

One, Just One

Wynn Sandman

after Margaret Atwood's "The Female Body"

1.

Here, in this crazy place that locals call "high school," we see a wild teenager! This one's a female. You can tell by her skinny jeans and newly formed sense of insufficiency. Ooooh! And would you look at that? A young male has just entered the shop classroom! Let's see how the two interact.

As you can see, our young male has already begun making moves on his female. See how he crowds her workstation? This is his way of showing her that he's interested. Now, if you use a careful eye, you may notice that she is slowly backing away. What does this mean, you ask? She is sending a very subtle and intricate invitation for him to continue his pursuit! Our young male receives this message loud and clear, hence moving on to the next stage of his complex mating ritual. "I know!" he thinks, "I'll woo her with my extensive knowledge of small engine mechanics!" What a smart young teenager! Despite the young female's competence in this unit of small engine repair, our male seizes his opportunity and begins to scrutinize her work. In doing this, he exhibits his generosity and helpfulness. What a kind young male!

Uh oh! The young female seems to be slightly annoyed by this thoughtful gesture. How will our teenage male respond? By insulting her! This evolutionary tactic consists of calling the young female names, such as "fat," "stupid," and "ugly." Although executed with brilliance, this tactic, too, fails to woo the female teenager. But does our young male give up that easily? No!

Just before the sun sets on another great school day, our young teenagers encounter each other again in physical

education class. Will our teenage male finally win over the female? Let's watch and find out! At this time of year, the "high school" physical education class has just begun its tennis unit. Our young male first begins by revisiting his usual rituals of crowding the female teenager's space and insulting her in front of their peers, making sure to critique her form and athleticism when possible. When this doesn't work, our male is forced to move on to new strategies. As the young female is talking with a friend, our teenage male recognizes his chance. With one big movement, our young male whacks the buttocks of the female teenager! Oh, how playful he is! Now, let's see how she responds... WOAHA! What a roar from the young female! She, unfortunately, does not seem too interested, signaling for him to back off. Aw, our poor young male. But it's all right, friends! I'm sure he will find a better partner to pursue! One that can appreciate his adorable sense of humor.

2.

I haven't seen my family in so long. Extended family, I mean. Our last reunion was probably back when I was about five, or so. As soon as we walk in, everybody is saying the same couple of phrases, "Oh my, you've grown so tall. Honey, do you see how tall she's gotten?" and "The last time I saw you, you were just about knee-high on a grasshopper. Har Har Har," and "Wow, you're gonna be taller than your mamma here soon." Yes, a girl does tend to grow from age five to age twelve. I really don't mind the comments though. I am taller. It's kind of cool. I'm several inches closer to adulthood.

Who to talk to? Who to talk to? I see my dad and brother and walk their way. They are with a person I've never seen before. The tall, middle-aged man is watching my family play chess. I am invited to sit, and Random Older Relative begins asking me about myself. "How are you liking school?" he inquires. "It's been good! I'm honestly just looking forward to high school." I chuckle in reply. He asks

me more questions about my interests and the subjects I'm taking and the sports I play. It feels like I'm definitely talking about myself too much. "I play softball. My brother actually plays baseball. What team are you on again, Mark?" My brother opens his mouth to answer, but before he can speak, Random Older Relative interjects, asking, "Oh, softball, huh? So, what position do you play?" Mark and I share a glance, acknowledging that this interruption was slightly unusual, but agreeing to ignore it. As the conversation progresses, this pattern repeats itself many times. Random Older Relative has no interest in what Mark has to say. I am unsettled but shove the feeling aside and continue talking.

"Do you want to dance?" Random Older Relative asks. It is a tradition at our family reunions to have a dance floor dedicated to polka dancing, being that we are all of Finnish descent. Internally, I am disinterested, but externally, I give a polite "Yes, please." As we move toward the dance floor, the hairs on the back of my neck begin to stand. What's wrong? Why do I feel so off? As we get into position to start a schottische, I feel even worse. Somehow, a dance that normally includes only linked arms and held hands has turned into one where Random Older Relative has his hands on my waist and the small of my back. He pulls me in too close and does not break eye contact once throughout the course of the song. As soon as the band stops playing, I quickly express my thanks for the dance and hurry away. I am horribly uncomfortable.

After this weird interaction, I spend a lot of time jumping from table to table, talking with relatives all by myself. I really am so adult now. I never could have done this at the last reunion. As I finish my conversation with a nice older lady (maybe a great aunt or a distant in-law?), I see a familiar face marching in my direction. "Save me another dance?" Random Older Relative asks. I say, "Sure. I might sit for a little while, but the next dance is yours!" Every part of me hopes he won't remember this promise, but every part of me knows he will. I need a game plan. Ask Mark to go outside for a while! That's what I'll do!

My brother and I play frisbee in the yard outside the event center until the sun goes down. With every minute that passes, a little more relief sets in. I don't have to dance with Random Older Relative! That relief leaves pretty quickly upon hearing his voice behind me. "What have you been doing out here?!" he yells. "W- We were just playing frisbee." I stutter in response. "So what? You were just going to forget our dance?" Random Older Relative replies. "No! Not at all! We can go in and have our dance right now." I say, in a small, shaking voice. "No. We can't. The band is packing up for the night. Real nice." He turns on his heel and stomps his way back into the reunion. I have never felt so mortified in my life. That is until it came time to say goodbyes, of course.

The process of leaving our reunions usually entails two incredibly long lines, one line remaining still while the other moves toward the door. My family is in the moving line. Standing between my brother and mom, I slowly make my way through the crowd, dreading my inevitable meeting with Random Older Relative. The moment finally arrives. As I look at Random Older Relative, I am immediately confused. I study every part of his face but can find no remnants of his former anger. He greets me and then initiates a hug. As we lean in, it almost appears as if he's going to kiss me. OH! He is going to kiss me! I swerve at the last minute, causing Random Older Relative's kiss to land sloppily on my cheek. Still in disbelief, I attempt to shorten the length of our embrace. As I begin to pull away, he holds me in place and whispers a phrase I will never forget. Nestling his mouth close to my ear, he softly says, "It's okay. You can kiss me." I pull back in fear. He smiles at me, then acknowledges the next person in line.

3.

It is Halloween. The group is waiting excitedly. The group is waiting excitedly to walk the haunted trail. The group walks the trail. The group gets scared while walking the

trail. The group laughs while walking the trail. The group finishes the trail.

The group must wait for the other group to finish the trail. Girl and the group are waiting by rows of haunted houses for the other group to finish the trail. Girl does not want to go into the haunted houses. Girl and the group get scared of the pretend monsters walking around the haunted houses. Girl and the group go into one of the haunted houses. They have fun in one of the haunted houses. They get scared in one of the haunted houses. They exit one of the haunted houses. Girl and the group are giggling outside of one of the haunted houses. Girl and the group are waiting by the tall grass outside of one of the haunted houses. Girl feels something grab her ankle through the tall grass outside of one of the haunted houses. Girl sees a hand.

Girl sees a hand wrapped around her ankle. Girl sees a pale, white hand wrapped around her ankle. Girl tries to pull away once. Girl tries to pull away twice. Girl tries to pull away a third time but loses her balance. Girl loses her balance and falls to the ground. Girl gets increasingly scared when she loses her balance and falls to the ground. Girl becomes frantic. The hand remains wrapped around Girl's ankle. The hand remains wrapped around Girl's ankle and begins to squeeze tighter. The hand remains wrapped around Girl's ankle and begins to drag her toward the tall grass outside of one of the haunted houses.

The group grabs Girl's wrists. The group grabs Girl's wrists tightly. The group grabs Girl's wrists tightly and pulls her away from the tall grass outside of one of the haunted houses. The hand remains wrapped around Girl's ankle. Girl is scared. Girl is very scared. Girl is scared enough to kick. Girl is scared enough to kick the hand that remains wrapped around Girl's ankle. Girl kicks the hand hard. Girl kicks the hand hard enough to make it lose the grip that had remained wrapped around Girl's ankle. The hand lets go.

Girl's ankle hurt. Girl's ankle hurt very badly. Girl's ankle hurt very badly as she limped toward a floodlight. Girl needed the floodlight. Girl needed the floodlight to feel safe.

Girl needed the floodlight to feel safe from the hand that had remained wrapped around Girl's ankle. Girl and the group made it to the floodlight. Girl and the group made it to the floodlight and looked down at Girl's ankle. Girl and the group looked down at Girl's ankle to find it covered in blood. Girl was embarrassed by her fear. Girl was embarrassed by her fear of the hand that had remained wrapped around Girl's ankle. Girl smiled and laughed to disguise the embarrassment she felt about her fear of the hand that had remained wrapped around Girl's ankle. Girl saw Mom. Girl saw Mom and smiled. Girl saw Mom and stopped smiling. Girl saw Mom and bawled.

In the next week, Girl's ankle bruised. In the next week, Girl's ankle bruised and scabbed. In the next week, Girl's ankle bruised and scabbed and hurt. Girl did not sleep. Girl did not sleep on the night of the encounter. Girl did not sleep well in the week following the encounter. The world felt unsafe. The world felt unsafe to Girl. The world still, sometimes, feels unsafe to Girl. Yet, We go on.