



The Weekly Man

Episode 49: Sunday - Jackie

Jackie was just finishing washing her breakfast dishes when she heard the familiar knock. She hadn't expected it so soon and immediately felt a rush of guilt for not visiting Mrs. Gilbert in the hospital. She strode to the door and opened it.

"I'm so sorry, Mrs...." The guilt vanished immediately, replaced by amazement. "You did recently have a heart attack, didn't you?"

Natalie laughed heartily. "Yes, I did Jackie. But, it turned out to be more of a warning signal than a threat. Mind you, I will have to make some diet changes and take some medication, but all in all, I'm feeling very good." She crossed her arms. "Just thought I'd drop by and see if there's anything you need."

Jackie smiled as she closed the door. It was as though nothing had happened to Mrs. Gilbert. She was as vibrant as always and not the slightest dimming of the sparkle in her eyes. She still felt bad about not visiting her in the hospital but she knew that Mrs. Gilbert understood.

That's one tough woman. But you really should have gone to the hospital to visit her. Why didn't you? Why didn't you go to the hospital to visit her?

Jackie knew there was a reason, a very exact reason for her not visiting Mrs. Gilbert but she couldn't define it. It was there, lurking somewhere just under the surface of all the excuses she might try to make up like "I wasn't feeling well." "I was trying to deal with a crazy lady." "I'm kind of preoccupied with getting my sex changed." There was something else, something familiar even.

What is that? Why didn't I visit her?

She sat down at her laptop and stared at the blank monitor for a few minutes. She didn't feel like researching sex changes today. She didn't feel like writing. She let out a long dissatisfied sigh, stood up slowly and walked to the window. It was overcast with that amount of gray that

could go either way, rain or just more cloud. For some reason, she started to think about the weather forecast. It appeared on her custom tool bar, the temperature and the condition—whether it was rain, sun, cloud, or snow. She seemed to recall it forecasting clouds for today. She wondered about the usefulness of a forecast when all she had to do was look out the window and there it was, the weather: sunny with clouds, heavy rain and high winds, light snow.

What's the use of a weather forecast?

Almost as soon as the thought came into her mind she was distracted by the milling crowds of people in the park. Nothing ever stopped the park people from going to the park and doing their park thing. The runners would run in hurricanes if they had to. The bench warmers would bring plastic and umbrellas if they had to. The baby walkers would walk their babies because they had to, or go nuts. A thought suddenly popped into her mind.

She'd never gone for a walk in that park. She'd never sat on one of those benches. The park had always been like an enclosed glass container that, when you shook it, the inside would fill with weather and people would do things in that weather. It was never something that she felt was a part of her, other than something she observed every day and, over the years, had seen the same people coming and going and doing their park thing. She wondered why she'd never given them names and it occurred to her that she'd never even wondered about any of them, what they did when they weren't in the park, where they lived, what kind of buildings they lived in, where they worked, what their families were like. And she was a writer.

Shouldn't I be looking at people and asking myself those questions? Shouldn't I be curious? I'm a writer for god's sake. I should be down there mingling with those people, observing them closely, listening in on conversations, taking notes, getting to know a few people and asking them about the others.

She knew the seniors who spent their days on the benches eager to talk to anyone who would listen would have much to say about the area and likely most of the people who were regulars at the park. She could learn so much from them.

And what about just lying in the grass and looking up at the cloud formations through the branches of the trees with their fiery boughs of fall colors that were just starting to fade. What about strolling along the sidewalk and stopping to admire the wilting flowers in the gardens scattered throughout the park?

All these years and I've never done any of those things. Well, time to change that.

She strode into the bedroom and changed into jeans and a sweater, put on her jacket from the coat rack by the door and went outside.

Sitting on the steps outside her building, she stared across the street at the rich source of experience and conversation that was hers for the taking once she started to mingle and become part of the movement and rhythm of the park. She thought about listening to the seniors talking about their working lives and how happy they were to finally be away from the grind, or how much they missed having a place to go from nine till five other than a park bench. She pictured herself standing next to a large maple tree, looking out over a dying garden and listening to the conversation of couples and groups as they passed. She looked at a clearing in the park and imagined herself lying on her back staring into the sky with nothing particular on her mind.

She sat on the step throughout the afternoon and evening until it was the time and went upstairs. She went to the washroom and then went directly to bed without eating.