

Damn Sure Right

by Meg Pokrass

The man had come up behind me and locked my arms backwards. I could feel his cock or gun against my low back. He told me if I moved he'd hurt me and he said did I know what that meant? I did know, however I was watching from somewhere else (sort of interested in this, sort of not).

My jaw would not open very well. Two police came and one of them called my boyfriend with his phone. They took a detailed report. When asked, I spit my formal name - blood came out of my mouth but I was not hurt and didn't know whose blood it was.

There was a witness, an African American woman who had been hiding to protect herself. She had helped me up from the dirty concrete floor, straightened my dress, smoothed my hair down. She told the police that she was forty-five years old, employed. She gave them her phone numbers and home address. I felt as if I were watching an actress playing a Good Samaritan in a movie, she was so familiar.

She explained to the police that she had ducked behind a vending cart. She described what she saw him do. She said it was awful, and that he didn't need to do what he did, that I was a petite woman. She told them she had helped me up from the floor, so I could stand on my feet. I nodded my head to show them she had. She said, "he didn't need to hurt her, damn sure right."

One of the policemen asked me if I had family nearby. My boyfriend Ian, I tried to say, but it sounded like "oyfenian". I wouldn't go anywhere without him, I said, which sounded like "ahh wed go widout him."

I wanted to walk up Broadway with Ian, out into the middle of the fine day. I imagined how we would sit at the Greek place, touching. Since I was not compliant with their suggestions for paramedics, they told me that I would have to sign a release denying medical transportation. Did I understand?

How quickly Ian arrived, as if he were there exactly the minute he needed to be - and how still he stood nodding his head while the police were talking. I hadn't yet said goodbye to the woman who had helped me. I wanted to talk to her, but I couldn't see her anymore.

Ian thanked the police and took forms from them. He told me he didn't think we should go to a restaurant. "We need to do the right things now," he said. He held my hand tightly and we walked out of the dim station into the bright afternoon. He hailed a cab even though it was just a few blocks to Roosevelt Hospital.

While Ian filled out admitting forms in the emergency waiting area, I slumped in a chair, watching a plump-lipped weather woman on the waiting room TV. The weather woman looked mildly worried about a tornado, though her forehead didn't wrinkle, the way foreheads used to do in the old days. She was moving her arms and hands apart and back together, showing the way a situation with air masses was quickly changing. I hated the way she looked, and couldn't watch.

I said, "don't leave me" when he got up to go to the men's room. I said it to his empty chair. My slurring words made me feel untidy.

Sometimes now, twenty years later, my husband will enter me from behind - and because I can't see him, I remember Ian - his flannel shirt and the smell of his fear and the things he did that he thought would help.

