

Tchotchke

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For a few weeks, I'd been posting variations on this ad to Craigslist:

Pretty M2F looking for genetic girl for sexy NSA fun

I'm a pre-op m2f transsexual, on hormones since 1998 and living full time since 2001. Blonde, 6', hazel eyes, functional, kinky. Currently in an open relationship. I'm looking for a genetic femme for all manner of fun and physical affection. No (metaphoric) ropes, no strings, no obligations. Preliminary headshot exchange? Yes. You first.

A girl visiting from Portland by the name of Tchotchke was the third girl to reply since I'd been posting it. The first one turned out to be a friend for whom I felt no particular spark, and the other started promisingly, but disappeared before we actually met. I'd replied to a few ads, and was largely ignored. The art of casual dating had always been a mystery, and remained so. I wasn't looking for anything deep or emotional; I already had that in my primary relationship, someone to love. What I wanted now was something cheap and quick and meaningless, the nice-boots kinda stuff which I'd been lead to believe existed but remained as elusive as the unicorn. When you're a tranny girl who doesn't like boys, promiscuity only works on paper.

Tchotchke lived in San Francisco back when dinosaurs roamed Valencia and had always been curious about South Park, so I suggested Caffe Centro. My office was literally around the corner, and it felt more San Francisco-y than my default suggestion of the corporate coffee chain at Third and Townsend.

Arriving early, I couldn't decide whether to sit inside or out. It was a beautiful day, and I was trying to not be so afraid of the Sun, so I decided to grab a table

outside. Eh. The problem with being outside on a sunny day was the the big burny yellow thing in the sky, so I went back inside. The problem with being inside on *any* day was the extremely loud music, and the only available table was below a speaker, so I went back outside, preferring to brave the light rather than the sound.

At about twenty past, she called to say she was running late, but was in a cab and would be there shortly. No problem, as it gave me a chance to do some writing. And, you know, beautiful day and all. I put my phone on the table next to my notebook, then decided to put it in my Alternative Tentacles messenger bag at my feet. The sun wasn't shining *directly* into my eyes, so I took off my sunglasses. Being a vain wannabe whore, I didn't put my regular glasses on. I'm nearsighted so I'd be able to see her fine without them, and I hate how I look with them on. First impressions and all—I wanted to look what I considered to be my best.

Finally, Tchotchke arrived. We talked for a few minutes about the differences in traffic between Portland and San Francisco, because that's what you talk about when you're nervous and have to fill the air. (Whenever I visit my family in Fresno, the inevitable first discussion is about the inevitable bottleneck on 101.) She went inside to get an actual beverage, I returned to my writing. I was vaguely aware of a scraggly-looking guy walking towards the table, veering closer and closer--

--and then grabbing my bag and running. It took about a half-second to comprehend what just happened before I launched from the chair, shouting: "No you don't! No! No! No! Give that back! He has my bag! Give that back! That's mine! No! No! No!" I took a self-defense course called Girl Army in '04, and the training was kicking in something fierce. Probably the most important thing I took away was To Make Noise. Not that I was consciously thinking of the class or anything; my instinct was just to *scream real loud* and get my stuff back, to follow

the lizardbrain which was saying

hetookititisminehemustnothaveitthiswillnothappen over and over.

If we were on foot he might have outrun me, but instead he ducked into a cab. I caught up with him before he closed the door and leapt in, grabbing for my bag, continuing to scream “No! No! You don’t get that! It’s mine! No! No!” My glasses were in the bag, so the surge of terror and adrenaline from berserker mode combined with my blurry-bright myopia and the utter bizarreness of attempting to wrestle my bag away from a thief sitting in the back of a taxi gave the entire scene the surreal sense of a dream. Indeed, it was very much like the kind of dream I have on a regular basis. I’ve never had sex in a dream, but my personal space is frequently violated. My brain hates me.

I knew it was real, and I was focused, *getmystuffgetmystuffgetmystuff* but since I’d left the bag open for easy access the contents had gone flying everywhere. As I grabbed for my wallet there went my glasses and grabbing for my glasses there goes my wallet and I grab for my sunglasses case and are those my keys? Yes they are because the TV-B-Gon which Maddy got me for my birthday was flashing blue, and man oh man they do *not* want to give up the wallet, the holy grail of the purse-snatcher with my driver’s license and ATM card and Visa card and AAA membership card and keycard and my Safeway card without a name attached to it so they don’t say “Miss Connelly”—or, worse, “Mister Connelly”—every time I make a purchase and my library card and Red Vic punchcard and a relatively small amount of cash and I’m trying to put them all in my bag without anything else falling out while the guy is trying to keep the bag away from me and all throughout this as I’m flailing half-in half-out of the cab the thief and his skanktastic crackhead of a girlfriend are shouting right back, the guy saying “Go cabbie go! Gun it! Go! Drive! Go cabbie go!” but the cabbie isn’t going at all, he’s just sitting there *watching*. It isn’t until later that I realize that he’s done the math: if he drives, he’ll hurt me. A lot. My head and torso may be in the cab, but the rest of me is on the street. If he guns it as his crank-added primary

passenger is demanding and the flesh is torn off my knees, he'll get into serious trouble. I suspect a cardinal cabbie rule is probably Never Take Your Foot Off The Brake When The Door Is Open, even if you're a willing accomplice to a crime.

None of this occurred to me at the moment, of course. My eye was not on that particular ball. Nor did it occur to me at the time that the thief was not violent; he could have punched me, kicked me, done any of a number of things, but he didn't. Probably he was too shocked by the fact that I chased him and struggled rather than simply letting it happen.

Realizing the driver isn't following orders, the thief and his crab-infested consort start shouting: "The guy's crazy! Shit! You're crazy, guy! Get out! Then: Fine, take the stuff! Get out, take it! You're fucking crazy! You're on drugs! This guy's on drugs!" Of course he was calling me "guy." When I'm panicked and shouting, it doesn't matter how femmey I might look—my voice betrays me in the worst way. Even without the voice, I'm six feet tall and built like a date-rapist linebacker. Being this large has never done me a damn bit of good.

I stumbled back out of the cab, thoroughly frazzled and clutching my bag to my chest as though I would never let it out of my hands again, and asked the nearest person in the growing crowd to please please *please* hold my bag so I can check for whatever else might be still in the cab. He just stood there, perhaps not understanding what I was trying to say, or more likely not wanting to get directly involved. Nobody did anything but watch.

Now free of immediate liability, the cab sped off, turning at the first available corner. On the street in its wake were a half-dozen multicolor hairties which fell out of my open bag during the fracas, like prisms in an oilslick.

In the crowd of people was Tchotchke, her mouth hanging open. Cutting through the panic and adrenaline was the realization that this was a horrendously bad first impression. My fledgling sluthood is dealt another blow. I looked at her and said: "Welcome back to San Francisco."

My keys, wallet, and both pairs of glasses were all accounted for. The important stuff. My phone, however was a victim. For as much of a technofetishistic connection as I had to my cell phone, at least it was easy to replace. But, in my astronomical carelessness did I perhaps leave my phone on the table, and someone else swiped it while I was fighting to get back my other possessions? I decided I didn't like that thought. It was on the floor of the taxi, yes it was

Though nobody got the cab's ID number, Tchotchke did notice the name of the company, and one of the onlookers had already called 911. He handed me the phone, instructing me to tell them what happened. I proceeded to do just that, talking a mile a minute and gesticulating widely and smiling and laughing hysterically and doing all the maddening things I do in that heightened state. Finally, I heard the operator, terribly cross: "Be quiet! Stop talking! I'm trying to help you by asking questions, but you just keep talking! Be quiet and let me talk!" She lost her patience and transferred me to someone else. Presumably she was new, and missed the day in training where they mentioned that people calling a *frackin' emergency number* might be a little agitated. I'd like to think she got into trouble, but I don't have that much faith in the system.

The second and considerably more patient operator told me I could wait for a cop to be there in about twenty minutes, or I could go to the station to file a report. I elected to wait. Tchotchke and I sat back down at the table, and I after a while were about to talk about things other than crime. My heartrate took a while to subside, and I continued clutching my bag, just in case.

As in every telling of the story up to that point, when I told the cop what happened I made sure to mention that I should have been watching my bag closer, keeping it on my person, copping to my culpability, blaming the victim before anyone else had the chance, in hopes that they might not feel the need to tell me what I did wrong. Y'know what? That never works. The cop, though actually very congenial, still felt compelled to remind me to be more careful in the future in spite of me having made it abundantly clear that, yes, I knew what I'd done wrong. But it's in the script. They can't *not* say it, because if I am not told, I will not learn.

On the other hand, when I told the cop that I ran after the thief and got my most of my stuff, he smiled and said "I love it when people fight back."

Thcotchke said that if she was free on Wednesday she'd drop me a line. Considering how jinxed our hookup things seemed to be. I decided not to hold my reath.

Much to my surprise, we did spend a chaste Wednesday evening together at the Lexington Club. As we parted company, a goodbye hug being the sole physical contact between us, she said she'd call and we'd hook up again on Thursday. I spent the evening by the phone, and never heard from her again. Another phantom returns to the aether.

Though the whole thing was more than a little disappointing from a carnal standpoint—the sole physical contact was a goodbye hug—I did get learn an unexpectedly valuable lesson. (It would have been nice to have learned the lesson AND made out a little, but that's not the way the Universe operates.) I've always wondered how I'll react when I'm inevitably queerbashed. Now I knew that, when assaulted, I fight.

In Girl Army, they told us that small girls tended to inflict more damage and be more difficult to restrain, since they tend to be scrappier fighters. If I was anything that day, I was scrappy. It's reassuring to know I fight like someone half my size.



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