



The Weekly Man

Episode 58: Tuesday - Jackson

Jackson wasn't an emotional person. His dealings with a wide variety of personalities in his work demanded that he be patient and even-keeled when dealing with people who didn't really understand what he did until after they'd worked with him for a while, and even then, he had to occasionally explain why a wonderful concept they had wasn't going to work commercially. It all added up to the need to keep his feelings subdued and his mind always in charge.

He had to be good at explaining things.

But this one had him stumped. He'd started a list of things that had happened to him over the years—things like injuries and sicknesses. It still nagged at him that he couldn't remember the circumstances surrounding the bump on his head. It didn't make any sense. He was a smart man with a good memory, and it didn't matter how much his mother had told him that he was different. Some things needed to be remembered. He was concerned about repeating whatever it was that had caused the bump. How could he avoid it in the future if he didn't know what to avoid?

He stared at the monitor, at the first item on the list:

Bump/Cut

That was all he could really put his finger on and even that seemed like a long time ago. He tried to remember other things, the scratches, broken bones, bruises, black eyes, bee stings, mosquito bites, cuts, tooth aches, missing teeth, rashes, pulled muscles, burns. He couldn't remember losing any of his baby teeth but he remembered the quarters under his pillow. He had a vague idea of these things but the whole thing seemed more like some esoteric concept than like things that were part of his everyday life.

Bump/Cut

He wondered why it was suddenly so important for him to know about the bumps, the cuts, the broken bones. He vaguely remembered wearing a cast on his arm when he was a kid.

Or was it on my hand? Left or right?

Bump/Cut

How could you not have questioned this long before now?

He recorded as much as he could remember about the bump before saving the document. He determined that he was going to write down every stubbed toe and shaving nick in the future, write down the injury, when he first noticed it, how long it lasted—everything he could think of so that he wouldn't forget, so that he could live with the injury, aware of it as part of his life and not a gap in his life.

He started to read the email from Jody.

Mr. Gabriel,

I truly do not understand your attitude...

That was as far as he read before clicking Reply and giving Jody a list of recommendations to continue his work and informing him that he would transfer all his courses and files to the new person. It felt good to not have to read all the way through one of Jody's stuffy emails. He wondered how he'd managed to put up with him for so many years. It wasn't really all that much of a bother as he was a boring and negative entity in his life.

Time to get rid of boring and negative.

He noticed there were no emails from Roy and assumed that he was on vacation and staying away from computers, cell phones and anything else that wasn't directly related to relaxation and the appreciation of having nothing to do. He scanned the rest of his mail. Nothing required action on his part. Strangely, he had nothing in the hands of any of his subcontractors. There was suddenly a lull in his workload. He had nothing to do. He wondered about the timing. It was perfect. He wanted a vacation and it looked like he had the time for it. His mood lifted. It looked like this was going to be a good day.

He went into Google Maps and zeroed in on the area he lived in. The park in relation to the streets that surrounded it looked small but that was far from what he'd felt when he walked through it. Then, it had seemed like crossing the world.

But not anymore.

He decided it was time to go for lunch and then go for a walk in the park.

He could still taste the ham and cheese bagel, a bagel freshly boiled and baked after a night of fermentation. The park was cool but sunny. A robust breeze shook the dried husks of leaves from the nearly barren branches of trees, giving the park a skeletal feeling. Jackson liked that. He liked that he could see the structure of things, the networks of branches and bows in the trees and the intricate snaking of bushes and vines. He figured this had something to do with the work he did,

determining the structure of information and aligning it to make sense. The gardens still had some late-blooming flowers. He had no idea what their names were but he loved the splashes of color in the otherwise bleak landscape.

The park was busy. All the benches were taken. He sensed a low murmur in the park, a fusion of conversations from the benches, the breathing of runners, the gurgles and cries from strollers and the breeze channeling through the park. Not long ago, he might have passed out where he stood but that was all over now. He loved the sound. He loved the busyness and the movement, the current of people, the ebb and flow of life all around him. He felt like he'd been dormant for most of his life and now he was stepping out of a mausoleum and into the world of the living.

He wondered why he'd always felt that he wasn't part of this. But then he remembered his mother's mantra of "differentness." Over the years, he'd sensed the difference, especially when it came to things like time. He wasn't sure exactly what the difference was but it was there, like the meeting he was supposed to have with Roy and Jody.

What was that all about? Why would they complain about me missing something that hadn't even happened yet?

Something was building to a head. He could sense it. He had no idea what it was but it was there, circling his consciousness like a buzzard waiting to streak in, claws open. Suddenly, his world shook and he fell down on one knee. His head spun for a moment before his eyes focused on a young woman in running shorts and a flimsy top that seemed a bit too light for a cool day.

"I'm so sorry!" She reached down and grabbed his arm. "I was looking at my timing..." She practically shoved the Iron Man watch on her wrist into his face. "...and didn't see you. I'm so sorry." He stood up straight with one of her hands still on his arm, gripping him tightly. "I didn't mean to..." She stopped short and looked into his eyes. "Oh, it's you." She seemed irritated. "So, are you someone else today, or are you the photographer from the Frederick Mall?"

He stared into her eyes, confused. His knee hurt. "Photographer?" He reached a hand out to her. "My name is Jackson...and I'm definitely not a photographer."

She laughed. "Well, whatever you say, Jackson. Maybe you should drop by the mall and see what your twin is doing." She smiled and slapped him on the shoulder. "Sorry for knocking you down." She turned to run and looked back. "I mean it...check out the mall." He kept his eyes on her as she ran around a corner and out of view.

Jackson wondered about this photographer who was his exact twin. He would have to go to the Frederick Street Mall and check him out.

Something to do this afternoon.

He'd never been in the Frederick Street Mall. He'd never been in any mall. Almost all his purchases were done online and, given his previous aversion to people and crowds, he never felt a need or desire to go shopping in a mall. He stood at an intersection where four wide corridors with glass ceilings converged into a large sunny courtyard with a fountain and tropical plants in the center. Water gurgling from an artificial waterfall mingled with the quiet chatter of shoppers and subdued elevator music that seemed to spill out of the air. He knew about malls, understood the concept and had seen pictures online. He always thought that he would feel cramped and claustrophobic in a mall but he didn't. It was almost like being outdoors, except there was no wind and none of the trees were shedding leaves.

He walked up to a bulletin board that displayed a map of the mall and located the Carson Gallery. It was at the end of the wing to his right.

He was amazed at the texture and smell of the stores and businesses lining the corridor with its palm trees and benches and kiosks. It was so different than the one-dimensional stores with their micro perspective on individual objects or groups of similar objects. Even the 3D and virtual reality store fronts that Jackson had seen didn't come close to the rich sensory experience of walking through the mall. There was a repetitive monotony in the sale signs and the arrangement of mannequins in the shop windows, and the carefully aligned frontage created a mathematical sameness that bothered something in him but this was drowned out by the brilliant colors and rhythmic patterns in the life size photos of people and places. Some of the stores were already pushing Christmas themes. Jackson had never understood the attraction of Christmas since his mother had died.

And there it was. Jacky Carson's holographic photo gallery. The solidity of the holographic images was powerful enough that he couldn't see through them to the people in the gallery. All the walls were up, giving an appearance of a large square box of floor to ceiling photographs of plants and flowers sprouting out of concrete and tarmac. Some of the images towered nine feet to the tops of the holographic walls, engulfing the viewers with powerful colors and rhythms.

The gallery seemed vaguely familiar to Jackson. He shrugged the feeling off. The mall wasn't far from where he lived and he might have seen pictures of it in flyers or other advertisements. He was tempted to go in but he resisted the urge. He had no idea why he didn't want to go in...it was just the feeling he had.

He thought about the gallery owner, Jacky Carson, someone who apparently looked like him. A sign outside the gallery said that the artists/owner would make appearances at the mall on Thursday afternoons.

And what's that all about?

He decided that he really didn't want to meet the owner. He had enough strange brewings in his life to deal with and he had a neighborhood to explore. He was on vacation, his first vacation ever, and he wanted to be outside in the streets and sidewalks, discovering the place he'd lived in for more than a decade but knew so little about.

He wanted to meet people.

Bump/Cut

Natalie stared at the words. She felt a sickening knot in her stomach as she read Jackson's notes questioning things like quarters under the pillow for teeth he didn't remember losing and injuries he didn't remember receiving. She had no idea what had happened while she was in the hospital to cause the bump on their head but she knew that it must be something serious for Jackson to even remember it.

And he was starting to write those things down. Natalie could feel all her training and planning beginning to unravel.

She needed to talk to Manzer. And she would get in touch with Valerie Vine as well.