

Narrative

New York gets colder every year, I thought as I sat slumped in my patrol car. I watched my breath metamorphosize into a ghost and rise out the window, leaving this miserable city behind. It even seemed to wave goodbye. Two more hours. Two more hours until I could go home, hang up my jacket, sit in my recliner, and let my eyes give way in front of the TV.

At times it was hard to keep up the facade of satisfaction with my job. I had these great fantasies of being a hero when I joined the force. But those were only dreams, nothing more. The true monotony of the job would shock people. My life was never glamorous, but it was the life I chose. I could accept that I wasn't going to be a hero, but at least I could put a roof over my head and feed my family. My only regret was the toll it took on our lives together, the sheer amount of time I had to be on duty.

I often wondered if I was doing a better job of being there for my kid compared to my own father. I wasn't physically there a lot of the times, but I hoped that he would know I was always there for him in other ways. I really hoped he knew how much I cared. Sammy is more than I could ask for. He's more than any parent could ever hope for: a reliable friend, a hard-working kid, a responsible son. As excessive as it sounds, the fact that someone like me was lucky enough to get Sammy as my child is, truly, nothing short of a miracle.

Even then, every year he got older, stayed out later, and came home for dinner less often. Not like I could really complain, it's exactly what you should expect from a teenager. Just once, I wished I could have 6 year old Sammy on my lap again, reading to him before bed. I began to

nod off, picturing the happier times with my family, only to be jolted awake by the sound of my radio.

“Unit 344 come in, Unit 344.”

“This is Unit 344. Over,” I responded.

“Unit 344 we have a report of armed suspects, I repeat, armed suspects in your area.

Caller reported two men in suits and masks. Call received from the corner of Hamilton and 2nd. Children present. Over.”

“Copy that, en route.”

I dropped my radio and shifted my car into gear. I couldn’t help but think, what kind of monster would bring a gun to a residential area on Halloween? Putting all those families in danger, they must have no regard for the pain they could cause. I thought of all the children who were just trying to enjoy trick-or-treating in their costumes. Every child loves Halloween. On Sam’s list, Halloween was definitely further up than Christmas or New Years. What had he chosen to be for Halloween this year? Was 18 too old for that? Part of me hoped not. There was nothing more sad than the image of Sammy not being able to give his favorite holiday the proper celebration. Pushing my nostalgic thoughts aside, I raced over to Hamilton and 2nd.

Upon arriving at the scene, I stepped out of my car carefully. The block was deserted, save for a few scattered Snickers bars and forgotten candy baskets. My heart raced as I stepped around the car with my hand placed carefully on my gun. Who knew how dangerous this situation would be? I had to be prepared for anything. Still no one in sight.

I began to reach for my radio again when I spotted two men running around the corner. Dressed in 1920's suits and wearing masks that covered their faces, they were quickly getting away from me. I leapt into action when I realized that one of them was holding a gun.

“Freeze!” I ordered. They both stopped in their tracks and looked at one another. “Drop your weapons and get on the ground!”

One of them, the shorter of the two, did just as I told him to do. The other made it clear he that he wasn't listening. When he began walking toward me, I steeled my nerves. Situations like this get out of hand all too often. I tried to regain control.

“Get on the ground!” I repeated. “If you take one step closer, I will incapacitate you.” I held on to the hope that he would come to his senses and listen. Even though the holiday was already ruined for the kids, the last thing this neighborhood needed was more violence.

He began to loudly mumble underneath his mask, but I couldn't make out the words. He took another step forward and raised one of his arms toward me. With his gun now pointed in my direction, I had to make a choice. Before he could get any closer, I grabbed my gun and pulled the trigger once. A shot rang out in the dark and he quickly collapsed to the ground, screaming in agony. I had hit him in the thigh.

His friend began screaming too. “What did you do... what did you do!” He cried as he took off his mask. There was a look on his face that was unsettling. He was scared, sure, angry, yes, but there was also a look that seemed to say he felt betrayed.

It was only when the man on the ground stopped screaming and began panting heavily that I started becoming anxious. Blood was pouring out of his leg too quickly, he was in more pain than I had anticipated. He rolled around on his back, shaking uncontrollably. This was not supposed to happen at all. I must have severed an artery. I felt my blood run cold. I had only seen this in training, never thinking that I would be the one in that situation. I had shot him a few inches too high on his leg. Quickly, I reached for my radio.

"I need an ambulance to the corner of 44th and Hamilton. Suspect bleeding out. Over."

"Copy that," I heard in response.

Ok, breathe, I thought to myself. I had to get him stabilized. I reached for the gun he had been holding, only to find that it weighed much less than I had anticipated. It was a fake. I threw it to the ground in horror and rushed to aid the man I now realized was innocent.

"You need to stay with me, sir. Listen to my voice... do not fall asleep." I pressed my handkerchief to his wound with as much pressure as I could as he continued to mumble. His friend screamed through breathy sobs, "What did you do, Mr. King? What did you do?"

Oh God, how did he know my name? I looked at him again, and suddenly the look on his face made sense. I recognized his face. Sam's friend? I'm sure I'd seen him in my house before, had him over for dinner maybe? A realization began to dawn on me, but I couldn't believe it. It couldn't be. In a blind panic I looked back toward the suspect and pulled off the black mask over his face. The face looking back at me was far too familiar. Sammy looked up at me vacantly. He was in a daze. My own son didn't recognize me.

“Sammy! You have to stay with me Sammy!” I kept screaming it at him. “Don't fall asleep, Sam!”

His trembling hands reached up and grabbed for something, anything to stop the pain.

“My dad’s gonna find you,” he whispered. He barely seemed conscious, a cloudy hue was beginning to come over his eyes.

“Sammy it's me,” I cried, “It's Dad. Please, Sam. Don't fall asleep.”

I heard the faint noise of ambulance sirens down the street. Tears flooded down my face as his gasps and moans became softer and faded into silence. He closed his eyes for the last time. I wrapped my arms around him and held him close, begging and pleading with some unseen force that he would be ok. In that moment, the whole world seemed to fade away. I could hear the EMT’s arrive and hurry over to us, but it all seemed oddly muted and surreal.

“Officer King?” Voices called my name, but I couldn’t focus on them. Numbly, I stepped back and let them pull Sammy away from me. Before I could even register what they were doing, they had him strapped in and speeding away to the hospital. I knew what was expected of me as the responding officer, but none of that mattered right now. The other officers who had arrived on the scene came over and spoke gently, coaxing me back to reality.

“What happened, King?” One of the officers stepped towards me.

“It was a prop gun, a fucking fake!” I replied.

They stood around, rightfully concerned about me. I was unstable, for sure. How could anybody be calm in this situation?

“He tried to tell me who he was, but...that damn mask, we couldn’t hear each other.” I continued.

“Are you alright, King?” The same man spoke up again.

“Sammy, he...I...I shot my son” I managed to choke out.

I knew as soon as I spoke those words that things were not going to be okay. Things were never going to be okay. How could I ever explain to mom? Or his girlfriend, Sophie? It was too late, he was gone. This was one mistake that I could never atone for.