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## Andrea Dworkin: The day I was drugged and raped

The feminist writer's harrowing account from 2000.

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PARIS IN THE RAIN. PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES.

I was in Paris. I was 52. It was Thursday, 19 May, 1999. I was in a garden in a hotel. I was reading a book, *French Literary Fascism*. I was drinking kir royale. I had two. The second one didn't taste right. I didn't finish it. Then I became sort of sickish or weakish or something, and all I could think about was getting to my bed and not making a fool of myself in public view. I prayed: "Let me get to my room, please let me get to my room." I had ordered dinner from room service and the waiter, who had also made the drinks, had said: "It will be my great pleasure to serve you your dinner tonight." I conked out.

Then a boy was in the room with dinner. He had served me the second drink. I tried to get up and I fell against the far wall because I couldn't stand. I signed the check, but could barely balance myself. I fell back on to the bed. I didn't lock the door. I came to four or five hours later. I didn't know where I was. The curtains hadn't been drawn. Now it was dark; before it had been light, long before dusk.

I had internal pain. I hurt deep inside my vagina. I said to myself: "Well, it's cancer, and there's nothing you can do about it now so worry about it when you get home." I went to the toilet and found blood on my right hand, fresh, bright red, not menstrual blood, not clotted blood. I'm past bleeding. I tried to find the source of the blood. My hand got covered in it again. I found huge, deep gashes on my right leg from the middle of the back of the leg to the middle of the front. I couldn't stop the bleeding of the gashes so I tried to keep them clean.

A few hours later, I took a shower. I had a big, strange bruise on my left breast, next to the aureole, not a regular bruise, huge black and blue with solid white skin in the centre, as if someone had sucked it up and chewed it. I didn't feel good the next day or the day after. I thought I had been drugged and raped, but I felt confused. I couldn't stand the thought of making a wrong allegation. I thought that the bartender had done it, because he had made the drinks and he was on the room-service phone and he had flirted grandly with me, though I had not reciprocated. I thought that maybe the boy, who had brought me the second drink, was supposed to report that I had passed out. I thought the bartender had raped me. I didn't know if the boy had been there or not, but I thought yes.

I couldn't remember, but I thought they had pulled me down toward the bottom of the bed so that my vagina was near the bed's edge and my legs were easy to manipulate. I thought that the deep, bleeding scratches, right leg, and the big bruise, left breast, were the span of a man on top of me. I had been wearing sweatpants that just fell right down. I had been wearing an undershirt. Usually I covered myself, but I had felt too sick to manage it before the boy came in with the dinner. Besides, I don't know how he got inside since the door was dead-bolted. He appeared suddenly, already in.

In my own life, I don't have intercourse. That is my choice. I got an internal infection in the aftermath. How? It was horrible not knowing. I had literally no memory of what the man and the boy had done. It's like being operated on. You don't feel anything until you feel the pain that comes with a return to consciousness. I speculated that my body must have been relaxed, no muscles straining, no physical resistance or even tension. This repelled me.

The hours were gone, missing. My mind went over and over that day and night for weeks and weeks turning into months and months. I couldn't find the missing hours because they weren't there, in my brain. That is why drugs such as Rohypnol and gamma hydroxybutyric acid (GHB) are called amnesiac drugs. (Since I could taste something in my drink, it was probably GHB, called on the street Grievous Bodily Harm.)

I lost all hope. I couldn't defend myself. I had been helpless. I had decided long ago that no one would ever rape me again; he or they or I would die. But this rape was necrophiliac: they wanted to fuck a dead woman. Why? I was scared. I thought that being forced and being conscious was better, because then you knew; even if no one ever believed you, you knew. Most rape experts agree: how can you face what you can't remember? I tried to hammer through the amnesia, but nothing broke. I was so hurt.

A few days later, on a Sunday, at the suggestion of my mate, John, at home in Brooklyn, I placed a call from Paris to my New York feminist gynaecologist of more than a decade. I said that I thought I had been drugged and raped. She said that a gynaecological exam wouldn't prove anything one way or the other and that the call from me convinced her that she should have an unlisted phone number. I thanked her (I'm a girl) and collapsed in tears. On the plane trip home, I huddled and shook. I felt overwhelming grief as if I had died. I also felt grief for this sick world.

I started hating every day. I hated seeing the sun rise. I couldn't put one foot in front of the other and I wanted to put a butcher's knife into my heart behind my ribs. I was very lonely. I was consumed by grief and sorrow until I was lucky enough to become numb. I thought I could resist by not dying, but that might be too hard and maybe I was too old and too tired and couldn't do it any more. My body was a curse and had betrayed me. I couldn't figure out why they would want to do this and why they would want to do it to me.

I couldn't be consoled. I couldn't talk to anyone. How could I say the words to the people I loved, most of whom work precisely to stop violence against women: this is what he, someone or they, did to me. Yeah, I know I represent something to you, but really I'm a piece of crap because I just got raped. No, no, you're not a piece of crap when you get raped, but I am. John looked for any other explanation than rape. He abandoned me emotionally. Now a year has passed and sometimes he's with me in his heart and sometimes not.

I don't know why the world didn't stop right then, when the creatures drugged and raped me. I don't know how the earth can still turn. I don't believe that it should be possible. I don't. I think everyone should have stopped everything because I was 52 and this happened to me. I think every person should have been in mourning. I think no one should work or spend money or love anyone ever again.

I ask: "Why me?" I say: "It can't have happened to me." I say: "My bad pheromones or karma brought the rapist pigs to me." I blame me no matter what it takes. I go down the checklist: no short skirt; it was daylight; I didn't drink a lot even though it was alcohol and I rarely drink, but so what? It could have been Wild Turkey or coffee. I didn't drink with a man, I sat alone and read a book, I didn't go somewhere I shouldn't have been wherever that might be when you are 52, I didn't flirt, I didn't want it to happen. I wasn't hungry for a good, hard fuck that would leave me pummelled with pain inside.

And after: I don't want it to have happened. I can't remember it. They took my body from me and used it. They were inside me. I felt for stickiness. There was none. I prayed that meant they had used condoms. (I'm waiting for the outcome of a second round of HIV and other STD testing. Immediately after a drug-rape, as I didn't know then, there are about 24 hours in which to get a urine sample and 48 to 72 hours to get a blood test.)

And then there is that I know too much. Forgive me for saying this, but it makes everything harder. I know a lot about rape. I study it. I read about it. I think about it. I listen to rape victims. I engage with prosecutors and lawyers and legislators. I write about it. I was raped before this. I remember being raped. I say that we're fighting back. I give speeches and say that women and girls are being raped and we need to do this and this and this. I know hundreds if not thousands of raped women.

But this is new. Rape with amnesiac drugs is new. It's so easy. In most studies on rape and pornography, about 30 per cent of men say they would rape if they could get away with it. They can. This is foolproof rape. The gang that couldn't shoot straight can do this kind of rape. You can do this hundreds of times with virtually no chance of getting caught, let alone having anyone be able to make a legal case in any court of law. And smart women with attitudes like myself can't stop these pieces of dog excrement through militance or violence or persuasion or just being reasonably polite.

See, if there were feminist vigilantes, I couldn't even ask a favour. I can't put the bartender in the hotel room with me. I know it was he and his little accomplice, but how do I know? The circumstantial evidence that leads to the conclusion that the rape happened does not identify the rapist(s). One point for prosecutors: this is poisoning as well as rape; always bring both charges.

As for me: about ten days after I came home, my 84-year-old father broke his knee. He was never out of a hospital or nursing or convalescent home again until he died on 4 December 1999. A few days before Christmas, I was hospitalised for bronchitis, pneumonia, cellulitis (an infection of the soft tissues in the legs - lethal if not treated with antibiotics) and blood clots. I had been wandering in delirium from a high fever on New York City streets until a young woman helped get me off the street and called John.

I was in the hospital a month, which caused my leg muscles to atrophy, so I am learning how to use them again. I used to worry about taking a Valium or two to fall asleep in strange hotels. Now I take on average 12 pills to sleep and they only work sometimes. How can I close my eyes and voluntarily become unconscious? For the first time in my life I go to shrinks, a lucid one who prescribes drugs and an empathetic one whose speciality is in dealing with people who have been tortured. I have been tortured and this drug-rape runs through it, a river of horror. I'm feeling perpetual terror, they both tell me. I stare blankly or I say some words. I'm ready to die.

Andrea Dworkin (1946-2005) was a radical feminist writer known for her work on pornography, war and sexual intercourse. Her account of being raped in Paris in 1999 was published exclusively by the *New Statesman*.

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