



# **The Weekly Man**

## **Episode 24: A Big House in the Country**

The upside of raising seven children occupying one body is not having to change seven diapers each day. But that was about it for the upside. There was no going to doctors, specialists or therapists: that would have made them media freaks overnight. They would spend their lives under the public microscope and never be really free to live their own individual lives, and that was Natalie's biggest concern. She feared that finding out about the others within themselves might cause them all to collapse into one personality and she wasn't going to let that happen. She had seven children, not one less, and she wasn't giving any of them up. Ever.

It took planning—long grueling hours of planning—but she had Manzer, who'd become a godfather to the kids and offered to use his government contacts to create legal identities for each of them. Thanks to Manzer, they each had their own birth certificate with different last names—and birth dates one day apart.

She bought a sprawling country house in the center of ten acres of land far enough from any town or city to isolate them from the contradictions of the outside world but close enough for them to know it was there.

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While she was still in the hospital, she noticed things they had in common: they fell asleep at exactly midnight and, an hour or so into that sleep, she could see the transformation in their faces and body postures. She watched the nervous agitation of Jack give way to the quiet confidence of Jackson and then to the mystical in Jax—and finally to Jackie. She knew that Jackie would always be at odds with herself—a woman in a man's body, aware of it every moment of her life. It was going to be tough but Natalie knew that she would find a way to bring some kind of balance into Jackie's life.

In the meantime, there was much to do.

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When they began to speak she noticed another thing they had in common: they perceived the passage of time in a different way from the rest of the world. Their one day was their week. When faced with the other six days, they weren't puzzled, they just didn't see them. It was as though they occupied a plane of existence where the hours of a week compressed into the hours of a day. She knew this would be a problem when they started interacting with the outside world, so she worked out survival strategies for them.

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She wasn't surprised that Jackie was the first to notice something different about time. In a way, she existed outside the body of the other six and Natalie assumed that she would always be the first one to question things because she'd already be questioning things.

It happened on a rainy Sunday morning when Jackie was five. They were homeschooling at the kitchen table Jackie pointed at a schedule fixed to the refrigerator door with magnets.

"What's that?" she said.

Natalie followed her finger to the schedule showing the days broken into periods of learning and play for each of the children. She immediately realized that the schedule and anything like it would have to go or be hidden. "Oh, that's just something I use to remember things."

"But what are Monday and Tuesday and those other names along the top?" She looked into Natalie's eyes, not with puzzlement, but interest. "I've heard of them from some of my books and on the internet, but they're all wrong."

"And why is that, Sweetheart?"

"Because Wednesday isn't as long as Tuesday and Thursday." She chuckled. "Nobody takes all Wednesday to eat lunch." She laughed loudly. "You're going to remember things all wrong, Mommy!"

It took Natalie a few minutes to catch on. Jackie was seeing the schedule the way she perceived her days: the row of days at the top of the schedule was the column of time periods of her day. Though the periods were different lengths of time, she'd assimilated the concept of the seven day week into her life as seven periods of her day. Natalie used this phenomenon to build a construct of the world outside the house that would allow her children to function out there.

They made it easy for her with their stubborn refusal to see time in any way other than their own. The rest of the world had a problem, not them, and Natalie capitalized on this and took it further with a mystical approach to their education that included a dream state in which they might do things they might not remember later. This dream state, reasoned Natalie, would explain those times when their lives might overlap, like when they couldn't remember how they'd cut a finger.

As they grew older, they stopped thinking of this as some mystical dream state and just shrugged off things that were suddenly different.

*Oh yeah, that. Just like Mom said.*

It was as though some inner mechanism operating in each of them was busily patching up the cracks of inconsistencies before they became holes, allowing them to function in a world that might have been in another dimension.

She never fooled herself, though, that things would be easy for them, or for her. There would be sacrifices. Their lives would not be the same as the lives of others. No matter how well the

coping mechanisms worked, confrontations with the realities of the rest of the world were inevitable. The best Natalie could do was to prepare for those eventualities, anticipate them, think them through and plan for them.

She and Manzer made lists of scenarios—thousands of them—everything from schooling to friendships they'd make as they grew. They planned for jobs, romantic relationships, social circles where they might come into contact with people who knew one or more of the other personalities. They made lists of every possible interaction they could have with each other, like how their rooms would be arranged and the clothing they would wear that would be dictated by their personal tastes.

In the end, they would be lonely, cut off from the rest of the world in many ways and always feeling that something at the essential level of their being was not quite right. She was glad now for the way she'd named them; the similarity in names would help later when they came into contact with people known by the others. They would have to spend their early childhood in the house, homeschooled, limited in their contact with the outside world until they were ready to fit into it on their own terms. If they wanted to attend college, it would have to be online.

But, no matter how much they planned and prepared, there would always be the matter of their independence. They had to be free to be themselves as much as possible. Natalie could not always be there to hold their hands but she also needed to be close by to put out the fires caused by unforeseen events. At some point and at some level, she would have to leave them.

So they planned her death. And they planned her resurrection.