

ut vereor est vis matris

Sherilyn Connelly

2004

One day in the latter half of the nineties, I was walking up Van Ness, minding my own business. Then, as now, I was six feet tall, but I also weighed upwards of two hundred and eighty pounds and was not lacking for body hair, facial and otherwise. If being a big hairy boy was how I was supposed to look—and, genetically, it seemed to be my lot, and you can't fight genetics, right?—I hoped that I at least *appeared* to be a person nobody would want to fuck with. In truth, I was an utter and complete wimp with no self-defense skills to speak of.

At Geary, two men appeared on either side of me and grabbed my arms. They informed me that I was coming with them. When I protested, one of them told me that I had really, really better not try to get away. We started walking back towards Market, and what was happening dawned on me. *i'm about to be the victim of a violent crime. they're going to take me into an alley, rob me, and beat the shit out of me. maybe even kill me. it's entirely possible that i'm about to die.* When they walked me past an alley without going in, I was more surprised than relieved. *weren't we supposed to go down there? I'm so confused...*

Instead, we stopped in front of a coffee and donut emporium. They stood me in the doorway and said, "Is this the guy?" A woman standing by the counter looked at me for about half a second before saying, no, I wasn't the one took her purse.

They released their deathgrips on my arms as though I was on fire, apologizing profusely. I suppose I had every right to be angry. Instead, I was just happy to be free, and without another word I walked away. After a few blocks, I broke down ever so slightly. I found a payphone and called my girlfriend, telling her the

story as best as I could, in between the sobs and unsteady breathing. I didn't realize until then just how scared I was.

I narrowly avoided that one, but I haven't always been so lucky. In high school I got punched for no good reason by some drunk kids looking for trouble. I also found myself in state of mutual antagonism with a kid in Spanish II who'd decided that pulling on my hair was more interesting than the class itself. (This was a good ten years before I transitioned, and my hair wasn't even all that long—although the power struggle between my mother and I over its length was soon to end.) Eventually I got so frustrated I lashed my hand out behind me; I was never sure if I hit him or not. It was almost involuntary action, part of an unpleasant adrenaline rush as my brain realized that “flight” was not an option.

He responded with a much more carefully aimed blow to the side of my head. After class he confronted me directly, but nothing happened, although I was always wary of him. (His name is still the one that comes to mind when I need to name a villain in fiction.) A year or two later, I learned he was paralyzed in a drive-by shooting. That was my first exposure to a genuine moral paradox—it was something that shouldn't happen to anyone, and he couldn't have deserved it more. As though to keep things in perspective, a good friend of mine was killed in a drive-by not long after.

Oh, yeah. Almost forgot. For a few years following our parents getting divorced, my closest brother beat me up on a regular basis. He didn't stop until I finally started hitting back. He feels terribly guilty about it now. I don't feel much of anything.

I never did get mistaken for a purse-snatcher again. Nowadays, over a hundred pounds lighter, defoliated and with my hormonal polarity reversed, it's unlikely to happen again. There's a much greater chance of *my* purse (my messenger bag, anyway, since I'm far too modern for a purse) getting snatched. Or of things much darker.

The most obvious elephant in the room is rape. The statistics haunt me, even if I'm unsure of the exact numbers. I don't need to know. One in three, one in four, one in six, what does it matter? Does it make a difference if the statistical probability of sexual assault is twenty-five percent rather than thirty-three? It feels like it all boils down to a single word: *inevitable*.

I don't live in fear of it, mind you. It's in the back of my mind, particularly when I'm walking alone at night. Aside from keeping as aware of my surroundings as possible, though, I go on about my business as though it's not going to happen. I don't have any choice, really. Otherwise, I'd never be able to leave the house, and if someone wants to get in, they'll get in.

Then there's the sneaking suspicion that I'm even more of a target because of how I look. After being on hormones for five and half years and presenting as female in public for over two of them, I've grown accustomed to the male gaze. It's gone from being flattering and encouraging (*do they think i'm a girl? is this really happening?*) to just a fact of life (*jeez, take a picture, it'll last longer*). It comes with the territory.

Except that, as previously mentioned, I'm six feet tall, with a countenance often described hyperbolically as "supermodel" or "movie star." This is not me bragging; I don't see it when I look at myself. Whatever the reason, I'm noticeable and it does seem to result in something more than just the standard, cursory lecherous look. I know when I'm being watched, and I can't help wondering what's going through their mind.

A few are surely clocking me, recognizing that my birth gender and what they're seeing now don't quite match. The majority never get close enough to tell, however. Someday, the statistics imply, I'm going to unknowingly trigger someone—or, more to the point, they're going to be triggered by whatever malfunctioning neurons cause them to do these things in the first place, through no fault of my own—and it'll happen. I'll be raped.

I wonder sometimes what it'll be like. Will not being sexually attracted to men make it even worse? Probably not. Violation is violation, no matter what your orientation. It'll be about power and violence, not sex.

The defining moment, of course, will be The Big Reveal. I suppose it might not happen if he's focused on my ass, but in all likelihood he'll discover before too long that *it's a man!!!* Then my sin of simply *existing*, the one shared by all females, will be overshadowed by an even greater one: the fact that I'm not *really* a girl, that I'm a faggot, a deceiver, an unnatural abomination. In all likelihood, I'll be bashed to within an inch of my life. Or an inch past it.

For the record, I remain a wimp with no self-defense skills to speak of.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 2nd Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.