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THE EFFECT OF THE PREDATOR ON HIS PREY

Alicia E. Freeman

She sat quietly in the corner of the Planned Parenthood tucked away from downtown and the public's eye. Her eyes, puffed and red, stared at the floor, swept up in sadness and memories. Her limp, curly blonde hair frizzed away from her head in a rushed ponytail with a hot pink headband keeping it out of her plain, pallid face. Her neon orange shorts slid up her thighs, unable to hide the four long, red, painful scratches finger width apart across her upper thigh. She looked worn and exhausted from screaming and crying.

She ran all the way to Planned Parenthood that morning. Normally, running was a delight of hers. The exhilarating pumping legs helped clear her thoughts and even, sometimes, solve homework math problems. But today, her thoughts were too strong; they screamed in her head, playing over and over the events of the night before. She had never thought to look in the bushes as she ran by, but now, her eyes searched for an unknown assailant.

His sweat still lingered on her cold, aching skin, mixing as she ran with her own. Vomit, a visitor that had appeared many times the night before, fought up her throat, but she swallowed it, unwilling to stop now. Through the vomit she also tasted the musky smell of cologne.

The weight of his body mixed with that overpowering musky male scent took her breath, making her think that she would suffocate, if he did not murder her first. But, he had not wielded a gun or a knife. Rather, he struck from behind, brutally forcing her into a thicket near one of the larger parking lots on campus. Before, she had always assumed if she jogged by the parking lots someone traveling to his car would notice if she were attacked. Someone would be around to help. But no one was. No one noticed. As the

assailant ripped her favorite track shirt from her high school in San Bernadino, she swore she heard a girl giggle by chatting away on a cell phone. The victim screamed and fought, but the attacker, like his cologne, overpowered her.

Now, she sat quietly in the corner, her shoulder, covered by a not so favorite plain black t-shirt, shivered from an aching bite. She had evidence of him all over her body. She wondered, not daring to meet any of the four waiting women's eyes, if there were twigs in her hair. She had seen one of the women, a fellow student, examine the scratches on her legs, which embarrassed her. Yet, the only thing she worried about now was getting inside behind the doors with a savior: the doctor. She knew she should have called the police first, but the shame prevented her.

She was ashamed that she could not stop him, even after taking a defense class a quarter before. She was ashamed that she had let him scratch her, bite her, leaving his mark. She was ashamed, especially now, that she still could not escape.

"Stephanie Whaller?" a short, tanned blonde nurse called her name from the only door in the room.

The ringing of her name from the door surprised her. The fog of trauma kept her so focused that she had not noticed the door open. She stood, embarrassed for her surprise, and walked gingerly toward the smiling nurse outline.

"What can we do for you today, Ms. Whaller?" the nurse asked, smiling reassuringly.

Stephanie held back tears, trying to seem strong though she felt as fragile as a porcelain doll, "I was raped last night."

The nurse wrapped her arms around Stephanie, and Stephanie cried, uncaring if anyone could hear or see. She cried for the innocence she lost and for the ultimate violation. They would help her, they would find him, but no one could take away the memory, the smell, and the taste of him. He had left not just scratches and bites, but also an emotional scar that would never fade away. ⑤

Moebius Editors' Note: San Luis Obispo has a Sexual Assault and Recovery Center (SARP) with a free confidential 24 hour crisis and support line: 805-545-8881 or 1-800-656-HOPE.