

Character Done Perfectly by Clare Lauren Kelly

So recently after getting some things off my to do list as well as watching a few movies or finishing a few shows that I had needed to take the time to get through watching without being distracted by some new show or movie, I decided it was time for me to start the next show that had moved to the top of my list, *Spider-Noir*. In order to be able to enjoy the outfits and scenery without spending all my time focusing on trying to figure out what colors they were, time that should be spent focusing on the story and characters, I made the decision to watch the show in color first, then go back and watch it in black and white. Seemed like the best choice to me and right off I was not disappointed by all the outfits and how colorful the clothing of some of the characters was, along with the buildings, scenery and more.

Partly into the first episode, I was enjoying all that was happening and the organized crime element to the show, then while in the nightclub after the first wonderful performance a character appeared that caught my attention when he was called upon by name for assistance and made his way into focus as a physical presence. Flint Marko, a bouncer/bodyguard in the club, makes his appearance and as soon as I could actually see him I got really confused and paused the episode to try and figure something out. The question I wanted to answer was why did this person look so familiar to me? And why couldn't I place who the actor was and what he was in that I knew him from?

Seeing his name didn't help me much as it wasn't ringing any bells, I don't always know actors by their names, and I didn't want to stop the episode for too long in order to look him up since it was a bit late and I had work early the next day. So I decided that I would just continue watching and let my brain think it over to try and place the familiar face since usually it happens eventually, and if it didn't then I would look him up before bed.

But then my brain made the connection so much sooner than I thought it would, because as soon as Flint opened his mouth and spoke not even a minute after he had appeared fully on camera, the distinctive gravelly voice the actor had decided to use struck a chord in my memory, and while the voice wasn't the exact one he used for this other character, it was close enough to make the connection I had been struggling to make. And once that voice and his face struck the chord, I had to stop the episode once more, but this time for a happy reason and I was literally

laughing out loud once the connection had been made, because I had realized just why I hadn't been able to recognize the actor by his face, despite having been able to see it clearly and him having no makeup or anything to obscure his face.

Jack Huston, the wonderfully talented actor who brought the half masked, socially awkward war veteran and expert sharpshooting marksman Richard Harrow to life, from a show that I feel is pretty underrated and needs to be more well known, *Boardwalk Empire*. I didn't recognize Jack Huston in *Spider-Noir* because I was used to seeing him wear a mask on the left side of his face that was painted to look realistically like what was hidden underneath. And as soon as I realized that I had to start laughing because it is something I found to be very funny, especially since the mask that he wears as Richard Harrow is actually painted to look realistically like his face. It isn't like the Phantom where it is just a white half mask, I suggest looking the character up on Google so you can get a good idea what I mean, and maybe then it will make a bit more sense why this was so funny to me.

The clothing his character in *Boardwalk Empire* normally wears also played a part in why I didn't recognize him right away, given the show is a time period piece of sorts that takes place after the first World War during Prohibition in the United States and Richard has a sort of typical attire he wears. In *Spider-Noir* it is also around that same time period to a degree, but the clothing that Huston wears as Flint Marko is a lot fancier than what he wears as Richard Harrow. So the clothing did play a part since I'm so used to a specific look, but it was mainly the fact that Huston did not have a mask covering one half of his face as well as glasses to hold that mask in place.

After that realization, I continued on with the episode and eventually went to sleep, but remembering Richard Harrow made me want to go back and watch *Boardwalk Empire* once more, or at least watch the parts with Richard in them or some of the other characters that I really enjoyed. And so I did, and that inspired me to start writing this little personal essay because there were things that I noticed now that I may not have really noticed before, or some choices on where the camera that hadn't seemed as big to me the first time watching the show. Warning, there will be some spoilers ahead, but I'll try to keep it to a minimum. Now like with any show there are good and bad parts to *Boardwalk Empire*, but one of the best parts of it in my opinion,

is the performance of certain actors who did a wonderful job bringing their characters to life, whether they were real people from the past or characters created just for the show. Richard Harrow is one such character that was made for the show, but he was made based on real things from that time, the most recognizable being the half mask he wears to cover the heavily damaged and scarred left side of his face.

Without going into it too much because I will start to obsess and this will end up much longer than it needs to be, the character Richard Harrow was a marksman in the war and was injured somehow, with the damage being to the left side of his face and to his throat so he is missing essentially the entire left side of his face below the eyebrow. His left eye is just an empty socket, the skin is heavily scarred with the scars possibly being bad burns, the cheekbone on his left side is missing and some of his teeth are visible since he does not have any lips on his left side. Throughout most of the show Richard Harrow wears a tin mask that covers the left side of his face from the public that is held on by a pair of spectacles, and this mask is painted to resemble how his face would look without the damage.

And with the damage to his face mainly being covered, there are a few other scars on his face around the mask and on his throat to show that he did not come back from the war the same man he was before. One of these scars was on his throat, and as the actor said Richard's dialogue was written in a very specific way with periods breaking up his speech, leading Huston to think that his injuries weren't just to his face, but that his vocal cords might have been damaged as well. And this all led to the very distinctive and hard to listen to voice that Huston uses for Richard, the very sound of it makes it seem like he is in pain, like talking is uncomfortable and perhaps even painful for him. Huston also added in some clicking sounds while he talked or when he cleared his throat that always just hit me hard, with mmm's and pauses added into his dialogue to help make sure you feel unsettled or on edge when Richard is talking, because that was important for his character, the audience had to feel as uncomfortable when Richard talked as the other characters with Richard in the scene probably did.

And that played such a big part in his character for me, because Richard was a character who was more dangerous than a lot of the other characters on the show, and with how dangerous some were that is saying something. As the character with possibly the highest kill count in the

show, a portion of which are off screen from when he was in the war, Richard is not someone you can afford to forget about if you do something to get on his bad side, and he is not someone to be underestimated because of his shy, somewhat awkward demeanor, and half masked face. The people who underestimate or just dismiss him often get reminded of just how dangerous Richard is right before he kills them or someone else that is there with them.

The most memorable scene for me happens later on in the seasons, and it is when Richard goes on a rampage through a building in order to get back the boy who is being kept there, a boy who Richard sees as someone he needs to protect as he is the son of a deceased couple that, in a way, took Richard in, showed him kindness, and treated him as a person, a pair of people who saw him and not his mask or injuries. So Richard goes on a rampage in order to get this boy back, in order to get him to a safe place, and while going on this murderous rampage Richard is outnumbered but still kills at least 11 gangsters with various firearms he brings with him without getting shot himself even once. Terrifying.

Richard is also an example of undying loyalty as well as a character that is affably evil, he is so loyal to friend and fellow veteran Jimmy Darmody that he is willing to kill without remorse for him. Jimmy was kind to Richard, treated him as a friend and a person, was able to look at him with his heavily disfigured face and just look, to see him and not look away. This is implied to be why Richard became so loyal to Jimmy so quickly, implied to be the reason Richard became the loyal right-hand man to Jimmy.

But Richard is also genuinely a nice person as long as you have not done anything to cross him or those he is loyal to, Richard is a somewhat sensitive and polite young man who also happens to be a ruthless killer. I loved this about him, a duality to this character that was done so well, that was shown in all the interactions that Richard had with others and was shown more as he got more screen time.

While Richard is probably one of the most dangerous characters in the show and certainly the character with the highest individual kill count, I think it is safe to say that he is also the most moral of all the criminals that appear over the seasons, and there are a lot of criminals. Richard might even be more moral than some of the non criminal characters. He feels that a man's death is something that needs to be taken seriously and respected, that it is not a laughing matter, even

when the dead man in question is one of Richard's own victims, and in one case a victim that I feel did deserve his death. And Richard is not happy when someone else takes credit for one of the murders he carried out, even if he did not make it known that he is the one who carried out the killing, because Richard respects the dead to a degree, he is not one to brag for the lives he has taken.

One thing that I really enjoyed about Richard Harrow, is the fact that he grows and changes over the course of the show, that he starts to regain his humanity and starts to really feel more emotions and show them as time goes on and he makes connections with more people. You see the bond he has with Jimmy and Angela Darmody, the bond he has with Tommy, Jimmy Darmody's son after the boy loses his parents, with his sister, with the woman that he meets and falls in love with, and her with him. You see him adding in magazine pages to his scrapbook that is filled with pictures of happy families, showing that Richard just wants to be loved, wants to have a family that loves and accepts him for who he is. Because of the friends Richard makes, the kindness they show him, and the love that builds between Richard and Julia, Richard begins to regain his humanity and wants to stop killing.

But at the start of the show, Richard has no problem killing anyone that Jimmy tells him to, killing anyone that is in their way or that could be a threat, or even killing those connected to the ones he is hunting in an effort to flush out his targets. Richard is a war veteran that definitely has been desensitized to violence, to death, and to killing to the point where he has no problem becoming a hitman for hire and a criminal. There is a time in the plot that Richard and Jimmy are brought in to hunt down and kill a group of brothers that are causing trouble for Jimmy's boss, as well as trying to kill said boss. When the time comes to kill the four brothers left, it feels pretty important to note that despite the characters Jimmy Darmody and Al Capone being ruthless in their own right, Richard is the one sent to kill the fourteen year old boy. Yes this fourteen year old boy was a violent criminal, but he was still just a boy that fell into a life of crime, following in the footsteps of a good portion of the boy's older brothers.

Now, taking a step away from Richard as a character and his arc, I want to address the way that he is shot on the camera, the way he is positioned when interacting with others, especially when Richard is one of the main characters in the interaction. As I have said, Richard

wears a half mask on his face that completely covers the left side of his face starting right below the eyebrow and going down to his chin. Which means, if the camera is angled on his left side, all you see is his mask which can be very jarring, at least for me, when he is talking and you can't really see Richard's mouth moving, you don't see his lips forming the words and sounds which threw me off a lot. There is no way the way things were shot and what part of his face you saw was not deliberate, just like Richard taking his mask off in moments of extreme distress or anger, when he is feeling most vulnerable, would have been a deliberate choice.

When Richard was in a scene where he was having a conversation with multiple characters, the placement of where each person was standing was interesting to me because Richard only has one eye. And with the lack of an eye and the mask his face, there is a significant impact on Richard's field of vision, he has a major blindspot which could be a considerable disadvantage to Richard. If the main character Richard is talking to is in front of him with the camera behind that character, and the third character in the scene is next to Richard on his right, Richard had a bit of a problem. When Richard looks at the man in front of him, how well he can see the man next to him is limited, and when looking at the man to his right, then he might be completely unable to see the man that was in front of him. Something that could be dangerous for a criminal character interacting with other criminals, but I feel like it added something to the way Richard moved and how he angled his face.

I found it interesting that when Richard was on camera, the angle always paled a part in the emotion or tension of the scene for me, since whether I saw more of his face or of the mask changed things for me. And a lot of the time that Richard was on screen, he would angle his face a bit so his masked side was away from whoever he was talking with, which might have mainly been so he could really see them and his surroundings. In addition to this, fitting in with Richard being shy, he would sometimes walk or stand hunched over slightly with his head down a bit so he was looking at the floor, then he would glance up at whoever he was talking to before looking away again. He wouldn't always make direct eye contact with people, especially people he had only just met, and for me this showed that Richard was not only shy, but very self conscious about how he looked. About the mask he wore, the damage to his face.

One scene that really hit me hard, was when a child he was watching over got scared after seeing his face uncovered by the mask and was screaming in terror, which woke Richard up from the happy dream he was having. Richard apologized over and over to the child, tried to soothe her and apologized to the girl's mother and the man of the house, when all he had done was take off his mask so he could sleep comfortably. On a small couch. He took off the mask so he could be comfortable, and ended up apologizing over and over again because other people were uncomfortable or scared of him because of his face.

Then later when the mother apologized to Richard for how she had treated him before and for being scared of him simply because of the affliction he could not control, saying that she needed to judge people by what was on the inside and not the outside, Richard seemed confused. His response broke my heart even more. Richard's response was to say that how could he expect her to judge him based on what is inside rather than how he looked, when he couldn't even do that himself. That there were times he forgot what he looked like, then he would pass a mirror and be reminded. I had to stop there the first time I watched that scene, and every time after that I went back to it so I would have a moment for a little cry because that is something I was and still am able to relate to, to some degree.

Now this is a personal essay that I could continue on page after page, but I know that it is best to wrap it up now and not let myself get carried away. If I was to take the time to really go into all the details and characters that I found interesting within the show *Boardwalk Empire*, I really have no idea how many pages it would turn out to be, but it would for sure be more than three times the length of this. There were so many characters, so much character development, so many story lines, plot points and so much detail put into this show that went on for five seasons, and there was a lot that I found myself enjoying. There are several actors that I remember mainly from this show, even when they have gone on to be in other projects that I have seen and enjoyed, some of which were a lot more mainstream or popular than *Boardwalk Empire* was. It was just so memorable in so many different ways.

Out of all the shows I have seen, this is one that I would recommend to almost anyone whether or not they enjoyed crime shows, because there is a whole lot more to *Boardwalk Empire* than the crime aspect, so much more than the power struggle and issues brought about

during Prohibition. It deals with and shows some very serious problems that were very big back in that time, and are still relevant now as well unfortunately. There is violence but that should be expected given all I have said about this one character and the sort of show that it is, but there is also love, relationship building, pride and its consequences, and so much more. So give it a shot and enjoy the wonderful world and character building that exists in *Boardwalk Empire*.