



The Weekly Man

Episode 8: Sunday – Jackie

The blistering hot water felt good, relaxing, but as usual it felt like something wasn't quite right, as though the water were hitting her body at a strange angle, an angle that missed the essence of her skin. It seemed foreign, as though it were meant for someone else's body. Her hands building lather on her chest and thighs felt out of place, like lathering a foreign object. Nevertheless, the flow felt good with the heat cranked up to null the feeling of inexactness that flowed like a river of doubt just under the surface of her days.

She pressed the scrubber hard against her skin until it turned bright red and then she scrubbed some more. This was how she started her days: feeling out of place, misaligned, somehow out of tune with the rest of the world. She'd read a story once called *The Man Who Was A Few Pixels Out*. It was about a man who woke up one morning to find himself just a few pixels out of alignment with the rest of the world. He was out just enough that he dropped things, missing a firm hold by just a few pixels. He tripped over stairs and misfiled digital documents as though everything was on some other plane of being just a few pixels ahead, behind or to the side of him. She didn't know where the feeling came from. It was like a sense of urgency that spread through her body, tightening her stomach and chest and racing her heart beat. Sometimes it dazed her enough that she had to sit or lie down until the feeling passed.

She scrubbed her skin with a vengeance, as though it were to blame, as though everything about her was somehow at fault and she should scrape the flesh off her bones as punishment for being her skin. It was an imbalance that invaded every second of her life, even her work.

She was a playwright; not exactly famous, but not overly obscure. She'd had several of her plays produced by local theaters and she'd received mostly positive reviews, even a few raves. Balance was the theme in all of her work. Her plays started with imbalance and moved toward balance, even if the balance was more disturbing than the imbalance. In her latest play, *The Bar Crowd*, three men and two women crawl around on a barroom floor growling and hissing at each other, snarling and drooling. When they come into contact with each other, they roll around on the floor barking and biting, scratching and kicking viciously. Everything they say is

unintelligible. They might as well be wild animals. As the play progresses, the actors begin to talk increasingly coherently—their behavior becoming less violent until, in the last minutes of the play, they're sitting on barstools laughing and talking. Just before the play ends, one of them takes a gun from inside his jacket and shoots the woman sitting beside him in the head. A woman at the far end of the bar says, "That's much better. So much more civilized than teeth."

Balance for Jackie was the ideal, something to be strived for but never attained but, unlike most artists, she didn't just accept this as a Great Truth to be accepted however begrudgingly. For Jackie, it was an ever-present thorn in the side of her being and over the years it had given rise to a deep pit of resentment that tainted her vision of the world with a nasty side dish of cold spite. If she couldn't be comfortable with the world then she wouldn't let the world be comfortable with her, especially with her art.

Not knowing how to interact with others because she didn't know how to interact with herself had driven her into a life of seclusion. Her contact with the world outside her flat was through the internet, literature and movies. She worked at home with the only physical contact in the outside world being that part of the world outside the high windows with the curtains wide open to let in the light of a world she would never be fully a part of. How could she fit into all the space and diversity of that infinite distance on the other side of the glass when she couldn't fit comfortably in the square footage of her own body?

She turned off the shower. Steam curled off the surface of her skin. She toweled forcefully, leaving bright patches of red on her arms and legs. In the bedroom, she slipped into bright pink pajamas and made her way to the kitchen where she grabbed some yogurt from the refrigerator, made her way back to the living room and sat down at her workplace: the bed and a laptop. She kept her life simple. When you don't fit in anywhere, she reasoned, you make everywhere as simple and small as possible.

She pressed the On button, logged in and opened the file containing her next play. It was tentatively called *The Beautiful Ugly*. Generally, she would change the title several times while she was writing but she liked this one. The play was about a beautiful woman who felt the overwhelming ugliness of her existence every minute of her life.

The play was about her.

But first, she would send an email to the janitor thanking him for fixing that annoying drip from the kitchen tap.