

Unwarranted

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By Kelly Morgan

“Hey, baby,” I heard a man’s voice call — as if I would walk over and ask him to fuck me because of that comment.

It wasn’t an attempt to get me into his bed, not really. It wasn’t a proposition: it was a show of power. In two words, the man reminded me that I can be reduced — that I am weak, that I am here to be observed, that men can interact with me how they will. Regardless of my intelligence, regardless of the sarcasm and distance I space between myself and the males with which I converse, regardless of any attitude I assume in life, in two words, he can make me into an object. The man wanted the ability to momentarily control someone else’s role in the world.

And it was also an assertion of his masculinity. He reminded me that he has power — primal, brute, atavistic power — that I do not. If he wanted to, he could pin me down and force his way inside of me, and without help, I couldn’t stop him.

As I continued down the sidewalk, nightfall approached more quickly; the cars on the highway roared by, anxious to arrive home.

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Long after I unlocked my door and stepped inside, I continued thinking about the catcall. I told my friends about it. We complained about sexism and the patriarchy. We moaned over the relevancy of feminism. We all shared stories of men behaving boorishly.

“He started motioning...should ignore it...he was really cute...it’s scary...just not that big...flipped him off...gotten used to it...”

While the conversation progressed, I realized within myself and my companions a certain pride that came with the storytelling. The moments were rites of passage; they were badges that we are women.

In the mind of the man who yelled at me, I was considered feminine enough to merit this brand of degradation and intimidation. As the recipient of the harassment, I was offered confirmation that to men, I am not only a female, but a woman.

Then, in relating the story (and my distaste for it) to other girls, I gained status points. We bonded over the shared objectification; we united against a common enemy – and through this, each girl got a chance to display her own muliebrity. We all used our own “catcall” experiences to further our social standing, to express that we, too, were part of this adult world.

There was a lull in our dialogue.

This is the real malignancy in a catcall. This is the inimical nature of the beast. Not just the unwarranted sexualization, but the subconscious affirmation women feel afterward (*I felt afterward*) — its usage as evidence that one is changing from a girl to a woman.

I felt a spark of terror when the man shouted at me. I was frightened by the situation's potential; I was disgusted with the less-than-equals treatment. However, once I reached safety, a part of me was pleased. The door had opened slightly wider for me to step into adulthood. I was, in short, proud. It was an unwarranted pride, certainly — just as undesirable as the comment and the fear that followed — but there it was all the same, and that unbidden emotion scared me more than any other part of the incident.