

Episode 28- "The Next Chapter"

With Balassario gone and the SPD treaty signed, I could finally dedicate myself completely to my work on the show. I had finally set up a time to meet with casting and I was very excited.

I was a little less excited when I finally found out where Dusty had gone off to. He was in Ocean Bluff with RJ. Evidently RJ and his wife had twin girls. I didn't know more than that and honestly didn't want to. RJ had broken my heart in a way no one ever had and it still hurt to think about what could have been if only Aubrey had lived.

Besides, I had a daughter now. Harley was the most amazing little girl ever and Rocky and I were wonderful parents. I had my family. RJ had his. No sense dwelling on the past.

I arrived at the studio for my meeting.

Stu was in the lobby waiting for me.

"Stu, it's so nice to see you." I said.

Stu hugged me. "It's been awhile. I'm glad to see you're doing well. Are you excited to revive our old project?"

I nodded, "Absolutely. This time everyone knows it's not real reality so it will be so much more fun."

We went into a conference room and sat down. Janice, the casting director, was there as well.

"Ms. DeSantos, it's a pleasure to finally meet you." Janice said.

I smiled, "Likewise. And call me Michelle"

"I understand you wanted a hand in casting your TV family." she said.

"Very much. This project is my legacy and it's very important to me that this version of me...the TV me people grew up with...is done right." I said.

"I know you mentioned your ex playing your on screen husband. We talked but couldn't work out a deal. Do you have a back up plan?" she asked.

I blinked. Jon bailed on me. "No, but I will. Give me a minute. Meanwhile, how's the rest of casting going?"

"We found our new leading lady." Janice said.

"We did?" I asked.

"Her name is Josie Totah and she's going to play a cheerleader named Lexi." Janice said.

I cocked my head in confusion. "Isn't she a trans actress?"

"Yes. But no, the role isn't trans. She's just a beautiful young woman we wanted for the part." Janice said.

"She's getting producer credit as well." Stu said.

"Wait, what? A newbie is getting producer credit?" I asked.

"So will you." Stu said.

"But she's a newcomer." I said.

"Yes, and we want to be better to this group of kids than we were to you. I know I didn't do right by you guys like I should have." Stu said.

I didn't like it but how could I argue with that. "Fine."

"We also started auditions for the role of your daughter...Lizzie, right?" Janice asked.

I nodded. "Yes. Elizabeth...Lizzie."

"We have it narrowed down to 5 we'd like to have read for you." she said.

"Wonderful. Set it up." I said, "And I have a solution to the Jon issue."

"I'm all ears." Janice said.

"I have been going about this wrong. Instead of poking fun at my TV image vs real life I need to steer into the skid. Give people the good girl version of Michelle they grew up with. Who would THAT Michelle have married? Not a rock star to be sure." I said.

"Liking where this is going. Do you have an answer to your question?" Janice asked.

"Well, let's see if Stu can answer it since he basically created that image for me." I said.

Stu laughed, "I would say someone upstanding...police officer or firefighter...maybe even a doctor or teacher."

"Bingo." I said, "Another teacher. This Michelle is a choir teacher. I'd say her husband is also a teacher. His name...um...Jonathan...Jonathan Moore. He needs to be an All-American guy. I'm thinking...someone like Kevin Sorbo or Dean Cain."

"I actually know Sorbo's agent pretty well. If you have him specifically in mind I can make a call and see if he's down." Janice said.

I nodded, "That would be the dream casting. If he's interested I'd love to do a chemistry reading with him and see if it works."

"I'll see what I can do and I love what you came up with." Janice said.

"It really is perfect." Stu agreed.

"Gotta give the fans what they want. Let me know how it goes. As for Lizzie Moore...set up the auditions and I'm there." I said.

We talked and brainstormed a little longer then I headed out. I had to pick up Harley from hockey practice and get her to motocross training with Hunter.

I was so happy to have my normal life back. I know...I know...Stefano was still out there somewhere. Maybe. We knew he survived the blast but having not surfaced it was possible he died afterwards. We hadn't had any trace of him. Cam did scans as did Rocky. Nothing came of it. I was happy presuming he was gone for good.

Ninja Storm had gone back to Blue Bay Harbor (Cam had gone on a mission to return the gemstones), except for Dustin and Marah, of course. They were in Ocean Bluff for a few more days then they'd be back in Angel Grove.

Hunter stayed behind too. He needed to regroup and decided he would stay here a little bit as he enjoyed coaching Harley. I would miss having my friends around, but again, it was nice to get my normal life back.

As for the Sonic Rangers...they still had powers but we considered them an inactive team for the moment. They were high schoolers and needed to get back to their own lives. Peyton was busy applying to colleges, Brielle was hard at work trying to get a record deal or a TV role, Rory was busy leading his hockey team to playoffs, and Finn was trying to graduate early so he could get to college.

I got to the hockey rink and found Harley waiting with Rory.

"Hey Har." I said.

"Mommy! Rory was just showing me a new stick technique." she said.

I smiled, "Thanks Rory."

"Anytime. You know I love this kid. She's gonna be the first girl in the NHL someday." Rory smiled back.

"You know it!" Harley said.

"I have to get to practice. Have fun at motocross." Rory said.

"Bye Rory." Harley said as she grabbed her bag.

I waved to Rory and got Harley loaded in the car then we rushed to the track. Hunter was waiting for her.

"Hey kid." Hunter said.

"Hey Hunter." Harley said as she went to go unlock her bike.

"Competition Saturday. Are you ready?" he asked her.

"Always...but practice will help." Harley said.

"Never enough practice. Ever." Hunter said.

I smiled, "I have some errands to run. I'll be back."

"I can take her home." Hunter said.

"You sure?" I asked.

Hunter nodded, "Absolutely."

"OK...have fun Har. Love you." I said.

"Love you too Mommy." she said as she put her helmet on.

I went back to my Jeep and got in just as my phone rang. It was SPD.

"Hello?" I answered.

"Michelle, hi. It's Commander Cruger. I was hoping you were free next Tuesday to give a talk to our cadets." the voice on the other end said.

"I'm free in the afternoon. Is around 2 PM ok?" I asked. I didn't like it but I had to do whatever I could to maintain peace.

"That would be great. We'll see you then." he said.

I hung up and sighed. Why me?

When I arrived at home I was alone. Rocky was working late at the dojo. He had a lot of paperwork to catch up on with Balassario taking up so much of our time. Harley was at practice and so for the first time in a very long time I was alone. It felt weird.

Honestly, I didn't know what to do with myself. I ended up putting on some purple and gray sweats and sitting in front of the TV. I hadn't vegged out in front of the TV alone in ages. It was nice. I ended up turning on a sitcom and tried to relax. It was a foreign concept to me. Hunter texted me and asked if he could take Harley to dinner. I agreed as it meant I didn't have to cook. I knew Rocky would order delivery while he was working and I could just snack.

A couple of hours later Harley walked in with Hunter right behind her.

"Hey! Did you have fun?" I asked.

Harley nodded, "Sure did. Beat my own record time."

"Good job kiddo! Now tell Hunter goodnight and go take a bath. Between hockey and moto you are one stinky child." I said.

Harley laughed, "OK. Goodnight Hunter. See you later."

"Goodnight Har. Sweet dreams." he said high fiving her. She ran upstairs to go bathe.

"Thanks for bringing her home." I said.

"No worries. Where's Rocky?" he asked.

"At work. You can hang for awhile if you want." I said reaching for his hand.

"Mich, no." Hunter said pulling away.

"Hunter, I thought you were dead...it broke my heart...I still love you." I said.

"And I love you. I always will...but I told you...I promised Rocky I wouldn't do anything to break up his family and I won't risk Harley's wellbeing by being the reason her parents split up." Hunter said.

"Rocky would never know." I said.

"Maybe. Maybe not. Either way, I would know." he said.

"Hunter, just one night." I said.

Hunter shook his head, "I can't. I won't. You have to stop. If you insist on cheating go find Jon. I'm not doing that to Harley. She's a good kid."

"Fine. You should go." I said.

Hunter nodded, "Goodnight Mich."

"Yeah. Goodnight." I said as I watched him leave. I knew he was right by at the same time I also missed his touch. I sighed. Maybe it was better this way.

I was pulled from my thoughts by the phone ringing. It was Janice. "Hello? Michelle here."

"Michelle, hey, It's Janice...I have some news, I hope, will be great." she said.

"Oh, I'm all ears." I said.

"Well I called my contact that works with Sorbo and he reached out to...it doesn't matter. Long story short, Kevin agreed to a chemistry reading." she said.

"Seriously? Oh my gosh! That's wonderful news! I'm such a fan of his. I'm stoked to even get the chance to read with him." I said, excited.

"I knew you'd be thrilled. Now, as for Lizzie...how's next Tuesday at 3?" she asked.

Crap. I'd be at SPD. "I'm actually booked. Can we do Thursday at 3?" I asked.

"No good. I'm in different auditions that day. I can do Monday at 2:30." she said.

"Ok, that works. See you then. And thanks again." I said.

"That's what I'm here for...I want to help you bring your vision to the screen." she said.

"Talk soon." I said hanging up. Everything was going great. 2020 was going to be a year to remember, I just knew it.