

WHAT YOU CAN SEE WITH THE NAKED EYE

By

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EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Assorted debris, junk, bits of broken plumbing, electrical conduit are stacked up on all sides. The detritus seems to be holding up the splintered wooden fence.

The small bungalow that flanks the yard is humble beyond words. Leaning in tandem with the fence, almost slumping to the ground.

And seated primly on an upturned fireplace log, MISS PIERPONT. She is 28, conservatively well-dressed, and wearing a frown put on for just this occasion.

A rattletrap pickup truck, every rusted panel vibrating in time with the floundering engine, backs into the yard.

It stops, and the beleaguered vehicle dies one more of a thousand violent deaths - wheezing and rattling. Finally dying with a burst of blue smoke.

Out climbs JAKE JACKSON. He's in his forties, could pass for years older. His clothes are creased with dirt and his eyes with worry.

He scowls at Miss Pierpont and immediately begins unloading the truck, piled high with debris like that in the yard. Miss Pierpont rises from her perch.

MISS PIERPONT

Mr. Jackson?

He barely acknowledges her as he traipses by with an armload of bent conduit. He throws it on the conduit pile and returns to the truck.

MISS PIERPONT

I'm just here to check on the repairs we discussed at our last --

Jake pulls a broken mattress frame off the truck.

JAKE

(mutters)

Repairs are all done.

He hauls it to the other side of the yard, leans it against the fence.

MISS PIERPONT  
I'm sorry, did you say they were --

Jake doesn't break stride, starts to pull an old water heater out of the truck, with some difficulty.

JAKE  
All done.

Miss Pierpont consults a slip of paper.

MISS PIERPONT  
(reading)  
The wet trap in the bathroom, the water meter electrical ground, the basement stairs handrail --

Jake launches the water heater into a miscellaneous pile in the corner. Turns to Miss Pierpont.

JAKE  
Leak under the kitchen sink, fixed that too.

Miss Pierpont puts away her list. Summons courage.

MISS PIERPONT  
May I see the work?

Jake's scowl flares into hostility.

JAKE  
Hell, no.

MISS PIERPONT  
I beg your pardon?

Jake pulls some assorted planks off bottom of the truck bed.

JAKE  
Inspector saw it. Signed off on it. Ask him yourself if you don't believe me.

MISS PIERPONT  
Mr. Jackson, I'm only concerned for the safety and well being of your son, Arthur.

Jake irritably tosses the planks to nowhere in particular. He turns to Miss Pierpont.

JAKE

Artie. He likes to be called Artie. And he ain't here right now so you can see if I'm keeping him in clean clothes, or if he's got lice or any of that other bullshit you like to pick at.

Miss Pierpont bravely fakes indignation.

MISS PIERPONT

Mr. Jackson, my job is not to find fault with how you raise your son.

She looks around the yard. Obviously she finds lots of fault.

MISS PIERPONT

I have a state-appointed duty to monitor his care. I know you're doing the best you can.

Jake suddenly has nothing to say. He looks around the yard, as though knowing his best isn't very good.

MISS PIERPONT

I understand from your sponsor that you're doing well, you have been clean and sober --

Jake takes a step towards her. She tenses.

JAKE

(points at the house)  
From the day I took him in. From the day Maureen got killed and the county brought him to my door. Not one drink. Not one.

Right now he looks like he could really use one.

MISS PIERPONT

Uh, Mr. Jackson -- you -- you have one more ... item.

Jake turns and looks. A tattered cardboard box the size of a golf bag remains in the truck bed. Jake turns back, looks at Miss Pierpont. No comment.

MISS PIERPONT

Well, I'll -- I'll speak to you next month, then.

From beyond the house, the air brakes of a school bus squeal.

Jake still watches Miss Pierpont.

JAKE  
That'd be him.

The brakes squeal again and the bus rumbles down the street.

Jake and Miss Pierpont share an awkward moment of waiting.

Finally, Miss Pierpont has to speak.

MISS PIERPONT  
Does he usually -- will he --

ARTIE, 9 years old, slight build and in poorly fitting clothes, appears at the back door.

ARTIE  
Dad, I'm home.

Jake does not remove his gaze from Miss Pierpont, who squirms like a pinned beetle.

JAKE  
Hiya Artie. Miss Pierpont's here.  
Come say hello.

Artie lopes into the yard, extends his hand. Miss Pierpont regains her composure, takes it.

MISS PIERPONT  
Hello Arth -- Artie, how was school today?

Jake turns to the scattered planks, begins picking them up.

ARTIE  
Alright, we mostly did quadratic equations.

MISS PIERPONT  
Oh my. I remember those from seventh grade. You're pretty advanced.

Laying the planks in a pile across the yard, Jake allows himself a private smile.

ARTIE

Yeah, well Mr. Biederman is a pretty good teacher. I guess I --

Jake turns to Artie, interrupting the banter.

JAKE

Artie, why don't you get cleaned up and I'll make you some dinner. About an hour, okay?

ARTIE

Sure Dad.

Jake turns to Miss Pierpont.

JAKE

And show Miss Pierpont out the front door. Even though she came in through the back yard.

Miss Pierpont frowns.

MISS PIERPONT

No one answered the door. I thought I should wait.

JAKE

Next time you wait in the car, or on the front stoop. Like civilized people. This is my property, as long as I make the payments.

ARTIE

Dad?

Artie waits at the door, not sure what the adults are going on about.

Jake steps back makes a grudging gesture of civility. Miss Pierpont nods, follows Artie into the house.

Jake turns to the truck, gently slides the tattered box to the edge of the bed. He rubs the worn cardboard anxiously.

EXT. BACKYARD - NIGHT

Lights are on inside. A threadbare blanket covers something in the back yard. The faint sound of Jake singing and strumming a ukelele wafts from an open window.

JAKE  
 (yodeling)  
 Haaaa-ppy birth-daaaaaaaay to  
 youuuuuuuuuuu!

Sound of Artie and Jake cheering.

Artie and Jake come out the back door. Artie has a piece of cake and a party hat on. Jake carries a rootbeer.

Jake strides towards the blanket-covered object. He pulls the blanket off with a flourish.

Underneath is a telescope. It appears to be something more than just an amateur device, with a stout barrel and sturdy tripod. One end of a tripod leg is propped on a brick. Obviously this is a second-hand item.

ARTIE  
 Wow!

Artie puts down his cake.

JAKE  
 Got it at this yard sale. Pretty slick, talked 'em down to -- well anyway, you were sayin' you wanted one. What'ya think?

Artie eagerly examines it.

ARTIE  
 Cool, it's a reflector telescope. Those are the best kind. It uses a mirror to collect light and focuses it at a --

Jake is clearly not understanding the science.

JAKE  
 Well give it a whirl!

Artie carefully adjusts the angle of the telescope, turns the eyepiece to his eye and peers in. He frowns, turns the controls.

JAKE  
 Well?

ARTIE  
 Oh, uh. It's cool. It's neat.

He looks up at his dad. The excitement's faded. Jake can tell.

JAKE  
Let me take a look.

ARTIE  
Dad, it's okay.

Artie reluctantly steps aside as Jake leans over and peeks through the eyepiece.

JAKE  
Oh. Shoot. Is it outta whack? Can't you use one of these knobs to well, focus or something?

Artie bows his head glumly.

ARTIE  
It looks like the mirror's broken.

Jake's shoulders drop, along with his pop bottle.

JAKE  
Well ... shoot.

Jake looks around desperately, as though a solution might present itself. All he sees is a yard full of junk.

He crouches down in front of Artie, who's still glum.

JAKE  
Artie, I'm sorry. I know it's been rough on you, with Mom gone. I'm probably the last guy you wanna be shackled up with, some damn poor loser junk man, not the kind of dad a kid wants --

Artie looks at Jake.

ARTIE  
(comforting)  
Dad, it's okay. Really.

Jake stands up.

JAKE  
Well no it ain't. Shoot.

Jake looks around, hopeless.

Artie gazes skyward, takes his dad's hand.

ARTIE  
That's Ursa Major.

Jake's stuck in his misery, only half hears him.

JAKE  
What?

Artie shakes Jake's hand, points up.

ARTIE  
That's Ursa Major.

Jake looks up, peers at the stars like he'd never noticed them before.

JAKE  
Really?

ARTIE  
That's Cassiopeia, over there.

Jake looks at his son, so proud it hurts.

JAKE  
You know the names? The science names?

Artie smiles at his dad.

ARTIE  
Yeah, there's a whole bunch of them. Constellations.

JAKE  
Constellations.

Artie and Jake look some more. Jake puts his arm around Artie.

ARTIE  
There's Cepheus.

Jake picks one out.

JAKE  
What's that one?

ARTIE  
Orion. The bright part is called Orion's belt. That star on the end is --

Jake tousles Artie's hair -- watches him gaze steadily at the sky.

ARTIE

Rigel ... there's Pleiades.  
Technically, it's a star cluster,  
not a constellation.

JAKE

(quietly)  
Happy birthday, Artie.

Jake looks up. Both take in the majestic beauty of the heavens.

ARTIE

Thanks, Dad.

FADE OUT.