



The Weekly Man

Episode 26: A Big House House in the Country 3

The aroma of spaghetti sauce in the big steel pot flooded the kitchen. It was Jacky's favorite meal—with meat balls, mushrooms and lots of hot garlic bread. They sat at the table looking at pictures in a wall calendar. Jacky had a collection of them but this was his favorite, big colorful pictures of brilliant yellow dandelions swaying in fields of green grass, huge long-stemmed dandelions reaching into blue skies, patches of dandelions spilling out of river banks, three dandelions breaking through concrete steps leading up to a blue door. This was his favorite picture in the calendar.

“Why don't we just let them grow, Mom?” he said. “I mean, they were there before the steps. And they're prettier than the steps.”

“But how would you get up to the door,” said Natalie.

“We could've built the door lower, or somewhere else maybe.”

Natalie smiled. “I guess that just wasn't in the building plans, dear.”

“We probably killed a lot of plants with those steps.” He looked at the picture and placed his right index finger over the base of the stairs. “We should build around the plants instead of on top of them.”

Natalie laughed quietly. “I don't think that would leave us much room for buildings. We wouldn't have many places to live.”

“You mean, like here...this house?” He thought a moment. “We probably have hundreds of plants under the basement right now, trying to grow into the sun.” He looked into Natalie's eyes. “I know we have to live here but I kind of feel sorry for them.” He smiled. “Do we really need a driveway?”

They laughed together. “Yes, Jacky, we need the driveway. Besides, most of the plants and trees around here are OK. We're just sharing a small part of the space with them.”

He smiled. “I know. I just can't help feeling that there's so much life under everything we build, like we just know about a small part of everything we see.” He looked back at the picture. “I feel like that a lot, Mom, like I'm just a small part of something bigger. And I want to see that

something bigger.” He looked back at Natalie and put a hand over her hand. “Can I have a camera for my birthday?”

“A camera?”

“So that I can take pictures of the things we don’t see.”

“But if we can’t see them, how can you take pictures of them?”

“I’ll look for them. You know, coming out of the steps, under the steps, on the sides of the driveway.”

Natalie wrapped her hand around Jacky’s hand. “Tell you what, if I get you a camera for your birthday, can we keep the house and the driveway?”

Jacky jumped up and threw his arms around her. “Yes! We can keep the house! And the driveway!” He hugged her tightly. “I love you!”

She let him hug her for a couple of minutes while he repeated “I love you” before pulling away. “I think the spaghetti’s ready. Hungry?”

“Yes!” He jumped up. “I’ll get the dishes out.” He hurried to the cupboard. As he opened the cupboard door he turned to Natalie, eyes wide with excitement. “I’m going to have a camera!”

Yes, you are, Sweetheart. It’s the least I can do for you before I go away.

A cool early evening breeze swept across the lawn and onto their faces as they sat on the swinging couch on the porch. They turned their faces into the breeze, enjoying the relief after an unusually hot autumn day. Natalie pushed her legs lightly into a slow swing. Jacques loved to sit on the swinging couch but only if it were slow. Fast swings quickly brought on nausea.

Jacques turned his eyes back to his laptop, to the story he’d written that morning. ““And she sat by the window waiting for him,” said the house.” He turned his eyes to Natalie and said, “The end.”

Natalie smiled. “That was beautiful, Jacques. You write such wonderful stories. But I have a suspicion that the beautiful woman in this story might be me. Is that true?”

Jacques blushed lightly. “Maybe.” Coyly. “What makes you think it’s you?”

“Let me see, it’s always the same woman and her name is always Natalie.” She put her hand on his arm. “Who do I know whose name is Natalie?”

Jacques laughed and threw his arms around her, almost dropping the laptop. “You! It’s you, Momma!”

They hugged for a moment before he released his grip and grabbed onto his laptop just as it was beginning to slide off his legs.

“But why am I always so lonely? And always waiting for someone?”

Jacques’ smile evaporated into a frown. “Because you *are* lonely, Momma.” He placed a hand against her cheek. “And in my stories, the house knows it.”

She put her fingers on his left cheek. “And how do you think the house knows it?”

He moved his lips slowly, as though the words were trapped in his mouth and he was trying to push them out with his lips. After a moment: “Because...because that’s how I feel about the house. I can feel something there besides you and me, Momma, but there’s nobody else here, so it can only be the house. I think it reads our thoughts.”

Natalie smiled. “So, you think the house is our friend?”

“Yes, Momma, of course it’s our friend. It loves us and wants us to be happy. And it wants to tell our stories.”

“So that’s why you have the house telling your stories?”

Jacques considered this a moment. “Yes. It’s the house telling the story through me.”

Natalie laughed. “Why that’s a wonderful thought, dear. So, now there’s three of us living here, and two of us are storytellers.”

Jacques giggled. “Yes! And maybe more.”

The smile dropped from Natalie’s face. “What do you mean by more?”

Jacques thought a moment. “The other people in our stories, Momma.”

Relieved, Natalie smiled. “Of course. The other people in your stories.”

“Our stories, Momma, our stories.”

Natalie hugged him to her. “Yes, our stories.”

Jacques lifted his face up from her chest and looked deep into her eyes. “I wish I would have known Papa. I put him in some of the stories as the prince you’re waiting for. Please, Momma, tell me more about him.”

She released her hold on Jacques. “There’s really not much to tell, dear. He was a very nice man, very kind. And very handsome. And very smart. It broke my heart when he was killed in the car accident, but he left me with something very precious.”

“What was that, Momma.” He smiled. He already knew the answer but wanted to hear it again for the hundredth time.

“You, my dear. You were in my belly.”

They both giggled and then laughed. “Momma?”

“Yes?”

“You never told me how you and Papa met. How did you meet?”

“Let me see, how did your Papa and I meet?” She thought a moment. “Oh, right. We met in a laundromat.”