

## **IT'S A VERY SCARY TIME FOR YOUNG MEN IN AMERICA**

*The* war on men started in a café near UC Berkeley on the type of crisp fall morning that brings leaves flittering down in shades of gold across the cool gray concrete of the sidewalk.

Women sat comfortably, sipping frothy cappuccinos and coconut milk lattes with ease, reveling in the safety that they so often took for granted. A girl named Brooke was among them, typing away on a dissertation about female privilege and the plight of oppressed men. She sipped a latte from her refillable steel tumbler and brushed her red locks of hair from her eyes as she noticed the fall light reflecting off of the pastry case. It was glimmering and beautiful. She had eaten two chocolate croissants and felt satisfied and full. For a quick moment, Brooke felt a twinge

of sadness when she considered the men in her life and how they were often too self-conscious to eat one croissant, let alone two or three. Her sadness passed and she ordered another. Life was good.

Brooke turned back to her dissertation work. She felt pleased with herself for highlighting the struggles of men. Her long fingers hit the keyboard with a continuous string of *click click clicks*, so proud to be an ally to the underrepresented. *It is a very scary time for young men in America*, Brooke thought. *I'm going to help them.*

Crossing college campuses alone or attending college parties, even with friends, could be dangerous for men. Brooke heard endless stories of male students being drugged and assaulted by women they knew from campus—they even had classes with some of the perpetrators, but most of the young men on campus were too afraid to speak out. The women had too much power—they often came from wealthy families or held high-status positions on college sports teams or in academic clubs. Accusations would ruin the women's careers, so the administration kept the stories of assault under wraps, to protect their futures. Brooke was determined to blow these stories wide open, hoping to draw some credible media attention. She believed that her allyship would make her seem more trustworthy, and maybe even help her find a boyfriend.

Yet as much as Brooke believed the men in her life when they opened up about carrying pepper spray while walking home at night and always feeling the need to cross streets if they saw women walking toward them on the sidewalk, a part of her felt that the men were too emotional and maybe exaggerating a bit. Men appeared overly dramatic when they explained how much effort they put into their jobs or school work—at least twice as much as women, they claimed—and still, the women earned more of everything: more money, more recognition, more freedom, more safety. Brooke tried to put herself in their shoes, imagining outlandish scenarios in which she might feel unsafe at a bar with her friends or dismissed at work, regardless of her efforts, but she didn't fully get it. She had never experienced those situations. Regardless, she pressed on, knowing that her dissertation would rattle the status quo and garner some attention, and Brooke loved attention. In fact, she never understood why men didn't like it, too. "She was giving you a compliment," she said to her friend Mark after he complained about a strange woman shouting "Nice ass!" as she watched him cross the street. "I really don't know why that's such a big deal."

Every Wednesday and Friday morning, Brooke made her way back to the same café with its shiny glass cases of pastries and its proudly displayed

“Local, Man-Owned Business Since 2015” placard next to the register. She felt so progressive, radical even, when she supported this and other man-owned businesses, and she knew the other women there felt it, too. She’d often see the same patrons each morning, and they’d all quietly offer one another congratulatory nods, grinning to themselves and each other about how “woke” they all were to be fighting sexism against men. Fridays were her mornings to interview different men about their gender-specific experiences and she was always amazed—though she fought to hide it—that so many men had so many issues.

On this particular Friday at the cafe, she interviewed a UC Berkeley student named Kenny, and she couldn’t help but notice how attractive he was: dark hair, smooth olive skin, and big dark eyes with the most lovely long eyelashes. She didn’t understand why, when at the end of the interview in which he shared stories of gender discrimination and childhood abuse, he looked offended when she asked him on a date.

“You’re just like all the rest of them,” he said as he huffed and walked away.

“I was just trying to be friendly,” she said under her breath. “Your loss.”

Kenny reminded her of the last few guys she had dated; *all of them so fucking sensitive*, she thought.

They wanted to communicate and set boundaries and check in about feelings and Brooke just wanted to keep things casual. None of them could stop yammering on and on about consent. A few of them refused to watch certain movies because they portrayed violence against men and it was too triggering for them. One guy even asked that she not do specific things to him, sexually, because he was sensitive about past abuse. It annoyed her.

She explained to the men that violence in movies was fictional and that the men were making a big deal out of nothing. She told the guy with the sex issues that she respected him but couldn’t get off during sex because she had to focus too much on his needs. Yet, she had to conduct herself in a way that convinced men that she was safe to be with. Hence the dissertation.

After Kenny left, Brooke noticed a group of men gathering around tables in a room reserved for private parties at the back of the café. The room appeared to have more political posters than the previous week. The posters had cute boy power sayings on them, like “Every Father is a Working Father” and “Nevertheless, He Persisted” and “A Man Needs a Woman Like a Fish Needs a Bicycle.” The last sign, about the fish and bicycle, irked her but she thought it was sweet that the men were organizing and supporting each other. The men were all straight and white, of

course; the most oppressed group of all. Their lively conversation fell to a low hush as Brooke swung her hips and tossed her hair over her shoulder on the way to the restroom. She turned and held eye contact with one of the men near the doorway, a guy named Brian, who had thick blond curls and nice big hands.

“Hey, you’re Brooke, right?” he said. “I’ve seen you here a lot. Come to this meeting next week if you can. We’d love to have more women support our movement.”

Brian handed her a flyer for a planning meeting that read: “Men Strike For Equality!”

The following week, on a cool gray Monday in October, Brooke wore her most flattering red dress to the meeting, hoping to kill two birds with one stone: 1. Gather data for her dissertation and 2. Meet some cute guys who’d surely be impressed with her allyship. The meeting was in the basement of the local Unitarian Church, “because they are more inclusive towards men,” one attendee explained. She saw Kenny, who she had interviewed the week before. He had an open seat next to him but as she smiled and walked his way, he glared and threw his coat onto the empty metal chair.

Brooke turned and found a seat next to Brian, the cute blond who had invited her.

The meeting began calmly at first, men politely

speaking about the changes they wanted to see in the world. They wanted equal pay, safe well-lit streets, free childcare, accountability for the women who had harassed and assaulted them, an end to targeted violence against men. As the men shot their hands into the air, each waiting their turn to speak, Brooke noticed the energy in the room shift. The polite, calm discussion grew louder. The men became angry.

“I’m tired of working ten times harder than the women in my office and never being taken seriously,” shouted one man.

“I’m tired of being judged for how I look and constantly worrying about how I dress,” shouted another.

“I’m tired of people not realizing how much work goes into being a stay-at-home dad,” another said.

“I’m tired of watching BBC crime shows where every plot revolves around the rape and murder of young attractive men,” another chimed in.

“I’m tired of constantly teaching my young sons how to defend themselves against women, and that they should treat every woman as a possible predator. It’s not okay,” another ranted.

“I’m tired of having to pay for birth control. Condoms are getting so expensive,” shouted yet another.

“I’m tired of being discriminated against. Being a