

Such Is Life: Episode I

By Dwan L. Hearn

I knew better! Dammit, I knew better. The moment I got up this morning I felt it - Today was going to suck. THE moment I woke up this morning I knew it was going to be a bad day. At 5 o'clock this morning, my alarm went off and I jammed my finger hitting the snooze button. It was only after this that I realized that it was the alarm on my phone that was going off NEXT to my alarm clock. It didn't make any sense for my alarm clock to be going off anyway. I rarely use it. But you got to give me a break. I was literally awake for, like, 1.8 seconds. I was still trying to process the dream I had. I was on an island attempting to repair a boat so I could sail away from the big storm that was about to start. I know. Doesn't make sense to me either. Why would I be fixing a boat, on an island, to get away from a storm? I'm still going to get rained on and it'd just fill the boat. I know... weird.

"Hey, Bayside!"

I jumped. Looking around, I went from thinking I was in a dream to realizing I was in a nightmare. I'm just saying if there is a retail store in hell, it'd be this place. Waterman's General Store, where the customers see an ad line like "Everything you didn't know you needed" and think that you're supposed to carry absolutely everything. It doesn't help that Waterman's carries a lot of weird stuff that I guess would qualify as "things I didn't know I needed" minus the fact that I really don't need it.

"Did you hear me, Bayside? Waterman's looking for you."

Startled again, I turned around and saw my 'not-so-favorite freightmate', Mike Topps. To clear the air at this point: Yes, that's what the company calls the Stock Crew - Waterman's Frieghtmates. Yes, it's dumb as shit. Yes, you get in trouble for NOT using the term. Yes, it makes me want to beat myself in the head with a hammer.

"Huh? What? No... I didn't. I was... thinking...something. What did you say?"

"Dammit, Bayside! You're always in the clouds! Go! Waterman is pissed! I got your stock."

"Yeah yeah.. gotcha. I'm going."

Leave it to Mike Topps to interrupt a conversation I was having with myself! They say everyone knows an asshole named Mike and dammit if I didn't get away from that for 25 years before

Mike-fucking-Topps starts working Mid-day Freight with me. The "know-it-all" type who has the amazing skill of getting on your damned nerves twice at the same time. First, he thinks he knows everything, and I mean EVERYTHING! Football, Politics, Science, Mating habits of Extinct animals... yeah, he thinks he knows about all that... and has no problem volunteering you to hear him loving his own voice.

The second thing that pisses people off about Mike? He fuckin' DOES know it all. The only thing worse than a guy who thinks he's right all the time is a guy that really is right all the time!

I pulled myself off the floor and handed my box cutter over to Mike.

"Fuck is this?"

"A box cutter, Mike. We use it to cut open boxes. Hence the name: Box Cutter."

"No shit, Bayside," He pulled a box cutter from his back pocket. "Wouldn't you think I already had one?"

Okay, he got me. I should have figured that, but it's just one of those 'pass the torch' kinda things when you're passing a task on to someone else. See what I mean? Know-It-All. And, once again, he was right. I took my box cutter and put it back in my pocket. "Whatever, man. Where's Waterman?"

He pointed to the back room and I walked away - not before saluting 'Captain Smarty-pants' with a very kind, ultra-professional center-digit salute... Too much? Okay, I flipped him off.

I should explain that I'm flipping him off not because he was a know-it-all, but because it took me this long to realize that he called me "Bayside" like three or four times now. My name is Zachary Morris Miles. Yes, actual legal birth name. I was born in the 90s and my mom just LOVED that show "Saved By the Bell"! She was so obsessed with that show, the characters, and that whole 'slightly imperfect' high school experience that she wished she had. She also, apparently, had an unhealthy celebrity crush on Mark-Paul Gosselaar. It was so bad, that she almost convinced herself that 'Zack Morris' was my real father and was going to add "Junior" to the end of my name. My grandparents stopped that. "Just because you don't know the father doesn't mean you can just make one up" my grandma used to say. My mom's kinda off. She'd start inventing new TV dads for me.

Anyway, long story short, when I introduced myself on Mike's first day, he, being a bit older than me, caught the name right away. "Zack Morris, huh? Did you go to Bayside High too?" He used to sing a song from the show every time I walked by. "Bayside is the school that's cool and you know that it's true". I thought it was a theme song but it's just some random song from an

episode. Nonetheless, he started calling me Bayside which isn't the first time, just the first time it stuck. Sigh.

James "Jim" Waterman Jr is a quirky guy, to say the least. His father founded this company and knew my grandfather. Grandpa said he was a really driven man who wanted to make things easier for the great town of Kingston. That's why he opened the general store.

Waterman Sr had two kids, a daughter who apparently thought she was too pretty to run retail and a son, the Jim Jr. that I'm walking swiftly to go see for reasons unknown. Waterman Sr. died some years ago and since the daughter wasn't here (it was last told that she was still searching for fame in Europe somewhere trying to get ahead by giving....nevermind. It's just a rumor anyway) and his wife divorced him a few years before (which some people say was the real reason he died. The doctors said heart attack), Jim Jr. was the only one left to plan the funeral and where was it held? In the store. Yep. Right here in this very store, during business hours, while the store was still open, to the public. Who does that?! Jimmy Waterman Jr does that.

We were here that day. We were having a big dinner and we were buying paper plates and cups and shit like that, and the next thing you know I hear someone yelling, "Aisle 6, make way! Make a way! Dead Man Walking!" Dumbfounded, I just kinda stood there thinking there is no way I really heard someone say that. Some guy yanked me to the side out of the way. My back hit the shelf and about ten packs of plastic forks fell on my head. Not all at one time. One after another. After another. After another. After another. After another. My head didn't hurt as much as my pride did. Mind you, they were rolling a casket with a dead guy in it down the aisle and there was a small parade of people following it and all of them watching these forks bouncing off my head. No space to move away from the cascade of cutlery. Some people even gave me grief for being disrespectful of the funeral. The one taking place outside the deli counter. In the general store. During business hours. While the store was still open. To the public.

He has this weird business sense. He thought that mixing current events and advertising would work great together and I can see how that looked great on paper, I'm sure. When that gorilla got killed in that zoo, Jim Jr. thought it'd be great to get a giant inflatable gorilla outside the store. This led to people wondering why we had a giant inflatable gorilla outside and what aisle the little gorilla toys were in. Or where we were selling the smaller inflatable gorillas. Or if we had gorilla t-shirts in a 3X. We had none of that. He didn't think that way. He just had it up to have it up. The only gorilla-related item we had was gorilla glue and gorilla tape. So he orders all that stuff. The inflatables. The T-Shirts (in 3X. Only 3X). The stuffed gorilla toys. I'm STILL clearing all that stuff out of my way when I start my shift. Do you have any idea how hard it is to move a pallet of inflat...

"Zack look.."

Face, meet door. Door, meet face.

Standing in front of me was my friend, Venus. "Oh, shit, dude!" she exclaimed, her hands cupped over my face, hiding her smile, "Zack, you okay?"

Venus is probably the only "normal" person that worked at Waterman's and is likely one of the few normal people in Kingston. I always thought she was cool. She was named after Venus de Milo, a statue or something. Because she's Black, people think she's named after the tennis player. She was popular because of that so she's pretty slow to correct people. She sucks at tennis, by the way.

I dropped to my knees to collect myself. I open my eyes and look down at my red hands. Red?! Dammit, I busted my nose on the door I forgot to open before running through.

"You okay, Zack?" she asked me again, with a little bit of added annoyance. She reached down to help me up. "You really should open doors first before charging through them." She hands me a cleaning towel to catch the blood and embarrassment.

"Yeah, I'm fine." I felt my nose to see if it was broken. I don't know what a broken nose feels like exactly, but I just assume that if it was broken and I felt it, I'd instantly know. No WebMD required.

"Why are you in such a hurry? I'd avoid the back as much as possible. Waterman's pissed about something."

"I know. That's why I'm going back there. Mike said he's looking for me."

"Good luck with that! I'll say something really nice about you, I promise." She tried to do the Catholic body cross blessing thing. I think she did it wrong. She thought so too and just kinda shrugged it off and patted me on the back. "May the force be with you or something like that." She tried to do the Vulcan V split-finger thing. That she did right. I didn't have the heart to tell her the Vulcans are from a completely different series. I'll let her have her moment.

This is the part where I would have walked through the door properly, without the blood and pain. And it would have worked too if it wasn't for the door opening in my face as Waterman was coming out of it. Back to the floor I went.

"What the heck are you doing playing outside the doors, Miles?" Waterman scolded. Full-fledged TV principal stance. There he was just standing over me with khaki pants, a white button-up shirt, a black bowtie, and closed fists on his hips.

"Get up, Miles!"

"Working on it," I told him. It's probably not a good time to be sarcastic but at the moment, I was trying to figure out what exactly to do with my hands. Hold my nose? Hold my face? Both? Neither? Do I reach them out for help? To Waterman? To Venus, who is trying her damndest not to crack up laughing? Answer: to Waterman. He reached his hand out to help me up. I awkwardly make my way to my feet. Oh, look! A couple of random falls to the floor hurt my knee too! Lovely.

"I've been waiting for you, Miles!" Waterman said ominously, pointing his finger in my face. His eyes lowered slightly as something caught his attention. "What the heck happened to your shirt? Taking lunch early again?" Waterman poked my chest like he was testing my manhood. Not exactly the exam I was studying for, but before I poked him back, I saw the bloodstain that he saw as ketchup or something.

"It's blood, Sir."

His eyes briefly widened as he panicked, wiping his hand on his shirt and then his pants. He went for his shirt again, but just kinda left his arm hanging there a moment. Venus was able to straighten her face just long enough to hand Waterman a cleaning towel and step back a few feet away. Waterman nodded to Venus as a thank you and wiped his hands, both of them, on the towel. The one Venus gave him. The same one she had just given me. This wasn't going to end well. This is when I would learn Jim Waterman had a weird thing about blood. Maybe he's paranoid about contracting some weird hybrid blood-borne disease or something.

After he wiped his hands, he went to wipe the spot on his shirt that he wiped his hands on originally. That was when he noticed the towel was covered in blood.

In a mere matter of seconds, I saw Waterman go from rage mode to pure psycho-panic. I'm talking just totally crazy! If he flipped his lid any more, he'd qualify for the Olympic Gymnastics Team.

He wouldn't have medaled though.

He screamed a very girly high-pitched scream and threw the towel... somewhere. I never saw where it landed. He did a couple left-foot-right-foot hops, kinda like he had a mouse running between his feet. He turned and ran towards the bathrooms, pushing babies and shopping carts out of his way as he did so. No babies were harmed in the throwing of this fit.

The screaming and little hoppy moves continued all the way across the store to the bathroom. The Women's bathroom. Poor guy wasn't paying attention to which door he opened. The women

inside the bathroom did! You heard the door open, the door shut, Waterman screaming in panic, the women collectively scream in panic, a secondary younger woman/little girl scream, Waterman scream again, and then Waterman calling for help! The door opened as the Handicap Match between Waterman and The Women of the Bathroom spilled out onto the sales floor. Good Ol' Jimmy was standing his ground, too! That is until he was no longer standing and was just on the ground getting beaten with purses and wet umbrellas while the women spoke a many-a unkind word and not all of them in English.

Not really sure why, but the other women who were just in the store joined in on the fray. I don't think they truly understood what was going on. At this point, I didn't either. This train wreck was a much more entertaining train wreck than the one that happened this morning and made me late for work, which is what I thought the talk with Waterman was about. Security managed to break up the ruckus and by "security", I mean Mike Topps and the cashier on Lane 3. Mostly the Lane 3 guy. Mike seemingly just went up there to watch and cheer on the women. I saw him motion for an elbow drop a couple of times. I also saw the cashier (Hank, maybe?) look Mike in the face and just yell, "Dude!" and Mike helped pull Waterman out of the pile of pissed-off patrons. Waterman made it to his feet, shoved Mike and Hank out of the way, and ran straight out the main door. He got in his car and sped off, nearly driving into the side of the building. He recovered and made it out of the lot, making a left on Jackson St.

I stood there in shock along with most of the staff who had gathered to watch their boss get beat up by a bunch of women from the bathroom, some who hadn't bothered to completely re-dress before starting to brawl. As a hush started to fall over the store, Venus broke her verbal seal and could be heard laughing all over the store and in the parking lot. Yep, she was the normal one.

I looked down at my watch. 5:45 pm. Close enough. I turned to Venus, who was paying me no attention, so I turned to the worker... um... freightmate... in the aisle next to her, pointed to my watch, pointed to the backroom, and mouthed the words 'I'm out'. She nodded, looking back and forth between me, Venus, and the front door, and shrugged.

I went to the backroom, without injury, and saw Daniel standing a few feet from the time clock, talking on his cell phone. Daniel was the General Manager. He works under Jim and handles all the typical manager stuff. Schedules, hiring, breaks, invoices - you know, manager stuff.

He saw me walking to the time clock, glanced at his watch, and did the "wait here" with his finger as he continued the call.

"Uh, no... I guess I missed that pa.." Whoever it was on the other line was cutting him off.

We made eye contact again and he waved me over. "Yeah..no... I didn't call the police." Pauses. "Well, I didn't think it was going to.." Pauses. "No, Hank had it under con..." Pauses again.

I knew his name was Hank.

"No, that's fine. I'll talk to him, he's right here." Brief pause. "Yes, I'll cover that tomorrow. You take the day off... You'll be fine. The doctors have tests for all that kind of stuff... okay, bye"

This wasn't going to go good.

I mustered up the fakest happy voice I could. "Hey, Daniel! Wow, did you see that?! That was... you know... Wow, right!?"

"Yeah, I saw it. You got hit in the face with the door. You okay?"

Forgot about that part. "Yeah, I'm cool. Better than Waterman."

Daniel just kind of stared at me. I stared back. He stared. I stared.

"Too soon?" On a scale of 1-to-5, my fake smile was a 12!

Daniel dismissed my question. "You know he was looking for you and he wasn't very happy."

"So I heard. Didn't really have the chance to talk to him. He hit me in the face and then wiggled out," I replied. I wanted to make sure if we were having a "serious workplace discussion" I put this in there.

"That was Waterman on the phone when you walked up. He said you were 45 minutes late today. That true?"

"Yeah, didn't you hear about the car that hit a train on 6th?"

"No."

"Really? A car hits a parked train and you didn't hear about it? Been the story all day. Anyway, I was two cars back when it happened. A guy two cars behind me was trying to get out and the car in front of me was trying to get out and the guy in front of me hit the guy who was behind me and.... needless to say, I wasn't going anywhere and I tried to call and no one answered so...yeah, I was late."

"And you started the store fight?"

"WHAT?!" I was in pure disbelief! I started the fight? Hell, if anything he hit me with a door and poked at me. "I didn't start a damn thing! He walked into the women's bathroom!"

"Restroom."

"What?"

"It's a restroom. No one is bathing in the restroom."

"No one is just resting in there either."

Pauses. "Okay, fine. But you apparently attacked him with a bloody rag."

"Again, no. He poked a bloodstain on my shirt. And he.."

"He poked you?"

"He poked me."

"In the chest?"

I pointed to the red spot on my shirt. "Here."

"Huh."

"That's kinda what I said."

"...and the rag?"

"Someone else gave him the towel."

"I see," Daniel said, his face frozen as he tried to process all the different bits of data he just collected. His head gave a slight nod as he seemed to come to some kind of conclusion. "Well, Waterman said you're fired anyway."

And now my face was frozen. "I'm fired?! For what?!"

"You left the back door open after your smoke break and a raccoon came into the building and was eating Waterman's invoices."

"I don't smoke."

He paused.

I paused.

"Oh yeah, okay, well, never mind. Have a good day." Daniel called someone on his phone and walked away.

I clocked out for the day and went home.