



The Weekly Man

Episode 16: Monday – Jack

“Time to invoke the Fourth Prerogative.” Panther’s words flowed from a panel of black cars with headlights forming spotlights on the road into Panther’s mouth in the next panel. His eyes were wide but determined. “They’ve pulled out of Knitsburg and they’re on Route 1,” said Leopard as he tracked them on his cell phone with an app he’d developed that tapped into government surveillance satellites. “They’re less than thirty miles away.”

“God knows what they’ve done in Knitsburg,” said Panther in the next panel, which showed the group circled on the floor. In the following panel, a close-up of Bobcat showed her saying, “Nothing good, I’m guessing. Probably poisoned the water supply or something equally as insidious.”

“But the Fourth Prerogative?” said Cougar through a closeup of his face looking both worried and awed. A dialogue balloon led into the next panel with the tail pointing to Panther. “We have no choice.”

On the next tier of panels all seven faces formed a circular pattern looking into the reader’s eyes, their expressions dead serious, and maybe a little frightened. The gutter between this panel and the next was bridged by a square dialogue box leading unto a panel showing the tops of their heads, faces bent down looking into their cell phones. The dialogue box had Panther saying, “We need to synchronize and begin.”

In the next panel, Jaguar says, “But we’ve never done this before. We don’t really know what we’ll be unleashing.”

Jack smiled as his pencil flowed from panel to panel. He still wasn’t sure what the Fourth Prerogative was, but he knew it was something fraught with danger for the Tyranny and possibly for the Unseen themselves.

It was time for a break before finding out what this formidable weapon was. It had to have something to do with their cell phones. He knew this by instinct.

Something in their cell phones, a powerful app against evil.

He brought out his laptop, turned it on and went straight to his mail program. There was a slight tremor in his hands and his stomach was tight. His heart quickened when he saw the email from her.

Jack, I'm so sorry to hear about your accident. I hope you're alright. It sounds like you had a serious fall. How do you feel? And it's a good thing I didn't stay long after our meet up time. Some ass in a baseball cap kept walking by my table and winking at me. Can you imagine? Just walking by and winking. Not even saying anything. Just winking. I think some people should be kept off the streets and out of bars.

Can we meet tonight?

Jack's heart pounded.

I know a nice little coffee shop on Argyle Street. They make the best coffee. You know, the kind that tastes as good as it smells. It's called the Argyle. How's that for imagination? But I guess it might make the place easy to remember and find. I used to frequent a coffee shop called...

And another few pages that Jack read eagerly, sometimes reading lines two or three times.

Can we meet?

Vine

Of course we can. He noticed that she hadn't mentioned the time, but it was always the same, so he would see her at nine. And the man in the baseball cap wasn't one of them. He was just a creep giving her a hard time and if he hadn't chickened out, he would have been there to protect her from him. This time he wouldn't run. He would stay and meet her. Finally.

Argyle Street cut through an old part of the city not far from where Jack lived. In fact, the buildings and streets were much like Jack's area: lots of trees, wide streets and older but well maintained buildings. The Argyle Coffee Shop was on the bottom floor of a four story red brick building. Like all the other buildings on the street, small shops and businesses occupied the main floor with flats and condos on the upper floors. A fenced area outside the Argyle surrounded tables and chairs but the cold air had driven the customers indoors.

Jack stood by the entrance to the patio staring into the windows of the coffee shop. The tables inside were like the ones outside—round with just enough surface area for a cup of coffee and a laptop. They lined the walls leading deep into the building. About two dozen people talked and drank coffee, almost all of them couples. Vine sat near the back, alone, her tan rain coat hanging from a coat rack on the wall by the table. Her black turtle neck sweater contrasted vividly with her bright blonde hair flowing over her shoulders. He'd never actually seen her close up but from a distance he could see that she had almond eyes, light brows and an almost pug nose.

He looked around the street. Street lights muted the autumn colors in the trees. There were no alleys here, but most of the buildings had steps outside leading to basement apartments—perfect concealment for anyone watching him. Everything looked good. No eyes burning hatred through the gates and grates along the road.

Tonight. I'm going to meet her tonight. I'm going to do it. Finally.

He looked back inside the coffee shop. She was still there.

Of course she's still there, fool, she's meeting you there in a few minutes.

A black SUV turned onto the street a block away. Jack froze on the spot, watching it approach. It seemed to him that it might be going far too slowly and there was something suspicious about slow driving black SUVs. He kept his eyes trained on it as it approached. He was partly crouched, ready to spring into a run. He could make out a dark haired woman's vignette as the SUV drove by. His heart beat returned to normal and his shoulders stooped as his breathing relaxed.

Just a woman out for a drive. Nothing to worry about. Nothing to worry about.

He walked up to the door and paused.

What are you doing? You only know her from emails. No. Stop it. Not tonight. What would Crosby do? Fuck Crosby. You're going to meet her. It's going to be OK. You love her. She's not one of them. She loves you. It's time.

He opened the door and stepped inside slowly, eyes darting back and forth at the people sitting along the walls, forming a wall-less hallway leading toward her. Her head was bent over. She was reading something. He walked closer, breath shortening with excitement, stomach curled into a big heavy knot.

She's so beautiful. What does she see in you? You're a big fat nothing. But maybe, just maybe...

He was just a few feet from her table. She was still reading and hadn't seen him. He saw what she was reading. A cell phone.

What's she doing with a cell phone? Who's on the other end? She's supposed to be with me. Who's she texting? Them? She's texting them?

He walked right past her table to the back of the coffee shop and into a hallway that led to the washrooms and the fire exit. He opened the door and ran.

Crosby was right.