

What Happened

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Harper utilise une écriture du courant de la pensée pour nous présenter l'histoire d'une femme qui accepte de monter en voiture avec quatre étrangers dans un moment de confiance et de manque de jugement. Elle s'interroge sur les circonstances qui l'ont conduite à être détruite par deux hommes sur la banquette arrière, sur une route déserte. Il y a une ambiguïté poignante au moment où la narratrice perd son sentiment de sécurité et d'autonomie lorsque les mauvaises intentions des hommes sont révèlent. Avec une sinistre clarté, elle nous démontre l'aisance avec laquelle les femmes sont prises au piège dans des situations dangereuses, se retrouvent impuissantes et voient se dérober leur pouvoir de contrôler leurs propres expériences. Elle montre aussi le peu de preuves indéniables que les femmes possèdent, à la fin, pour appuyer leur témoignage.

I shouldn't have gotten into that car accepted the ride but how else was i to get home after midnight mass on christmas eve in sydney soon after i had arrived in australia to live for the second time but this time escaping from somewhere else deliberate not just going to stopping in sydney while on the road and so feeling depressed empty what was i to do now and midnight mass was nice i guess all the people squeezing together in the cathedral downtown and i didn't know any of them though later i found out that a future roommate was there and if i knew him then if i knew anyone then i could have asked for a ride home because as it turned out the trains had stopped running and the busses too because it was late on christmas eve and people are usually together with their loved ones and if they're out at midnight mass they all came together and will go home that way

so it was only me all alone like how i arrived in sydney the week or so before with about a hundred bucks and a couple of friends i could stay with so i didn't have the money for cab fare home or i didn't want to

spend the little money i had on cab fare and i didn't know until later that the house wasn't that far away from downtown and i could have walked or i should have taken a cab because it wouldn't have cost very much at all but instead i ask the group of friendly easygoing aussie blokes where they're headed and they say isn't that something this guy lives a block away from you so of course and they were all pumped up and jostling each other joking but in that laid-back kinda macho way some aussies have and i thought i knew who they were the kind of people simple down-to-earth traditional values talking about sheilas teasing each other women but so what not harming anyone they know what's right know whose shout it is at the pub real gentlemen true blue fair dinkum never'd hurt a sheila opens doors for them knows the rules good people really good regular folk

the first revelation was these guys were just at a bar a disco drinking partying all evening i had not thought that anybody went out drinking on christmas eve i thought it was a quiet cozy family night reflective or at the very least a last minute shopping frenzy who the hell went to clubs on christmas eve these guys

and i was feeling trusting after having just attended church which is something i don't do often at all but feeling trusting because of the feeling of all those people all squeezed together in the cathedral at midnight all there to celebrate something of the spirit something lasting something they hardly understand but can feel somehow when they all come together like that

and i was feeling a little desperate well a lot after having run down to underground stations through empty echoing cement corridors trying to catch whatever last train there was so i thought of asking someone on the street someone who had just been to mass one of the mass of people there

when i asked the group of friendly young men who made it easy because they spoke to me first i assumed they had attended mass we were just down the street from the cathedral but when i told them i had they elbowed each other some more hey she's just been to church hey

their car was the last one in the underground parking lot and walking to their car with them for the first time i felt just a bit nervous and was relieved when i saw another person in the lot

now comes the part i am embarassed about the part that i brush over sometimes alter when i tell the very few people i have told the part that makes it maybe partly my fault my poor judgement but i was just trusting people and why is that so wrong and i've always been right my instincts intuition assessments of situations have never misled me and i've lived an exciting anything but sheltered existence so far and so far i have never felt fear

there are four of them they are young about twenty maybe younger i am only a couple of years older two get in the front and one gets in the back tells me to slide in i hesitate come on in so i do cheerfully of course i create my own reality i am not afraid of anything and the fourth guy the hugely-muscled one gets in after me and i am squeezed in between two men in the back seat

there it is i don't like to admit it feel a little embarassed but i am in the middle i am between these two guys i didn't insist against it i didn't say no i'd like the front seat please or at least a window seat i am polite i let myself be seated and here i am squeezed in between two men in the back seat

but it was a night for people close together like in the cathedral nothing wrong with strangers packed in together on christmas eve and it was a small car and they are nice enough to give me a ride home

then the comments start

hey she's not wearing a bra

the driving in the wrong direction

just taking the scenic route

the touches

they're nice, i like the pointy kind

the plans

i am not naive not innocent left a broken home at 15 travelled through south-east asia worked as a musician in penang worked as a secret agent for australia's central intelligence bureau in sydney as an accounting clerk in vancouver knew lots about life knew men well had serious and not so serious but always intense relationships this all by the time i was nineteen and of legal drinking age

the plans

what they were going to do

to me

it is difficult to continue this over a decade after this event even still it is difficult to continue this

well the truth is i needed a ride to where i was staying and i shouldn't have gotten into that car

shouldn't have never say shouldn't have i never say
shouldn't have implies regret shouldn't have regret
shouldn't have

gotten into that car

that is unless on some level i wanted this experience

at some point i realized that these guys hated me they actually hated me or what i meant in their world she's a smart one i bet your boyfriend is a wimpy bloke with glasses a professor or something right so at that point even my seemingly lightly tossed off but really carefully measured responses even my ability to know how to talk to different people in their own language even my wits failed me turned against me nothing i could do or say nothing i tried on was right that was when i started getting

scared i guess though i still couldn't believe it and when i did when i finally realized there was nothing i could do this time this was for real these guys are for real then i got scared and almost threw up i'm going to throw up i tell them no you're not just relax sit back and relax

just relax

since then i know not to trust anyone any man who says those words to me other than maybe doctors

once when the car was stopped at a red light i got the attention of a woman in the car in the next lane i mouthed help help me looking frightened desperate hoping she'd know this was no joke

the muscle guy looked at me funny did he notice or not maybe he did he was pretty quiet hadn't said much if anything so far so i thought i would appeal to his sense of goodness compassion humanity very basic humanity i whispered to him unlock the door and let me out now do it now come on and he just looked at me funny dumb smile slight shake of the head no he is not my ally and soon after he spoke his first word yes

you want to fuck her don't you

yes

and the woman in the car beside us just looked at me with a little frown and i wondered why i came back to sydney

we started driving by dark bushy areas parks and i started pleading just let me out feeling reduced to my very basic self all the layers of experience social skills intellectual verbal abilities dissolved and at the bottom the core was a person needing to survive but even still i was aware that perhaps this pleading frightened person no longer smart and witty would perhaps touch them convince them this wasn't right even still i could remove myself from the situation objectify even in the grip of fear don't do this please don't do this

but we always fuck the girls we give rides to

but i was different was i so different i don't go drinking on christmas eve
i don't wear a bra or heavy make-up tight clothes i don't want it did the
others if there were others and it's because i'm different isn't it it's
because i am not of their world it's because they hate me

i don't know where we are
we drive down a deserted lane by an empty lot
there are no houses in sight no people
and the lane stops dead end
and the car stops
the guy next to me the slim good-looking one
the guy who's been doing most of the talking
all of the touching
stops talking quiet everyone is quiet

i scan the area if i got out and ran which way would i go how fast could i
go could i escape one way the lane stops and there is the empty lot a field
and something industrial-looking and the other way is the road where
we came from but it's so far away my god where could i run to i could not
escape there is no escape no

my words come out in small breaths

okay but

just you

no one else

the slim one and the driver get out together go away from the car talk
argue i hear but she says she'll fuck me she wants to

and suddenly there is a different possibility a chance a hope

something in me switches on i do some fast talking to the short guy in the
front seat who's now looking pissed off i say when i got in i memorized
the license plate i know the license number i can give it to the cops i can
describe each one of you i even know your name

he's nodding his head is he an ally i've found my ally i do some more talking i use the word rape i talk about attempted rape sexual assault how even he is implicated even if he doesn't do anything finally he says as if i've offended him

we don't rape girls

the two guys return the slim one is red-faced angry silent they get in the car the short guy says to the driver quietly she knows your license number she says she'll tell the cops

the ride back to where i'm staying is very short we were right in the neighbourhood

before the driver lets me out he says no hard feelings right i say nothing he repeats it louder slower aggressive

no hard feelings

right

right

on christmas morning i tell my friend i'm staying with what happened i try to tell him but nothing i can say can come close i keep saying the word helpless i felt utterly helpless there was nothing i could do he nods his head as if he understands but i think how could he because i can't describe it it is too much there is too much mixed in with the fear now there is fear now i will never get into a stranger's car now i will never feel invincible strong and he asks me if i'm going to tell the police what happened but i can't how can i and besides nothing really happened they

didn't do anything

to me