

Darwin and Caprica: Endings

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The squat, stucco-covered headquarters of Darwin Films sat baking in the sun, its pale brown hue contrasting with the deep blue of the Kansas sky. The only hint of color was the yellow and black triangles of a fallout shelter symbol on a nondescript door in the back. It was fitting, as the stark and utilitarian building gave the sense of a bunker, a fortified structure designed as a barrier against the world.

Stan Darwin was in a dangerously good mood when he arrived. *Point of Tragedy's* gala premiere at the Regent had been a great success, and the orders were already pouring in. This would show the nay-sayers, the pansies, all the ones who said it couldn't be done. They said it under their breath, of course, because none of them would dare say it to his face.

Point of Tragedy was the third release from Darwin Films. In the same vein as Stan's first two movies, it was a ten-minute cautionary tale about the dangers of running with scissors. In her screen debut, Stan's daughter Marcie portrayed a nameless little girl who learned the hard way--or, as the narration suggested, "the sharp way." Stan was still proud of that particular turn of phrase. He was even more proud of Marcie's performance in the film. She had no lines, for his films had no sync sound—overdubbed narration was cheaper and more effective--but he felt she'd really nailed the part.

Stan breezed into the lobby and swept past his secretary Janet, without a word or a glance. He made a beeline for the liquor cabinet in the corner of his office and got out a bottle of wine. The good stuff. It was only nine in the morning (Janet would probably point out that it was actually a quarter to eight, but that

would be just like her, wouldn't it?), but he'd earned it. Last night was a cause for celebration, and damnit, he wasn't done celebrating.

Janet stood the doorway of Stan's office. She didn't like going inside if she could help it. The walls were lined with memorabilia from his days in the mainstream movie industry. His biggest claim to fame was as a stand-in for Tom Haight, the world's top action star. Several of the pictures were of Stan on movie sets, often in costume as a cowboy or a cop, gun drawn. Haight loaned Stan the money to make his first film, *Boyhunter*, about predatory homosexuals. ("Not that there's any other kind," Stan was always quick to point out.) The film was a success; when Stan attempted to repay the loan, Haight told him to use the money to make more movies.

Stan never missed an opportunity to brag about his association with Haight, as well as other celebrities of both upper and lower tiers. If a picture on the wall wasn't of Stan on a movie set in costume, it was of him shaking hands with a movie star. In spite of this, Janet observed, he would also complain about Hollywood's lack of morality and dangerous examples it sets. But that wasn't what she had on her mind just now.

She closed her eyes and took a deep breath. *okay, here goes.* "Mr. Darwin, there's something I'd like to ask."

Sitting at his desk, Stan's attention remained focused on the bottle of wine he was opening. "What would that be, Janet?" His tone was jovial.

Janet opened up her eyes. "Don't you believe in happy endings?" As soon as she said it she regretted her phrasing. *should have said DO you believe in happy endings, darn it.* He picked up on that sort of thing.

Stan finally looked at her, his smile fading slightly. "You know, Janet, I don't think I understand your question."

"Well, we've made three films so far," she said, again wincing inwardly at her phrasing. He didn't visibly react to her use of "we," which could only mean he didn't pick up on it. Stan had a thing about credit going where it was due, and little else set him off like someone taking more of their share. For his second film (*Stranger Danger*), Stan hired a young man to be his assistant--mostly getting him coffee and running various errands. One day, the fellow made a passing reference to himself as the "assistant director." He wasn't familiar with movie terms, but it seemed to make sense. He was assistant the director, right? Stan fired him on the spot.

Presently, Janet continued. "They've all ended badly for the children. Poor little Marcie, impales herself on scissors in your new one, and I don't even like to think about what happened to the child in *Boyhunter*." She paused. Stan said nothing. "I guess what I'm asking is, don't you think you can get the message across without being so...dark?" There. She said it, and she couldn't unsay it.

Stan looked at her coldly. Janet's eyes dropped reflexively to the ground, and she willed them back up, forcing herself to return his look. "Janet," he began, "you do understand the concept of acting, right? That movies are make-believe?"

"Yes," replied Janet, hoping she wasn't showing as much indignation at the question as she was feeling. "It's not that—"

"Good," Stan replied, starting to smile again, returning his attention to the wine bottle. "I'm glad. Of course, that's part of the problem, isn't it? The movies are make-believe. But they're the best I can do, and *someone* has to."

He paused, as though allowing her space to disagree. Janet said nothing.

"I wouldn't expect you to understand," continued Stan. "See, I've tried to tell my daughter everything in my movies. I've tried to tell my nieces and nephews, and the children of my friends. But they don't listen. It all just goes in one ear and out the other. You know how children are. Oh...sorry. I forgot. You wouldn't know, being unmarried and all. My apologies."

Janet bit the inside of her lower lip slightly. *oh, right*, she thought to herself. *this is why I usually don't talk to him unless it's work-related*. The question had been niggling at her, however, and she simply had to know.

The unusually stubborn bottle finally opened, and Stan's smile widened. "You and I know it's make-believe, and the kids know, too. On some level, though, it's also *real* to them. They believe what's on the screen. When they see dangerous behavior without consequences, they don't realize that it doesn't work that way in the real world." He poured himself a glass of wine. "They need to know they are not immortal. They *can* be hurt, and badly. There are bad people out there. The world is an unsafe, dangerous place. It's going to hell in a handbasket, and they have to be ready for anything." Stan sipped at the wine. "I'm so proud of Marcie in *Point of Tragedy*. When you watch her on the screen, you're watching every child who ever thought they would live forever. But they won't. They need to know that. Life doesn't have happy endings, and my movies are life."

The phone rang before Janet could reply. She was grateful.



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