



The Weekly Man

Episode 3: Tuesday - Jackson

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Mrs. Gilbert had that look of someone who blended in well with the washing cycles of life. No doubt, she was worn, but worn well—and though the color had faded, the vibrance under the surface of her life was ageless. Jackson figured she was in her late 60s, maybe early 70s. She was tall and blocky with dark stringy hair—and wrinkles. Jackson had never seen anyone as wrinkled as Mrs. Gilbert. Her face was a landscape of valleys and promontories and it was sometimes difficult to say where her mouth began and where it stopped until she moved her lips to speak. Her nose was wrinkled. Her ear lobes were wrinkled. Her arms and legs were wrinkled. But stripped down to just her eyes, she could have been twenty. They sparkled.

Jackson had never seen her go outside. Like him, she had everything delivered to her door. It made him wonder where the sparkle came from.

“I had Mr. Joyce come in and take a look at that faucet,” she said with a warm voice that sometimes cracked when she talked for more than a few minutes. At first he thought she might be a smoker but she never had that smell that smokers had. He guessed that maybe it was allergies or just something she did after a few minutes of talking.

“I noticed, Mrs. Gilbert. Could you thank him for me. I must have been shopping when he came” Jackson, like Mrs. Gilbert, was tall but slim with a runner’s build though he didn’t run. His jaw jutted out just enough to suggest someone in charge of his life.

“I know how those little sounds, like leaky faucets, bother you, Jackson” Mrs. Gilbert knew of Jackson’s need for complete silence when he worked. She’d said once that he was so unlike the others and he’d wondered what the other tenants must be like. He’d never heard any of them, day or night and he only knew of them through Mrs. Gilbert. She was right about the noise thing though. One time he’d lost an entire day’s work because the sound of squirrels scampering in the eaves had magnified to thunderclaps as the day wore into evening and made Jackson physically ill

before the evening was over. The next day the squirrels were gone and Jackson couldn't even recall anything being done about them.

"Well, I should get lots of work done today." He smiled and nodded as he closed the door and he felt just the slightest presence of his mother. She'd died when he was a child but he had no lack of mothering from Mrs. Gilbert.

He had an uncle named Manzer—Uncle Manzer, his mother's closest friend and someone he'd known since he was a kid but these days he might see him two or three times a year, when there were decisions to be made about his mother's estate. Manzer took care of those things.

He walked across a room with high ceilings and windows, and pulled the curtains open. The park across the street teemed with runners, mothers with strollers filled with plump babies and retired baby boomers sitting on benches watching life pass by while they talked about lives that had long since faded in their memories and taking on new dimensions as names were forgotten and details changed over time, the way myths and legends evolve.

Those people, the boomers, were his demographic, his clients. Well, maybe not the ones sitting on the bench outside, but others... the ones who'd garnered knowledge and experience through lifetimes dedicated to the work ethic and being the perfect team players. Their brains were gold; their memories, chunks of rough diamonds.

Jackson was their cutter and polisher. His tools were an uncanny ability to extract information and present even the most esoteric concepts simply and clearly. He was the man behind **Expert Life**, that company everyone had read about in *Forbes* and *Modern Business Innovation*. Well, he liked to think that everyone had read about his company but his real thrill was when he nailed it. In the words from his website:

Retired? Turn Your Work Experience Into Cash

You've spent a lifetime working and learning and becoming an "expert" in your profession. You've turned theory into practice and boiled the learning down to those things you need to know to get the job done.

Isn't it a shame?

Now, when you're more valuable to your employer than ever, all that learning and experience is discarded from the workplace.

But it doesn't have to be.

You can put it back into the workplace. Expert Life can take all that know-how and turn it into online training for professionals and you can sell it through our worldwide outlets.

Get in touch with us soon and learn how you can turn your experience into cash.

Given the generous pensions of the ones who were gold, Jackson was doing well, and it was the perfect gig for someone with his problem. He worked from home and he hired artists, programmers and web developers through online employment sites. He never had to go outside unless it was absolutely necessary—a sweet situation when you had a pathological fear of people. Put him on a busy city sidewalk and he would fold in on himself so completely he wouldn't be able to function, he would barely be able to breathe. He'd fainted once, right on the sidewalk, in front of everyone, all those people. He'd needed five stitches to close the gap in the side of his head and he'd stained his favorite blue shirt. Mrs. Gilbert had nearly had a fit.

He never met in person with his clients or contractors. He did business through video messaging or email. Even so, he respected them—they still had things to say and contribute and they weren't ready to sit on park benches or alone in their homes watching TV and waiting to die. Their years as senior managers were making more money for some of them than they'd made while they were working.

And the work wasn't without its entertaining moments.

Roy Pickering and Jody Blake had worked at the same company for thirty-five years, starting at the same time and retiring at the same time. They'd been directors of different departments but they worked on the same floor and there were stories that you could feel the hatred they had for each other creeping in the halls between their offices. The hatred started when Jody found out that Roy was having an affair with his wife and it compounded a hundred fold when she left him to marry Roy. After that, work was daily war between them. They stole each other's best staff, they tried to get each other fired and for thirty-five years, they never once spoke to each other. Now they were retired, they still weren't talking...and they were both clients of Jackson's.

Both had just released courses on conflict resolution in the workplace and the fight was on in the forums. Just for the hell of it, he logged into BetterThanCollege: Self-Training for the Time Besieged, one of the forums that still tolerated the two. Right off, the first posting was from Roy.

Let me make clear that over 35 years of practical, hands-on application of conflict resolution in the workplace has given me great insight into effective strategies for dealing with conflict in the office. My online course (now available through Expert Life) appropriately titled *Toward a Sweeter Working Environment* is IMOHO probably the single best learning instrument on office conflict resolution that you'll find anywhere.

It's full of real life scenarios, task-based exercises and clearly written instructional text. You'll be a conflict resolution pro in no time.

Now, I want to warn you about another course released so coincidentally at the same time as my course. It's called *Avoiding the Office War Zone*, and it was thrown together by, you guessed it, Jody Blake. A man who has been stealing my ideas in course after course and attempting to pass them off as his own, but to no good effect. Even with my ideas out there and so simple to comprehend, Blake has put together another training aid that completely misses the mark.

But they paid their invoices on time and they trusted Jackson to keep their projects separate and never discuss one's work with the other. Jackson was the best at what he did and they both knew it.

He opened his email and saw what looked to be something from a potential new client. The subject line read: Need course to save the world. *Hope he doesn't want me to come up with the reference material for that*, he thought.

Mr. Gabriel,

I have a mystical link to a bonafide superior being with a message and instruction on how to stop the madness and save the human race from certain extinction and I need your expertise in turning this message into a course that can be delivered on the internet. Can we discuss particulars via email?

We must stop plastic!

Jax MacDonald

I believe I'll be demanding payment in advance if I decide to take this one on.