

STANTON

From inside the earth, a force seemed to suck the surface of pavement so that it bowed. The pigeon shit had collected for years. People walked through it. It mixed with the dirt. It formed this random pattern on the pavement. Stanton stared at the sediment.

People gathered around the drugstore. They dealt each other home remedies.

“I just got in this drug rehab program. I couldn’t get in the house until I was approved. So I was sleeping outside last night. That was no way to get things together. Where was I supposed to stay while I waited to get it all together?”

He could hardly hold it together.

“I better not fuck this one up.”

They were kicking Radon out of the drug rehab facility.

“I’ve been fucking clean. And they caught me using my phone. I’m off dope, but I’m on the street for the next three days. What kind of bull shit is that?”

Whose story is this?

Deke hadn’t taken down his Christmas lights, and it was already Valentine’s Day.

“I am still waiting for the revelation.”

“You are going to have to wait for a long time.”

“Maybe, Easter.”

There were moments when he could hear the crying of children echo in the living room.

“Where are you going Stanton?”

“I am going out.”

“And you’re leaving me to watch the kids.”

Stanton was looking for an excuse. He couldn’t remain here any longer. Cassie looked down at Dawn. She was motioning to her mother. Stanton felt that this was his cue. The door seemed like a mile away. And he felt weighed down by everything in his life.

Once he was outside, he took a deep breath. He knew that Cassie could work her guilt trip on him. He could hear Dawn crying from inside the room. He needed to leave. He had somewhere to go. And he was not going to let Cassie hold him back.

Stanton was looking for perfect silence. And it would be forever denied to him in the house. He was looking for his private paradise.

“Have you forgotten me?”

He had forgotten himself.

Stanton started to walk. He left his truck at home. He wanted to enjoy the day. He could feel everything breaking down around him.

The rain started all around him. The further that he got from the house, the more that he felt that was not his life. Who were these people? How had they taken over his mind?

Dawn might have felt the lack of connection with her father. Her existence was in doubt.

“What are you going to do about those kids?”

Stanton’s mother was quizzing him about his options.

“Mama, you have no idea what is going on.”

“You got two little babies. You just can’t put all that responsibility on that woman.”

What would it be like if he could start over? He could close his eyes and be ten years

younger.

“Some people realize what they have to do early in life.”

He was hearing the echo of his mother’s counsel. This advice had the power to change his life.

He sat on his mother’s porch while he drank a beer. After he downed the first, he headed in for a second.

I saw myself as this limitless structure reaching up to the sky. With each level completed, there was the foundation to push out further. And I was united with this purpose.

The frame enabled the triumphant gesture. The breadth expressed the full glory of the architecture. The builders realized their faith. This was way beyond physics. They challenged the order of the universe. They attained a permanence.

I was participating in that greatness. I was like a bird in flight. There were no obstacles anchoring me to the earth. I felt as if I was paving the sky. In this pattern, I was sharing in that same inspiration as the creators of the great cathedrals!

I looked to the heavens. I was poised above creation, and I stepped into space. What was this? I was suspended in midair. This was the ultimate temptation. For all builders, this was the invitation. I let go. I did not fall.

I accepted my madness. I made peace with my destructive urges. This was defying gravity. I negotiated with the universe. How did we settle our differences?

I could not attain this certainty. I had to share it. In sharing my accomplishments, I felt threatened. What was being taken away from me?

I felt aggressed. I sensed my sacrifice to attain greatness. Others had not been challenged in the same way. There was a threat to my integrity. Was I so privileged? What did I offer that made me unique.

I understood how my colleagues sought the same transcendence. My family wanted to feel the same freedom. I needed to escape from all these obligations to feel like myself. Why was I feeling so isolated? I needed to learn their language. I took comfort in my isolation.

When I felt alone, that only made me more a part of this edifice. It needed so much more to extend its reign. And I joined with its quest. This was my particular communion. The flexibility of the structure provided me with a unique energy. I felt my whole being involved in the process.

I was a prisoner in my life, but I felt liberated in my urges. I melded with steel. I sparkled in the light. I took shape in the congress. I projected myself in the form. I felt pride in the moment. I was beyond myself. I felt the blessing.

I encountered my nemesis. I reveled in the conflict. I was charmed by the excitement. I extended myself in the wingspan. I filled the expanse. I branched out. I was overwhelmed by my ambition. I was everywhere exhaustive. I renewed myself in each gesture. I danced in the clashing forces. I threw myself against the disturbance. I found oneness in the chaos.

I exploded in creation. I blasted away. I felt hurtled along by these primal energies. I gave myself to time. I became aware of the threads of history. I was protected by my knowledge. I was perfect.

I pushed beyond. I was reborn in these organic forms. I was here, there, and everywhere. I was made by the spirit. I was molten. I felt cast along by the powerful interpenetration. I

peered deep into the crystallization. I immersed myself in the romance. I was the jealous lover who kept everything for himself. I cast off all encumbrance. I needed nothing and was needed by no one. I was the original man.

I was the original longing. I was matter before matter. I was never right with myself. I screamed out for some resolution. I made everything coincident. I couldn't let go. I was flattered by time. I wanted to speak for history. I had a deeper mission. I had never realized my magnificence. This was all me. I would not yield. Surrender was beyond my nature. I was a visionary. I closed my eyes and touched the hot metal.

"Where were you Stanton?"

"I had to go out. I needed to check something at work."

"You are always checking things. There's enough to worry about here. We have two babies to look after. How are you doing your part?"

"I am your husband. I work. I do the best that I can."

"Husband? We aren't married. And sometimes, I wonder if you even want to be here."

"Why are you questioning me?"

"If you gave a little more of yourself. You only like it here when things are already taken care of, and the place is calm. What do you want from me? You take everything that you can."

"I realize that this is my place. I am not feeling right with myself."

"Right with yourself? That is an excuse. What if I don't feel right with myself?"

"We are two different people. I am trying to be like you. I am trying to live up to my responsibilities. But I feel drawn to a higher purpose."

"A higher purpose, not me?"

"I am not sure what I am supposed to say."

"You are supposed to help me. You are supposed to make me feel right with myself."

"If I can't do it for myself, how can I do it for you?"

"That is lame. What are you so weak?"

"I want to be strong. Something is missing. I have no idea what is the missing ingredient. Why do I feel this way?"

"You can't give credibility to all your feelings. Otherwise, you would never get anything done in life."

"I need to know who I am."

"You are father and lover. Everything else is superfluous."

"I have job to do. I have to do it the only way that I know how."

"That seems noble, but it is not enough."

"What are you telling me?"

"I feel as if you are violating our agreement."

"What agreement?"

"Our plan. Where do you see yourself in five years?"

"Five years? I don't even know where I am going to be in five days."

"This is a strange partnership."

"You have to do what you have to do for yourself."

"And what about you?"

"I am trying to do what I can for myself."

“What about myself, Stanton. I want a life for myself.”

“You fit in with this life much better than I do.”

“Because I work, and I take care of the kids. And you live in a fucking dream world.”

“You don’t have to be so aggressive.”

“You are passive aggressive. Your whole life style is in denial of what you have to do.”

“I can’t take this pressure!”

“No one can. That is called humanity.”

“Don’t generalize my pain!”

“Don’t dismiss mine.”

“I am trying to be sympathetic.

There was a woman outside his door clinging to a blanket that she had received from relief services. They had passed them out before a brutally cold weekend. It had become her jacket that she now wore everywhere. It had warmed a little, but it was still a little chilly. He opened his door and called her over.

“Here’s five bucks!”

“Thank you, sir.”

Stanton was in a white t-shirt and jeans. He had on his construction boots. He had just got a call from Cassie. They didn’t live together. But they had a child together.

“I can’t do this.”

“What are you talking about? You owe child support.”

“Owe? I’ve been keeping up with payments. I’m a good dad.”

“Then what are you talking about.”

He couldn’t tell Cassie what he really meant? He looked at himself in the mirror. This was too much to think about. Going to work at the stadium. Driving that cement truck. All the shit. He was getting buried in the shit.

“You’re an adult now.”

Everyone else around him was getting buried in this life. Not something that he wanted to do.

He had wanted to love Cassie. There was no magic. He couldn’t even remember how things had progressed the way that they had. He had life get ahead of him.

“You’re a man now. Stanton, you can’t play the role all your life.”

Play the role? That was what he was doing. When he was with his daughter, he hardly felt connected. He lived and died for the child. He brought her toys. He spent time with her. But he felt as if he didn’t know her.

After a day at work, the sweat clung to his shirt. The dirt collected on his pants. He felt proud. He was strong. He left the site with a sense of grace. He was a modern day knight.

He now put it all behind him. He went out for pizza and beer. It was still early. He was the only one sitting at the bar. The bartender sat at the other end of the bar. She held her cell phone next to her as if she was waiting for a call.

She had been friendly when she served him. He wanted to say more to her. He was caught up in his life.

Stanton, you can’t just snap your fingers and go back to your old life.

Stanton looked at his hands. There was certainty in those hands. He could command all

that power. There was total focus in his every motion. His awareness was evident at work. He had total control. He was respected by his superiors. He enjoyed camaraderie among his fellow workers.

He felt as if he could crush solid rock with his hands. The sand would slip from his hands. He had asserted his strength. He could make the world with these hands. He was shaping molten ore. He was creating with his total concentration. He was distinguishing himself among his associates.

Why was he even bothering? He wanted a greater role in his life. He wanted to be rewarded for his presence. He felt the need to assert his vision.

Each day at work, Stanton became more immersed in the task at hand. He was acquiring inspiration. He was finding a place for his immense skill. The job welcomed his contribution. He was a valuable player in the marvel. More and more, his place in the panorama was key to what was unfolding.

Sure, there was an aspect of wishful thinking in his perspective, but he was participating in all the action which made this place special. This was a magnificent promise for the future.

This magnificent project was taking shape. The contours were being established. The ambitious plans were being realized. There was a wondrous collective feel to this work.

I feel special powers. And they make me see things that other people miss. You need to feel that juice pulse through your body.

“I was going to go see your son.”

“I’m glad that you didn’t. I don’t want you seeing how he is now. They have him on the stuff, and he sits there all day. They tried to get me on the stuff.”

In coming into contact with our creative power, we also face our destructive power. Even the most all-encompassing forces in the universe face their contradiction in the manifestation of human experience. The terrible fury of desert winds are matched by an absurd intrigue.

“When we are led astray, we can only hope that there is enough goodness in the soul to bring us back to the flock.”

“I didn’t know that you were looking for lost sheep.”

“You may not fear your concupiscence, but I have enough concern for my own faith that I will not let pride precede a abrupt and perilous fall.”

He was staring at her half-open shirt.

“Did you come here to sell me a bible? I already know the word by heart.”

“I can only assume as much. Rumors are quite another thing.”

“The pastor is a gossip.”

“I am after the truth. I want to hear it from your lips.”

“Is that all that you are expecting from my lips?”

She was taking the initiative. He did not want her to get control.

“My name is Lane.”

“You are quite a preacher.”

“I make it up as I go along.”

Stanton looked at the family. These were not people who he knew well.

“Sir?”

“I think that I came in the wrong house.”

“You look a lot like someone I know.”

“I am not him even if you think that I am that person.”

“I am not going to think anything that I shouldn’t. Do you need a place to stay?”

“I have been sleeping on the street. And this friend told me to stop by his place. Sorry, I got it wrong.”

“You can hang out if you want. We could use a man around here.”

“Maybe you could help me. Aren’t you a preacher?”

“What is bothering you?”

“I feel as if God made me into something. I don’t even know what that is. Can you make sense of it for me?”

“How would I do that?”

“Ask me some questions. Read from the good book. Put everything in place.”

“I am not a faith healer. Is that what you need?”

“You can heal. And you know quite a lot about faith. What are you lacking in your own development?”

“Are you trying to turn me into something that I’m not.”

“Where have you been?”

“Out drinking with friends after work.”

“You were drinking instead of coming home.”

“I live here, but this is not my home.”

“What would home look like for you? Do you want to make all the rules?”

“I feel this creative power. I want it to make a difference in my life.”

“How are you going to do that?”

“Woman, what are you doing to me.”

“What kind of life are we living here?”

“I am not really here.”

“He broke his back at work. And they had him on all this shit trying to get better. He was no longer going to be himself. Not the way that they put him back together.”

“Where is all this noise coming from?”

“Where are we at?”

“I just want to know something important for my life.”

While the bus held there, I had a wi-fi connection. He was this preacher who was seeking a personal revelation, something which would guide him in his self-understanding. It was not simply an idea. He lived by something more urgent. A physical reality. He would drive his Cadillac, and people would be staring at him.

“Who is this guy?”

“He has a real voice.”

“I need some real hope. I don’t want to go back home.”

“This may not be your life.”

“They are my kids.”

“That may not even be a sure thing.”

“This is how you get assigned a story.”

“The baby is crying. Someone hears it. This person hears the connection.”

“We stopped at the drugstores on Main Street.”
“What are you buying?”
“I need some cash back.”
“They are going to charge for cash back.”
“What kind of neighborhood is this?”
“Someone is always making money off of someone else.”
“I am so sorry.”
“There is no respect.”
“Did someone get diapers?”
“The baby is no longer living at the house.”
“How did that happen?”
“It wasn’t my child.”
“I don’t get it.”
“I borrowed a baby. I was pretending.”
“I think that this is marriage.”
“Are you telling me that I am the one that you are looking for?”
“I was dealing with some bad shit.”
“Were you in rehab?”
“How long were you involved?”
“I can help you escape your life, but it is going to take some time.”
“Real money?”
“Lots of it!”
“Thanks for the kiss.”
“I need you to get me fucked up.”
“I need you to fuck me.”
“Where is the balance?”
“It will all be clear at midnight.”
“Where is this story going?”
“Back to the beginning.”
“I just got out of treatment facility. I was put back together. But I need a job.”
“Can you wash silverware?”
“What are you asking me? I am trying to develop an identity.”
“Where did you go?”
“I was hating my life. I didn’t have an identity. This story held together, but everyone started picking me apart. What do you want to do with our life?”
“I am creative. I like art.”
“That is code for telling me that you are a destructive person.”
“It is not the power of creativity. It is the creativity of power.”
“Are you going to help with this family?”
“Are you inviting me to live here?”
“Could you get a job?”
“I know people in construction. I can get on at the stadium.”
“What do you do?”
“I am good with concrete.”

“Is there a body floating in concrete? She will never be found.”

“I don’t want to be found. It will give me the chance to find a new identity.”

“I know you.”

“I know you as well as anyone else.”

“There are winners and losers.”

“They tried to put me on the same drugs. I would have just been comatose. There would have never been anything for me again. That would have been the end of my story.”

“Where the hell are we?”

“You are being cared for. What is your complaint? You have something to eat, a place to sleep. Do you have any initiative?”

“Where is my life going?”

“Keep staring straight ahead!”

“How do you live with yourself?”

“I used to have a family. I couldn’t deal with it.”

“I meet all these people who walk out of their lives. But this was never my life in the first place. I was being forced to be something that had nothing to do with whom I truly was. It was scary as shit.”

“I want to help you. God doesn’t make it easy. Once you make a choice, that is your choice. You stay that way for the rest of your days. You can be made to feel better. But you can’t walk out of your own wife.”

“I have heard about another life.”

“You would have to jump on a plane and vanish completely.”

“I wouldn’t mind that.”

“Do you have your own story? What happens when you park that Cadillac in the motel parking lot.”

“I do pictures. I found this woman who wanted to be a model. I invited her to the room. Afterwards, I regretted the things that I had done.”

“I WANT TO ESCAPE THIS LIFE!”

“I can’t deal with that baby crying.”

“The baby is coming to a knowledge of the world. I can’t deal with it when I hear you crying all the time.”

“This is so sad.”

“We are so sad.”

“Stop me while I can.”

“You are the weak link.”

“Preacher, what are you going to do for me?”

“How old are you?”

“I am all of twenty. I have my own place. Want to come by and drink some beer.”

“That would be against the rules.”

“What rules?”

“I have some rules for myself.”

“This is exactly what I have in mind.”

“I imagined that the story was changing.”

“What do you have?”

“I have a bed and a television.”

“Why television?”

“Where is this going?”

“Are you different?”

“I am a man. You are a woman.”

“We could switch roles.”

“I am not looking for a family.”

“You are a sleazy guy.”

“I met this upstanding guy. But he hates his life. And he is doing everything that he can to bend the universe so that he can escape for that thing in his life.”

“This is a terrible way to start the story.”

“I hate this job.”

“What does it mean that you hate your job?”

“I have a lot of money. But I can’t do this anymore.”

“I want to bury myself in concrete.”

“We are getting lost in the foundation.”

“I have a lawyer. He is going to get me extricated from my life.”

“If you were interested in making money, you would have found a way by now.”

“I can’t stand my job.”

“We are all friends here!”

“There is no money in your account.”

“She really wants it.”

“She wants the baby.”

Dawn had her story. She was crying for her Daddy.

“I don’t earn enough to stay in this place.”

“Are you leaving on me?”

“This is a terrible way to get out of a story.”

“Preacher, are they going to forget me?”

“They already have. This is a life for you. Is that going to appeal to you?”

“I want to help her with her education.”

“Do you even care about her?”

I had a good job. I could pay for my family. But I wasn’t living my life. In high school, I never imagined it like that.

“That one day exploded it all for me.”

I got taken to the hospital. They filled me up with shit, and I was never the same after that.”

“Who are these freaks?”

“These are your nurses.”

“I can figure out wellness on my own.”

“This is an important book. What is it about?”

“Blow me dead.”

“There are freaks and nurses.”

“Once they get out of their rooms, they are doing such bizarre things.”

“They call this a pleasure ward. These are people who experienced too much

pleasure, and the find it impossible to go back to their everyday lives. So they keep them drugged up in this place.”

“This hell cat tore him apart.”

“All the children perished in the fire. The Christmas gifts. Everything.”

“We are trying to find some kind of purpose for this kind of hell.”

Stanton realized that all the power was not inside of him. He joined together with these other players. They were making something greater than themselves.

“What is going on in that place?”

“It is a black site. Real bad people. People who do not obey the rules.”

“That is not legal.”

“People want results.”

“Results do not matter if there are no principles.”

“It’s the means not the ends.”

“I ain’t coming in to work. I need to stop at the Walmart for some food. Then I am going to go about my business.”

“We need you on site today.”

“I have shit to do.”

“Can you sell this candy?”

“I am afraid of you.”

“Do you want a cut?”

“You collect the money. You put it into an envelope, and you deliver it to the said address.”

“Do you have a driver?”

“I drive myself. I have a truck.”

“Are you still working construction?”

“I am doing odd jobs. Delivery.”

“What about your kids?”

“They weren’t my kids. They were hers. I tried to make a place for myself there. But she kept pushing me on things that I could not do for myself.”

“That sounds like a convenient way out.”

“I did not belong in this place.”

“Are you still telling people shit about my kids?”

“I never felt at home in the place. Then I figured it all out.”

“You don’t know how to be responsible.”

“You are trying to trap some guy into living with you.”

“You could have just left when you wanted.”

“I have nothing to do with this.”

“Are you living on the edge?”

“I have a playpen.”

“I am more low budget, low-fi type of guy.”

“Preacher, can you do miracles?”

“Seriously?”

“I can change water into wine. Then I can get drunk on my wine.”

"I can heal myself."

"Where have you been?"

"I injured myself on site. Then I got exiled to this medical facility."

"We once knew each other well."

"I have been hiding in the basement."

"I knew a doctor. And he took care of things."

"You had a habit."

"I couldn't stop myself!"

"You took the wind out of my sails."

"Stanton, where are you going?"

"I got a job in Seattle."

"I wanted you to be part of my story."

"I have to get out of here."

"I could make it worth your while."

"Preacher, you were supposed to get me out of this shit."

"What the hell!

"What are you doing?"

"I am a little perverse."

"Are we taking bets?"

"This guy is fucked up."

"The story is going to get very unusual."