



# ***The Weekly Man***

## **Episode 61: Friday - Jacques**

Jacques was tickled with himself. He'd just written a novel in record time and revisions had steamed along faster than ever before; in fact, revisions had been mostly just reading the novel and enjoying it while correcting the occasional spelling error.

*I think I've found my niche...where I can write from the heart and the soul without having to change my words later. Insufferable Bitch...you're such a better writer than Jasmine Jackson. And hotter.*

But it was time to read Jasmine's email. He lay his cigar into pristine ashtray and opened his mail.

There were over a hundred messages offering condolences, encouragement, support, suggestions for treatment, anger at the hackers "who did this to you...they should be punished," old family recipes, requests for advice on how to write a novel, praise for her work, praise for her courage, questions about her sex life, requests for her to read somebody's "just finished novel that's going to be the next box office best seller of all time," and an email from Judy. Jacques smiled as he opened her message.

Jasmine,

I honestly don't know what to think anymore. I have a hard time believing that your email account was hacked. That seemed a bit coincidental and convenient didn't it? And the way the nastiness was cut off from the rest of the message seemed just a little suspicious.

I don't know what to think. I loved reading your novels so much. There was so much in each of them that I could look at and say, that's me. I almost felt sometimes that you were writing about me, especially in "The Tide's Out". Sylvia was me right down to the scar on her shoulder. I haven't mentioned this to anyone, but I feel as though maybe our minds merged at some level and you wrote about me.

*How many glasses of wine have you had, Judy? Three, four...?*

It almost makes me wonder if I'm actually writing my books through you. I wonder if these wonderful stories you tell that are so much me are coming from my subconscious and traveling through the air and into your mind. Wouldn't that be wonderful? And to think that I was asking you for advice when you sent that terrible email. What were you thinking, Jasmine? It's almost like were almost one person when you tell my stories. MY STORIES, jasmine. Your telling my stories and you said such awful things.

Well, Jasmine Jackson, FUCK YOU!

Judy

*Hear that, Jasmine? Fuck you. Looks like it's time for you to slip into the big sleep. Judy thinks you're just a reflection of her life. Judy's drunk. Judy's a psycho. Fuck you, Judy.*

Almost as soon as he thought the words, he regretted them. He didn't harbor any bad feelings toward Judy Armstrong, the forty-three year old woman living alone after the breakup of her marriage.

*And how long have you been living alone, Judy? All by yourself, wanting to write a novel but not knowing how, just writing a bunch of pages and throwing them out and writing a bunch more pages.*

There were times when he felt frustrated reading Jasmine's fan mail, especially those from the most desperate women, the housewives who dropped out of college or gave up their dreams to go to the big city and grab the world by the ass to stay home and raise a child, and then another child. And there were the lonely ones, the ones who were never even seen by men and pretty much invisible to most women. To them, the stories and characters in Jasmine Jackson's novels were more real than their own lives, which were nothing more than something to escape; Jasmine's novels were something to immerse themselves in and float away on a raft of dreams.

He wondered if he should reply to Judy's message. He could be kind, try to let her know that he knew where she was, what she was going through, her pain. But he really didn't feel that way and he wasn't Jasmine Jackson anymore. He was the Insufferable Bitch. He needed to cut loose from Jasmine and all the Judys in the world.

*Cut loose.*

*Good.*

*Time for a walk in the park.*

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*If they'd seen how I was dressed just a few hours ago...*

The young skate boarders littering the sidewalk in front of him eyed him closely, suspiciously. Today, Jacques wore pajama pants, a red plaid hunting shirt and a light brown, down-filled vest. He didn't think he looked that much out of the normal to merit the scrutinizing he was getting.

*Maybe I should have worn shoes instead of sandals.*

As he walked through the group, he heard one of them say, "Naw, that's not him. He wouldn't dress that weird. Just some guy that looks like him."

He turned and looked at a tall lanky kid with a baseball cap on backwards. The kid looked back at him and squinted his eyes as though trying to figure something out. Something about his face seemed familiar but Jacques was certain that he'd never seen him and, if he had, it would have been just in passing when he was on his way to a laundromat, or the rare time he went to a store

or restaurant. Their eyes met for just an instant before both men snapped back to their own worlds.

On his way to the park an unusually high volume of traffic had stopped him from crossing the street in front of his building so he started walking along the street. For the first time ever, he allowed himself to actually see the street: the buildings, the street lamps and power poles, the shops and apartment balconies, the red and blue brick, the cafes and restaurants, the boutique art galleries, the cement planters with wilted flowers and dried headless stems. He followed a hundred scents: fresh paint drifted out of a building down the street from his flat. His nostrils hummed with the greasy aroma of sausage, pork and chicken frying on grills in the restaurants. The stench of sewage reeked from metal vents in the curbs, the bouquet of flowers seeped out the open doors of flower shops. He followed the sound of classical music emanating from somewhere in the windows on the floors above the shops and galleries. Horns honked in the distance and an engine accelerated loudly beside him as the light turned green. The sun was bright and beginning to cast the first long shadows of late afternoon.

Jacques was spellbound by the feelings the street invoked in him. He'd always thought of the streets in his neighborhood as routes to laundromats. The thought had never occurred to him that he might walk along the sidewalk just for the sheer joy of walking along the sidewalk. He hadn't traveled much in his life. He'd been downtown a couple of times and had cabbied to laundromats miles from his neighborhood. But he'd noticed that there was a distinct difference between his neighborhood and other areas of the city. It was closer here. More relaxed. He thought it might have something to do with one side of the street having buildings and the other side, a park. Everyone had a view of the park, a perfect square forming a chlorophyll hub at the center of a few hundred lives. From the very tops of buildings, you could barely see the tops of the buildings on the other side of the park. He wondered why he'd never thought of these things before. He wondered why he'd never felt these things before.

*That kid said I was dressed weird, that I wasn't someone else. What did he mean by that?*

With that thought, the mood crumbled. The street was a street. The sun was getting lower, the shadows longer. The memory was back.

*Whose clothes was I wearing? Whose phone did I have?*

He stopped and stared into the window of an antiques store. He focused his mind on seeing the ancient grandfather clocks, the 1950s license plates, the wide-eyed dolls with elaborate dresses.

*Whose?*

That was the pattern of his life. The trick to survival was to shrug off the questions and accept the reality of the situation: there were no answers.

*Just shrug it off.*

He walked around the entire park. Street lights buzzed with clouds of insects making one last hurrah before the frost came to erase their lives. The air was chilly and he was cold, his fingers and toes were numb. He needed a beer. He needed to stop questioning and just accept and get on with his life. When there were no answers, you lived around or through the questions.