michael Moriarty has been nominated for an Emmy Award in the Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Miniseries or a Movie category for his work in TNT's James Dean.

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