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My mother gave me the biggest safety speech about six months before I was slated to transfer to Radford.

“Don’t leave a drink lying around unattended!” she chimed in, standing in the kitchen with a potato peeler pointed at me, her long, graying brown hair tied into a ponytail. The potatoes boiled violently between the two of us, threatening to bubble over. “You know how some men are. I don’t want you in some weird situation,” she said.

“I don’t have a social life. It’s highly unlikely I’ll be drinking,” I said. It was true. I was antisocial, underage, and had no idea why people liked partying in the first place. Seemed like too much effort. “You might want to check the potatoes.”

She placed a lid carefully on the pot. “You’re not listening to me,” she said.

“I know this conversation verbatim, Mom,” I said.

“You do?”

“Yes, we’ve had it since I entered high school, five years ago.” I neglected to mention that transferring to Radford to avoid parties was like going to a library to avoid books. “I’m in a relationship. It’s kind of disrespectful to go out every night when your partner can’t go with you, isn’t it?” I said.

“Yes, well, maybe you’ll meet a nice boy at Radford!” My mother, the ever-hopeful heteronormative saint. I stifled a laugh. “Be safe. Don’t do anything stupid,” she said.

“I won’t, Mom.”

“And don’t date the wrong sort!” she added. The potato peeler was now inches away from my face. “Some men only want one thing.”

*Sadly I think those men would be better off pursuing someone who didn’t dress like a bag lady.* “I have no interest in the wrong sort, Mom,” I said.

“Well, just one thing, okay?” She put the potato peeler on the stove - *thank God*, I thought to myself - and grabbed my hand. “Promise me you’ll try not to walk home alone at night,” she said.

“Well,” I bit my lip. “I won’t if I can avoid it.”

“Well, just try, okay, Er-Bear?”

“Ugh. Fine.” I grabbed the potato peeler and placed it in the drawer, being careful to avoid the cutting edge. “I won’t go home alone at night if I can avoid it. Okay?” I said.

What my mother will likely never know was that “don’t walk home alone at night” was the only lesson of hers’ I ever took to heart.

She had been saying that to me since I was five years old. I suppose that is a reasonable thing to say to a five-year-old. No one wants a young child walking home alone at night in greater downtown Richmond. I was also an extremely gullible, clumsy girl, so it made sense.

However, it increased with frequency when I turned thirteen.

I am sure many women can relate. It is an ever-popular axiom, quoted by many a parent and police officer. There is even a comedy sketch by Ever Mainard about it. However, I do not think very many women take it to the level I do. I am an extremely anxious person, as anyone who knows me will say without a doubt. I am rather easily spooked, and though I know Radford’s campus is relatively safe compared to other places, it still creeps me out when I have to walk around alone at night. Drunk co-eds stumble around campus like some strange, university version of *28 Days Later*, complete with beer bottles and trash scattered around everywhere. Now that I’m off-campus, I rarely have to walk home.

I’m not so much afraid of the people in Radford as I am the atmosphere. There’s something terrifying about a college campus at night, particularly if you’ve always been taught to be afraid of it. It’s creepy, derelict, and freezing cold during most of the school year. Police cars buzz about with a kind of frequency that seems astounding at first glance. On a more personal note, I have always felt vulnerable and weak on my own. Maybe I have been made to feel that way, but it is something I cannot rationalize away.

The sad thing is, I find myself justified in my fears when I turn on the news or read a newspaper. Every day there seems to be a new kidnapping case, a new string of murders involving women, a

new sexual assault, a new robbery. Radford is a pretty safe campus, all things considered, but other places are not. One in six women will be raped during their lifetimes; one in four of those women will experience this while they're in college. Men do get sexually-assaulted, but they don't tend to report it. One in three women wind up being domestically abused in their lifetimes, though this isn't an exclusively female phenomenon. One in nine men admit to being abused during their lifetimes, and reporting for men is lower. The argument that these acts are perpetuated by only a few men is both unconvincing and more troubling, as this shows a profound failure on the part of the police force to do anything about it.

A few questions to weigh on my mind as I write this article.

Am I the only one who feels like this? Are there other women out there who feel vulnerable on this level, or am I just a little paranoid?

How does this affect men? Do men feel demonized by society today? I know a couple of men who've expressed similar sentiments.

And lastly, how can we change this dynamic? Is it possible?

These questions are something for us all to ponder, especially for the population of women students of RU. So girls, next time you decide to walk to the streets alone at night, think about the consequences that could possibly ensue, and for the boys as well, think about how your actions will affect others before you make a move that could be detrimental to the women around you.