

1972

The Whole Story

William Stafford

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Recommended Citation

Stafford, William. "The Whole Story." *The Iowa Review* 3.3 (1972): 106-107. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.1402>

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judging of these things, the selection of these things, and conduct in light of these things, is everybody's job. And I don't believe in discipleship or even leadership, or anything like that. Maybe this is one of the things I get from my parents . . . a kind of readiness, even when I was very small, for them to accept some things I could see that they couldn't see, and for me to accept some things they could see that I couldn't see. There was an easy give and take. I remember when I was a little kid, my father took me out for a hike in the country and we were looking for a hawk that we thought had landed in a line of cottonwood trees . . . and he said, "Now Billy, look carefully, in these trees—you may be able to see the hawk better than I can." For me, this is just a little emblem in my life . . . because I remember the jolt I felt: could I see the hawk before my father would? And his tone of voice just said, "Maybe you can, maybe you can't . . . give it a try."

THE WHOLE STORY

1.

When we shuddered and took into ourselves
the cost of the way we had lived
I was a victim, touched by the blast.
Death! I have death in me!
No one will take me in from the cold.

Now among leaves I approach, and I
am afraid that pain and anger
have crept their fire into my bones,
but the slaver around my mouth is drying.
I hope that the light on the hills can
pass open woods and slide
easily around slopes, hold my eyes
before they search their way to an enemy:
I have to contain all this anger, but with luck
it can pass directly into the sky.

2.

I am the sky. After everything ends
and even while the story goes on
I accept all that is left over. When all
the signals finally die, they still find
their way everywhere, meaning the same
as ever: they can't get away. I hold
them for something that approaches through winter.

3.

Though I am winter, through the light on the hills
I let children approach. In a pale straw slant
the sun angles down. Maybe the children will not see

the victims, will somehow survive. The sun touches
along and goes away, and while the stars
come out the sky waits and wherever they look
it is now and there is still time.

4.

I am time. When you look up
from this page I will be waiting to go
with you to the end of the story.

DREAMS TO HAVE

1.

They film a woman falling from a bridge
but the camera stops, and she stays
in the air. I remember that place
the rest of my life: it is going on
while events wait for their cues.

2.

Time jerks its way forward and you are
a long-waiting part, ready, ready,
walking our town. I round your corner
and my eyes come true.

3.

At a gallery every picture has us
in it: a frame back of the frame
pulls us, and I turn with an awkward
lope, heading outward. But that urge
takes me ever toward the center,
which moves.

4.

A person mixing colors bends low
when we walk there. "Why are you
so intent on that bottle you are stirring?"
And then I know: in that little bottle
he has the sky.

William Stafford