

From TobakkoNacht – The Story

The Spark

Scene: A young mother, carrying an infant, preparing to cross through a crowd of smokers in one of New York's public plazas. Her shoulder-length hair is in some disarray, its black curls falling on her shoulders in tangles as though she's been running. Her eyes seem a little wild, and her breathing is a bit ragged.

She is muttering softly under her breath, but floating security nanocams augmented with Homeland Security's SUB-VOC¹ programs record the scene for later broadcast and analysis.

##It was AGAINST THE LAW! Damn smokers' rights groups and commie ACLU got open air bans ruled unconstitutional. Filthy nic addicts! Got to get to the building... They're all in my damn way with their damn POISON!##

The mother is clearly in her fifth or sixth month of pregnancy despite holding a child of less than a year partially wrapped in a rubber raincoat. The morning's rain had just stopped as the security tapes began recording the scene. Smokers were enjoying their reborn freedom during their lunch breaks, sharing benches with smoking and nonsmoking friends, and standing around in convivial groups as the sun broke through the clouds.

The young woman glares at the scene before her and wraps the raincoat protectively around her infant's head to make a bubble of clean air before starting to rush across the plaza. Her breakneck pace begins propelling her into groups that she pushes through, rather than detouring around, cursing and muttering all the while. Oddly, she's trying to hold

¹SUB-VOC: Statistically Upgraded Brain-Voice Optimized Characterization: a new, flashy, and controversial Homeland Security tool, allowing properly equipped Holocam drones to catch and record subvocalized thoughts of people in public places.

her breath, so she doesn't really speak aloud but just keeps jerking her head to the side to tell the smokers they've got to move.

##Why should I have to go around THEM? They should MOVE!!!##

She clasps the raincoat tighter. The wisps of smoke in the air seem to be almost a solid fog when seen through her eyes. She looks down at the raincoat wrapped around her child...

##It's getting in the CRACKS! The Damn Smoke is GETTING IN THE CRACKS! I can feel my baby KICKING! Damn smokers won't MOVE!!!! What's the MATTER WITH THEM????##

She almost snarls at a group in the way of her progress. The smokers seem shocked and a little frightened by her distraught appearance and wild eyes. She swings an arm at them as though trying to knock them aside with sheer willpower.

##Why are they just STANDING there STARING at me as though I'M the one who's crazy while THEY'RE the ones sucking down poison and blowing it everywhere while my BABY is trying to BREATHE!##

She won't be intimidated. She stops her headlong rush, pulls the raincoat a little tighter to protect her baby, and stands and glowers back at a group right in front of her. Then ... horrors! One of them actually starts walking toward her waving a hand holding a lit cigarette. Some critical observers have since claimed that, from the camera view, it looked like he might have been concerned about her and was about to ask her if she needed help of some kind. The SUB-VOC data record that would confirm this has unfortunately been lost.

He is still about three feet away but as he opens his mouth to talk to her...

She sees SMOKE starting to come out of his mouth. He'd had the smoke in his LUNGS and was now going to spray it all over her and her baby and her unborn child! This was TOO MUCH! She couldn't stop herself. She drew in a lungful of the foul smoky air. It almost choked her. She felt it burning down her throat and causing micro cancers in her lungs that would grow into brown seeping masses and kill her but she had to breathe it in because she had to ... she HAD to ... SHE HAD TO

SCREEAMMM!

SCREEEAMMMM!!

SCREEEEAMMMMM!!!

The camera shows her stopped, almost across the plaza. The smokers had stopped as well; the tableau was frozen, but later Holo/SUB-VOC analysis expanded upon what you could see in her eyes and what was going through her mind...

They're not even SMOKING anymore but they're STILL burning their cancer sticks and sending their poison to attack me and my babies! But I'm almost through. I can see the fresh air gushing out of the vents by the doors of the building. There's only one more dirty smoker in the way ... And he's a POLICEMAN!! How can they be ALLOWED to smoke in public where decent people can see them? Where did he COME FROM??? He wasn't there a minute ago!

The camera showed comprehension dawning in her eyes as she realized he'd been in what was left of the old "Smokers' Butt Hutt" built ten years earlier between the office buildings and the main plaza. It was a small, nasty little thing with no light and a depression in the concrete – worn by smokers' pacing feet – where rainwater collected and putrefied in

puddles of tar. He'd clearly heard her scream and come running out to see what was happening.

The idiot actually comes out thinking he could HELP ME? With a DEATH STICK IN HIS HAND???

At this point it's clear that the besieged mother has simply lost control. As the officer approached with a hand offered toward her tightly wrapped and protected baby, she kicks out and gets him right in the groin. He drops like a rock and she rushes past into the cool, fresh air from the building vents.

She stops and takes a deep shuddering breath; and then exhales as hard and fast as she can to try to get the poisonous brown foul carcinogenic tarry gobs of smokers' air out of the recesses of her lungs.

She takes another deep breath and hugs her precious pure baby to her bosom. At least she had protected him. His air bubble had kept HIS lungs safe.

She hoists him up in her arm and goes to pull the flap of raincoat free to smile at him and let him know that all is OK...

Damn! The damn raincoat is TANGLED! I didn't pull it this tight! Oh! That's right, I tucked it more at that first knot of stinking smokers! But how did it get so TIGHT???

The camera shows her pulling frantically at the flaps while the knots resist her stubbornly. Her baby has stopped kicking ... isn't even moving. He's lying there loose in her arms as she finally pulls the last corner of the raincoat free.

His head lolls sideways. His eyes are open and sightless and accusing.

SCRRREEEEAMMMMMMM!!!

THE SMOKERS DID IT!

THE SMOKERS KILLED MY BABY!!!!

She looks up at the smokers in the plaza. The idiots are STILL frozen and staring at her, STILL holding their burning murders between their fingers and blowing their deadly smoke at her.

The cop has gotten up and is limping toward her. He is almost on top of her, reaching out toward her precious lifeless baby. She lunges forward and pulls out his gun. Shoots him. Starts shooting into the crowd of smokers.

BANG!

BANG!

BANG! BANG!

BANGBANGBangBangbangbangbangba....

After a dozen wild shots take down almost a dozen people, the policeman levers himself up from where he'd fallen and shoots her with his backup pistol as he dies. The shot bursts through the head of the child in her womb and severs an artery in her chest, killing them both almost instantly in a spray of blood....

The plaza goes silent.