



Audace

Audacious :

The reality of being transsexual or a transvestite is a far cry from the from the simplistic and comic representation on the Cover Girl tv series.

Dressed well, and looking nice, I wander the corner of St-Laurent and St-Catherine, in front of *Peep Show*, when a police car suddenly pulls to a quick halt in front of me. One of the two cops inside shouts at me:

'Hey you! Get over here. Do you have any ID?' I hand over my photo ID. Immediately, his colleague shouts,

'Fuck! It's a guy!' Grabbing his colleague by the arm, he shows him the picture. Pointing at it, he says

'It's a guy, man. I swear!' They immediately turn sarcastic and insulting, launching comments that are threatening, and violent. In the face of their contempt, it becomes impossible to contain my anger, which is rising quickly. I respond:

'Listen boys, you checked my record, nothing came up, and you don't have anything against me, so may I go now?'

They respond by telling me that if I know what's good for me, I wouldn't come around here anymore. That they don't want to see me around again, or else-

'Or else what?' I reply, 'you have no right to harass someone who hasn't done anything. You both seemed smarter than that. Where do you get off with this harassment?'

'Hey!' they continue, 'you're gonna shut that big mouth if you don't want to be taken to the station sooner than necessary!'

'To the station?' I tell them, 'No thankyou. You know, I'm not from Montreal, but at the farm where I lived, I loved the pigs. But only inside their pens.'

In just a few seconds, several moves, and in spite of my resistance, my hands are in cuffs and I'm being pushed head first into the back of the car. When we arrive at the station, I ask what I'll be charged with.

'You are charged with having been in a public space with the intention of solicitation'. Smart, isn't it? Here I was thinking that I was going to be accused of having berated two police officers for the disgust and contempt they showed for me. Apparently that wasn't going to be the case!

The next morning I find myself in court for the preliminary hearing, in front of a judge who doesn't leave me any opportunity to be released. He sets my bail at a thousand dollars knowing full well that I won't be able to pay it. With little hope, and no other options, I resign to prepare to spend time in prison.

That same night, I arrive at Bordeaux all dressed up, made-up, and in high heels. This time, I am placed with the other prisoners, having previously been separated from them. I quickly learn the extent of the boredom experienced by the prison guards. With my arrival, clearly a spectacle, the mood shifts considerably. The obvious departure from routine causes a range of reactions; some seem almost inebriated from the spectacle. Most avoid looking at me directly, but as soon as I pretend to look away, some quickly begin staring at me, looking me up and down, from head to toe. I'm reading all sorts of reactions, their responses written all over their faces, from disgust, to surprise, from stupefaction to a the most subtle twinge of excitement.

I'm called for a strip search. This one isn't the routine strip search to which everyone is subjected. This time, it is the most rare and exotic spectacle; I am being compared to the hundreds of men that pass in front of them each week. And they intend to make a real show of it. The other guards decide to suspend all regular operations, and drop everything they're doing. They outbid each other with homophobic remarks and all kinds of slurs. For just a moment, they seem to me like kids in a playground, throwing insults, and harassing the weaker student hiding in a corner of the yard.

I undress in the following order: my wig, my breasts, my shirt, my bra, my miniskirt, my high-heels, my earrings and necklace, my nylon stockings, and finally my two pairs of underwear. Why two? Because only one pair wouldn't be enough to hold the whole package, and would risk betraying our desires. Each piece of clothing that I hand to them is then presented and analysed by all the guards present, who begin to look more and more pitiful, and overexcited, simultaneously. I can't help but laugh. Once I'm completely naked, to conclude the spectacle in style, I swing my penis from side to side, and holding each of their gaze with mine, I ask:

'So just tell me which one of you guys can brag about having such a nice, big cock? Maybe one of you secretly wants to pay me to go satisfy your girlfriend. What do you think?' Grumbling all kinds of insults, they throw some ugly prison clothes at me.

Once I arrive in my section, I'm dressed like all the other prisoners, in clothing that's masculine and completely undifferentiated. As I move toward my cell, I feel a growing curiosity, laced with anxiety. I'm about to find out with which other prisoner I will be sharing the tiny cell. Once in my cell, I realize no one is there. I drop my belongings, take out my sheets and covers, make my bed and quickly go to the communal room to explore my new environment.

I sit down at a table between two boys. My presence is quickly noted. The first of the two to notice me quickly passes word on to the others. A frenzy suddenly takes hold of the room, and I am at the center of it. Some of the reactions seem to belie an earnest curiosity, for others, it's regarded as funny. Others are intent on making me feel as though I don't belong there, and for others, less numerous but more dangerous, their very masculinity and machismo seems at stake, making no attempt to hide their aggression or contempt.

It all begins to look an awful lot like a trial - *my* trial. I shudder. Four guys walk up to my table. One of them begins to speak,

'You know what you're gonna do. You're gonna go see the guards and tell them to transfer you to another cell, right away. There's no way you're sleeping in my cell tonight, 'cause if that's the case, you're not going to get out alive; my reputation depends on it.' I am afraid, not only because of his threats, but because he happens to be the one that disgusts me the most.

I muster all the strength and resolve I can in order to answer. I channel all my desire and determination to be free into my response, trying in equal measure to avoid the intense danger. I calmly reply:

'Listen up young man, I had nothing to do with any decision that was made to be put in 'your' cell, and despite all the good faith and insistence I could show, there's not a thing I can do about it. On the other hand, if you ask for the transfer yourself, it might very well work.' At that moment, the whole section becomes laden with tension. It seems to me the vast majority of the group approves of this demonstration of force of which I find myself on the receiving end. Internally, I fear the ugly turn the events this could take.

In one motion, the young man turns, goes to the guards' office and asks to see the officer in charge. A half-hour later he empties the cell of his belongings and changes sections. I find myself in an empty cell of my own. Over the course of my twenty-one day sentence, the dynamic between me and the other inmates gradually begins to shift. Some of them invite me to join them playing cards, others maintain a distant but respectful relationship. Even the small group that maintain a certain coldness toward me have abandoned their hostility.

I quickly start to benefit from my cool-headedness and perseverance. Occasionally, small tokens of friendship and other treats are shared with me: a joint and a drink, some chips or chocolates. Despite all of these gestures and generous tokens and their underlying sexual propositions, only one inmate among them has caught my eye. I prepare a plan geared for him specifically. Getting off to a good start, I go to the nurse's station to look for condoms, and then arrange to switch beds for a night with the man with whom he shares his cell.

And then ... and then that night is amazing. He is modest and tender, I am warm and sensitive. I can read in his eyes, and in his gestures, that he is as attracted and amazed with me as I am with him.

Who knew that prisons, with all their violence and cruelty, might produce a moment of romance, of tenderness?

Just before falling asleep, I look at him in his eyes and ask, 'What would you have done Eric, if I had asked you to pay for this? I'm not sure you'd have to much to offer me, huh?' He smiles shyly and deftly answers,

'And you, Farah, you seem just as broke as I am. So you'd probably find yourself in much the same situation had I been the sex-worker asking *you* for my pay, right?

We burst into common laughter, and laugh until we're reminded to keep silent, a silence so sacred to all prisoners at night, once the cell doors are closed. We fall asleep together, nestled side by side. Two days later, I am back outside, on the streets, at work.

In prison, as in life, nothing is so simple as to be either completely black, nor completely white. But with regards to transvestites and transsexuals, we can see clearly how narrow our point of access and entry are, in accessing healthcare, in accessing community and social services. With such selective and exclusionary cultural and moral values, our society does not recognize us as people. We are accorded no respect, nor the dignity that makes us human - rights otherwise considered to be universal. From this place, then, we must claim these rights for ourselves and for our communities; rights that will enable us to grow within our communities, contributing to their collective intelligence, and to our growth as a society. In truth, the law of reason is still weak, but our voice will be heard. It is this that allows us to hope.
And you, what's your take on it?

-- former street sex-worker, and member of the Prisoner Correspondence Project