

The Circle Poem

It was back in late 1981,
James Grimes, wife Sheila
And their new born son
Drove 'round Monument Circle's arc
Where there were no spots
So they had to double-park
in front of a bank called AFNB
Where they'd applied for a loan
And had to pay the fee.

Officer Cress was on duty
It was no big production
Just keep the traffic flowing
And free of obstruction

Then he saw a car
Setting astride
The circle of bricks
So he pulled alongside
And yelled,
"Hey buddy, let's move.
You can't park here,
Traffic's got to flow
This lane's got to clear."

James Grimes looks over
Tells his wife not to worry
"Pay the loan with our checks.
Be back in a hurry."

He turns to the officer
And with a big smile, says
"Be patient patrolman, I'll move...
This won't take a while."

"Hey, buddy, I said move it,
There's no double-parking!"
When James ignored him,
The cop began barking.

"Hey, patrolman, you know
you don't have to yell...
just look straight ahead
and you can tell
They're double-parking
on this hub.
What's that place...
the Columbia Club?"

Yes, 10 cars were there
Some occupied,
And 3 double-parked
Sitting side-by-side.

But Officer Cress couldn't see
the obvious double standard
He took the question personal
And he felt slandered.
So, he got steamed,
I mean he really got salty
(I think he knew
in his heart
his logic 'bout all this...
was faulty.)

So when Mr. Grimes
Still didn't move,
Cress blocked in the man's car.
His authority to prove,
He got out of his jeep
Perturbed and went
And stuck his head in Grimes' window
continuing the argument.

Attempting to move,
Grimes was not fast enough
Officer Cress got perturbed
And things got rough.
Cress reached for the keys
To turn off the car
"Don't touch me please."
Said Grimes.
"You're going too far!"

Tragically, he pulled off
'round the Circle's curve
Officer Cress dangling outside,
Grime's car began to swerve.

As the two men wrestled
with the steering wheel,
Sheila's left foot on the brake
stopped their automobile.
She pleaded, "Don't shoot!"
"Don't shoot!"
When she saw the gun's
Flashing stainless steel,
But the policeman enraged,
ignored the appeal.

In this conversation,
Cress got in the last word,
According to Sheila:
“I’ll shoot you, you bastard!”

Suddenly silence...
and stillness
the turning of heads,
The busy Circle froze
with what everyone dreads.

Then Sheila’s wailing
and sobbing began
an ambulance, sirens,
everyone ran
To see what took place
while a news camera clicks
Pictures of blood on the
Circle’s new bricks.

The next day
Folks were talking
and some wondered why
one man got in trouble
while others got by?
They silently realized
what everyone knew,
Double-parking on the circle
was a privilege for a few.

One person said,
“This is so terrible!”
“Why did he die?”
“It was over a parking ticket?”
“What! That has to be a lie.”

“Hey, isn’t the Circle
A public space,
Doesn’t everyone have
a right to this place?”

Another person answered,
“Yes, we do, buddy
but here’s the rub,
there’s no parking on the Circle
‘cept at the Columbia Club.”

“You hear what I’m sayin’
do you know what I mean?”

You must not be hip
to this scene?”

“You’ve seen *Animal Farm*,
ain’t ya?
Well, this is the sequel:
We’re are all the same
‘cept some are more equal.”

“‘Some are more equal,’
Now, that don’t make sense.
We all pay our taxes
And pay our rents.
We all have to obey
the laws of our city.
Why did a man die?
That’s a pity.”

“Well, just look at the facts
of the offense because
Big shots can double-park
and break the laws.
While tax-paying citizens
have to pay.
For the rich and powerful
Police look the other way.”

“Do you want to know more
‘bout why that’s the case?
Why allowing double-parking’s
a slap in the face?”

“Yes, tell us all.
It’s such a mystery.
And the children too,
So they’ll know the history.”

“Well, the Columbia Club’s
an old and exclusive place
where politicians, businessmen,
‘n lobbyists embrace.

“Here, the wealthy and powerful
can park two abreast
and if were you or I did,
there’d be an arrest.

“It’s our own little ‘White House’
Where our mayor stops by
to please special interests
and then comply.

“In this case
it was Mayor William Hudnut’s
weak,
ineffective,
‘n negligent leadership.
See, it was OK with him
Cops shoot from the hip.
And this allowed the official
endorsement
and attitude of
overzealous law enforcement.

“Historically there’s an attitude
in the police assortment
overly-suspicious
of black folk’s deportment.
Many do not know how
to approach a true man
So they treat certain people
as less than a human.”

Now, let’s get back to the story:

“How did Officer Cress
Get himself in such a mess?
He could have played it cool
and called for backup
or walked away instead
he let his anger stack up.

“But there’s no excuse
for a professional lawman
to let double-parking
get so out of han’
he looses control of
the situation until
it escalates to the point
where he will kill.

“Officer Cress was trying
to please
his pals, parents, and
bosses, so in fact
it was all of his lingering
insecurities
that was the cause of this
tragic and senseless act.

“He wasn’t king,
but the law was,
so he could impose his will
like authority does.
He had no power,
but the law did
he could be a bully,
and his badge would keep it hid.

“So, it was just another,
an’ another
then another poor judgment!
And he wouldn’t budge
Now he was stuck--it meant
He had few options now
but to aim and shoot:
Arrest,
judge,
and then execute!

“I mean,
how far do you go
to deliver a traffic ticket?
How far does a fox
chase a rabbit into the thicket?
What’s terribly wrong
with this situation?
Imagine that,
a man was killed
as a result of a
\$7.50 parking violation!

“So, Naptown’s a place
where injustice remains
where power gets its way
and no one complains

“Be they public officials,
these agents of social control
teachers, realtors
or police on patrol
will continue to maintain
the distance we know
that keeps us a part
‘n maintains the status quo.

“Once a monument
to our Civil War glory,
the Circle’s now a reminder of
a preventable and terrible story.

“We’re like small southern town
and it’s a shameful disgrace.
The reason James Grimes died was,
he didn’t know his place.

“We’ve got to draw the line
and make everything fair
democracy’s Monument Circle
isn’t a square!

“This is a travesty of justice
And we’re all dam fools
Until we consider
these new traffic rules:
Unless anyone can park
anywhere for any (length of) time
on our Monument Circle

I tell you, it’s a crime!
Or unless no one can park anywhere
for any time--it’s all cause for alarm;
So until everyone can double-park
or no one can double-park
We’re still livin’ on ‘Animal Farm.’

“So, if you park on
Monument Circle today
Don’t forget the price
One man had to pay.
To stop this tragic
hypocrisy
someone had to die...
so we must see
what James Grimes saw:
All men are created equal
in the eyes of the law.”

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This poem is based on the shooting death of Mr. James E. Grimes by Indianapolis Police Department Officer Michael Cress on Monument Circle in November of 1981.

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