

# Not Every Man, But Any Man

Tired, sticky bodies, pushed together into a suffocating tram carriage.

Tall men surround me. Standing at five feet and eight inches, I still cannot meet their eyes without tilting my head back. I do not even try, knowing that they will see the fear in mine.

Suddenly a hand—someone’s hand, anyone’s hand, *everyone’s* hand—reaches behind me and squeezes my backside.

There’s nowhere to run to, nowhere to go. I stand completely still, willing myself to be anywhere else, until I can finally get off the tram.

It could have been worse.

I got off easy.

Some women aren’t so lucky.

I check behind me—*is anyone, that man, following me into the train station?* My body slackens with relief when I do not see him anywhere.

As the doors of the train slide open, I take a step into the carriage. My eyes dart back and forth, left and right, as I work out my game plan.

Empty seat to my right: good. Middle-aged man with his hands in his pockets sitting in the next seat over: bad. I pass by the empty seat.

Standing room at the opposite end of the carriage: good. Only men standing in the vicinity: bad. I decide sitting is the best option.

I choose a seat near a woman and a young family; this will be where I am safest.

Forty-five minutes left on the train. The young family and the woman disembark at their respective stations.

Thirty minutes left. An older man who looks to be in his 60s at youngest boards the train and immediately makes a beeline for the vacant seat next to me. *Please, no, choose one of the many other empty seats.* I breathe slowly. *Don't assume the worst.* I look out the window.

Fifteen minutes left. The man reaches into his pocket and pulls out his digital camera.

Twelve minutes left. I glance down at the man's camera to discover it pointed directly at me, clutched near his waist, red light on, recording my every move. My stomach clenches. I clutch my backpack and move to the seat opposite mine.

Ten minutes left. The man shifts his body. I again look at the camera. Red light is still on. Still angled at me. My stomach, still clenched.

Arriving at the station. I stand up and wait nervously in front of the cold, silver doors, waiting to be released from this metal prison.

The train slows to a stop. I feel a breath on my shoulder. I glance behind me. The Man With The Camera presses his body against mine.

I run to the opposite end of the carriage as the doors slowly open, exiting through the second set of doors. Tears sting my eyes, partly due to the sudden wind rushing into the train, and partly because of the adrenaline and fear coursing through my veins. I fumble to find my Myki pass, and I slam it down on the Myki reader to touch off. I race down the flight of neverending stairs and sprint all the way home.

Home. Safe. Lucky.

Until tomorrow.

# Exegesis

As a local student at the University of Melbourne, I find myself on public transport frequently. I use the train and the tram to get to and from university around three times a week, and even more often when there are exams to study for or papers to write. Weekends find me on the train on my way to see friends. In the world's most liveable city, however, my experiences riding trains and trams and buses have felt anything but safe.

I have found myself being stared at, photographed, filmed, groped, and followed. Unfortunately, my experiences are not isolated ones. Women everywhere experience rape culture on some level. Rape culture does not only involve the act of penetrative sexual abuse; rape culture, as a whole, encompasses the catcalls women hear while walking to class—phones clutched in our hands while we walk home, 000 already typed into the dial pad, just in case; the quickening of our pace when we pass a group of men; the fear of the worst when a man is walking behind us.

When I tell women about my experience of rape culture on public transport, they listen and understand and sympathise. They respond with their own tales of sexual harassment and nervous train rides. But, often, when I tell men of my experience, they respond in one of two ways: incredulous shock, or defense. Some men empathise and tell me they're sorry that I have had to go through that and that they can't believe things like that occur. But sadly, the majority of men shout, "It's not all men!" It is hard to be patient; it is hard to tell them, "No, not all men. But it could be *any* man." But I do. And by aiming to let the reader in on the experiences of the everyday female (through first-person narration), I hope that this prose tells them that, too.

## **Biography**

*Monique Courtney is a 19-year-old Bachelor of Arts student at the University of Melbourne. She is a writer, and an advocate for women's rights and equality. Her passion lies in the dismantlement of rape culture, and education for those who do not yet understand.*