

The Real Housewives of New Jersey Recap: Sad Songs Say So Much

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Tonight's episode falls on September 11, which is fitting because our country's colors don't run, and neither do most of the people in this cast. But before we're off to the "Cupid's Chase 5K," the producers treat us to a slo-mo flashback of Joe Giudice's tooth hitting the foyer stonework, complete with brutal chipping sound. There is only one sound more brutal in this episode, and that will be Gia's quasi-vibrato as she sings her song about her mom's relationship with her uncle. Juicy's ringing tooth chip may have me wincing, but by the end of the hour, Gia has both of my hands pressed to the sides of my face like I'm Macaulay Culkin and her excruciating lyrics are the aftershave.

But we've got to work our way up to that level of pain.

If a box on *Jeopardy* read "To help people with disabilities," and you buzzed in with "Why are the housewives doing this 5K?" then you would have just lost yourself hundreds of dollars. According to Jacqueline, she's walking to get hot before the group takes off for their trip to Punta Cana. Because nothing gives you a hard bod like taking a half-assed stroll for 50 minutes. Before the day of the race, Teresa comes over to Jacqueline's wearing a pink fur shrug (someone needs to start a race to raise awareness for all these mythical creatures she's been skinning!), and tells her and Caroline that Milania's birthday party is around the corner. Teresa wants the Gorgas and the Giudices to be in the same room together, because if everyone doesn't recognize Milania's special day, then the kid's head will pop open and the megalomaniac alien that lives inside will rise and obliterate Franklin Lakes with its telepathic death beam. Oh ... sorry, I've been watching a lot of *Doctor Who* on Netflix. It's more that Teresa wants everyone to be together, so Caroline instructs her to call Melissa right then and there so that these two hens can listen in.

If a category on *Family Feud* was "Things That Go Well" and you hit the buzzer with, "The phone call that Teresa makes to Melissa about their husbands," then you would have just lost the round for your family. The call doesn't go well. The Christening comes right back up again, and listening to Teresa and Melissa harp at each other, Caroline looks like she wants to send her head through the wall and plunge it into the bitter snow.

On the morning of the 5K, Mr. Dickface has put his best, heaviest chain necklace on for running, just like athletes do. At the Lauritas', Jacqueline's wearing a zebra knit cap — by this I mean that it's a knit head of a zebra on her head, not a print — and wondering if she can just give the disabled the money they're saving on Ashley's groceries instead of moving her legs. Her legs that she is so lucky to have use of. At the Giudices', Teresa is taking a monster flush (you can practically hear the silver-leaf pipes of the manse groaning) and air-spraying the shit out of the bathroom because she's got the runs, which is like a lost lyric from Alanis Morissette's "Ironic": "It's like a morning of the runs / When you're booked for a run ... " Joe doesn't want to get out of the cozy leopard bedding, and we're treated to a quick gander at his black panties before Teresa puts her butt on his face. In this moment, they are pretty much the most likable they've been all season, which is horrifying.

I even kinda like Joe as he's grinding sausage to bring to the race along with some wine. Wearing a clingy black tank top that threatens to show nipple, he stuffs the meat into a Ziploc storage bag, which is not unlike a metaphor for his own body. When the Manzo children and their surrogate sister Greg hear about the sausage and wine, they have a good time making fun of the Giudices on the drive over. Greg, pretending to be Teresa, says that he's got an "SAT prep book coming out called *Stupid Italian*," and with that he nails his audition for full-time housewife next season. I'm seeing a *Big Love*-type situation with him becoming dutiful second wife to Joe Gorga.

Do I need to tell you that Melissa's in a *faux*-leopard hat with cat ears and a matching coat? No, because that's what would come into your mind anyway if you shut your eyes and really meditated on it. Mr. Dickface is in a neon yellow vest because he has to let the drivers on the road know that he is a human being and not just a disembodied running penis. If you saw a penis bobbing on the side of the road, you might nervously run it over, too. Of course the whole group is late and getting their numbers after the race has started, but what do things like "start times" and "routes"

matter to people who are just there to wander in circles and pretend this event is about them instead of a charity? Joe waddles down the road in black like he's the Stay Puft Man from *Ghostbusters* after it's been toasted on a campfire. Teresa tries to keep up a jog because she's competing with the Wakiles; Kathy's eyes are so glassy from the cold they're like milky, hatching Fabergé eggs. And Albie comes in first because he cheated, which is maybe what he should have done more of in law school. Also cheating are Christopher Manzo, Greg, and Joe Gorga, the latter two flirting their way across the finish line — Cupid's Chase, indeed. It's a chilly winter day, sure, but there's such an obvious heat burning between them that Melissa says to her husband, "I swear you like men, just admit it!" But words are cheap, so instead Joe ties his scarf around Greg's neck and pulls him along, declaring he's his dog. I'm not really familiar with the official name for this kind of sex play, but I would guess it falls somewhere on the spectrum between S&M and furryism.

No matter, you can't keep these sweethearts apart. The Manzo Boys and Greg have invited the Gorgas over to their pad, with Greg pretending that he wants to bond with Melissa when Joe is really the "gorilla of [his] dreams." We're right back with the animal stuff again, this time with Greg role-playing Dian Fossey and Gorga doing what comes naturally (i.e., being naked and hairy, beating his chest). When Melissa previews her new single for the guys, they do an even less convincing job of pretending to like it than the Soul Diggaz, although Christopher still invites her to perform at their launch party. I think he just figures that everybody's going to be so disturbed by the black water being served that they won't even register anything else that's going on.

Next thing I know, the Joeboken gang is out at a club and Gorga is atop Greg's shoulders, his nutsack pressed against the back of his neck. Well okay, then! I thought that maybe we'd start with some romantic talk and gentle petting, but no sir, it's straight to balls-on-neck and Gorga shouting, "Hide yo kids, hide yo wives!" Joe even wants Greg to fondle Melissa a little because she's going to be Greg's sister-wife, and he's feeling out the possibility of a threesome. And he's also making sure that Greg understands what he's in for in this relationship by getting involved with "Tarzan," which is what Joe is calling his penis, at least for that night. He thumps his chest and you know that Greg is thinking, "Yes, yes, this is exactly what I imagined," and then the scene cuts before the two introduce a banana.

It's pretty anticlimactic to go over to Lauren's date with Vito, as they're making homemade mozzarella in her mom's kitchen. The producers try to spice things up by laying a Marvin Gaye instrumental soundalike over close shots of sweaty cheese being kneaded and Vito murmuring, "You gotta work it." But all of this is coming on the heels of Lauren being sad about her current weight, and so I'm just thinking, *Vito, you bonehead. Support her by making it a Tasti D-Lite night, and then maybe afterward you get on her shoulders and grind your balls against her neck to burn off the calories.* No, he's an enabler, that Vito. To paraphrase Madonna, he's going to wrap her up in his cheeses and meats, all over her body.

You know who's also in for a mozzarella-centric time? Milania, she of the many descriptors such as "very determined" and "full of energy," which are all euphemisms that boil down to "huuuuuuuuge pain in the ass." Get the kid a crown because she wants to wear a crown! And be sure you get the big one if you know what's good for you! On this, the occasion of her 5th birthday, Milania's parents have arranged a pizza-making party because they're low on liquid assets, and that means it's out with the kid limos and in with the marinara. It's a good thing she's too young to remember her sisters' lavish birthdays of yore or else I suspect the Giudice palace would have been doused with gasoline and burned to the ground.

After Teresa does some stellar parenting by telling a raging Milania that she's her "princess" and that Teresa is "her servant," Milania ends up in a pink tulle gown, her head lolling in the backseat of the car like she's starring in the sequel to *Insidious*. Once inside the packed pizzeria, everybody is assembled except for the Gorgas. Caroline's worrying about the trip to Punta Cana and Kathy's agreeing, her sockets so deeply shaded with shadow that they appear to go all the way to the back of her skull. The kids start pounding the table, shouting, "We want pizza!" and Milania's *just* about to set fire to the whole joint when here comes Melissa in more animal fur, her daughter Antonia well-coordinated in an animal cape. Juicy Giudice is eyeballing Joe Gorga while drinking from a dangerous red plastic cup, looking unstable. I learned in college that you never, ever trust what's in those red plastic cups. But hey, one person who's really excited to see Gorga is his niece Gia, and that's only the beginning of it. Because she's got a surprise for everybody, too. Doesn't that sound cute? How could this not possibly be fun and cute, you wonder?

Initially, Gia sings a song she wrote for her Wild Thing sibling Milania that includes the emotional lyrics, “First you were 1/Then you were 2/Then you were 3/Then you were 4” (take *that*, Rebecca Black!), and she’s kind of got this Katy Perry/Stevie B effect going, but okay. Okay. I’m not going to get on a kid for singing her little heart out to her sister via an original composition. And seriously, the lyrics are less embarrassing than the ones on Melissa’s single. Everybody back to the personal pizza assembling!

But wait, then Gia has another surprise song. Even before I know what this one is about, I get a feeling of dread in my gut — not unlike what Sookie described on tonight’s *True Blood* just before she found both of her boyfriends chained to a pyre — and I’m thinking, *Nononono, Gia. Just bottle up your feelings. Put in the plug and work it out with a therapist when your parents have money again.* And then she’s saying that this one is for her mom and her Uncle Joe, and whoa boy, I’m already withdrawing into the couch cushions, shaking my head in denial that this is actually barreling forth. “Waking up in the morning,” she ekes out and bursts into tears. I don’t need to hear any more. Just the fact that she began a song about her *mom* and her *uncle* with “waking up in the morning” is pretty much all I can take. This kid is waking up in the morning, and the first thing on her mind is all this bullshit stemming from discarded cookies and cards about “redone” homes? This is super, super heartbreaking, her voice quivering with sorrow and stress as she warbles about how their estrangement even gets to her when she’s “doing [her] hair and makeup.” And then it becomes even more brutal to watch because you know this is on TV and the poor kid’s going to have this moment on YouTube until the sun finally swallows the Earth (wouldn’t be surprised if Milania survives). And it’s not just what she’s singing, it’s the way that she’s singing. She’s wrecked, but she’s also trying to be good, in a way. She’s putting little trills on and she’s emphasizing tortured lines that sound like they’re about a lost lover, except they’re about her MOM and her UNCLE, and she’s taking what she learned from listening to Mary J. Blige and she’s coming for Melissa Gorga. She’s right on her heels, going out big and styled with an “oh-whoa-oh” and some “yeah, yeah”s.

Oh man, it’s brutal. So brutal.

There’s no reprieve either because she bursts into tears again afterward, telling her mom and uncle that she wants them to start acting like they love each other. This spurs a manic, screeching Teresa to wedge herself in a Juicy-Gorga sandwich, and the two Joes even briefly touch temples and share a tentative smile as they pose for a picture. Caroline’s hopeful that Gia just gave the adults a wake-up call, but what she fails to realize is that this emotional retardation isn’t a dream. It’s their whole lives. It’s in the very fiber of their beings. And short of Milania punching them upside the heads, turning them into amnesiacs, I don’t think a kid’s going to put an end to the madness. Even with a tragic song.

Oh-whoa-oh.

Yeah, yeah.

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