



The Weekly Man

Episode 5: Thursday – Jacky

Jacky's Visuals wasn't a full-scale art gallery with expensive Scandinavian furniture, high walls with ample negative space between paintings and podiums decked with sculpture. Far from it. It was a kiosk not far from the food court at the Frederick Street Mall. Unlike the other kiosks there were no counters or cash registers, there were no shelves or display cases. In fact, nothing was solid except the floor where painted footsteps outlined a back and forth trail in an area of about two hundred square feet...like a path through a maze.

When you stepped on the footsteps an amazing thing happened. All around you, walls hung with photographs of flowers and green plants growing out of concrete and the brick foundations of buildings sprung out of the floor. Giant yellow dandelions sprouted out of grates. Breathtaking images sprung out of the floor. You could reach out and put your hand right through them.

Jacky's Visuals was a holographic maze activated when you stepped on that magic floor.

On the last wall a holographic touch screen let you buy the images in the gallery. You could order framed prints or electronic copies and, every Thursday, you could meet the artist at the end of the path.

Today was Thursday and Jacky was talking to a beautiful blonde woman somewhere in her early to mid-twenties. Jacky was a good looking mid-thirties man who emanated a casual confidence that attracted women instantly. He was used to the blonde's dreamy faraway look and he often wondered if he could leave the mall with a different woman each day—something for some reason he'd never tried.

“And you took all of those images right here in the city?” She gestured towards the area she'd just walked through even though nothing was showing at the moment.

Jacky smiled. He'd heard this question hundreds of times. It never failed to amuse him how people found it hard to miss all that beauty they passed every day until they saw his images.

“Yes. In fact, all these pictures were taken within a ten block radius of here.”

“Ten blocks!” The woman’s eyes widened as she reached out her arm and put a hand on his forearm. “But I’ve never seen anything like this around here and I’ve been living here for over a year.”

Jacky smiled his usual confident smile. “It’s all around us on every street, every sidewalk, every block, growing out of buildings, railings, manhole covers and the bases of street lights. We just don’t stop long enough to notice it.”

The woman leaned closer, “Maybe I could come with you on one of your photo trips sometime,” she said, tapping her cell phone against her cheek. She gave him her business card and he said he would get in touch with her soon, though he wasn’t sure if he would but it was nice to think he would. He felt a light tap on his right shoulder and turned to see one of his regular customers, Nelson McCain, a businessman who seemed to be as fascinated with city plant life as he was. Jacky smiled and was about to say hello when Nelson said: “I could have sworn I saw you the other night, Monday, on Point Street. But the man I saw was kind of hunched over and wearing a hoodie and seemed to be almost startled when he saw me. Amazing resemblance though.”

“I get that a lot, Mr. McCain,” he said. “I swear I have an army of doppelgangers roaming the city. You said you saw him on Point Street? Haven’t been there in weeks.”

“Suspicious looking fellow,” said McCain. “Picture yourself as Gollum. Something like that.”

“I think I’d rather picture myself as something else, like an eagle or a terrier.”

They both laughed and Jacky showed him some of his new work. He was getting used to people telling him they thought they’d seen him but it still seemed strange, as though he actually did have an army of doppelgängers roaming the city streets.

Jacky had sold a dozen prints and he was happy, especially since the blonde had come back half an hour after she left and bought a print of red tulips growing out of a grate beside a construction site. That was the crux of his work—no matter how much concrete and pavement we spread over nature, she’ll always be working to strip it all away. Without the continuous battle of repairs and maintenance, most of what we’ve built for millennia would be mostly gone in a few hundred years. As he rode around on his bike looking for images, he imagined he could feel that buried life waiting to see the sun again.

The autumn air felt good on his face as he bicycled leisurely, looking for a flower breaking through a crack in the sidewalk or wild grass surrounding a metal grate, loosening the pavement supporting it. He loved bicycling this time of the year. The fresh brisk smell and the overwhelming color triggered his senses and he wanted to photograph every square inch of it but he kept to his theme—plants reclaiming the earth. There was so little time to do it. He’d read that, as you grow older, time appears to accelerate, the days seem shorter and the years pass the way months used to pass. This was the way Jacky had always viewed his life. Every day passed in an instant as though he occupied just a short space of time each day and the rest flowed past him like a shadowy presence he could sense but never see.

Oh well.

He loved bicycling. There was a freedom to it that he didn’t feel in a car. Sure, a car was faster and would seem to add some very usable time to his life but he would miss so many potential shots and there was the problem of parking, dealing with traffic...and just the size of the car seemed somehow prohibitive. On his bike, he was quick and nimble. He could zigzag through

traffic, park just about anywhere he wanted and he was up close and personal with the city, right where he could see its workings.

He had a small gray backpack that held one camera and three lenses and that was all he needed. He knew how to use his equipment, and he couldn't think of a single picture he offered at the kiosk that he hadn't sold multiple times.

Jacky's thoughts switched tracks almost instantly when he saw what he'd been looking for. Concrete steps led up to a grey metal door on what looked like an abandoned warehouse. The steps were painted blue and sprouting out from the second set of steps was a patch of brilliant yellow buttercups. Jacky particularly loved yellow on blue, basic colors that made each other sing with contrast. He had his bike parked and his camera ready with a medium telephoto lens and he was lining up shots from various angles but he knew the full-on frontal with yellow flowers framed in a deep blue background were his best sellers. He took ten pictures before packing up and getting back on the road.

It was a good day and he was happy.

He spent an hour processing his images in Lightroom. He decided on three for his website and kiosk. He would go back to those blue steps and take his tripod to get some more images—that yellow on blue.

Before he turned the computer off, he opened his wallet and looked at the card from the blonde. Her name was Krista Coleman and she was an interior designer. Her email address was on her card. He didn't date often and he wasn't sure why that was. He'd certainly had loads of opportunities. Krista was a beautiful woman and he'd enjoyed talking to her. He tapped the edge of the card on the desktop for a few moments before he opened his mail program and asked if she would like to go for a coffee the next time he was at the gallery

He wondered why he felt a sense of unease right after pressing the Send button.