

Catch Me if You Can
Roxanne O'Farrell

Course: English 101
Instructor: Dr. George Dorrill
Assignment: Memoir

“Don’t ever come back to my store again.” Those were the words spoken after what seemed like the longest silence in my life. I had been caught. How could I be so stupid, so obvious? I had been taught to be so much better than this. What will my mother think? She doesn’t have to know. I won’t tell her. My brother will laugh at me. He’ll find out. I know it. Why did I have to get greedy? Couldn’t I have just taken one? Was this worth it? These were the thoughts that ran through my head after I got caught shoplifting for the first time. I was ten years old. It was at a convenience store across the street from my childhood home. I had stolen from there so many times. I had gotten good at it too. But that time, I was a little too greedy.

I had been hungry, so as usual, the best thing to do was to go to the store and steal some food, just a little snack. It never once crossed my mind that this time was any different from previous times. As I walked into the store that day, there was no doubt in my mind that I would exit with some snacks for my brother and myself. I had it all figured out. I would go to the back of the store, get a Coke that I would pay for, and pocket some snacks (in this instance, some beef jerky). I thought I was incredibly clever to pay for part of it. I figured it would throw them off the idea of me stealing. After all, it had always worked before.

Everything went well at the beginning. I grabbed my Coke from the wall cooler and headed towards the beef jerky stand, pausing only for one moment to ponder and hope that this

Coke had a winning cap. I laughed to myself. Wouldn't that be funny? I wouldn't be paying for any of it then. As I stood in front of the beef jerky stand, I knew that since I was only ten at the time, the clerk would have to lean over the counter to see me over the tall aisles.

It was at this point that I messed up. I stayed at the beef jerky stand for too long. And instead of grabbing just one or two, I shoved ten or more beef jerky sticks into my oversized jacket and proceeded to the counter. This was always the worst part. At the time I didn't know why, but I hated looking into their eyes. Unfortunately, it was absolutely necessary. I couldn't look nervous. I stared her in the eyes, trying to not only look as innocent as possible, but to also look thirsty. That would guarantee we could avoid any small talk and I could get out of there. I paid for my Coke and went to walk out. Yes! I did it. Just a few more feet and I would be home free.

Before I could even finish enjoying my pre-celebration, the clerk stepped out from behind the counter and blocked the path between me and freedom. I could see the door. I had felt the sun coming through the glass onto me. So close. I was so close. But now, a shadow was cast over me by the clerk. I got scared. I knew I looked nervous. I couldn't say a word. She knew! She knew I was guilty. I knew I looked guilty. She stared me down for a second. But it felt like forever. What was she going to do? She reached into my jacket and pulled out the beef jerky one by one. I was paralyzed with fear. I couldn't move, couldn't panic. So many thoughts ran through my head. Was I going to jail? Would she hit me? Was she going to lock me in there and force me to spend an eternity as a stock girl in this run-down convenience store? Or worse ...Was she going to tell my parents? This is it. I know it. I'm a goner.

Finally, after the last beef jerky stick was removed from my jacket, she leaned in over me. Here it comes. She's going to scream at me. Man, this is going to hurt. But she didn't hit me

or enslave me or even yell at me. She firmly said to me, “Don’t ever come back to my store again.”

That’s it? That’s all she was going to do? I thought I would faint. I heard those words and began to cry. Why did I feel so bad? She didn’t even really harm me. Why was I so upset? As soon as she stepped aside, I sprinted to the door and ran home feeling more ashamed than I had ever felt before.

Looking back at it now, I know it was just a childish prank. I realize that by stealing, I was just trying to get away with something. There was a great, unknown pleasure every time I walked out of that store. An incredible victory had been won. I know now that these ideas are childish, but that’s what I was, a child. I was a child that had learned for the first time what it felt like to be ashamed of myself, with or without a tangible punishment. I was a child who had just started the long journey to understanding how damaging greed can be, how much pain it can bring to one’s pride and a person’s integrity and how lucky I was to not have received what I was sure would have been the most brutal beating of my life that night.

Dr. Dorrill’s Comments: Roxanne wrote her essay in response to a memoir assignment in my English 101 class. It’s really one of the best I’ve read from my 101 classes. She told an exciting story using sophisticated sentences. I particularly liked her opening and closing.