



The Weekly Man

Episode 65: Tuesday - Jackson

It was the closest thing that Jackson had experienced to a dream since he was a child when he'd stopped dreaming soon after his mother's death. He had no idea why he'd stopped, it had just happened. But it was something he took for granted. It was something that just...happened. Today though, he would write it down.

He would also write about the dream, if that's what he could call it. It wasn't like any of the dreams he'd had as a child, though he could barely remember those. They'd been mostly about his life around the house, times he'd spent with his mother, going into the candy store in town, the hobby store, the drive, the kitchen. As he thought about those dreams, they came back to him, but none were as strange as the one from last night.

He couldn't put his finger on exactly what he'd dreamed. He was aware of a woman's presence but he couldn't define what the presence was. It was as though he was aware of himself through her eyes.

No, not her eyes. Not her eyes. Her consciousness? Her awareness?

He couldn't picture her face but there was something about her that he knew well, almost as much as he knew himself but she was a stranger, someone he'd never met.

Maybe it was mom? Maybe I dreamed about her?

He rushed to his laptop and started making notes, including what little he could remember of the dreams from his youth, a couple of paragraphs about a fire, the wind rushing through the trees by the house in the country, playing Snakes and Ladders with a kid he didn't know. He did this throughout the morning, forgetting to eat or drink, absorbed in the task of remembering who he was.

Hunger. It was noon and he still hadn't eaten. Angry bubbles rumbled through his intestines. His list was almost as barren as his stomach. He'd hoped that, because he wanted to remember, the

memories would flood back. He'd hoped that as he remembered one thing, it would lead to another thing and then another but though that had happened a few times, for the most part, he'd had to break his life up into periods and age groups and try to remember things from those. He realized that he'd wasted most of the morning but he was OK with that.

I have a start. The rest will come in time. But now, I need to eat.

He dressed and stepped into the street where the early afternoon crowd bustled. This was the time of day when the park and surrounding area was a beehive of activity. Not long ago, it would have been the most terrifying time for him, but not now. Now, Jackson plunged into the humanity with glee. He didn't go into the park. Instead, he turned abruptly to his left at the bottom of the steps. He had no reason to turn left. He just did it and it felt good. It felt good to not worry about the people. It felt good to not know where he was going. It felt good to be on vacation and do whatever he wanted, when he wanted, and for no particular reason.

It was cool but he wore a sweater and a thin navy blue jacket he'd found behind his couch a year earlier. He had no idea where the jacket came from or how it had gotten behind his couch.

Another thing for the list.

The sun shone brightly and the day was crisp with the crinkle of windblown leaves. He nodded hello to people as he passed them on the sidewalk. Most of them smiled and nodded back or said hello. A few said things like "Beautiful day," "Wonderful weather," and "How d'ya do?" When he reached the intersection he had choices: go straight ahead, turn right and keep to the edge of the park or turn left and explore unknown territory. He turned left. Time for adventure, time to explore.

Almost immediately, he passed a bistro with spicy aromas that flowed directly into his nostrils.

He loved smoked meat sandwiches. The aftertaste curled around his palate deliciously, a mixture of the meat, mustard and bread. And the pickle. He loved the pickle.

It was beginning to warm up so he took his jacket off and slung it over his shoulder as he strolled down the street, stomach full and eager to explore. After a block or two, he was seeing fewer and fewer people and the buildings looked like they needed repairs. After three blocks, the only people he saw stood in the shadows of weathered porches and stairwells. Some of them wore hoods. Some of them stared into his eyes as he passed. He was certain he'd seen eyes peering out of curtains and between the slightly parted slats of yellowed Venetian blinds. He stopped nodding to people and decided it was time to turn around and head back toward the park.

He turned just in time to see two hooded men step out of the shadows of a dilapidated building and stand on the sidewalk facing him, blocking his way. He could just barely make out the malevolent outlines of noses and lips, eyes boring straight into his. He stood still, feeling his stomach tighten and his pulse quicken. Color drained from his face. All the fears he'd felt throughout his life were returning to him in a tsunami of dread. He tried to say something but his voice faltered. He didn't know what to say. He'd never been in a situation like this except in his imagination. He tried smiling, thinking that maybe they might spare him any harm if he appeared friendly.

"What the fuck are you smiling at, fuckwad?" said a deep chilling voice from one of the hoods. He wasn't sure which. "You think we're funny or something?"

He tried to say no, but his vocal chords and mouth were numb with fear.

"I said, you think we're funny?" The voice louder now.

Jackson managed a weak, "No."

"Then why you laughing at us."

"No." Weak, distant. He wondered if he'd actually said it.

The man on his right stepped toward him. "No what, fuckwad?" The man's hand flashed out and slapped Jackson in the face, hard. His head snapped to the right and he saw tiny flashes of light.

So that's what they mean by seeing stars.

This thought fascinated him so much he didn't feel the pain from the slap. The man's other hand swung at his face, this time a punch that landed square on his jaw. For a second, he couldn't see anything because the points of light exploded into a curtain of white light that bleached out the world. He felt a sensation of downward motion and pain from his knees as they struck the sidewalk. He sensed motion around him as his attacker grabbed him and the other put his hand into his back pocket and pulled out his wallet. When his vision returned to normal, he was alone. He saw his wallet on the sidewalk to his right. He picked it up. The money was gone but it appeared that his cards and ID were still in it. He looked around. Other than eyes peering from dark windows, he was alone. He stood up slowly, legs wobbly, and made his way home.

His jaw was sore. He looked closely in the mirror. There was a bit of reddening but no bruises or swelling. No loose teeth. A bit of a cut on his lower lip.

Not much of a puncher for a mugger.

But he'd still seen stars and was half unconscious after the blow. He looked down at his knees. Both were bruised and swollen.

Sidewalk was less forgiving than the mugger.

He wondered if he should call the police but decided against it. All they took was cash, which would be impossible to trace and his description of them would match thousands of suspects. He was certain that the people peeking through blinds and curtains would swear that they hadn't seen a thing. All he would get out of it would be wasted time filling out reports and answering questions that would lead nowhere.

He wasn't going to waste a moment of his vacation time. And he wasn't going to let this incident force him back into being a social recluse. He'd lost thirty dollars and some pride; small price to pay for being free of the prison his life had become.

Like getting back on the horse.

He decided it was time to celebrate his first, and hopefully last, mugging by going out for dinner.

It felt strange, but good, to be writing on paper with a pencil, something he hadn't done in years. He'd forgotten the feel of control and the overall sensual experience of adjusting the slant of the paper, resting his palm in a comfortable spot, wrapping his fingers and thumb around the pencil and watching the graphite flow magically off the tip of the pencil and onto the paper to the rhythm of his thoughts. He remembered reading somewhere that Hemingway wrote his first drafts in pencil and then typed them up the next day as a way to add one more layer to the revision process.

He'd just recorded the navy blue jacket that he'd found behind his couch, something he hadn't questioned at the time because, at the time, he wasn't questioning anything. The rest of the list was mostly random things that he barely remembered and in most cases, guessed at. The quarters under his pillow and the missing teeth. Had he just erased the memories of losing those teeth because of the painful experience? But given the pain involved, how could he have forgotten?

He wrote a few paragraphs about the dream he'd had with himself in guises that seemed so strange, even as the stuff of dreams, especially the part where he was Jacky Carson talking to his customers. It had seemed so natural, as though it was something he'd done a thousand times. And yet, he'd just seen the place once. He made note of the woman mistaking him for the owner of the gallery. That seemed to ring some faraway alarm, but as much as he forced himself to focus in on what that was, nothing came. He documented anyway and decided that he would include his doubts and any other thoughts he couldn't explain on his list. He asked himself why he was making the list. After several moments of thought, it came to him:

I need to define myself.

He wasn't sure why this was the reason, but he knew it was.

It was a cool evening but not cold. In spite of being mugged earlier, he felt safe in the park. He wondered why, with such a sketchy neighborhood only a few blocks away, there were never any muggings in the park, especially with the number of people who frequented the place at night. Maybe that was it...the number of people. He couldn't remember ever having seen police patrols in the daytime or nighttime. He'd seen patrol cars drive by but their presence was scarce and non-threatening. They just drove by and never had to stop for anything except to get food or coffee from one of the bistros or restaurants. It was like the neighborhood around the park was separated from the rest of the world.

Like me.

I've been a part of the world but not part of the world all my life. I've been the moth in the cocoon. But not anymore. I'm out and I'm part of the world. I've been mugged. I have a story to tell. But who do I tell it to? And do I really want to tell that story? And do I really want to create courses out of the experiences of old people? Is there something else I can be doing? Is there anything else I want to do?

He felt a sudden sense of excitement. His mind reeled with new possibilities. He couldn't remember how he'd gotten into the online learning business. He was just in it, like he'd fallen from someplace into something he was good at.

But am I really happy with it?

He wondered if he'd ever felt any deep sense of joy with his work, if he'd ever been excited rather than just satisfied at having finished something to the satisfaction of his clients.

Maybe I needed a punch in the head to rattle things up enough to honestly look at what I'm doing. The money's good. The work is always in demand. I have a reliable client base. But I make my living off other people's experience.

The excitement grew. His mind seemed to spin faster with each thought. He felt a sense of urgency at the pit of his stomach as his thoughts opened to the potential of starting all over with a new life and a new career.

OK, Jackson, what skills do you have that you can transfer to something else? You're a great communicator. Your writing skills are above average. No, they're exceptional. You're a good

listener. You can take large bodies of complex information and pare them down to the essential information and simplify it so that just about anyone can understand it. And learn from it. You're a brilliant educator. You're a hard worker. You know how to negotiate. You're an excellent judge of character. People like you. People enjoy working with you. You're intelligent.

His mouth curled into a smile just as an elderly man in jogging gear walked past him and, seeing the smile, smiled back as though the smile were meant for him. He smiled wider and said hello.

“Beautiful evening,” said the man.

“Yes,” said Jackson, “a beautiful evening and a beautiful day.”

He looked at his watch. It was getting close to the time. He turned toward home, his mind swimming with possibilities.