



The Weekly Man

Episode 27: A Big House in the Country 4

Natalie knocked softly on the bedroom door. “Jac? Jac? Will you come out please?” The door was locked only by the agreement Natalie had with all seven of her children: that she open the door only with their permission; otherwise, it stayed closed. There was no answer. “Jac? Please, come out.”

She’d told Jac about Alex not coming over anymore a few hours earlier. She couldn’t tell him the truth: Alex’s therapist had warned his parents that seeing Jac was not good for him, that something about Jac was upsetting him more and more with each visit. It was affecting Alex’s behavior in other areas, and not in a good way. His parents finally had to keep Alex away from Jac. Natalie knew what the problem was. Alex’s autism might have made him sensitive to the other personalities. He very likely sensed their presence but could only see Jac. Natalie could see how that would bother him but not to the extent that the two boys should be kept apart forever. That seemed to her a little bit of overkill and it reaffirmed her decision to keep her children’s personalities secret from each other and from the rest of the world.

She knocked again, a little louder this time. “Please, Jac, come out and I’ll make some hot chocolate and we’ll talk.” She knocked again, a little softer this time. “I know how much it must hurt you and I’m sure it’s hurting Alex as well...”

“It is?” His voice was faint, almost pleading.

“Is what, dear?”

“It’s hard on Alex too?”

“Yes, Jac, I’m sure it is. But it wasn’t his choice to stop coming over.”

“It wasn’t?”

“No, Jac, it wasn’t even his parents. They think the world of you. It was someone whose working with him, on his...condition. Alex loves you like a brother and I’m sure he’s feeling awful right now.”

He was silent for a while. Natalie put her ear against the door but she kept her hand off the doorknob.

After a few minutes: “Mom?”

“Yes, dear.”

“What’s the point?”

“The point of what, Jac?”

“Why do we let ourselves be happy?”

“Because that’s what makes everything worth living for, dear.

“Well, maybe everything isn’t worth living for.”

“No, dear, don’t say things like that. I know you’re feeling a lot of pain right now. Alex was your closet friend...”

“Alex was my only friend. My only friend. And they took him away.”

She thought she heard crying but couldn’t be sure. It was becoming increasingly difficult to keep her hand away from the doorknob. “Jac, please come out. We need to talk about this. Please, Jac.”

“Talk isn’t going to bring Alex back. I don’t want to talk. I just want everything to come to an end.”

“No, Jac. You mustn’t say things like that. Maybe...maybe Alex will be able to come see you after things have been cleared up. We don’t know...”

“Alex isn’t coming back, Mom. He’s not coming back. Ever!”

“Jac...”

“And I don’t want him to come back. You hear me? I don’t want him to come back.”

“I can’t believe she’s gone, Uncle Manzer.” Jackie’s eyes were tearing up. It had been three weeks since they’d faked Natalie’s death and though the kids were adapting well, they would likely feel the pain for a long time. Natalie was pretty much the only other person in their lives. Some of them had had friends over the years but those friendships hadn’t lasted long. It was difficult to maintain any kind of close relationship when you were just around for one day of the week. But the kids had done well for the most part, especially considering there were seven of them— seven separate personalities that had to adjust to an extraordinary situation.

“I know, Jackie.” He stroked her forehead. She was sitting on his lap in the living room. A fire blazed and cracked in the fireplace. Large flakes of snow fell silently outside. “I’m going to miss her too. She was a wonderful woman.”

It broke Manzer’s heart to tell them, especially having to experience it seven times, day after day, for a week. There had been tears, plenty of tears from all but Jac. He’d sunk into a brooding funk, staring expressionlessly into the air. It almost seemed like he’d been expecting the news and he accepted it with a grim fatalism. Manzer decided that he would have to keep a close eye on Jac.

But for now, he needed to deal with Jackie. She was the one who would have the greatest hurdles. She’d already surmounted so many—to be a girl in a boy’s body and to know that something was wrong.

“Am I going to have to go away from here?”

“No, sweetheart, you won’t have to go away.” Manzer looked her in the eye. “I’ve made arrangements. Your mother and I talked about what to do if anything happened to her. And I’ve made those arrangements.”

“What arrangements, Uncle Manzer?”

“Well, let me see, do you remember Miss Winchester?”

She nodded yes. “I like her. She’s funny and she makes wonderful pies.”

“Yes.” He smiled. “She does make wonderful pies.” She stroked her forehead again. “Well, Miss Winchester is going to come here to live.”

“You mean all the time?”

“All the time, sweetheart. She’s a retired teacher and she’ll be continuing your homeschooling.”

Jackie turned her head toward the fireplace and stared into the fire. Without looking away from it, she said, “I wish Mom were here, though. I miss her so much.”

“I know, sweetheart, I know. And I know that no one can ever replace her. And Miss Winchester knows that as well. She won’t be trying to replace your mother. She just doesn’t want you to be alone or to have to leave your home.”

“Uncle Manzer?”

“Yes, sweetheart.”

“I never feel like I’m alone. I always feel like there’s other people around. I don’t know where they are. It’s like, sometimes I feel that I can look behind me and see them but they’re not there. But they are there.”

“How does that make you feel, sweetheart?”

“I don’t know. I guess I spend a lot of time trying to make sense of it.”

“And how...”

“Uncle Manzer...”

“Yes, sweetheart.”

“It almost seems to make sense to me that I’m not me, that I’m someone else.”