

## **Such Is Life: Episode IV**

**By: Dwan L. Hearn**

When it comes to my biological father, I've never met him. Admittedly, as sad as it is, I don't even think about him. It's not like he was there and left. He never existed. When I was younger I heard all kinds of stories about him and, as a child, I believed them. That is, until one Saturday morning, I was watching TV and realized exactly how crazy my mom was at the time. I was about nine years old when I was watching some old reruns on TV with my grandpa. I pointed to the screen at a guy my mom said was my dad. I stood there proudly imitating the guy, mimicking every single one of his moves. By the time I paused long enough to see Grandpa, the look of disapproval on his face was apparent and frightening. I froze, stopping dead in my track as my eyes began to well up. His eyes did too.

"I'm sorry Grandpa! I'll be good, I promise!" I defaulted.

One deep sigh later he reached out to me. "No, Zack. Come here, you're okay."

I ran into his arms and he hugged me tightly. He held me for what felt like forever. Quietly, I started to sob. He told me I was okay, meaning I wasn't in any trouble, but I couldn't help but feel like he was upset with me. The more I cried, the more he held me. The more he held me, the more I cried. He was, and still is, the greatest man I've ever known. The idea of upsetting or disappointing him was unbearable. I have always sought his approval. My grandfather is the walking, talking, living, breathing definition of a Man.

After an unknown number of minutes, he outstretched his arms, hands on my shoulders, and held me in front of him. Eye-to-eye he let out a quite audible sigh and began to speak. "Zachary," he started, "this isn't going to be an easy conversation for me to have with you, but I think it's about time to address it. It's already gone too far."

I stared at him confused.

"Zack, you have to promise me that you won't talk about this to anyone, especially your mom. Do you understand?"

I nodded and wiped the tears from my face.

"The man on the television is not your daddy. None of them are."

My eyes widened. The tears forming in my eyes held still wondering what they should do next. They stood there motionless listening to Grandpa's words. So did I.

"Your mother only pretends those men are your daddies because we don't know who your real daddy is. You don't need details, but just know that the people in your life love you so much that you don't need to worry about a daddy. Do you understand?"

I nodded again, but I didn't truly understand. I knew enough to know that everyone had a daddy and I was even more confused about the idea of no one knowing who he was. Being that young, the concept of one-night-stands was totally foreign to me, but as time went on, I would ride a mental and emotional roller coaster around this topic. By the time I graduated high school, I completely understood what Grandpa was saying that Saturday morning so many years ago - I was loved and supported without any man playing the role of Dad.

Glancing at the clock on the car stereo, I noticed a flashing light on my phone. At the next red light, I looked down at my phone - three missed calls from Venus. I wonder why she'd call so many -

The Light turned green and I sat my phone back down. I drove for about five more minutes until I was about four blocks away from the address Venus sent me. I got to the corner of Wolf Street and Meyer Avenue when I saw the sky lit up with red and blue lights. Just from here, I could see at least ten police cars lining the streets. Surely, they're not at the party. Venus would have called me.

The phone vibrated. I noticed it this time. Call number four. I answered. "Hey, Ven -"

"Where are you?"

"Wolf and Meyer. Coming towards Villa."

"Turn around now! Do NOT come down Villa Drive. It is BAD!"

"So they *are* at the party?"

"The Cops? You bet your ass. 'Chelle and I got out the back and we'll be at that one doughnut/coffee spot on Lemon soon. You know it?"

"Yeah, I can turn here and get you."

"Please do. Hurry!"

I turned left at the next corner and headed towards the doughnut shop, Lemon Street's Sweet Treats. A few minutes later, I'm turning onto Lemon Street and I see two figures walking along the sidewalk. I slowed down and parked the car just off the corner. I rolled down the window and called out for the two people to get in. A moment later, a deep and manly voice said, "Man, you're quick!"

Perplexed, I adjusted the rearview mirror to see the back seat. Two people, a man and a woman, were sitting in my back seat. Neither of which were Michelle. Neither of which were Venus. The chick was cute though. Shame she's with him.

"Excuse me, why are you in my car?" I asked.

"Why wouldn't we be in the car?" he replied.

"You told us to get in, remember?" she added.

"Well, yeah, I did but, -"

"So, if you wouldn't mind, Kingston Theater, please," she requested.

"Oh baby, we got plenty of time. Don't rush the guy," the man countered.

"But I don't want to get a bad seat. We need to get there early," the woman said to the man.

"We have an hour! We're, like, 20 minutes away, tops! You are always in a damn rush," the man replied to the woman.

"You know, I wouldn't have to rush if you weren't always taking your sweet ass time every time we go out somewhere! Which, by the way, is damn near never!" the woman declared bitterly to the man.

"Here we go again! Look, I've told you, I like to take my time. Life's too short to rush through it," the man replied defensively to the woman.

Part of me felt like I should interject right about now.

"You don't like to rush? That's funny! You're so damn quick in bed, I don't even know why I try with you!" inquired the woman of the man.

Yeah, I'm not getting in the middle of this.

"Try with me? Are you serious right now?! I practically have to beg you for a piece of ass!"

"Piece of ass?!" the woman asked angrily. "That's what I am to you? You know what, your sister was right about you. I never should have dated you!"

"My sister?! Why the hell are you talking to my sister about me? My sister ain't got a damn thing to do with any of this!" the man said.

"What does she have to do with this?" rebutted the woman. "Let's just say she doesn't have to beg for this piece of ass!"

GASP!

"What the...? Are you? With my sister?! Are you sleeping with my sister?!?!" bewilderedly asked the man.

"Oh, Honey. No matter how late it gets, we never sleep!" boldly stated the woman.

Silence from the man.

Silence from the woman.

Silence from me.

Silence from Venus, who, during all this, saw my car, noticed people in the back seat, walked around to the front seat, stuck her head in the still open window, and had been listening to this fight since the piece of ass comment.

"I can't do this anymore. I'm done! You're done! You can sell the show tickets for all I care," said the man, brokenhearted.

"I already did! I didn't think you were seriously going to take me. That's why I wanted to get there early to get good seats," the woman replied.

"You had me out here and you sold the show tickets and you waited until we got in the Lyft before telling me?" the man asked, thoroughly confused.

Here! This is where I interject. "Hey guys, I hate to be the one to tell you, but I'm not a Lyft car."

The couple, well, the now former couple, both just turned and looked at me. The man looked awkwardly at me and said, "Why did you tell us to get in your car, weirdo?"

Michelle opened the back door closest to the man. "Us. He thought you were us." She pointed back and forth between herself and Venus.

"Where did you come from?" inquired the man before turning back to his now ex-girlfriend. "Oh, I bet you set this up, didn't you? You with them?"

Tapping on the door, Michelle said, "Well, she is kinda hot. I wouldn't exactly be against it."

Venus and I laughed at Michelle. The woman chuckled a bit herself. "You're not that bad yourself, Doll," the woman replied. They passed a wink back and forth and blew each other a playful kiss from either side of the man.

The man had enough. Flabbergasted, the man looked around at all of us and hurried out of the still-open door. He tried to slam the door shut but Michelle was still holding it open, slowly shaking her head with her crazy girl smile at how flustered he was. He took a few steps away from the car and looked at the woman through the opening. "Dammit, Janet! I hope and I fuckin' pray that I never see you -" he paused to gather himself "- or my fuckin' sister ever again!"

The woman opened her door and stepped halfway out and looked back at the man as he walked away. "I'll see you at Christmas, Honey!" She started to sit back down in the car when she popped right back up. "Oh, and I'm keeping the ring!" She waved the back of her left hand in his direction. She sat back down in the car and closed the door. She started to mock him. "Oh no, you're sleeping with my sister?" She dropped her voice an octave, "I don't wanna see you again." She continued, "Dammit, Janet!"

Venus and Michelle turned to each other and smiled. Venus, looking at Michelle, "Dammit, Janet." Michelle, looking at Venus, "I love you!"

The woman cut us off before we all really got into the song. "Hey, why does everyone have to sing that stupid song! The movie wasn't even that good."

"Are you serious?" I asked.

"Have you even seen Rocky Horror!?" Venus added.

"Is your name Janet Weiss by chance?" Michelle wondered.

Curiously, the woman looked around at all of us. She answered us, in order, "Dead serious. No, never. Bradley, actually. Janet Bradley."

The girls got into the car. Venus turned around in her seat to look at Janet. "It's a cult classic! That song where Brad is confessing his love has to be the best song in the whole damn thing!"

Janet shrugged, "If you say so." Janet looked at Venus and noticed that she was now looking past her, staring out the window behind her. Her facial expression had also gone from fun-filled to

fearful. "You okay, Doll?" Janet asked. Nothing. She looked around at us. Her eyes were bouncing back and forth between me and Michelle. "I wasn't seriously upset. I was just joking."

This caught Michelle's attention too. "Hey V, what's wrong?" No response. Wanting to see what had Venus' attention, she turned her head and looked around.

With my eyes on Venus, I re-adjusted the rearview mirror to see out the rear window. I glanced up and saw police cruisers slowly riding down the cross street, one having turned and parked on the corner. Two officers were walking along the street, focused on an alley.

"V, you good?" I asked.

Janet responded to me first. "I don't know your friend here, but I'd bet she's not okay."

"Zack, I think we should go," Michelle said, voice filled with a mix of confusion and clarity.

As if taking a break from her trance, Venus finally broke her silence. "Go. 'Chell's house. Now." Venus sat down and fastened her seat belt. Michelle and Janet followed suit. "Slowly," Venus added. I shifted the car into drive and proceeded to Michelle's apartment, about 15 minutes away.

A rare hush filled the car. It was more of a noisy silence - where there is no sound made, but everyone is thinking and everyone else knows what everyone else is thinking. Michelle isn't cracking jokes. Janet, although we just met, doesn't seem the type to ride idly by while a stranger drives her to another stranger's apartment in another part of town. But there she is, in my back seat, quiet. And Venus. Something wasn't right and I wanted to poke and prod, but something in the air says it's not a good idea.

I attempted to break the silence. "So, it's Janet, right?"

"Yup!"

"And what's his name?"

"Oh Zack," Michelle interjected, "we don't need to talk about the ex now do we?"

Janet added, "Yes, please spare me. That was a long time coming."

"But with his sister, though?" I asked, trying not to sound judgmental.

"Was she hot, too?" Michelle asked.

With a muted giggle, Janet responded. "Oh Lord, I didn't sleep with his sister. He hates his sister because she was the favorite growing up and he was always complaining and blah blah blah. I

knew it'd piss him off to say that. A bitch move, yes, but man, it feels good to not have to be a part of his compensation/mommy issues." She stopped, then added, like an afterthought, "And yes, she is hot."

Michelle was reeled in, "So, now I gotta know - are you bi?"

I was going to stop her because I felt it was intrusive, but given the conversation, I was curious my damn self.

"When I'm allowed to be, yes. I was only allowed to be a perfect little princess for him. If I even mentioned another woman was cute, he'd wait until we got home and grill me like he caught me in the middle of a damn orgy!"

Michelle chuckled, "I mean, I like orgies!"

Janet laughed, "Well, so do I, but I didn't deserve all that. Hell, tonight we were only going to see this show because I said the lead actress was ugly. I was exaggerating, of course, but that seemed to be the only way he'd go out to see it. So, I assume you're into girls too. Are you bisexual?"

Hearing this, I knew what was coming next. Michelle changed the tone of her voice and delivered her favorite bar pickup line, "Am I bi? Well, 'bi' me a drink and let's find out!"

"Does that line work for you?" Janet asked. I could hear her smiling as she spoke.

"Yes, actually," Michelle answered.

"I see why," Janet replied, her voice sounding flirty.

Trying to hold back my annoyance, I looked over to Venus. Still no expression. I lightly nudged her arm with my elbow. She pulled her arm away and hugged herself, keeping her arms tight. She never looked my way. She just stared forward, out of the windshield. Her usually vibrant face, always active with expression, was blank. I could tell she was breathing harder and her lips were moving, like she was whispering to a ghost.

I wanted to ask her what was going on; she's my friend and I care. Before I could, Michelle tapped my shoulder. I looked back at her and she just shook her head and mouthed the words 'Don't. Not now'. Venus and I were close but I know she's closer to Michelle. I dropped it. We were almost at Michelle's place anyway.

As soon as I stopped the car in front of Michelle's apartment, Venus got out of the car, walked to the apartment, unlocked the door with her extra key, and went inside.

"Is she always like that?" Janet asked.

"No. Next to never." Michelle answered. She hopped out of the car and hurried around to open Janet's door. "Here ya go!"

"Well aren't you just the sweetest! I bet you treat all the ladies this way."

"I mean... yeah, maybe."

I jumped in. "You gonna get mine too?"

Michelle reached for my door handle and pulled her hand back. Smiling, she said, "Nah, I think you can handle it."

We all laughed for a moment. A brief one. A wave of remembrance seemed to wash over all of us at the same time. We all turned and looked at Michelle's apartment door. No sign of Venus inside. The door was closed. No light in the windows. Nothing.

Without shifting my glance, I asked Michelle if she knew what was going on. Hesitant, she said, "I'm not super sure." I wasn't quite buying it. She knew something or at least had an idea and she's keeping it from me.

Janet added her two cents. "She got quiet when she saw those police folks. Doesn't have a record or nothing, does she?" We shook our heads. "Well, then I got nothing. Maybe she recognized someone or something."

Michelle, turning to us rather nervously and said, "Look, I'm gonna go check on her and probably lay down myself. You're good if you wanna stay and chill or whatnot, but I'm kinda over all this. It's been a long day."

I declined. "I'll just head home."

"You sure? You know I got the space." Michelle turned to Janet, "Plenty of space if you need a place to crash for the night."

A brief pause and Janet nodded and held Michelle's hand as they walked towards the door. "Sure Zacky Boy?" She motioned her head towards Janet and back towards the door.

"I'll regret this later, but no, I'm good. I'll call you guys later on."

They waved and I got back in the car. I noticed the light on my phone blinking. A text from Venus: "I'll be fine. Need space. Bad night. Goodnight."

I started up the car and drove home. It really has been a long day.