

The Anecdotal Value of Date-Rape

It wasn't really as funny as you might think the time a satirical columnist of great renown date-raped me,

although he told a joke to diffuse the situation after, and I didn't storm out as I had planned to storm out after he pulled out

of me and came on my belly. Where's the condom? Where's the condom? I kept saying over and over like it was a magic

trick he'd performed, a hidden coin he was going to pull out from behind my ear, a prophylactic he'd palmed and

would produce but couldn't, didn't, because it wasn't magic. That was our third date. On our second date I'd told him about my ex of ten, long years. Knowingly

he'd said, "People stay with each other out of fear, to keep a lost childhood. It was something a cynical hero from a Lorrie Moore story would say—

the one about how she left the boy who loved her for men who didn't, and when I read it at 19 I thought who would treat true love so cheaply? Shabbily?

Me. And I hadn't considered the implications when I agreed to sleep with him, but after he had sex with my body sleeping beside his body and I came

out of my dream to him thrusting away and his semen was like a wakeup call from childhood, from all dreams: no, no, no, no!

I kept saying afterwards, the words of the raped, not knowing yet it was considered rape what he did to me, to my sleeping, trustful

body asleep like a child beside his hairier, larger, stranger body. No, no, no, no, this can't have happened to me: I am precious to myself,

therefore I must be precious to others, but this is the thinking of a child. I was a tagline to an anecdote he no doubt told. I was a statistic.

to the rape counselor I consulted later, after the dreams started in which I choked my satirical columnist and screamed, Stop laughing!

It's not funny! It's not all funny! And bashed his head in with a baseball bat or kept getting lost in daytime fantasies of castration and I a pacifist.

I was a statistic she recorded: This many young women are

raped in this many city blocks on this many given nights in August.

O precious, sweet child who once forded the stream alone
like Robinson Crusoe Searching for Sunday in the

wilds of a Virginia backwoods Between the grocery store
and the townhouses; there is no one to

remember your adventures
but me and to record the pain of the night

you were taught to fear funny men most of all
in the dark who don't believe in keeping childhood alive.

Confessions of an ex-Sex Kitten

When I'm tied up on the couch—
a soft brown one, obviously chosen to hide

the stains, smelling not so much of old sexual encounters
gone rancid but of milder strains of dust and mildew—

it's the same as *her* being tied up, Girl #2, the one without a
name to dignify her slavery, the one that I am playing

in this scene opposite the Movie Star, who is playing the
Movie Star always despite being assigned any other part, in this case:

a silver-haired lieutenant of the law, one of lower-middle
income who probably could not afford the personal makeup

artist applying powder to his nose between closeups.
In this encounter, where the Movie Star acts, will lean over

my heaving bosoms and whisper wake up, wake up,
and I, on cue, will whisper back I will suck your dick, baby—

a statement I would never make any man in real life, let alone a Movie Star,
old enough to be my dear daddy issue reborn. The cameras stop rolling, he comes

back and kneels before the couch; he takes my hand still restrained
with a zip tie pulled a little too tight, chafing my wrists,

and he says, you have talent, that was special, we had a moment,
and I say, thank you but later I want more than his words.

I want his help as a sort of apology for what I went through
on that couch, but because I know the intensity he liked

wasn't acting, I don't ask him for anything. On day two when
the abused girl I've been playing is rescued from her couch,

strapped to a gurney by an old friend of mine, a retired fireman, who
puts the old uniform to use, plays bit parts in films and offers me true comfort,

I tell him they didn't even cover me up between takes.
I start to cry again, those real, admirable tears.

My God, he says. You're not an animal, he says.

What am I then? Isn't that what a sex kitten is? An animal.

For those days Hollywood enslaved me on a dirty couch
in a basement in East Brooklyn, tied up and tortured—

the plaything of men; the horror was real horror,
the horror of being a thing and the Movie Star called

me a genius and took his breakfasts on silver trays,
and had his beautiful hair blown out then played

my middle-class savior, and could I be blamed for not
believing in him or in myself or thinking I was saved,

or could be salvageable after all?

City Sonnet: A Prose Poem

Dreaming I return why to the patch of 9th Street in New York on the East side of the city; I dream so precise and strange dreams. Up on the roof painted a blinding silver, where I would peel the orange, soak up the sun, grow pots of basil and heirloom tomatoes, feeling god-like larger than little figures scurrying below and sometimes on nights not too quiet and solemn drink a bottle of beer alone, avoiding always the too-intimate hour of twilight when regrets flash and home is a concept without meaning in the homelessness of the seeking soul. Why there, why this to which my psyche must return endlessly to this one season of a lazy longing and an absurd loneliness, when loneliness was only to hide and seek alone?

Hiding from and seeking not love, not myself, nothing but a pattern which I could cling to like ivy growing on rock, or like an espaliered tree find if I could bear mysterious fruit—nothing too sickly sweet but a fibrous, hard, irenic nourishing of self under the wide, indifferent, and welcoming framed eyes but closed, safe and the familiar, few intrepid stars of an urban sky forever winking a fragile hello.

Empyrean

I have terrible nightmares
that my front door is continually open,
that friends visit

whenever they want. But these friends
are litterers and loud, more obnoxious than real friends,
and don't look at me, like I'm the ghost
in my own home. (Writing this the nightmare
makes embarrassingly clear to me its meaning) when I
Google "people who hurt people" I get one of those

Google poems: people who like pain,
people who help others, people who use long words,
people who don't care, people who hate people.
There's so much to learn in feeling the words

that hurt without putting little bitty bandaids
over the wounds. And still, I love New York,
despite the people, the people everywhere underfoot,
above, as if my nightmare were a waking dream and
I'm overrun, just me and my dog walking along,
the backdrop to so many millions of eyeballs,

but the leaves were undeniably red and lemon
yellow on that fall day like a Kodak ad and the air
was pure champagne. When does the world
stop being your oyster or you the pearl in it?
When do you become the slimy, little anthropod,
covering in the dark? Snapping your shell shut?
Irritated by the miracle of a grain of sand,
pretending you're meditating, waving your hands in T'ai Chi 21
master or a dragon without wings, flying high in the

Chinese skies of the overpopulated planet.

Advice to a Child (For Frankie Rose)

Know where the root is
never pluck it from the ground
palm it and with magic breath
ignite the rose and thorn
until the great halo descends
down through the ages comes a mist
that shrouds the terrified eyes until
death lifts the veil. All night is
woven cloth by blind and beggared children
in the souk .

I see a blackbird
on an apple tree
and visible melodies

in the wind-stirred grass,

in the bright shafts of sunlight
that drop blessings onto my tired eyelids;
where have the girls with the
fluttering skirts gone? Down to the river
to sing of Jesus and wet their feet.
I cannot go with them again.
After praying to the evening star,
I will say a little poem:

*catch the silver fishes of the
sea, my sweet, and bake them
to the white bone. A*

vast, treacherous desert
is youth and only crossed once. The oasis
beckons;
there we elders sit and pray
for you before the burning sands.