

Chapter 32
SLUMMING ON SKID ROW
(ERIC DANE & REBECCA GAYHEART)

My first visit to L.A.'s Skid Row was back in 2007 when I was the third wheel on a romantic stroll through the rough area with a *Grey's Anatomy* star and his wife. Our "date" started off on the right foot, but ended horribly when I became privy to a devastating childhood secret that I have not written about until now.

My *USA Today* assignment began innocently enough (as so often they do) with a pitch from a publicist to spend a day with Rebecca Gayheart, the actress who had played Luke Perry's murdered bride Antonia on *Beverly Hills, 90210* and more recently appeared in Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time in ... Hollywood*. Besides her film credits, Gayheart's name unfortunately had also become linked to the tragic vehicular manslaughter death of a 9-year-old boy from Mexico whom she'd struck with her Jeep Grand Cherokee back in 2001. By the time of our interview, Gayheart was well on her way to completing her 750 hours of court-ordered community service and had become passionately involved with the organization Chrysalis, an incredible non-profit that helps homeless men and women get back on their feet. If you think there's nothing you can do to make a difference in your community, Rebecca would prove you wrong!

I thought it was a solid celebrity/human-interest story, but my editor saw the opportunity for a much bigger "get." Gayheart was newly married to actor Eric Dane who had shot to overnight superstardom on *Grey's Anatomy* (then TV's hottest show) when he emerged from a steamy shower clad only in a towel, instantly earning himself the nickname "McSteamy"—a play on co-star Patrick Dempsey's "McDreamy."

Suddenly, everyone wanted to know more about this sexy, sweaty, mysterious Greek god, and my editor mandated that we would only do the story on Rebecca's charity if she were accompanied by her husband. (See, it's not only the tabloids that exploit stars' personal lives to sell papers.) I thought Rebecca's reps would balk, but they agreed almost immediately.

So, the three of us met up at Chrysalis' Skid Row headquarters to begin our walk-and-talk interview in full view of men and women openly urinating, rummaging through garbage cans and shooting up heroin. Way worse than anything I saw during my *Enquirer* years.

While Gayheart was very chatty and friendly with me throughout the day, Dane seemed withdrawn and distant. When I asked him back at the headquarters who had been his childhood role model, he simply walked away as if he'd not heard my question. It could have been interpreted as rude, but I sensed I'd touched a nerve.

"He never really had a role model," Rebecca explained to me, as Eric disappeared into a labyrinth of donated clothing. Though I elected not to probe any further, Rebecca nonchalantly offered up that Eric's father had committed suicide when Eric was just a 7-year-old boy. Wait, *what??!!* I was stunned! And I knew Eric would be livid with Rebecca for revealing such a whopper of a secret to a reporter they'd only met an hour earlier.