

BEZ
No, really. Tell me.

LUKE
Trust me. You do not want to know.
It's insane. Anyway, I think this
poem...
(he can't help himself)
...eighty thousand dollars...this
poem could have a Celtic theme...

BEZ
Are you out of your mind?

LUKE
I want to do this for them.

BEZ
All right. But eighty thousand
dollars! That's...very generous.
If you don't mind, I'd like to write
you a check.

LUKE
Bez, it's cool, really. I know you
would if you could --

Bez digs into his backpack for his checkbook.

BEZ
Please. Besides, I don't want to
tell anyone this yet, but it looks
like a very big publisher is
interested in my new novel. So,
please...let me do this.

LUKE
Okay. Fine.

BEZ
Thank you. How's five hundred until
I get my advance?

Bez hands the check to his brother, who tucks it neatly into
his wallet.

12 EXT. SIXTH AVENUE - DAY

Bez stands immobile in the rush hour crowd, staring up at a
monolith sheathed in black glass. It is the headquarters of
"WEBSTER BOOKS."

13 INT. WEBSTER BOOKS BUILDING - DAY

Bez moves with the crowd toward the elevators.

GUARD (O.S.)
Sir? Can I help you?

Bez stops in his tracks, turns toward the guard.

BEZ
I was going up to see my editor.

GUARD
Who?

Bez doesn't answer, not knowing what to say.

BEZ
Mr. Webster.

The guard looks him over and picks up a telephone.

GUARD
I've got a writer down here for Mr. Webster...What's your name?

BEZ
Stone.

GUARD
Stone...Yeah.
(looks up)
Robert Stone?

Bez nods, barely. The guard's manner instantly changes.

GUARD (CONT'D)
That's the eleventh floor, Mr. Stone.

14 INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Bez riding up, nervous.

BEZ
Mr. Webster, it's a pleasure to meet you. My name is Jabez Stone, and I am a writer.

(beat)
Shit. It's great meeting you, Mr. Webster. I've written a book.

He winces at the sound of it.

BEZ (CONT'D)
Shit. Shit. Shit.

15 INT. ELEVATOR/ 11TH FLOOR - DAY

The doors slide open and Bez starts to exit, then stops, half in and half out of the elevator. A bear-like man is waiting, arms extended to hug him. This is DANIEL WEBSTER.

He is wearing a shirt with a tie loosened at the neck, sleeves rolled up to show massive, hairy arms. He also has a mid-afternoon cocktail in his hand.

WEBSTER

Bobby!

Bez and Webster both freeze.

WEBSTER (CONT'D)

You're not Robert Stone.

BEZ

(weakly)

Mr. Webster, it's a pleasure to meet you. My name is Jabez Stone and I am a writer.

The elevator doors start to close, trapping Bez between them. The doors hit him, open up and hit him again. The RECEPTIONIST discreetly picks up the phone.

BEZ (CONT'D)

Mr. Webster? May I move out of the way of the doors?

WEBSTER

I wish you would.

Bez steps into the reception area. The walls are lined with the dust jackets of the great books Webster has published over the years.

WEBSTER (CONT'D)

What do you want, Mr. Stone?

BEZ

Just two minutes of your time.

A SECURITY GUARD races in, steps between Bez and Webster.

SECURITY GUARD

I'll take it from here, Mr. Webster.

(to Bez)

Why don't you come with me, sir?

The elevator arrives.

BEZ

Please. Think of it as your good deed for the day.

The guard pushes Bez into the elevator, knocking the backpack from his hand. The laptop slides across the floor and lands at Webster's feet.

WEBSTER

You don't want to forget this.

Webster picks up the computer and hands it to Bez.

BEZ

That's my new book. I want you to read it. I think I have something important to say.

Webster nods, with a hint of a smile.

GUARD

Right this way, sir.

BEZ

Right.

(to Webster, trying again)

Ideas that will be as relevant a hundred years from now as they are today.

GUARD

(interjecting)

Let's go sir.

WEBSTER

Hold on, Frank.

Bez looks up in surprise.

WEBSTER (CONT'D)

Alright, two minutes, Mr. Stone.

16 INT. WEBSTER'S OFFICE - DAY

It is a large office on a corner of the building, looking out over Manhattan on two sides. Webster refills his drink, then drops into the chair behind his desk. Bez remains standing.

WEBSTER

Now what can I do for you?

BEZ

I sent you a manuscript.

WEBSTER

Do you have any idea how many submissions I receive in a year? Not that I finish many. Typically, I read only until I'm satisfied the writer has nothing out of the ordinary to offer. Sometimes this requires the perusal of the entire manuscript.

(MORE)

WEBSTER (CONT'D)

More often it only takes a few sentences.

BEZ

I have something out of the ordinary.

WEBSTER

And what would that be?

BEZ

Novels like the ones Dickens or Kafka wrote. Books that will be as meaningful years from now as they are...

WEBSTER

(Interrupting)

Yes I know. About a young man who wants to be a writer.

BEZ

A young man who is a writer.

WEBSTER

Has he been published?

BEZ

No.

WEBSTER

Then he should know better than to call himself a writer anywhere but in the privacy of his own home. There is a difference between wanting to be a writer and the writing itself. The one thing is the reward, the other is the work.

BEZ

I've done the work.

WEBSTER

Two hundred and fourteen pages, am I right?

Bez nods, stunned, trying to figure out how Webster knows this.

BEZ

So you read it?

Webster just stares at Bez, refusing to answer.

BEZ (CONT'D)

I know it needs work, especially toward the end...

Webster gives nothing.

BEZ (CONT'D)

My new book is coming more fluidly,
in fact, it's pouring out of me...

Still no response. Bez glances around nervously, finally breaks the awkward silence:

BEZ (CONT'D)

Is that a tail?

Bez motions toward a glass case containing what appears to be an animal's tail. It is narrow and perhaps three feet long, coming to a sharp point. It looks lethal.

BEZ (CONT'D)

It looks like a whip. Is it real?

WEBSTER

What makes you think I would display
a fake tail?

BEZ

Where did you get it?

WEBSTER

I won it. If I'd been a second
quicker, I'd have nabbed one of the
ears, too.

BEZ

What kind of animal did that come
off of?

WEBSTER

Your two minutes are up, Mr. Stone.

BEZ

But we haven't talked about my novel.

WEBSTER

You see all these famous books?

Bez surveys the room. Books, pictures of writers, editors.

WEBSTER (CONT'D)

Decorations. I've published perhaps
five great books in my life, maybe
fifty good ones. The rest I don't
remember. We have other editors
with more enthusiasm for the process
than I.

BEZ

I want to write stories that last.

WEBSTER

You have already lasted beyond all expectations.

Webster rises to shake Bez's hand. His shirt sleeve rides back to show the beginning of a horrible scar, a purplish patch where the flesh has been burned. Bez momentarily glances at it.

WEBSTER (CONT'D)

Go home and write something, Mr. Stone.

(beat)

Write something better.

Bez heads toward the door, opens it, and then stops, looking back.

BEZ

Just out of curiosity. How far did you get? With my manuscript?

Webster holds up three fingers of his right hand.

BEZ (CONT'D)

(hopeful)

Three chapters?

Webster says nothing, just stares. Bez smiles, tentatively.

17 INT. ELAINE'S - NIGHT

The watering hole of the successful literati. Bez and a group of friends, all writers, occupy a large table in the back. Bez is recounting his Daniel Webster adventure to his two closest friends, MIKE WEISS and MOLLY GILCHRIST. Julius Jensen, the dean of the group, sits back, carefully taking it all in.

MIKE

So then security came with what, stun guns and pepper spray?

MOLLY

(imitates a police call)

We got a 201, desperate writer wielding unpublished manuscript.

BEZ

Actually, Webster took me back to his office and we had a nice chat.

MOLLY

Then you got pepper sprayed.