



MELANIE VARE
Robbed And Overdrawn

It was nine o'clock on a warm Los Angeles fall night, 2007. It had been a long day. On my way home I stopped at an ATM. I was the only one in the parking lot. After making my transaction, I walked back to my car, opened the door and was about to get inside when out of—what seemed—no where, a man grabbed me from behind, put a knife to my throat, and demanded I give him all my money.

After I finished screaming my head off, I tried to give him what he wanted, but unfortunately, I was overdrawn at the time.

I thought he'd realize I was a lost cause and move on, but he didn't. He forced me into the driver's seat, while he climbed in the back seat directly behind me, keeping the knife to my throat the whole time. He then instructed me to drive.

After a few moments, the awkward silence was killing me.... So, I began to apologize: "I'm sorry I don't have more money to give you. It's just; I'm really bad with money. I've already bounced two checks this month. I never seem to be able to save a penny. And I've been really irresponsible with credit cards too. I've even gone to Debtors Anonymous. I should probably go back. I may look like I have money, but that's just because I overspend and can't stay within a budget."

After letting me ramble without taking a breath, he mumbled, "Yeah, I hear you."

He continued making me drive him through the Hancock Park area. I assumed he was looking for nice dark areas where he could rape me.

After a few minutes, he told me to pull over and that's when he put a tighter grip on me, pressed the knife steady on my throat and started groping me. It hit me what was about to happen, so I started in on another rant.

"Oh no! You're not going to rape me are you? Oh no, please, I don't want to have to go to therapy! I'm not really

even sure it works. Oh God, please don't, I'm a pretty well adjusted person. I grew up in Orange County. My parents are still together. This is totally going screw me up. I don't want to carry this in to my future relationships. I definitely don't want to turn into my grandmother and cross the street when I see minority males—"

—He cut me off, "Shut up! Pull up in to that dark area."

I cried, "No! I know what people do in dark areas."

He yelled, "Just shut up and pull up!"

Then, he added, "I'm not going to hurt you!"

I didn't believe him but then I saw him put away his knife, so I pulled up in to the dark area... and he jumped out!

A wave of relief poured over me as I sped off. I was stunned to be getting away unharmed—well, aside from his having grabbed my boobs, anyway, but who could blame him? I have a nice rack.

As I was driving, overjoyed to be free, I couldn't help but recall what several ex-boyfriends had said about me talking too much. Hmm, I thought, maybe they were right? I mean, this guy didn't even want to rape me.

The police responded quickly to my call. When I told the officer what happened he started praising me, "Wow that was some quick thinking! That's amazing how you were able

to talk your way out of the situation by ‘humanizing’ yourself.”

He thought it was some sort of a tactic. I accepted the praise, not wanting to admit that, “No, actually... I’m just really annoying.”

I woke up the next morning completely distraught. I had horrific nightmares all night. All I wanted was my mommy and daddy. I waited until 6:00 a.m. to call my parents. I wanted them to have one more night of sleep before they started picturing me slashed to pieces. I *worried* about telling them because I didn’t want them to *worry*. My family raised me right.

My folks are already extraordinarily wound up, especially my mom, who told me she has to wake up earlier and earlier because there are too many things she needs to get up to start worrying about. Before I could even say hello, my mom started crying, “Oh my God, what happened?”

Suffice it to say; within an hour of my call, my dad was at my West Hollywood apartment to escort me back to Orange County, where it was safe.

The entire forty-five-minute trip south on the glorious 405 Freeway, I had the privilege of receiving a lecture from my dad on ATM safety,

“Now what have we learned here young lady? No ATMs at night! Right?”

When we arrived at my parents' house, my mom ran out in her pajamas, hugged me, cried and then said, "Come inside, you have to see all of the emails you've gotten!"

What? Apparently, my mom had sent out a mass email to everyone we know with the subject line: MELANIE WAS KIDNAPPED, THIS IS NOT A JOKE!!!

Yes, with a subject line like that, I'm glad family and friends didn't just press 'delete.'

As I was reading all of the responses, I was really touched by the outpouring of love. I also noticed that the emails were falling in to one of three categories:

One—I'm so sorry this happened; if you need anything please don't hesitate to ask.

Two—If the police find this guy, I am going to personally cut off his balls!

Three—Then there was my Uncle Bob, who simply replied, "That sucks!"

At first I was a little put off by my uncle's nonchalant response, but it turned out to be the most helpful, because it showed me how to be brief.

After all the drama died down, I figured I was okay since, technically, I wasn't harmed. But, I started to see that I was pretty rattled. It came to a boiling point one night at Walgreens. I found myself patrolling their parking lot. I came out of the drug store. It was dark. I immediately noticed a

man loitering in the shadows. As I stood in front of the automated doors, which were opening and shutting behind me, I yelled, “Sir, you’re either coming in, or heading out!” As I was yelling, I was also clearly signaling—with both arms—the direction who should head, as if I were lining up the launch of a jet aircraft.

I scared the poor homeless guy to death. But I really impressed the staff at Walgreen’s—they’d been trying to get rid of the man for weeks.

The next indication that I might have been struggling occurred on my first date after the incident. When my date picked me up, I realized I was terrified to be alone in the car with a man. I should mention that I had known this guy for a few years, but still, I clung to the door handle for dear life. In the event he tried anything funny, my plan was to simply drop and roll out of the car.

After that I decided to see a shrink, a trauma specialist. It was very helpful. The therapist explained that although everyone experiences trauma differently, there are a few symptoms that affect everyone—flashbacks, hyper vigilance, nightmares, increased anxiety, avoidance of places and situations that are reminders.

It was oddly reassuring just to know that what I was experiencing was “normal.” She said it would slowly get better, and one day I would be free from all this. She also

said that it would help if I talked about the attack. She said it would take the power out of it. I think she suggested talking confidentially with friends and loved ones, but I decided to talk about it on stage at comedy clubs.

At first audiences didn't seem to know how to respond. They didn't want to laugh, but that's what they came to a comedy show to do and now, some blond chick was talking about how she was nearly raped.

I may have freaked a lot of people out, but I started to feel much more like my old self.

Meanwhile, a few months after the incident, the detective on my case called to inform me that a man whose fingerprints matched ones found in my car was in custody. This news sent me on a huge adrenaline rush. I felt like I was the lead story on *CSI: West Hollywood*.

Sadly though, this man was linked to another case where he had done something similar to a woman who wasn't as lucky as me, or I guess, as annoying.

I went to the courtroom to testify against him, but when the guard brought the defendant out, I wasn't sure he was the right guy. My doubts were quickly put to rest, however, when my man in the orange jumpsuit looked into the crowded courtroom, zoned right in on me, and rolled his eyes—like he was annoyed to see me again! HE recognized ME.

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I was so nervous as I took the stand to testify. I barely remember a second of it. I do vaguely recall having parts of my testimony stricken from the record... because I talked too much. Nevertheless, our attacker is now serving 25 years to life.

You may recognize MELANIE VARE (formerly Reno) from her appearance on Comedy Central *Premium Blend*, although she doubts it. Melanie's has also been featured on *The Moth Radio Hour* and the *Story Worthy* podcast. Melanie has a blog called *The Nail Biter*; it is filled with stories that will make you giggle and a little anxious. Melanie started the live *That Time of the Month* show after getting ~~released from prison~~ laid off from a research analyst position.

Melanie has been attempting to make audiences laugh for over a decade, and is forever committed to adding more humor to the world.

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