

What do we tell our daughters and our sons?

These are our stories; a quick flit through the memories of two people. We started sharing our mundane and illuminating stories with each other because we wondered what to say to our daughters about how to navigate the world as a young woman. How do you navigate a world that can be cruel, whimsical, unfair, wonderful, perplexing, and frightening? And then too, what do we tell our sons? We didn't come up with any answers, but certainty is often misplaced in complex matters.

She was recently separated, at a party at the house of a friend. Everyone else at the party was a couple. The wine flowed; the singing started. When on her way to the downstairs toilet, she met the husband of a friend, he pushed her hard against the coats hanging on the wall, pressed his weight against her. His hand on her arse, he kissed her vigorously. Pinned to the wall and taken completely off guard she momentarily froze. A horrified wriggling and 'no, no, no' came out of her mouth, she pushed him, moved sideways. He was fat and heavy. Into the living room, eyes searching for her bag and avoiding looking at his wife. She left with a hurried goodbye. She walked home the wrong way. Get away, that was all just get away.

She was walking her dogs in the lanes near her house. She had done so the day before also. The affluent looking 50 something man who had passed her in a convertible Mercedes on the previous day, passed again. This time he stopped and talked to her about the rain, which had been biblical and noteworthy. He told her he had been soaked earlier on his run but had decided to keep going anyway. He smoothed his hair back and drove off.

After a night of dancing, she left her friends to get the 10-minute taxi ride home. She sat in the back staring out the window, in her own world. The taxi pulled into the cul-de-sac where her



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father lived, and she asked the driver how much she owed him. He turned to her and said, 'You can pay me in another way...' She was 18 years old; he was over twice her age...she looked him in the eye and declined, hurriedly gave him some money, and ran up the road to get to her father's front door. It was dark, she was on her own, there was no one around.

With her husband in the bank to discuss their joint mortgage; the mortgage broker jokes and banters with her husband, ignoring her. "We'll start with your earnings, shall we and then look at the supplementary income your wife brings in." Her husband - "She earns three times more than I do, so you may want to start with her". An uncomfortable shuffle in the room, she now has his attention.

She was working as a temp to earn some money before moving abroad. On her last day, the fatherly colleague who had taken her under his wing asked if she would come to a meeting room as he had a leaving present for her. They chatted, he asked her how she was feeling about leaving, what she planned to do when she got there...he handed her the gift - a piece of jewellery and some money (small but generous) to get help her get something for the trip. She opened her mouth to thank him, he grabbed the back of her head and pulled her towards him trying to kiss her...she pulled away and pushed the gift back across the table...

Pre pandemic times she travelled a lot, rising at times at 3am to catch a flight. On one such occasion she had travelled on the early flight to Frankfurt and was returning to Bristol airport in the late afternoon. Having become skilled at sleeping when she could, once at the gate for her flight she made a pillow from her coat and napped on her briefcase. She was awoken by

a female flight attendant, just as the last few passengers were exiting the gate to board. All woozy, she picked up her things and joined the line. The man in front turned and said, 'I asked the flight attendant to wake you, because I thought you might be scared if I woke you up.'

A night out dancing with friends, a group of girls, dancing in a circle. She felt hands on her hips, grabbing her underwear through her skirt...rubbing against her bottom...she moved to the other side of the circle, he follows, again grabbing...rubbing...she moves again back to the other side of the circle...moments later, he is there again, grabbing...rubbing...she turns to him to say no...he raises his hand to hit her...

Early in lockdown she had been asked to attend several collective Zoom sessions for a client, they were check ins to give people a chance to connect and talk. She was there, along with a male colleague, to add in some psychology where appropriate and generally contribute, reassure, and facilitate. When the meeting was finished, her partner, who (due to open plan living) had listened to the session, said 'Wow they listen to that other guy don't they? Even when it was things you said, they referenced him.'

She was having some building work done, using the same company that had done some work on her mother's house. Her mother calls her to say." Don't react to what I'm about to say and try to see the funny side. The project manager wanted to let you know that it is not appropriate for your husband to make them tea and coffee and said he was going to speak to you about it...I said don't, you would eat them alive..."

He turned to her and said, 'You can pay me in another way...'
