



The Weekly Man

Episode 7: Saturday – Jac

A crazy-dancing curtain of flaming burlap wraps around a woman running in circles with her child wailing in her arms. Their screams pierce my ears through the flames as the woman runs with sizzling eyes into a post, hitting it so hard the impact knocks her off her feet, sending herself and the child scattering in glowing embers and ash while children with blazing hair run around them screaming for their mothers.

Clowns on fire perform macabre dances pounding their bodies with their fiery arms as shags of skin peel off their arms and faces and their blackened costumes smolder into their chests and legs. Jugglers toss balls of fire from hands seared to the bone. A man with wide eyes stares through the flames surrounding his head, wondering why he hadn't just stayed home today and made a delicious curry dinner for his family. And where was his family? Where were they in all this terrible mess? A brother and sister grip each other as they lay on the ground while crazy-eyed people trample them to death as they run mindlessly in circles through the horror.

Jac's eyes pop open.

Well, that really sucked. Again.

Every night...the same dream or variations on the dream. Jac's days trailed out of Bangalore, India in the 1981 Bangalore Fire. With less than a hundred dead, it wasn't the most catastrophic fire of all time. It wasn't the 1212 London fire with three thousand dead or the 1923 Tokyo fire with over a hundred and forty thousand dead, and most of the deaths were children who'd been trampled to death by the stampeding adults, and it was in a faraway place most noted in the West for its string-rolled cigarettes. But for some strange reason, it haunted Jac's nights even before he'd heard or read about it. It wasn't until he was in his early twenties that he came across the Bangalore incident on Wikipedia. Some of the details were different but he knew that his dream was in Bangalore.

That fire, that dream, gave him a perspective on life that was the wellspring of his writing and made him one of the most hated personalities in the world of children's books.

Maybe “in the world” is a bit of an exaggeration. He wasn’t really all that well known. His books weren’t popular, he’d never been on a bestseller list and he made just enough money to scrape by along with the money from his late mother’s estate. But his needs were simple and his life was uncomplicated with the exception of the occasional death threat and the nasty emails from parents condemning him for what they claimed his books were doing to their children. He didn’t blame people for hating him; he wasn’t a particularly big fan of himself. He had something to say and he said it well, so well that his books had broken up marriages and relationships, given children bad dreams and made them problems at school, and now they’d made a little girl flush her pet hamster down the toilet. He read the email from her parents:

Mr. Pierce,

My wife and I don’t know how you can live with yourself. The things you write about are dismal and depressing. Your complete lack of hope, happiness and the joy of life is psychopathic and we honestly can’t understand why your books aren’t banned from the internet and why you haven’t been institutionalized.

Two weeks ago, we bought our daughter, Chrissie, a baby hamster. She loved her hamster and spent hours each day playing with it, watching it do things, and taking hundreds of pictures of it with her phone and sending them to her friends. Then she read your book, “Janie and Her Hamster”. She read it in the afternoon and that evening she flushed her pet hamster down the toilet. When we asked her why she would do a thing like that, she said it was what Janie should have done with her hamster so that she could lessen the pain that the hamster would cause her. I checked her reader to look at the book to see what she was talking about and I was shocked.

I’ve never read anything so disgusting and sick and I can’t understand why anyone would buy your books. If we’d known that our daughter was going to download your perverse book, we would have stopped her. As it is, we’ll be monitoring her reading more closely from now on to make sure that you don’t get a chance to hurt her anymore with your warped writing. And we’ll be telling our friends about you and warning them to keep your books away from their children, not to mention the messages we’ll be sending out through social media to warn the whole world about you.

You should be ashamed of yourself and stop writing.

Earl and Chloe Wharton

Well, this might actually be good for sales.

Jac Monroe was the hated Simon Pierce, whose books stressed a single overwhelming truth for children: life sucks. It was true for his life, so it must be truth for everyone and the best time to learn and accept this was when you were a child. He honestly believed that he saving them the false hopes of happy lives and building a healthy immunity to the certain disaster that would define their lives.

But his message was misunderstood, especially by the parents—and the dozen or so kids getting professional help after reading his books. No one could prove a clear enough link between his books and the behavior of a handful of children to take him to court but they didn’t stop the hate mail. And besides, he believed the Wharton girl had done the right thing. He also believed that *Janie and Her Hamster* was brilliantly written in that it epitomized his philosophy of planned hopelessness so well.

In the book, Janie wants a hamster but her evil step father won't allow it. One day, he mysteriously dies. Janie's mother tells her that they're free now of the step father's tyranny and takes Janie to the mall where she buys her a beautiful white and brown hamster that Janie names Sunflower. She marks the day in her calendar so that she can have a birthday party for Sunflower a year later. She plays with the hamster night and day and it becomes her favorite possession. She promises Sunflower daily that she will never leave her and she knows, looking into the hamster's eyes, that it's promising the same thing. For the entire year, she talks about the birthday party and obsessively makes plans that change almost daily. On the day of the birthday, Janie runs excitedly to the cage but Sunflower isn't leaning against the bars waiting for her—she's just lying there, dead.

So Janie hangs herself.

As far as Jac was concerned, the girl got the wrong message. All Jac wanted was to teach children that owning things—even pets—is pointless because some day they will be gone and the longer the possession, the greater the pain. Jac saw no reason for anyone to kill themselves over a healthy dose of reality. He saw himself as a modern Grimm's Brother...with email.

Oh, look another message from A. Fan...

Hey Simon, baby, just finished reading your latest book and just want you to know that it's the same as all your other books. MISERABLE CRAP. That said, just want you to know that I'm getting closer everyday to tracking you down. And when I do I'm going to kill you. Count on it.

Have a nice day.

A. Fan

So why are you reading children's books, asshole?

He had more than one A. Fan who wanted to kill him, read about his death, watch videos of him burning in hell or beat him to death with his own books. And he hadn't even written his masterpiece yet.