



Lasky Park

It was a beautiful sunny day in Lasky park. People were moving slowly, soaking it up. Shadows were wrapped around everything and sounds were muffled by a cool breeze in the trees. One might have felt like pulling up a chair and reading a good book, maybe dozing off for a while

It looked like slow motion to Charlie, who took a seat on a bench, scraped the little stone that was bothering him off the bottom of his shoe, and unpacked his brown paper bag

The idea was it would contain Samantha's lunch of the day. Fuck he loved her. But the little orange Tupperware with his sandwich and the tangerine had been discarded in favour of a bottle of Pappy's bourbon

He was fucking it up with Samantha.

He knew he was.

This.

Doing this.

This was the definition of fucking it up with Samantha.

Charlie sat back on the bench, peeled back the brown paper from the bottle, looked around himself for any scornful gazes and upended it.

He suddenly felt his toes. Like they'd woken up, tingling, coming back to life, a warmth creeping up him and finally into the part of his brain that manufactures smiles.

He did indeed smile as he looked forward to his next drink and was able to relax enough to appreciate two birds battling over something in the grass.

This is what Charlie wanted. Just 2 birds. Over there. Doing their thing. What were they fighting over. Where do they live.

Charlie needed to absorb himself in the birds. And forget everything else.

He was just picturing what these 2 fighting birds were going to give their kids for dinner and he heard the sound of footsteps slowing in front of him.

Another man, or rather the shadows and sounds from another man had slowed down past the bench, and seemed to be considering a seat

Charlie thought, for fucks sake how many other benches are there? Literally 4 yards away right there, buddy.

But the man came over and took a quiet seat at the opposite end of the bench. Charlie accepted the intrusion and vowed to get back to what he was doing. But he couldn't remember what he'd been doing.

The birds had gone, dispute resolved, and life went on for everyone and everything.

Charlie thought about another sip but now this guy would think he's some wino or something. For fucks sake. Just a quiet drink in a quiet park without fucking bench stalkers. Is that too much to ask? Please.

Charlie looked down at the bag and was about to twist round to the side to take a secret sip but then the man spoke and stopped him in his tracks.

"I'll bet you're worried about tonite."

"Excuse me?"

"Well, you know Samantha is gonna say something tonite. You've been slacking, not paying her enough attention, smoking hot booty like that too, silly boy. And she's looking so hot..."

"What the fuck?" said Charlie. "How do you know... you don't know anything about me"

"I know everything about you."

"Who are you?"

"I'm you. I'm everyone."

"What? You're not me. Fuck off. You don't know me."

"Oh really?"

"Really!"

"OK," said the man. "So ask me a question about yourself that I couldn't possibly know? And be ready to have your head fucked."

"What?"

"You heard."

Charlie wanted this fruit cake gone. Say something and then grab the booze and that should be enough for him to find another fucking bench

"OK," said Charlie. "So, when I was 6 I had to bury my rat. I took him down to the river and used a rock to dig a little hole and bury him. I thanked that rock for helping me and I gave it a name. What was that name?"

The man smiled and laid back on the bench. "Good one," he said. "Like it. Well, let me see now, oh, poor baby, your little face trying to hold the tears back, bless ya. Now what did you call that rock? Hang on. I got it. And you called it..... wait for it.... Ricky the rock."

Charlie felt a cold sweat settle on him. If he wasn't sitting down he might have needed to sit down.

"Ricky the rock, motherfucker," said the man.

"I have never told that to anyone, not my folks, not even my sister back then, not my fucking dog, not even the silence when I am alone. Not once, ever."

"Are you sure? So I shouldn't know anything about your dog Buster then, should I?"

Buster. How the fuck? Now Charlie WAS dizzy. He didn't know if he was sitting or standing. Trying to walk away or falling asleep. All the noises in the park wrapped themselves up into a single tone and all the images and smells followed them. He couldn't have moved if he'd wanted to as the man

continued...

"You were coming home from school on the bus and you saw this plastic bag by the trash outside Lehmans and for some reason you had to watch that bag and then you saw it move. Do you remember that feeling you had, you thought about getting up and getting old Jenkins to pull the bus over but you didn't, did you? You had to get home or you'd get the belt. And as soon as you got home you were bothering your daddy to take you back there cos theres something in the bag opposite Lehmans and finally you bothered him so much, you got the belt anyway didn't you? And later, your daddy felt bad and took you back to Lehmans. The wind was all blowing the dust around, enough for you to put your T-shirt over your face. You were so nervous going over to the bag because it wasn't moving anymore, apart from the wind making it sound like tiny firecrackers. You looked inside and there was a little tiny pink thing, little arms and little legs, just lying there, wasn't moving. Your heart sank down below the dirt and right into hell because it looked dead. Then, just as your first tear popped out, it turned its head and just about managed to look at you and you knew it was alive. You shouted up to your daddy and you knew you were shouting up to God as well, didn't you? And your daddy came over and said it was a little puppy about just a few days old. You looked up at him and he looked right back at you and that seemed like forever and then, when he smiled, you were the happiest you'd ever felt in your whole life. You looked back down at that little pink thing in that bag and that was yours. That was buster."

Charlie heard "Buster" again and snapped out of wherever he'd been to discover tears were rolling down his face. He was seconds away for letting out a shout of anguish to the world.

"Stop," he yelled. "Please stop. What do you want?"

The man pulled up his sleep and checked his watch. "It's now 1.45. At exactly 2.25, someone will break into your home. They will see Samantha and she will look like, "Oh my God who the fuck are you" and that man will shoot her and kill her."

"What?"

"You heard."

There was something in Charlie that instinctively told him it had to be true. Everything this man had said had been true in the most minute detail. There was literally no other course of action. This was the moment.

We may get it once. We may even get it twice but we rarely recognise it.

He would save Samantha. He would prove he could be there when she needed him.

Charlie got up and looked down at the man.

The man was smiling respectfully and reading his paper. He then looked up into Charlie's eyes and renewed his smile. He got up, dropped his paper on the bench and walked off.

Charlie thought "hey, hang on," and a million other things to stop him, but not a single syllable came.

Then Charlie looked down to the newspaper on the bench. It looked different to his Times this morning. His headline was some democrat convention. This was Springsteen's comeback tour.

Then he saw the date on the man's newspaper was tomorrow's date.

Charlie was forced to think about sitting down again. He caught a flashback from the birds fighting and the voice of the man and buster and his Ricky the rock and his head started spinning out...

But then he thought of Samantha... and his feet didn't touch the ground.

One might speculate, in hindsight, it was the fastest a human being has ever covered the distance between the bench in Lasky park and his home.

It would be another 6 hours until Charlie thought about the abandoned bottle of pappy's left on the bench.

Or the man he met.

And both raised a smile.

And in the meantime, he got home with 10 minutes to spare, gave his beautiful wife a beautiful kiss.

And after exactly 10 minutes, shot a man breaking into their home.

And roughly 24 hours after that he collected his \$37 m lottery win