

Chaos and Consequences

poem · May 16, 2005

“Are you sure that’s him?” the cop asked.

He was a real cowboy, this one.

Out of place.

“Sure I’m sure,” I said.

“I’ll never forget that face.”

It was true.

The stark, wide eyes of fear like amazement.

A bewildering sense of power and control within them

And the terror of wielding it

chaos and consequences

cracking like thunder.

The fun was just a squeeze away.

Scott carried the money in a brown paper bag

Cash and credit card receipts from the store

A mild December morning

The city yawned.

2 blocks to the bank.

Laughing about the Grey Ghost

Always materializing out of nowhere

And suddenly a man with the gun materialized

out of the Christmas Trees

Bright eyes of fearful determination; so afraid.

Silence rolled over us like a wave

I studied the gun.

Vertical ridges

Blunt tip

Carbon blue

Glock 9mm

It pointed at me

Then Bernardo

Waved like a crucifix
In an arc
as if we were vampires

It settled on Scott
At eye level, I'm sure he got a good look down the barrel
Before it moved to his heart,
then found its way into the hollow trench
of Scott's throat

"Give me the FUCKING bag!" The Gunman shouted for the third time.
Scott didn't care about the bag or the money.
We were all shocked into astonished immobility
Fear clenches
Both Scott's arms were locked tight around the bag
My jaws, Bernardo's tiny fist, Scott's arms.

The gun moved again
under Scott's chin
His close-clipped salt and pepper beard.
Feel the cold steel and think of its possibilities, its movement seemed to say
Release the paper bag

At that moment I thought:
Scott is going to die today.
I saw Bernardo's imploring brown eyes
Over the outstretched arm of the gunman
A flannel sleeve of brown and beige

He spoke softly: "Scott. Give him the money."
With his free hand, the gunman tore the bag away
Bundles in rubber bands bounced on the sidewalk
As he fled down 79th street
Brown paper flapping loosely under his arm

Sound exploded around us
The world reeled us back into its noisy vortex
A passing taxi's tires as they jarred a manhole cover

Pigeons fluttered down to bread crumbs
The squeal of breaks as a bus slowed
Car horns in the key of F
2 trains rocketing through the station below

Bernardo knelt to collect the bundles
As Scott beckoned me to follow him.
Jesus. I thought.
We chased the gunman
“...at least see what direction he’s...” I heard.

The gun was still on my mind.
I was much faster than Scott,
But I ran behind him anyway.
A red Lincoln screeched to a halt at the end of the block
Then raced away

Scott was out of breath
Reciting the numbers and letters
I wrote them on my hand with a Sharpie from the pocket of my deli-coat
Twenty minutes later from the back of a police car
we identified the gunman.

Then on to the station
Reports were typed and filed
By the cop with the slight drawl and cowboy boots
“You’re lucky,” he said.
“In this neighborhood, they would have just shot you and taken the money.”

I had to ask. “Was it loaded?”
“Oh yeah. And a bullet in the chamber.”
Cowboy could see our satisfaction
Glaring at the gunman in the cell
Head down
Ashamed and foiled

“It feels good when you get them doesn’t it?” He said.
“You know what? It’s even more fun when they’ve shot at you.”

10:30 am, back at the store

The holiday rush was on and there was much to do

I decided to take a break anyway

I sat in the basement on a cardboard box of lima beans in oil

I flipped through the pages of a book, trying to escape into it

but I could not stop the cinema of scenes in my head

No matter

It was going to be the best Christmas ever