



The Mercury  
The Student Art &  
Literary Magazine  
of Gettysburg  
College

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Volume 2022

Article 44

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May 2022

## Sucedará

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### Recommended Citation

Montero, Gabriela () "Sucedará," *The Mercury*. Year 2022, Article 44.  
Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/mercury/vol2022/iss1/44>

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## Sucedará

### Author Bio

Gabriela Montero, originally born and raised in a predominantly low-income, Hispanic community, is now a sophomore at Gettysburg College, pursuing a BA in Political Science. She wishes to share the experiences she endured growing up to enlighten her readers on the reality that women of color often face. Stemming from her personal struggles of sexual harassment, financial instability, and poor education, Gabriela hopes to spread her message of perseverance to the women of color still trying to climb the ladder of success in America.

## Sucedará

GABRIELA MONTERO

\*Content warning: Catcalling/Sexual Harassment\*

My mother used to say to me:

*No importa cuánto lo quieras evitar, sucederá. Especialmente a las lindas como tú. Y cuando pases, querrás saber cómo reaccionar.*

“No matter how hard you try to avoid it, it’ll happen. Especially to the pretty ones like you. And when it does, you’re going to want to know how to react.”

For her, it was safer to make me aware of the dangers that existed in the world than preserve my naivety. While this knowledge robbed me of my innocence, she knew it was my only chance of surviving the evil that once damaged her and evil she knew would come for me. While some call it pessimistic, my mother knew that understanding this reality we face would save my life one day.

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I remember the day my friend and I had spent the day at Frank Sinatra Park overlooking the Hudson River. A place most people would classify as ordinary, but my friend and I considered it our favorite place to people-watch and eat food we couldn’t afford. It was getting late and we wanted to get home before nightfall so we hopped on the light rail at around 6 p.m. Once we got to our light rail stop, we were about forty blocks away from home, which was a little too far for our legs to handle that night.

As luck would have it, a jitney bus swerved in front of us and we decided to ride it as close to home as possible. After each paying the driver \$1.75, we got on the bus very clearly falling apart from the inside out. After growing up in one place your entire life, you learn to overlook the broken windows, the seats with cotton coming out the sides, and the lack of AC and personal space. There were only two spots left on the bus and, unfortunately, they were not adjacent. We both had to sit next to strangers, and we instantly gave each other a look that signaled our collective fear. Nonetheless, we both wanted to get home as quickly as possible, so we sat down. The man next to me

instinctively looked me up and down and I faced my legs outward on the chair to avoid as much contact as possible. By the paint-splattered jeans and the dusty, rough hands, the man definitely worked in construction. I tried not to pay too much attention to his features because I didn't want him to initiate a conversation. Despite my efforts, I failed. He began to speak to me in broken English until he realized that I too spoke Spanish.

*"Me gusta tu vestido."* (I like your dress.)

*"Gracias."* (Thank you.)

I noticed he started to rub the upper part of his thigh, right in between his legs, adjusting what I know he was eager to use. Instead of looking away, like men usually do, I felt his eyes on me as he continued to rub. I looked across the bus to signal to my friend that we were getting off the bus a couple of stops early, and I knew she'd understand why. I felt another tap.

*"¿Tienes un novio?"* (Do you have a boyfriend?)

*"Sí."* (Yes.)

As I was taught. The answer is always yes.

...

#### Lesson #1:

*"Los hombres como él respetan a otros hombres, no a las mujeres. Si un hombre te pregunta si tienes novio. Siempre di que sí."*

"Men like him respect other men, not women. So if a man asks you if you have a boyfriend, always say yes."

I went to a private boarding high school, so when I went home on the weekends, I took NJ Transit. The first time I took the train alone I was fourteen. I knew the ride would be about an hour and a half long and that I had to be at the station fifteen minutes early to not miss the train. Funny story. I still missed it. I was now waiting for the next train, which would arrive even later in the night. The station was empty, which I thought was odd because it was nighttime in the city. Nothing is ever dead. After an hour of sitting in silence, I noticed that the train would be arriving soon so I got up to make sure I didn't miss it again. That's when I noticed a homeless man, short and elderly, sitting at the bench near the tracks. I'd hoped he didn't see me but he did.

"You're very pretty."

"Thank you."

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

"No."

He smiled and my body activated its fight or flight response. Never being fond of confrontation, you can guess how my body reacted in the

split second I had to think. I rejected the idea of getting on the train altogether and called my mother. I waited for her inside a locked stall bathroom and on the drive back was her very first lesson to me.

...

I looked to my friend again to see if she was having a similar experience, and, thankfully, she was not. I grabbed her hand at the next stop and practically ran off the bus. She caught on to what was happening almost immediately. We started running from the man on the bus who we realized also got off at the same stop, this time accompanied by three other men. We reached a point where we didn't see them anymore, so I dropped my friend off at her house and hugged her goodbye.

"Text me to make sure you get home okay."

I walked back thinking of what my friend had said. This phrase is something I had never considered to be scarily normalized between female friends. We all shared this collective knowledge of how dangerous walking alone at night could be and we knew that we would want someone to check in on us and our safety, so we did the same for others. Random women in grocery stores. Women in public transportation. Women in clubs. *Are you okay? Are you comfortable? Do you need help?* Most women could read situations like this because most women had been in situations like this. Situations riddled with complete and utter fear.

Now deep in thought I realized I should pay attention to the walk ahead. I had my keys and pepper spray in one hand and my phone in the other, while my AirPods played music in my ears to drown out the sound of my fearful thoughts.

...

Lesson #2:

*"Cuando estás sola, no tienes a nadie cuidando tu espalda. No tienes el lujo de caminar desconectada del mundo. Nunca salgas de la casa sin protección, no uses los audífonos y mantén los ojos en alto."*

"When you're alone, you don't have anyone watching your back. You don't have the luxury to just walk around out of touch with the world. Don't ever leave the house without pepper spray, don't have your headphones in, and keep your eyes up."

My mother grew up in Cartagena, a major city on the coast of Colombia. It is known for its historical brick walls that surround the center of the city, first built to protect Colombian natives from enemies. My mother recalled that automobiles were only used by the wealthy and most of the city used bicycles if they could not get to their destination on foot. Every

time she speaks of her childhood there, I can see her eyes light up with excitement and happiness and I can tell she desperately wishes she still lived there. While I love hearing about the stories of her and her friends going swimming in the ocean at 2 a.m. or her and her boyfriend sneaking off on a boat for the day, I'm reminded of one story that took the glimmer out of her eyes, one story that I can tell still terrifies her to this day.

It was a hot day, per usual, and she, about seventeen or eighteen at the time, was riding her bike to go meet up with some friends. She had on the shortest shorts she could find and the bare minimum to cover up her top half. She bikes the same trail practically every day to get to school meaning she could afford to ride with leisure and get a little distracted. She remembers listening to the musicians performing on the side of the road and hearing the customary roadside sellers promote their fresh fruit and vegetables. Not more than a couple of seconds with her eyes off the road, she feels a slap on her thighs and a grip on her breast. She's thrown off her bike still not completely connected to reality. A group of men twice her age had thought her body was too attractive to not be touched by them.

*"Oye Mami, tu cuerpo se ve fenomenal."*

(Ayo Mami, your body looks fantastic.)

My mother was never the type to silently walk away from situations where she felt threatened, but the amount of men surrounding her, accompanied with the shame and embarrassment she felt, kept her from fighting or even speaking back to these men. She quickly picked up her bike and rode away hoping they wouldn't chase her.

...

I quickly took my AirPods out and only focused on the pavement ahead. I'd always been the type of girl to walk with her head down, but right now I was looking straight up, still making sure to not make eye contact with anyone passing by. I reached a crosswalk and could now see my street from where I was standing. Waiting for the red light to turn green, a man in a red truck pulled up in front of me. He had a beard and wore a wife-beater, and was puffing up his chest to show off the muscles he believed would seduce me. It didn't. Instead, it put me in a state of shock. I stood there while he yelled.

"It's not safe walking around alone at night. I can take you home, beautiful. Pretty girls like you don't need to be flaunting skin at this time of the night. I can make you feel safe and then we'll figure out a way for you to repay me."

He mentioned safety, but I felt the complete opposite. Once reality kicked in, I bolted in whatever direction the bearded man wasn't going. I

figured I could outrun him and then he'd just leave, which he did, but not without finishing what he was saying.

“Fine, you fucking bitch. You weren’t worth my time anyway.”

...

*“Aunque cosas asi pasen, no estamos solas.”*

“Even though things like this happen, we are not alone.”

Ruth George, a 19-year-old sophomore honors student at the University of Illinois at Chicago in Naperville, Illinois, had attended a fraternity event for future medical professionals at the University. After the event, she had taken an Uber back to a UIC bus stop and began to walk toward the on-campus parking garage to pick up her car. Through surveillance footage, the police were able to identify her attacker as Donald Thurman, 26. Cook County prosecutors say Thurman saw George at the bus stop and thought she was pretty. He tried to talk to her, catcalled her, and she ignored him. This made him angry, so he followed her into a UIC parking garage. He then attacked George from behind with a chokehold until she was unconscious, and sexually assaulted her in the backseat of her car. He was then charged with first-degree murder and criminal sexual assault.<sup>1</sup> Ruth was among the many women and men who are affected by street harassment and assault every day. The DC Office of Human Rights conducted a study on street harassment where, of the total 1621 participants in the study, 51% were women and 47% were men. They found that 69% of all their participants experienced unwanted verbal street harassment in the past six months and 52% of the participants first experienced street harassment before they turned eighteen years old. Due to this harassment, they gathered that 54% of participants changed their route or regular route, 34% felt anxiety or depression, and 29% stopped going to a restaurant, bar, or club. According to the data, verbal street harassment most frequently occurred on the street, sidewalk or, public transportation. Of the participants who reported experiencing street harassment on the street or sidewalk, 23% reported daily harassment, 34% reported weekly harassment, 15% reported monthly harassment. Of the participants who reported experiencing street harassment on public transportation, 18% reported daily harassment, 27% reported weekly harassment, 15% reported monthly harassment.<sup>2</sup>

1 Chilling Crimes. “Ruth George.” Chilling Crimes, 5 Aug. 2020, <https://www.chillingcrimes.com/blogs/news/ruth-george-1>.

2 “The State of Street Harassment in DC - | OHR.” Ohr.dc.gov, DC Office of Human Rights, 2020, [https://ohr.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ohr/publication/attachments/OHR\\_SHPA\\_Report\\_APRIL2020\\_FINAL.pdf](https://ohr.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/ohr/publication/attachments/OHR_SHPA_Report_APRIL2020_FINAL.pdf)

While heartbreaking, Ruth's story, along with data indicating thousands of other similar stories, serves as a lesson to all the girls and women who dare to walk around alone. To them, to the men that harass and rape and ignore the actions of their friends, we aren't people. We're things begging for the attention of men. We're silently waiting for a man to pleasure us and dominate us. We're not worthy of respect or even a shred of decency. We're walking objects desperate to be at the mercy of men.

...

Taking that detour home may have strayed me from my programmed path, but it also saved my life. I reached my home much later than intended. Out of breath and in tears, I ran up the stairs of my house and locked myself in my room not knowing what to do. If I told my mother, she'd never let me leave the house again. If I told my father, he'd blame me for staying out too late wearing clothes that "don't fit me." If I called my friend, she'd never let me walk home alone again and I'd risk her going through a similar experience. So, I was left with one option. I prayed. I closed my eyes pretending God could hear me for a moment and I prayed this never happens to me again. I prayed it didn't happen to any woman, any person, ever again. I opened my eyes and was jolted back into the reality that it will happen again. It was just a matter of when. For me, it was three days after the man on the jitney bus and the bearded man in the red truck.