

## **Such Is Life: Episode II**

**By: Dwan L Hearn**

So, that sucked. Damn near broke my nose, twice, got fired from my job, and THEN got un-fired. Fuckin' lame. As a result of my "involvement in a major incident", my shift got changed. Overnight Freight.

I came into work a couple of days after the fight to get my schedule and ran into Daniel. He was at Waterman's desk looking as if he hadn't slept in about a week and then found out his dog died. Was that too much? I'm just saying he looked stressed out. Waterman's desk was scattered with random papers and index cards. Daniel was sitting in Waterman's chair trying to talk on both his personal cell phone and the Hotline.

The Hotline was the private phone line that went directly to Waterman's desk. Officially, only family, specific vendors, and the Mayor of Kingston had the number to the Hotline. In reality, damn near the entire city had the number. Jim Jr. wasn't exactly the sharpest hunk of cheese. He called EVERYONE from the Hotline and just loved being seen using it. I think he forgot that this thing called 'Caller ID' exists and he has the line listed as "J. Waterman's Hotline". No one has the heart to tell him the secret's out. I must admit, the replica phone from the Batman TV series is pretty cool. It's got the little button thing on top but it just opens a panel with a traditional keypad under it. Pretty dope for real though.

Anyway, Daniel was on both phones trying to find the number of the security company to get a copy of "the brawl" for insurance purposes. Whether Waterman's business insurance or Waterman's health insurance I'll never know. Not really my business, I guess.

I stood in the doorway of the office for a minute, eavesdropping before I knocked on the door to get Daniel's attention. I must have startled him because I've never seen a human being snap his neck back faster than he did. The whiplash effect on his neck was instant. He dropped the cell phone from his shoulder and all that could be heard was the unmistakable sound of a cell phone screen shattering.

I froze.

He froze. It wasn't just his body that froze. The glare that he gave me was as icy as they come. It was such a powerful stare that I actually got goosebumps!

Everything went silent. We didn't say a word. I stood by the door. He sat at the desk with the Hotline receiver still to his ear. Whoever was on the Hotline must have heard the phone drop too; they were also silent.

"Umm..", I finally mustered. "Hey there, Danny-Boy!" I've learned that I'm really REALLY good at mastering fake cheeriness. "I was wondering if you had my schedule for next week?"

He didn't even blink! As icy as this stare still was, I could feel his anger flaring up. His face was turning a deep beet red. I thought it was a bit rosy because I scared him, but I'm convinced that if he didn't fear prison, I'd be a dead man and I'm not completely convinced he's currently afraid of prison.

Finally, he spoke, "Couldn't you see I was busy?" His voice was much deeper; very sinister.

"Well, not completely at first. That's why I knocked. I didn't mean to scare you."

"I wasn't scared!" This was the softest yelling I've ever heard from anyone... ever! "I was startled. There's a difference."

"I'm sorry, man. I just needed my schedule."

"Look, I'm extremely busy right now! When I get this VITAL information I've been looking for, I'll give you a schedule."

"The security company?"

He rolled his eyes at me. "Yes, the security company, Smartass"

I was taken aback. Did my manager just call me a 'Smartass'? This is what I deserved for asking for my work schedule? Really?! I was shocked! The eye roll was one thing, but 'Smartass'?! That was a bit much.

I stood there in the doorway of the office nearly motionless, just my head slightly nodding as I was processing exactly what to do next. I looked at Daniel sitting at Waterman's desk suddenly emboldened with a new sense of superpower. His eyes burned a hole in my soul just daring me to fight back. I lowered my eyes, not so much to the floor, as it would have seemed to Daniel, but internally. I was searching my soul for the right course of action. With a final stern nod, I calmly let out "Okay, Daniel," and walked over to the window.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?! Where are you going?!"

I ignored him. I walked over to the window and closed it, removing the old Kingston Local Phonebook that was holding it open. I took it over to the desk and gently laid it on the desk atop all the papers. I opened the book to the back cover on a long shot. Jim Sr. and my grandfather were from the same era so I just assumed that they were similar types of guys. Sure enough, I was right. Just like Grandpa, Jim Sr. used the "Numbers to Remember" section of the back of the phonebook to write down important phone numbers for future reference. I took the highlighter out of the pocket of Daniel's black management vest and highlighted the Kingston Security and Surveillance Company. I replaced the cap on the marker and placed it right back in his pocket and walked back to almost the exact same spot in the office doorway that I was standing before.

"Can I please have my schedule now?"

Daniel's face seemed very confused. Not to say that Daniel was very confused, but it was as if his face didn't know how to create the proper expression it was just given the command to make. It was 'twitchy'. Yeah, I guess that would be the word. If his face was a pie chart, I think that it would be 25% confused, 45% still angry, 15% relieved, 20% annoyed, and 18.3% dumbfounded. Yes, I do realize that equals more than 100 percent, but that, I believe, is why Daniel's face seems to be, as I said, very confused.

"You know what? Never mind, I'll just come back later or I'll call you on your cell ph..." I paused. I almost forgot about his phone breaking. I think he did too until now.

I stared at him.

He glared at me.

I walked away.

Passing the time clock, I saw Venus waving me into the break room. "Hey, Zack! You survived! How's your face?" She sat at a table eating her lunch of what seemed to be the most unhealthiest salad I've ever seen. She noticed me examining her food and immediately came to its defense. "Hey now! Don't judge me! It's still a salad!"

"You sure about that? From here, it just looks like you dropped some lettuce in a bucket full of ranch. Is that a tomato?" I picked a small red ball from her bowl and ate it. To my surprise, it was indeed not a tomato. It was also not ranch dressing. I was no longer convinced it was a salad at all.

Rolling her eyes, she again went on the defensive. "Mom was making up desserts again. That was a cherry. These are mint leaves and it's STILL a salad, Mr. Food Police! I had a very nice

sandwich before you came in. What are you doing here anyway? You're off today and don't work again until Monday."

"Oh, I just stopped by to get my schedule from..." I stopped talking and I could feel myself blinking. That blink of confusion when you're presented with information you weren't ready for. "Wait, how did you know my schedule?"

Venus, using the back of the spoon in her hand, pointed to the break room wall where a new schedule was posted. Disbelief! All that trouble I just went through and it was on the break room wall this whole time!?

"What?! When did we start doing this?!"

"Today. Daniel said he'd be pretty busy today with Waterman out for however long he's out. You sure did a number on him the other day!"

"That wasn't me. He poked me!" I poke myself in the chest mimicking Waterman. "Him losing his shit, running into the Ladies' Room, and getting his ass beat by two dozen women was all his own doing!" I have to admit, recounting the whole thing put a smile on my face much bigger than should have been allowed.

"You were the main reason he flipped!" she reminded me.

"You gave him the bloody rag!" I reminded her.

She smiled. "Yeah... I did!" She giggled and finished up what was left of what she called a salad.

As I went to leave, I realized I didn't actually look at the schedule. I went back into the break room, pointed to the wall bearing the schedule, and smiled at Venus, who was cleaning up. She smiled back and quickly covered her mouth. Wasn't sure why until I stumbled into the side table next to the wall bearing the schedule. I didn't exactly fall as much as I very slowly crashed to the floor. The table, however, wasn't so graceful. The candy dish atop the table actually was quite graceful. Once again, barely able to hold back her laughter, Venus watched the dish bounce a few times across the break room floor and into the hallway. Venus, myself, and a few other freightmates who heard the table topple and came to see what was happening, watched the dish settle, spinning and wobbling in the same way a top does when it's about to fall; listening to the oddly beautiful sound of crystal on concrete until it finally stopped flat on its bottom and completely intact! The entire backroom cheered at the amazing tumbling act we all had witnessed.

"Stand Clear!"

The crowd went from a collective expression of elation to a look of tragedy in an instant. 'Stand Clear' was the verbal warning the forklift drivers gave when passing doorways to alert people they were driving by. We all watched in horror as the forklift came rolling right by the candy dish! Seeing the looks of terror on all our faces, the driver stopped. Worried he missed something bad, Mike Topps turned off the forklift and joined us.

"What's wrong with you guys? Another viral cat video?" he inquired.

There was an incident where a couple 'Mates were on break and were playing around on social media. There was a compilation video of seriously adorable kittens. The video was about nine minutes long and about seven minutes in, the clips took an incredibly dark turn. I'll spare the details but I'll say the sudden abundance of red wasn't from a field of roses. The video would pull you into a deep trance of cuteness only to suddenly shock you with murderous sadness. The video got around the whole store and when Waterman saw it, he dedicated a Day of Mourning the next day for all the kittens that lost their lives in that video with 30% off all kitten merchandise. It was sad but I scored a cheap calendar so I keep telling myself that they didn't die in vain.

Venus and her best friend, Michelle, ran around to the other side of the parked machine. We lost sight of them but after a few seconds, we could see Michelle holding up Kingston's newest celebrity crystal candy dish. She proclaimed proudly, "She LIVES!!!"

Jubilation returned to the crowd complete with jumping, hugging, and high fives! Michelle held the dish high above her head like she was holding the Stanley Cup. She took the crystal trophy and paraded it around the crowd. Each person either rubbed it or kissed it. When she got to Mike, they just kinda exchanged looks. Michelle wanted him to at least rub the dish and Mike is still confused as to what is happening. The freightmates slowly started to encircle Mike, Michelle, and the celebrity candy tray. The air filled with pumping fists and quiet chants of "Do It! Do It! Do It!" Even I had gotten in on the peer pressure.

Surrounded on all sides, Mike did the only thing he knew to do at that moment. With all eyes on him, Mike reached up, grabbed hold of our newly crowned crystal savior, lowered it to chest level, said, "I'm not kissing your little ashtray" and walked away.

With the wind swiftly knocked out of our sails, we all begin to mourn the moment. A few seconds later, Venus, with a sudden sense of rejuvenation, called out, "He touched it! That counts!" The crowd quickly gathered again and continued cheering! Mike, still confused and shaking his head, hopped back on the forklift. He looked over at me. I just smiled and gave him a shrug.

"You're weird, Bayside," Mike called out before starting up the lift.

"I know. Pretty cool, huh?"

Mike smiled, still shaking his head as he drove away.

Venus and Michelle walked over to me, looking in Mike's direction.

"What was he carrying anyway?" Michelle asked.

"Looked like flatware," Venus answered.

We all kinda tilted our heads. "Huh," I said, "that just seems so damn..." I was looking for a particular word.

"Strange?" Venus offered.

"No. So damn..."

Michelle chimed in, "Weird?"

"Not,..." I thought about it, "No."

"Literal?"

We all turned around.

"Literal. A forklift lifting forks. It's so damn literal."

"Yeah, that's it!" I turned in the direction of the random voice to see a short young man who just walked into the room. "Who are you?" I asked.

"Name's Mitch. I'm new. You're Zack, right?"

"Yeah..."

"You're training me on Night Stock."

"Oh. Well, okay. Guess I'll see you then."

"Thanks. This will be great!" Mitch patted my back and walked away. We tilted our heads again and just shook it off. Michelle walked back into the break room, picked up the table, and placed our crystal idol back in its spot.

Waving to Michelle, I walked with Venus back to her post. We got to her cart and Venus just kinda stared at it. She moved it off to the side, wrapped her arm around mine, and walked me to the front door. She was always doing little things like that. We're pretty close. Sometimes, she's the only person I can trust or rely on. We got to the store's entrance where I bowed and she curtsied. We said our goodbyes and I walked out to my car. I saw Mitch still in the parking lot. He saw me and waved. I waved back. I hopped in my car and prayed tomorrow isn't anywhere near as eventful.