

# WOVEN: I Ruined His Weekend

written by Guest Contributor | December 11, 2019



*WOVEN is an Entropy series and dedicated safe space for essays by persons who engage with #MeToo, sexual assault and harassment, and #DomesticViolence, as well as their intersections with mental illness, substance addiction, and legal failures and remedies. We believe you. If selected for the series, we want to provide the editorial and human support such that our conversation continues long after the stories and names have changed. You can view submission guidelines for WOVEN [here](#).*

Reread the [archives](#), always.

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Image Credit: [Matthew Henry](#)

The San Francisco Superior Court is beautiful—cut stone and wide doorways, long windows and high ceilings. Couriers rush in and out with their bicycles, carrying stacks of paper that need to be served. On September 11th, 2015, my family gathers here to accompany me on my court date—my dad and his sister, my cousin and her husband. I want to clutch one of their arms with both hands, but the gravity of the situation forces me to stand alone. If I get too close to someone who loves me, I'll collapse right into them. If I stop holding myself up now, I won't be able to stand again.

We get in the elevator, and I push the button for the fourth floor. What we've all been counting on is this: if the defendant doesn't show up, I'll automatically be granted my restraining order. If he appears today, we'll both be required to present our sides. The judge makes his decision based simply on what we each have to say. I'm not worried about that; I know for certain I deserve a restraining order and it will be given to me. What makes me ill is the idea of seeing Andrew. I think, for the hundredth time, how perplexing it is that this system requires me to willfully orchestrate a coming-together with the very person I'm seeking to legally never see again. Is there no other way?

Still, I know he won't come. He's a chemical reaction of a man and his appearing today would be so uncharacteristic it'd almost be laughable.

Besides, he knows he's wrong. He knows he has no chance.

When the elevator doors open, I lead because I know the way, even though I wish my family could lock arms around me and move me through the crowd like bodyguards around a Kardashian. I guide us toward the printed sheet taped on the wall by the courtroom door that tells us what time our case will go before the judge. It doesn't matter, really; we all file in at the same time and sit through each other's productions. Checking the schedule is simply a means of passing these moments.

Before we get to the list, I stop short. Celia and Andrew are seated on the base of a stone pillar outside the door. Celia, when we see each other, makes a face like she wants to interact with me, hug maybe, like the friends we used to be. But my vision glances off her the nanosecond after it lands, like stone cracking against stone. I know from my peripheral that he's next to her, looking at me too, but to make eye contact with him would scald me. I don't do it. It's the only time today, and the last time ever, that I'll look directly at her.

I turn, sharp, and my family tangle together a moment before catching up. "They're here.

They're here," I say.

I retreat against a wall around the corner. "They're here." I say it again. I feel my family grasping for something, but there are no words of comfort to be shared. We simply wait, out of sight, until it's time to go in.

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On July 8, 2018, my girlfriend and I travel Highway 101 in the dark. I drive, she props her feet on the dash. We spent Fourth of July camping in the woods near Big Sur. We watched sunsets and built our own fires; we grilled vegan sausages like true West Coast lesbians. On the hottest afternoon, we rented inner tubes and spent a few hours on the river. I floated next to Erica and read, and when I tossed the book to shore, I noticed the sunscreen on my legs swirling into the stream. It came off in shimmering sheets, rocking on the river's surface each time I introduced a patch of my skin to the water for the first time. Without my body for coherence, the slicks split into ever-diminishing bits of themselves and drifted idly between my thigh and the black rubber. I looked at it and tried not to feel anything. It seemed trite to worry about my sunscreen pollution in the face of, well, everything else, and also callous not to care, so I settled somewhere in the untethered and impotent middle. This is where I'd been landing on most every matter of political implication lately. I wasn't proud but I also wasn't gathering the muster to move past it.

On the road now, we listen to an episode of *The Moth*. A woman tells a story

of the time she was attacked by a person dressed as a mime in the plaza outside her workplace. She talks about the lunchtime crowd that laughed while he violated her, and then about watching as he degraded a parade of unassuming women after her, all in the name of performance. Joking around. Making a profit.

The behaviors she experienced or witnessed include but aren't limited to taunting, ass-grabbing, and holding a woman's dress over her head. The public watched, and cheered, and tipped the mime.

This particular storyteller is more resilient than she should have to be, and the stories we love best are victorious and conclusive, so she shoulders a burden that isn't hers to carry. By the end, she steps in because no one else does. She overcomes the mime; she finds resolution, even triumph. But of course she does—if she hadn't, we wouldn't be listening to it on *The Moth*.

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When it's time to enter the courtroom, we follow the direction of the stern and accusatory woman at the door. We take our seats first; Andrew and Celia have to wait until the defendants are called in. I don't look at them, but my attention is hypertuned to their presence. I track their movements. I stay vigilant. As soon as they're allowed in, he, instead of following everyone to the defendants' section, stands at the edge of the our seating and tries to get my attention, his stupid-ass white-boy dreads bouncing and shaking as he cranes his neck and thrusts his chest in my direction. I wonder where the fuck the deputy is who demanded such orderliness from the rest of us. Finally she appears, introducing her public-service body between him and the section I'm in, pointing with a dangerously tensed finger in the direction he needs to go. Celia, too, hisses at him and yanks on his shirt sleeve. She's still with him. How?

Now that he's seated and I can exhale, I hope that some decision-making person was watching, and putting down a tick mark in the column against him. See? I think. He's the caricature of a person against whom one might seek protection.

Two weeks ago, I was in this same courtroom alone, to observe the proceedings before my own date. I left feeling sticky and infected, and wishing I didn't ever have to go back. But I also felt a muted sort of relief—the judge had approved protection orders for all but one case.

Today, however, is different. Three cases are scheduled before mine, and this judge denies orders for all of them. I close my eyes, toss my head around and try to crack my neck, but the pressure in my bones mounts instead of releases. My body won't give me this small relief.

When the judge calls my case to the front, Andrew, Celia, and I get up. I don't look at either of them even though we have to cross paths on the way to

our seats. I feel, or imagine, my family members tensing on the bench behind me. I sit in a plastic chair pulled out behind a gray metal table. With furniture like this, I could be back in high school. I could be in a weekend seminar for people looking to maximize sales strategies or meet singles after divorce. But I'm not.

I'm told to speak first. I tell the judge about the music festival, Celia and I driving there together, setting up my tent in the sandy California desert, finding my friends, dancing with them, swimming with them, drinking with them, coming back to my tent, waking up with Andrew's fingers in my vagina.

I tell this judge the truth, even though I know I'm not the right kind of victim. I know chances are high that the man looming above me will listen to me say "drinking" and "dancing" and "festival" and hear "careless", "frivolous", "slut." I tell him what actually happened even though he'd probably like it better if I said something like "stayed late at work" or "walking to my car from a self-defense class" or "parking garage with my keys between my fingers."

Still, there are things I leave out. Like the next day, when my friends, who knew nothing, talked about how much they disliked this guy and didn't want him hanging around, how he wouldn't stop pulling out his knife and playing with it even after they asked him not to. I don't tell the judge about walking from the campsite to the Port-a-Potty in the afternoon and hearing a couple in their camper having sex and I don't tell him that encountering those sounds brought me immediately and unexpectedly to my hands and knees to vomit over and over, great sprays of yellow stomach bile that splashed against the pine needles under my face. I don't tell him that Celia asked me if we could give Andrew a ride back to the city and I said no, and he stormed into our site later to shout at me: "Fuck you, Lauren, or whatever the fuck your name is! You ruined my festival!" I don't tell the judge that I sat motionless, letting his outrage pour over me like so many buckets of ice water because something wouldn't compute. *He touched me. I ruined his weekend. He finger-fucked me while I lay cold. I ruined his weekend?*

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Two storytellers follow the woman with the mime, but I can't focus, can't get past that tale of the violation of female bodies as a punchline. I'm still tangled up in a public that doesn't just endorse but communally delights in the assault of women. Erica notices, and asks if I want to talk. I don't say anything for a long time. When I feel more than I know what to do with, I freeze.

Finally I say, "You know how my memory hasn't been so good lately?"

She nods.

"Well," I say, then pause. I want to talk about the election, and the

president; about moving through my country with a known sexual assailant at the helm, and the resulting years-long hyper-inflamed state of my insides. But I also want to calibrate my words. I don't want to pull focus from everything else that's unbearable. Yesterday we listened to the news—it told stories of human beings in government-sanctioned cages. Mothers in captivity served soup thinned down with water from the hose. Mothers whose children were taken from them, who could do nothing but yearn. I want to feel, but I don't want to forget all the ways in which others have it so much worse.

But then, I think, isn't the phrase "it could have been worse" the tagline of rape culture? These are the mental gymnastics I lurch through daily, but I haven't come up with any useful answers. I wish someone would hand me a chart, so I'd know where to appropriately begin and end my personal and political despair. How much—as a lesbian, as a white woman—am I supposed to feel? I want to be good; I want to do my trauma right.

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The judge turns to Andrew, who shares a different story. He meets Celia. They fuck in my tent. He calls it "making love." I close my eyes, draw one finger down the bridge of my nose. *He didn't touch me*, he says, and anyway, I never knocked on the fabric of the tent. My tent. *I never asked permission to enter*, Andrew says.

I sense the tension whirring under the judge's skin. I'm coming to him with a criminal issue, but we're in civil court. I'm not asking for a criminal conviction—I did that already, with the police department in the county where it happened. After awhile, I stopped getting calls from them.

When I dialed the department for an update, the woman on the other end of the line told me the case had been closed. I asked why. *Lack of evidence*, she said. I wondered if she, or anyone, had helpful suggestions for what might be used as evidence in this crime that requires only human bodies and one person's monumental sense of entitlement. *Okay*, I said.

"Are there any charges currently being brought against you?" the judge asks Andrew.

Andrew pauses. "I have a DUI in Oregon," he says.

A woman steps up to the judge and whispers in his ear. The judge listens, then clarifies, "Are there any charges being brought against you that relate to this case specifically? Remember that anything you say can and will be held against you."

I feel a lift. Maybe he's said something to incriminate himself already.

"Oh," he says. "Nope!" A smile.

The judge takes a moment. "I can see this is very upsetting for you," he says, looking at me. I'm momentarily surprised out of my radioactive focus. I thought I'd been quite composed. "But I'm going to side with the police department here. There's not enough evidence. The request for a restraining order is denied."

Andrew and Celia thank the judge, looking at him meaningfully like they all have a connection, like he's done them a personal favor, which I suppose he has. I say nothing and look at the floor when I get up from the table, and for the entire length of the walk back to my family. They take me by my elbows and escort me out of the courtroom, down the marble hallway, and into the cavernous elevator. I have nothing to say.

Outside, we gather in a knot at the intersection. The fog burned off while we were in the courtroom. It's bright now, and hot. I lean against the thick wooden telephone pole, rough with layers of industrial staples used to pin up posters that have long since been torn away. I ripple with sobs, then bend at the waist and dry-heave. I spit several times onto the sidewalk, even though there's a steady procession of people in pencil skirts and heels walking by and glancing at me as they pass. My cousin finds me a tissue from her bag, hands it to me before I turn and drape myself over her. We stand and cry on the street. But crying is all there's left to do. The last possibility I thought I had of some sort of justice or retribution or semblance of power is vapor. No wonder so many women don't do this. No wonder silence is still the response of choice. I wanted to do everything I could. I hoped to make it clear, if just to this one man, that his passing whims don't trump my self-sovereignty. Instead, I'm walking away with humiliation and the imprint of two more unwanted hours in the same room as him. He's walking away with state-sanctioned permission.

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Finally I give up trying to compute my emotions and tell Erica the truth, which is that I've retreated from myself. I tell her, like she doesn't already know, about watching what's unfolded on our national stage and waiting for the moment when we would all collectively agree that shit had gone too far, that our humanity had been breached and insulted beyond doubt or defense, and I talk about the many times I thought that moment had come and the bruised, swollen feeling when it became apparent that the bottom was dropping ever-further away.

What I'm trying to communicate, to her and myself, is that I've built a life beyond the day of my violation and the total burning it wrought. But I didn't expect to be reminded so frequently of my own personal pussy-grabber. I hadn't been properly braced against my fellow citizens and the choices they were capable of making.

Erica gets me a napkin from the glovebox. She has her stories, too, and even

though we don't talk about them this time, they're attendant and accounted for. She asks if we need to pull to the side of the road. I say no, and keep driving from behind my tears. She puts a hand on my leg but doesn't attempt consolation. There's nothing to say.

There is, though, her hand on my thigh. There's the way we've decided, on purpose and against the odds, to treat each other as if we're worth something. In spite of it all, and with enough intensity to try, at least, to make up for those who refuse to, I love a woman and she loves me. As if our love, which isn't enough but is what we have, could punch back the shrink wrap of the patriarchal world and make a little more space for us. So that instead of hunching over, cowering, taking quiet shallow breaths, we might hold up the sky for each other and stand.

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**Hannah Anderson Harris** holds an MFA in Creative Nonfiction from Sierra Nevada College, where she served as managing editor of the *Sierra Nevada Review*. Her work has been published in *The Rumpus*.