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K Klipsun Magazine
Feb 27, 2020 · 5 min read · Member-only · Listen



A crosswalk in downtown Bellingham, Wash. on Feb. 21, 2020. Photo by Adam Vincent

Can you see me?

A call to my community from the shadow of isolation.

Story by Maya Anderson | Photos by Adam Vincent

**Editor's Note: The incident recounted below occurred on Jan. 28, 2020 while the author was on assignment for Klipsun. It was reported to the Bellingham Police Department.*

I am so focused that I don't notice him at first. I'm conducting my second interview of the day, at a coffee shop in the heart of Bellingham.

My source is excited to tell her story, and my fingers tap along the keyboard to document her thoughts. I want to get every detail right.

When he stops at our table, his brows are furrowed in what seems to be concern and confusion. He's dressed in a dark jacket with white stripes, dark jeans and a brown knit cap. His sneakers are worn and his nose is slightly red from the cold.

"I'm just wondering why you did it," the stranger says, peering down at me. "My mom and everyone in my whole family hates the shit out of you."



The seat at a coffee shop where the author sat on Jan. 28, 2020. Photo by Adam Vincent

I'm stunned into silence, yet my source remains calm.

"I think you're mistaken for somebody else," she says.

She's done this before, but I don't know how to respond. After some convincing, he leaves.

When our interview ends, I close my laptop with a sigh of relief. I thank the woman for her time and pack up my things, waving as she walks out the door.

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When I leave minutes later, he's standing outside the building. Our eyes meet briefly, and I quickly turn to face the cars rolling by. Weighing my options, I decide it may be best to cross the street instead of getting too close.

I don't give him any attention, but I can tell he wants it.



The sidewalk along Railroad Avenue in downtown Bellingham on Feb. 21, 2020. Photo by Adam Vincent

As I cross the street, he yells out the dreaded N-word.

He calls me a rapist.

It's okay, I reassure myself. This isn't the first time. So long as he stays on the corner, you're safe.

Another street corner and I've put a good distance between us. I allow myself to breathe.

But it isn't over. I hear footsteps approaching from behind. It's him.

He says I should hang myself, says I don't deserve to live.

My voice is surprisingly firm as I tell him to leave me alone. When he persists, I remember what I've seen people do on the news. I pull out my phone and start recording a video.

He spots the phone clenched in my hands and his bitter expression twists into hatred. I'm concerned he might take it, so I press it against my chest. He's so close to me that we nearly touch shoulders. Still, I make sure to capture his face in the frame.

He flips me off.

"Kill her ass!" he yells to the people on the corner as I stop at another crosswalk, praying for the light to change.

One woman walks past, watching the scene unfold. She stops behind me, conflicted. A few moments later, she's at my side. She asks if I want company. I hesitantly agree, telling her I'm headed to the bus station. It's just a block away, and there's usually police there. Surely they can do something.

The light turns red, and it's safe to cross. I feel a surge of confidence as she walks with me, step-by-step.

But as soon as I reach the other end, she's gone. Almost as if I'd dreamt she was

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Photo Essay: People Watching 

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there.

I'm alone again.



A crosswalk in downtown Bellingham, Wash. on Feb. 21, 2020. Photo by Adam Vincent

I can still hear him cursing behind me.

He says I don't deserve anything I have, that I should die. Even Black people don't like me, he screams. No matter how fast I walk, he's mere steps behind.

The people who pass by keep their heads down, avoiding any eye contact. It's almost like I don't exist. I watch them, wondering if anyone will intervene.

They don't.

Maybe I'm the dream. Everything is numb — like I'm wading through emptiness. Nothing makes sense. *Why me? Why now?*

He follows me past a row of restaurants. A burger joint, a café, the crêpe shop. The customers inside watch me behind the safety of thick windows. They observe with intrigue, like they're on the set of a reality TV show and I'm the entertainment.

One man watches wide-eyed as he takes a large bite from his burger. The toppings spill out onto his plate. He's more interested in sweeping up the mess with his bun. Others look on with annoyance, eyes narrowing. *How dare I interrupt their family meal?*

"You are the DEVIL!" he yells so loud I can hear the strain in his voice.

And I almost believe the words he screams at me.



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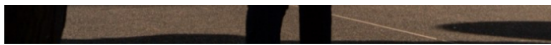
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The author stands in downtown Bellingham as she retraces her path on Feb. 21, 2020. Photo by Adam Vincent

When he stops, I don't know why; I just keep walking. The bus is in sight, its engine rumbling to life as it prepares to leave. I run to make it on time.

I step on the bus and look behind me. He hasn't followed.

The affirming beep after I've swiped my student ID card is an assurance of refuge. As I sit down, my mind is only on getting home.

I can only thank God he didn't lay a hand on me. Then I begin to wonder what I would do if he had. Would I get to my pepper spray fast enough? Would those two self-defense sessions kick in, or would I be too panicked?

Then I remember the streets weren't empty. This man had managed to do the impossible. He'd made me a ghost. My pain was invisible, easily disregarded by dozens of witnesses as if I were no more than litter on the curb.

But the most troubling thought of all rang in my head for weeks: *Will the safety of a young Black woman ever outweigh the taste of juicy cow meat?*

72



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