

"The City of the World"

"I know that Willie is especially eager to show you his city. Maybe we should start by going through the door on the left."

Without waiting to hear Stone's opinion on the matter, Flower opened the door and gestured for Nashe and Pozzi to go in. The room was much larger than Nashe had imagined it would be, a place almost barnlike in its dimensions. With its high transparent ceiling and pale wooden floor, it seemed to be all openness and light, as if it were a room suspended in the middle of the air. Running along the wall immediately to their left was a series of benches and tables, the surfaces of which were cluttered with tools, scraps of wood, and an odd assortment of metal bric-a-brac. The only other object in the room was an enormous platform that stood in the center of the floor, covered with what seemed to be a miniature scale-model rendering of a city. It was a marvelous thing to behold, with its crazy spires and lifelike buildings, its narrow streets and microscopic human figures, and as the four of them approached the platform, Nashe began to smile, astounded by the sheer invention and elaborateness of it all.

"It's called the City of the World," Stone said modestly, almost struggling to get the words out of his mouth. "It's only about half-finished, but I guess you can get some idea of what it's supposed to look like."

There was a slight pause as Stone searched for something more to say, and in that brief interval Flower jumped in and started talking again, acting like one of those proud, overbearing fathers who always pushes his son into playing the piano for the guests. "Willie has been at it for five years now," he said, "and you have to admit that it's amazing, a stupendous achievement. Just look at the city hall over there. It took him four months to do that building alone."

"I like working on it," Stone said, smiling tentatively. "It's the way I'd like the world to look. Everything in it happens at once."

"Willie's city is more than just a toy," Flower said, "it's an artistic vision of mankind. In one way, it's an autobiography, but in another way, it's what you might call a utopia - a place where the past and future come together, where good finally triumphs over evil. If you look carefully, you'll see that many of the figures actually represent Willie himself. There, in the playground, you see him as a child. Over there, you see him grinding lenses in his shop as a grown man. There, on the corner of that street, you see the two of us buying the lottery ticket. His wife and parents are buried in the cemetery over here, but there they are again, hovering as angels over that house. If you bend down, you'll see Willie's daughter holding his hand on the front steps. That's what you might call the private backdrop, the personal material, the inner component. But all these things are put in a larger context. They're merely an example, an illustration of one man's journey through the City of the World. Look at the Hall of Justice, the Library, the Bank, and the Prison. Willie calls them the Four Realms of Togetherness, and each one plays a vital role in maintaining the harmony of the city. If you look at the Prison, you'll see that the prisoners are working happily at various tasks, that they all have smiles on their faces. That's because they're glad they've been punished for their crimes, and now they're learning how to recover the goodness within them through hard work. That's what I find so inspiring about Willie's city. It's an imaginary place, but it's also realistic. Evil still exists, but the powers who rule over the city have figured out how to transform that evil back into good. Wisdom reigns here, but the struggle is nevertheless constant, and great vigilance is required of all the citizens - each of whom carries the entire city within himself. William Stone is a great artist, gentlemen, and I consider it a tremendous honor to count myself among his friends."