



The Weekly Man

Episode 35: Sunday - Jackie

She couldn't believe the amount of material on sex change operations on the internet. There were YouTube videos, forums, chat rooms and even DIY sites. The DIY sites. Do It Yourself sex change. They were chilling. She came across a question and answer DIY site with thousands of questions from people want to know how to change their sex on their own.

There were a lot of bad answers, like a question from a boy who said he always wanted to be a girl but couldn't afford the operation and wanted to know how to do it himself. Some idiot actually gave him directions, suggesting that he cut his testicles off first and have lots of rags handy. And then he wished him good luck.

What kind of psycho?

She found a blog posting about a man who wanted to be a woman all his life. He was married and had children. One day he went up to the washroom, telling his wife that he had a headache. He took some painkillers and used a home surgery kit to cut off his penis. After his 'surgery', he went downstairs and told his wife to call an ambulance. Apparently, the doctor told him he'd done a good job.

Yeah, give the man a medal for almost killing himself.

She scrolled down the search results, fascinated that there was so much. It was like nobody was feeling right with themselves. For the time being, everything else in her life was on hold. Finding a theater for her most recent play could wait a while. She already had two active plays out there. She had some ideas for new ones but they could stew in her subconscious for a while.

She rubbed the top of her head and started wondering again what had happened, but not for long. This kind of thing had happened before—not so much lately but it wasn't new to her. She decided to let it drop. Thinking too hard about some things created a lot of questions and stress that led nowhere.

Let it be. You have things to do.

Besides, nothing about her life had ever made sense anyway. Until now. She started reading an article called Clinical Studies On Sex Change when she heard a knock at the door. It wasn't hard,

but it wasn't soft. It wasn't Mrs. Gilbert. She knew her knock. Firmly soft. Just enough to get her attention but not so much as to jar her. And it wasn't Mr. Joyce. She would definitely have been jarred. She wondered who it could be. She couldn't think of anything she might have ordered that would be delivered. She never had visitors, unless it was one of the theater owners or a director with questions about one of her scripts. Even then, she dealt with most of those people online through email, Skype or some form of messaging. And when they wanted to meet in person, they made an appointment. This was someone without an appointment.

Jackie stood up and walked to the door. She put her hand on the knob but didn't turn it right away.

Who would be calling on me in the middle of the afternoon?

Another knock, this time a little harder. Jackie turned the knob and opened the door. Standing in the hall in a dark brown cardigan coat was a tall blonde woman with red cheeks—her blue eyes brimmed with tears. She looked Jackie up and down; she seemed to be confused. She looked Jackie in the eyes, opened her mouth and said, "Jacky?"

Who is this woman? Why is she looking at me like this and how does she know my name?

"Yes," she said. "And who are you?"

Krista breathed in deeply, loud. She cocked her head to the side, opened her mouth, squinted her eyes and said, "What do you mean, who am I? Who do you think I am? And why are you wearing pink pajamas?"

Suddenly, Jackie didn't like this woman. "I don't have a clue who you are and I'm wearing pink pajamas because I'm wearing pink pajamas." She gripped her left hand around the edge of the door ready to slam it. "I don't know how you know my name but I think it's time for you to leave."

"Jacky, it's me...Krista!"

Jackie tried to remember if she knew a Krista from one of the theaters, possibly an actress or a crew member. "Do you work for one of the theaters?"

Krista thought about this for a moment. "Theaters? Why would I be working for a theater? Jacky, if this is some kind of joke, it's not funny. I've been going through hell." Tears began to streak her cheeks. "I love you, Jacky. I love you! And I know you love me. We can make this work, Jacky."

She stepped forward with her arms out as though to embrace her. Jackie slammed the door shut and locked it.

Krista stared at the closed door. Shock quickly dried up her tear ducts.

He slammed the door on me. He doesn't know who I am. And why is he wearing pink pajamas? Is he some kind of cross-dresser? He didn't recognize me.

Krista had no doubt that Jacky hadn't recognized her. She could see it in his eyes, not an iota of emotion. There was nothing. A complete blank. She might have been a complete stranger. And there was something about his eyes, something she couldn't quite point to and say, "This. Yes...this." She didn't know what it was except, they were different. She lifted her hand to knock on the door but just as she was about to knock her hand dropped to her side.

His eyes. What is it about his eyes?

She stood in front of the door for several minutes, hands at her sides, staring at the wood panelling on the door, letting it slowly sink in.

Those weren't his eyes. There was someone else behind those eyes.

She backed away from the door, turned and ran past the stained glass window and down the stairs. Just as she came to the high double doors, one of them swung open almost hitting her in the face. She stopped running and stood still as the door opened completely and a huge elderly man bundled in a black winter coat, paisley scarf and black Russian hat appeared before her looking just as surprised as she did. After a few seconds, he smiled and moved to the side to let her out as he held the door open. She smiled back as best she could and walked past him and down the steps.

They weren't his eyes. What have you gotten yourself into now?

Damn, thought Manzer as he watched Krista rush past him, cheeks glistening with tears. Looks like things are already getting out of control.

He'd been out of town when he heard about Natalie's heart attack and had booked the earliest flight possible to get home and check on the kids. The kids. Even in their thirties, he thought of them as "the kids." And now the kids could be in deep trouble. Natalie, as Mrs. Gilbert, had been making sure that things ran smoothly. She monitored their computer activity, took care of their finances, shopped for some of them, rearranged the flat when they slept so that everything would appear normal for the one who woke up the next day. She'd been doing this seven days a week for all the years they'd been living here. And now, without any warning, she was in the hospital. And the kids were on their own.

She'd filled him in on what was happening with them but he hoped that she would recover quickly because he wasn't sure if he could keep the lid on things and it looked to him that he'd arrived just when the shit was about to hit the fan.

He came to their door and knocked. Sunday. Jackie. He heard her voice on the other side of the door. "Go away! Go away now or I'll call the police!"

Yep, time for some serious damage control.

He called out, "That's no way to welcome an old friend."

There was complete silence for a moment and then: "Uncle Manzer?"

The door practically flew open. Manzer opened his arms and Jackie practically jumped into them. Manzer pointed with his thumb toward the doorway where Krista had left. "Friend of yours?"

"No, Uncle Manzer. I have have no idea who that was. Somebody named Krista who says she loves me and thinks that I love her. And somehow she knows my name."

Just the sound, not the spelling. So that's the woman Natalie said Jacky brought home, coming to see him when he doesn't exist. This is going to be messy.

"I'll look into this for you, Jackie," he said. "But right now, I have some bad news for you."

Jackie put a hand to her lips. "What's going on?"

"It's Mrs. Gilbert. She's had a heart attack."

Jackie covered her mouth and stared for a moment at him.

"It was a close one. She somehow survived the night and Mr. Joyce found her in the morning and called an ambulance. She's doing fine now but she'll be in the hospital for another week or so."

Jackie's shoulders slumped with relief. She let out a long sigh. "I'm so glad to hear that she's OK. She's such a sweet person. When did it happen?"

“A few days ago. She...”

“And you said an ambulance came for her?”

“Yes. Is something wrong?”

“Not really, I guess. I just think it’s strange that I didn’t hear the ambulance arrive.”

Right. Jack was the one who would have been aware when the ambulance arrived. I’ll have to tell each of them individually except Jack.

“I think it happened at night. You might have been asleep.”

With a faraway look in her eyes, she said, “Maybe. I do sleep deeply.” She shook her head slowly. “But I didn’t think I slept *that* deeply. I mean, an ambulance. Sirens. Flashing lights.”

“Well, you would have been in your bedroom.”

Such a simple situation but so potentially dangerous. How does that woman manage to hold all this together so well? And for all these years.

His gaze settled on the top of her head. The bandage had been removed but there was a patch of missing hair filled with a dark scab on top of a bump. “What happened to your head?”

She touched the bump and rubbed it lightly. “I’m not sure. But it’s nothing serious.”

Which means the others will have the same thing and one of them has had an accident.

He walked over to her and took a closer look. “Well, it seems to be healing well. So, you don’t remember what happened?”

“No. It was just there.” She smiled. “But I’ve had this kind of thing happen before. I try not to even think about it.”

And that would be your mother’s training. How did she ever manage all this?

“I’m going to be in town for a while so I’ll be dropping in and checking to see that everything’s OK. How’s your next play coming along?”

The smile returned. “I’ve just finished it. I think it’s my best one yet.” Again the smile disappeared, and replaced with a faraway look. “There’s something I’ve been thinking a lot about lately, Uncle Manzer. Can we talk?”

“Of course we can. You wouldn’t happen to have any coffee would you?”

Jackie laughed and walked quickly to the kitchen. “Have a seat, Uncle Manzer. I’ll be right back.”

A sex change? She wants to get a sex change? But then, why wouldn’t she? She’s a woman.

Jackie stared into Manzer’s eyes and he could almost feel the torment roiling inside them. This had been her life since childhood. She’d never known a moment of stability, of feeling right with herself. He touched the side of her head as he stood in the doorway. She’d told him everything, even the weird DIY stuff. She was serious. She wanted to get a sex change.

He wondered if the others had any sense of what was happening with Jackie.

Rustic. It was the only way to describe Natalie’s apartment. Rustic—country rustic. There was a sparse simplicity about her place, a lot of woodwork showing the actual grain as opposed to paint. No metal frames here. Most of the furniture was from the old house. She’d told him she couldn’t part with it—too many memories of her and the kids. He went up to a painting of a boy laying on the ground, back against a tree, holding a wooden fishing rod. The rod’s string led to a

red and white popper floating in a pond. He reached up to the painting and turned it to a forty-five degree angle. A few seconds later, the wall swung inwards, revealing a sophisticated electronic control room with computers, monitors and control panels.

Well, time to catch up and get things under control.