

A Hunting Story

I got no excuse for myself. What I done was awful. But that old lady didn't have to be there when I needed the money so bad. Fact, she could have been anywhere on this God's green Earth, picking flowers, knitting sweaters, anything them old ladies do. Stead she decides to walk into my life.

There I am, thinking about the end. I got the barrel of the gun pointed right at me, like we're talkin. Only kind of conversation ripe to happen, is what I thought. I thought, first I state my side of the story--how my girl left me after swearing this time was for good, how she took my TV, which shined like seven full pay checks--then, the gun states its side. Gun says: that's it, huh? You cryin about that, are you? Sounds pretty bad, you're right? Lemme sees what I can do. Aha. Yes. Looks like I got a bullet here for you. Looks like you won't be talkin that much longer, or crying, either. Blam!

Only the gun wasn't finished when that old lady came along. Underneath that loaded brown shopping bag, she was the easiest target I ever seen, and I'm a hunter. In my day, I killed over two thousand animals, I'd say. But never a human. I only thought about that. Thought about pretty quickly as the lady walked by. Fact, I ain't so sure I was thinkin, and that's the part I'd like to make clear, that sometimes you act without malice. Then, sometimes you act with lots of malice. It's a scale, tippin back and forth between too little and too much. The crucified Jesus has his arms in a balance, but not us.

I sees her, and I says, there's no point in doin it now, so's that old lady drops her bag and screams. You don't want to show up in the papers as a story about broken eggs and heart attacks. That's not a clean way to leave, not as clean as you got going now with the silencer against your ear. That's got charm to it, like a deadly message you understand but never hear. That much is good, and shouldn't be ruined by some half-brained old lady, whose gotta be trudging past like a snail as the gun finishes discussing. I'm getting mad about it again.

She shouldn't have been there, or walkin that slow. There wasn't no grocery store in the area anyway. I started to think about her carrying that bag from some friend's house, as if she didn't need no grocery to carry some. Then I believed she was carryin it all the way from Kingdom Come, as a sign for me to gape at through the cracked windshield of my Chevy. This was a sign. This was God's way of tellin me what was in store had my girl never left me. I put on the wipers and cried.

I'm not sure that's what God wanted. See, it wasn't uplifting to know I was living without the senselessness of womankind, which senselessly left me in the first place. All my life, I've enjoyed that senselessness as something I lack in myself. I don't know how to be senseless. With me, everything is methodical, so that I can pack my cooler full of exactly the right number of beers to get me to the next convenience store happily as I drive. That may not seem like much until you realize I'm also talkin about huntin trips, which last overnight.

Every highway I drive is etched into my mind like a blue print of my needs, and I meet em.

Must not have needed to kill myself. Those tears started down my cheek and I felt good all of a sudden, too good. It was like a desert getting rain, and I was the desert. I didn't make a sound after a while, just sat there feeling the flood run down my cheeks, the whole time with that old lady movin in front of the car. That's when I popped it in gear, and runned her over. She bounced off the hood like a sack of potatoes. As I blew out of the driveway, I spit gravel from my rear tires over her unmoving body.

Today, I cleaned my car, and noticed a piece of her dress in the radiator grill. I must have missed it the first night because I was too busy with the broken eggs and strawberry preserves. Fact I wished I seen it. It would have helped me clean up. Not a big enough piece of fabric for so big a job, anyway. I don't know what I'm regrettin it for. I found it and I kept it and that's enough. Now I have a souvenir to remember her by as the senseless old lady who saved my life and put the fire back in me. Tomorrow I'm pushin further north for a head start on deer season. Maybe some of the boys will have better stories to tell.

Anyway, I doubt it.