

Spaidson

It was a small town, a strange town. It was called Spaidson. It wasn't far from any city, only about 45 miles out of Greysie City. But it was far out there enough.

I got there about 2AM. My car was out of gas about 5 miles from the nearest gas pump. After digging out my flashlight from the glove compartment and turning off the car, I headed out. We had no mobile telephones then, of course, only the ones in the wall. As I got nearer into town, a police car came up and stopped on the side of the road where I was walking, flashing his lights at me. I went over as the man stood out of the car door. He was a strange character, mousey with little glasses propped on a long skinny nose. He looked out at me from over his glasses, observing me like a specimen. Finally he asked, very softly but clearly if he could give me a ride into town. Of course I obliged his offer, not wanting to walk any further in the dark, night air.

When we got into town, we pulled into a little aluminum station. Two small gas pumps sat side by side out in the drive. An older man came hunched out of the station. His overalls were old and torn, covered in grease. He had a gas can in hand.

"Another one?" He questioned to the officer.

"You're the second one this week." The officer explained to my surprise, knowing that it wasn't far out from the city. However, this had been the first gas pump since Greysie, as I remembered it.

"How are you, Monty?" The officer inquired caringly.

"I'm very well, Rick." he said as he nodded, "That prescription you gave me really did some good."

After a long pause the officer gave a small smile as he nodded.

"Good," he said.

This conversation, at first, went rather unnoticed by my weary mind. I took my gas and my ride and got my car working again, eager and tired of this little town before even seeing it in daylight. But as I started driving out further, my mind began to wander, as minds do explore inward when there is little to explore outward. I thought back on that conversation all the way to my conference in Chicago. It was a Real Estate conference, meant to heighten our profits by 37.28%. It lasted three days.

On my way back, I was growing closer to that little town of Spaidson and that conversation once again came up in my head, "That prescription you gave me..." I wondered if this was just a joking way to mock a ticket, or perhaps if the officer had simply given him some kind of advice. But it wasn't just the words that made it so strange. It was the way he said it. Appreciative, not sarcastic. The man was serious and even a little bit embarrassed in tone. He spoke soft in volume and his words smooth.

I finally came out of my late-night driving glaze, realizing I had just run a red light. My deep thoughts were overbearing my reason. I saw the blue and red lights flashing in my rear view mirror and

heard the familiar *whoop* of the sirens. I pulled my car to the side and started digging through my glove compartment for my ID and insurance cards. A knuckled knocked against the glass window. I knew my wife would be terribly unhappy if I received a ticket that night so I decided not to tell her as I cranked the handle to roll down the window.

"Afternoon officer," I tried sounding alert. I pushed my cards out the window at him, but my arm just hung there as he wrote in his small notebook. He looked up at me once and hesitated, waiting for a thought to manifest, then wrote again quickly. I waited, my hand still out the window growing tired. He finally took my license, inspecting it-then back to writing.

"Are you feeling rushed today, Mr.-" he looked down at my license again, "Tinsley?" He finally asked.

I thought for a second, thinking this whole encounter rather odd. "Just have a lot on my mind this evening, officer." My voice trailed as I thought back to the strange conversation that took place at the gas station only three nights earlier. The officer looked unsatisfied with this answer. "I... was just on my way back home from a conference in Chicago." This seemed more satisfying an answer to him. He smiled and shifted his weight, crouching closer to my window.

"Are you married, Mr. Tinsley?"

"Excuse me?" I quickly rebutted.

"Are you married?" He simply asked again in a calm tone.

"Well, yes sir, but I don't see--"

"Do you feel inadequate at work, Mr. Tinsley?" he interrupted in the same soft tone.

This question offended me greatly, and I did not know what to say. I did not understand this strange line of questioning. "I..." I began.

"You're clearly not from around here." The officer thought a moment. "Well, all we want here is to help you, Mr. Tinsley. We want to prevent any accident before it occurs and running lights is usually a sign of feelings of inadequacy or stress. But perhaps you're simply too tired to be driving this evening. Why don't you go ahead and follow me to the Bed and Breakfast here in town. It's real nice and we can get you fixed up with a nice room and comfy bed." He stated ultimately.

"That's kind of you, officer, but I really should be getting back home to my wife, now." I tried to object.

"It wasn't an offer, Mr. Tinsley." He replied sternly. He put his notebook in his pocket and started back to his car. I waited for him to pull out ahead of me so I could follow, hoping to change his mind when we got there.

We pulled out onto the road and about three blocks down I noticed the little gas station from three nights earlier. A sign above the little station read, *Spaidson Gas*. I hadn't noticed it there before.

We made a right turn and drove up a little hill, passing some older houses lining the street. *Spaidson Bed and Breakfast*, read a little wooden sign outside the old mint home on top of the hill. The paint chipped away from the corners and whelped up from the rain and sun, the wood textures showed through. A little dirt garden seemed to hold the porch together, the rickety boards decorated with frayed wicker furniture. A small wind chime played in the soft wind.

As soon as we pulled up, the screen door creaked open and slammed shut behind a small, old woman. She held a coffee cup in hand and sat down in one of the old rocking chairs that looked out over the small town. It seemed nice here, inviting.

I was pretty hungry after the long drive and it was getting dark now. I got out of my car ready to defend myself against the officer but when I stepped out into the fresh air, the chimes ringing and the sound of the old wood rocking beneath the woman's weight, something switched inside me. I didn't want to leave. I didn't want to go home.

The officer came up beside me and I looked down from the house.

"Would you like to talk a bit, Mr. Tinsley?" He asked.

"Sure." I heard myself reply.

He led me up onto the porch and we went around the back towards the sunset, the woman nodding to us as we passed. We took two seats of our own and looked out into the purple and orange sky over a wooded area. I couldn't believe it was so beautiful in this strange town.

This officer was different than the one a few nights earlier. He was well-built and stalky, yet a wrinkle of worry and concern marked his aging forehead.

"Why did you go to the conference, Mr. Tinsley?" He started, "Was it to get away from your family? Or perhaps the stress of your job is too much?"

"My wife worries about the children having nice things, about their education..." I didn't know where this sudden cooperation was coming from, "But she knows I'm doing my best."

"Do you feel you're always doing your best for your family, Mr. Tinsley? Do you feel you could do something more?"

"Well, don't we all?" I gave him a half smile and wrung my hands. "I do wish I had more time to spend with the kids. I just, don't always know how to... I'm not sure how. I know what to do at work, but at home I feel frustrated, confused."

"I think everyone gets that way. But you know your wife better than anyone and she knows you. Maybe you should talk to her, confide in her, ask her what you should do. Don't you think she would know better than anyone?"

"Yes, well..."

"Do you feel she ignores the hard work you do, because she only sees the neglect you give your children?"

I was a bit startled at this last suggestion. "Now wait just a minute! Are you suggesting that I neglect my children?!"

"I'm sorry Mr. Tinsley. I only meant to say that you, yourself may feel this way. That you are missing your children grow up, that you're neglecting to spend time with them."

"Yes, I see your point now." I thought a minute...

"Do you feel you can't talk to your wife about these things?"

"Yes, exactly. I feel I can't talk to her because it upsets her too much."

"Have you ever thought that maybe she feels the same way? Maybe she feels you overlook the hard work she does at home."

"You don't know my wife, sir. She and I are very much in love. She is very understanding..." I trailed off a bit as I remembered the fits Laura would have if I forgot to bring home a simple gallon of milk or how she would sometimes cry in the window after the children went to bed, if I hadn't come home from work as soon as I had said. I remembered her using the word negligence, just as the officer had done.

"Well, I suppose sometimes, she can be difficult." I finally confessed. "Sometimes she worries, she thinks I don't care about her or the children. She thinks I don't want to be around them! Its complete madness!"

"Do you think there is any truth in it?"

"I... Sometimes I just don't know how to be around them. I try to talk to them but I feel that they're angry with me."

"Perhaps you should talk to your wife about this. You say she is understanding. But perhaps not. Perhaps it's your turn to be understanding. Perhaps you should discuss your work with them, make them apart of your life. Make them feel involved-trusted."

"I don't know if that would do much good, sir, to be honest."

"I'm sure this isn't the case, Mr. Tinsley. I believe your wife simply feels that the man she married isn't the same man she is spending her time with. She feels pressured to make your children's decisions alone and to raise them by herself. She wants your approval and support in the way she conducts the home and the children's lives, just as you crave her acceptance and support of the work you do, your conferences or late nights."

"Hm. Well, sir, I hadn't really thought of it that way. My wife's work in the home is the same as the work I do away from home. But do you really think that will make the difference?"

"If you really care for your wife, Mr. Tinsley, you will try this. At least see for yourself whether or not it will make the difference."

"Yes, Officer. I suppose you are right."

I went up to the room that the old woman had prepared for me. I thought about what the officer had said. I fell into a trance this place had casted on me. I wondered about the validity of this advice



from such an unusual source. I went to bed, pondering these words and my relationship with my family, wondering if there really was hope for our problems. I thought over my life's work, sold houses, debts paid, but also failures, and many more debts unpaid. Was there a meaning to any of it? I then thought on my wife's life work, raising our children and the home she so delicately cared for and nurtured. I thought of all the friendships she had grown in our home and the love she gave to our children. I remembered the way I had assumed she would have responded if I had gotten a ticket that night, assuming anger rather than understanding. Then I thought again about the officer from a few nights prior, the strange, mousey man who gave me a lift and the oddity of the conversation he had with the man at the gas station. It now all made perfect sense, and I began to finally drift into a deep sleep.

The next morning I had gotten my things together and went downstairs for a homemade breakfast. The older woman stood behind a counter smiling, the set table waiting as I came down from the stairs. I went out to my car after breakfast and loaded my things. I was about to get in when I stopped a moment to look out over the small and mysterious town of Spaidson. I looked up at the quaint hotel, falling to pieces yet well put together in an inexplicable way. I then saw the officer from the night before driving up the hill towards the house. I waited as he parked his patrol car and stepped out onto the gravel road.

"Oh, Mr. Tinsley, I would have thought you would have been on your way by now."

"I was just about to head out when I saw you pulling up. I just wanted to thank you for the advice last night."

"Anytime, Mr. Tinsley."

"Can I just ask you one thing, Officer?"

"Go ahead."

"Why didn't you just give me a ticket? Why did you try to help me?"

"Just doing my job, Mr. Tinsley. Just doing my job." He winked and began towards the house. "Have a safe drive now!" he yelled back.

I started home, pondering what he had said, when I noticed another sign. It read, *Now Leaving Spaidson*, and I smiled.