

IT'S JUST US NOW

By Jeff Dunne

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jeff@bearcreations.org

CHARACTERS

ALICIA

A disowned gay woman whose parents died in a car crash after she kicked them out of her apartment.

SETTING

Either at a grave or alone in a funeral parlor.

SCENE

(*Alicia is standing alone, considering the remains of her parents.*)

ALICIA

So. It's just us now, I guess. And maybe God. You said He's always listening, but... you never really believed that, did you. That was just something for *me* to believe, so I'd be a good little girl in all the right ways. Well, I was this afternoon. Were you out there listening to all those pretty words? Seeing all those plaster smiles, those glazed eyes looking down at their watches? But I did say all the right things, didn't I? About how much you'd be missed, and how grateful I was to have been your daughter. I wonder if anybody actually believed any of that crap. But that's what I was supposed to say, right? What they all wanted to hear? Or expected to, anyway. I doubt most of them were even paying attention.

Ebony was, though. And she *knew*. I caught her smiling at me from way in the back. Did you see her there? Were you looking down, and... cringing, or... whatever it was you always when she was nearby? So here's something ironic for you... something you wouldn't know. I think she may have been the only person there who actually felt something positive about you today. Don't get me wrong. She's not going to miss you... of course, neither are any of your so-called "friends", but I bet she was the only person there who thought you did something worth remembering in your lives. Something to make the world a better place. That's what she tells me, anyway. She's wrong, but... I like that about her.

So it's just us now, right? No point in putting on fake smiles, or... pretending that there isn't a part of me that's... really glad you're gone. No. No. I'm sorry. I don't mean that. As parents, you were pretty much an unmitigated failure. Always somewhere else when I needed you, or at least a total let down if you were too slow to get away in time... but I never wanted you to die. And God knows I never wanted to kill you. You have to believe that. I never for a moment... And when I found out...

But, I mean it wasn't... I mean, how could I have known? I couldn't have, right? No one could've. Ebony keeps telling me that. Every day... every day these past two weeks. But I just keep thinking, if I had only let you stay and talk for a few minutes. Even just *one* minute. That would've made the difference. It would, wouldn't it? That car would have plowed through the intersection before you got there, and... and everything would... would be different. But it wasn't. I kicked you out at *just* the right time... the wrong time... and now I'm gonna live with this... this guilt... for the rest of my life.

But damn it, it wasn't my fault! Not totally. If you had been even... had ever *tried* to show a *sliver* of humanity... all those years. I mean, you can't just *show up* after

seven years of silence and expect me to welcome you into our apartment... knowing how you felt... remembering all the things you said... all the things you did. All the things you didn't do.

Tell me something. Why'd you even come? What did you want, really? Did you think I had changed or something? Did you think that Ebony'd be gone and... what? I'd be your little girl with the pig tails... or your young lady with a white boyfriend?

You know, I almost did invite you to sit down. Almost. I was *this* close. I was so surprised to see you... so confused that you came over. Hell, I couldn't believe you even knew my address. Ebony thinks you kept it from one of the cards I sent. *I* sent. *She* was the one who sent them. I bet you never even guessed that, did you. All those birthday and anniversary cards? That was her. I never wanted to waste my time, but she'd always go on about how important family was. I guess that's something you believe if you actually *have* a family. I didn't even sign 'em after the first year, you know. She forged my signature. But I bet you never noticed that either. It's kind of ironic, isn't it? She's the one who kept the connection on life support, even though she was pretty much everything you hated about me. And she always defended you. Always. Always said I shouldn't judge you too harshly, that you were just... just...

God, I remember that night so clearly, like it's... caught in a crystal or something. You, standing there by the door, unbuttoning your coats like you just assumed I'd ask you to stay. Shaking the snow off that stupid brown hat with the tiny feather. I always figured that some bird rolled over in its grave every time you put that hat on. And you both had those phony smiles, the ones you used whenever you came face to face with a stranger. And you just looked at me while you drummed your fingers on that box, like I'd be so happy to see a present. Pretending like I'd be expecting it somehow... like you came by every year with a present. Wrapped up with a blue bow and everything. No, it was a pink bow, wasn't it? Or was it... I don't know. Ebony would remember, I bet. She walked in just as you were starting to hold it out to me. And you froze. Those empty, bullshit smiles frozen on your faces. Like you thought no one could possibly see the disdain in your eyes if your lips were smiling.

There it was. So fucking hypocritical in that roaring silence. Those stupid smiles dangling beneath those shallow, judgmental eyes. Every single time. Every time. You couldn't just... Just that once... you couldn't...

But that's it, isn't it? You *couldn't*. You *really* couldn't. You really were that... that... shallow. Always were. Appearances were the only things you ever gave a damn about. Not achievements, not respect, certainly not love. Just... what the neighbors would think. You know, I remember the day I finally figured that out about you. I think it was as bad as the day you realized I was gay, and dragged me through the park, screaming at me in front of everyone. Worse, actually. Realizing... *accepting* that you really had no idea what it meant to love someone. That's when I lost my respect for you. That's when you transformed from parents into... wardens.

In an odd way, maybe it was a good thing. Maybe it made all the rest of the rejection a little easier.

But you know what, you... you... I deserved parents, damn you! Other kids had parents! Other kids had families! What the hell was wrong with you?! Why couldn't you love me? Or if you really couldn't, why'd you even have me!? What kind of sick, stupid, fucks bring a child into this world when all you wanted was some... was the *appearance* of a happy, well-adjusted family? Why couldn't you just photoshop some smiling baby into a few pictures and call it done? That's all you really wanted, wasn't it?

Or maybe you just hoped you'd have a child who was as shallow and stupid as you. Maybe that would have been better. Maybe then I could have been happy... never realizing what you were really like. You still would have kicked me out eventually, though. Gay is gay, stupid or not. But maybe then I would have let you sit down for a few minutes. At least until you opened your stupid mouths, but that would have been enough, right? Would have been the difference between "stupid and alive" and "stupid and dead".

So here's something I never told you. Ebony and I... we're engaged. Yeah. Wedding's going to be next April. I'm taking her name. Not a big surprise there. I sure as hell don't want yours. Not that we ever uttered it anyway. I never wanted the reminder of being related to you. You know, I almost told Ebony that I was adopted. I used to fantasize about that. But the only thing she'd ever say was that if it wasn't for you, she wouldn't have me. And whenever I told her how much I hated you, she... she just... she'd say that she just pitied you.

I wish *I* pitied you. She used to say that while I was the victim, you were the losers. Hmmp. You know, I don't know that I ever really thought about that... *really* thought about that until just now. She used to say that you were the losers because you lost out on knowing your wonderful child. Ebony can be a little blind from time to time. I've tried to explain to her only about a million times that I'm no prize. But she never listens. That's kind of why I proposed. I figured that I better lock her in before she realizes that I'm just a mess.

You know, I told her that, actually. When I proposed. Full disclosure and all, right? And she said 'I know what you are, Ali, and I was locked in from the moment I first met you.' She can be really sweet. Shame you never even wanted a chance to know her. Your loss. Maybe I can pity you for that.

Or... or did you? Is that why you came by that night? To finally meet your daughter's soulmate? Could that look... that ugly, disdainful look that always made me so embarrassed and ashamed for you... was that just something you couldn't help? A reflex? Is it possible you really did want to reach out after all those years? Is it possible you weren't just being your usual crappy selves? Well, I guess I'll

never know for sure now, will I. But maybe that's not such a bad thing. Maybe if I pretend that you *were* reaching out... I mean, who'd say I was wrong, right? Maybe not knowing is the best answer I could have... a sliver of hope... some hint of a silver lining? If I can... convince myself that you might have changed a little, maybe that's enough. Ebony always says anything's possible. Maybe this one time I'll... well, I'll give it some thought.

Rest in peace, you two. You may not deserve it, but... I hope for it anyway.

(Lights out.)