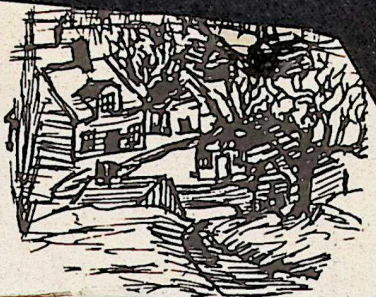


Village View by Andrea Leonard



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It's hard to accept that one of the social problems becoming more visible on Cape Cod is rape.

The crime is one frequently dismissed with the thought, "The girl was probably asking for it". That's too pat an answer.

Recently an elderly woman was raped in Hyannis. She lived alone, quietly, and wasn't "asking for it". The telephone wires to her house were cut prior to the assault. Her assailant was a young man.

Even when young women appear in public in seductive or scanty clothing, excusing an attacker with "she got what she was asking for", doesn't erase the crime of rape.

In today's society -- whether we like it or not -- near-nudity is commonplace among both sexes; such attire -- or lack of it -- is legal; the practice in no way changes the fact of rape.

To dismiss sexual assault by a man of a woman, without her consent, as "invited" refutes the purpose of the law which guarantees every person's right to freedom from molestation by any person upon any other person.

If we take lightly reports of rape or look upon them as resulting from a woman's own behavior, we shall find ourselves subject to greater and more serious crime.

The key word is "consent"; any act of friendliness or trust might be construed as "asking for it" if we begin to see rape as excusable because of the victim's attire or demeanor.

Let's assume some possibilities, and ask ourselves how we would handle such situations.

Suppose you were a single woman taking a course -- perhaps at the Community College, perhaps an adult education course at the high school, maybe a course offered by the Extension Service -- and met a man also taking the course. Say he invites you to a movie, to church or a party, Would you go?

If you did go, would you feel you might be raped? You could be. The length of time you knew the man would have nothing to do with the possibility. The circumstances in which you met would have nothing to do with it, although an introduction by a mutual friend is some protection, for it establishes a basis of on-going connection between people you both know.

Because women are vulnerable to attack -- and threats of attack -- any situation in which a woman finds herself alone with any male -- could result in her being raped.

Chances are, of course, most situations will not lead to a woman's being sexually assaulted, for most men have little or no desire to force themselves upon an unwilling partner.

Furthermore, even if they may have such de-

sires, at times, most are sufficiently inhibited to restrain their impulses.

Not, however, in every case. It's in the few instances, for whatever reason, a man becomes a rapist that a woman must protect herself, if possible.

If you accepted an invitation to a movie, a church service, or a ride to the next evening's course, and enroute, your companion announced he intended to rape you, what would be your response?

Or suppose you were to waken at night to find a man standing next to your bed, knife in hand, demanding you submit to him? Could you talk him out of it? Would you engage in a physical effort to defend yourself?

Suppose a knock came at your door, and the man you found on your doorstep threatened to shoot you if you didn't let him in, and again, if you didn't accede to his wishes.

What is your defense?

The first and best rule, of course, is to avoid being in such a position. It's not always possible to restrict your contacts with men to those you are sure will not attack you.

If you are accosted and are alone, depending on how threatening the man is, you must decide your best course of action. And you must decide quickly.

Do you scream? Do you run? Do you fight? Or do you take the path of least resistance to save your life? Can you talk your way out of the situation?

If you've had any training in self-defense, it may be possible to disable the man. If you make this choice, however, don't hesitate. Go into action quickly and decisively, without mercy. Be prepared to kill, if it comes to that.

Most men are physically stronger than most women, and if you fight you must strike the first blow, get him off balance, and incapacitate him immediately.

If your screaming will help, scream. If you judge him less fleet of foot than yourself, run. If he has a knife or a gun, that's not practical, though.

It's sometimes possible to talk your way to safety. One approach is "Don't be ridiculous." This can work if the man is uncertain. You may be able to convince him it's not worth it. Point out the dangers to himself, if he carries out his threat.

If none of these is successful, you could become the victim of the rapist. Then what do you do?

As soon as it's safe, call the police. The experience of interrogation, investigation, the court hearing, will not be pleasant; however, the police will do everything possible to spare you while at the same time prosecuting the case against your attacker.

You'll be taken to the hospital for examination; if the emergency room is busy, you may have to wait a couple of hours before a doctor can see you.

rior to the court hearing, you'll be assailed by doubts. You'll wonder if it wouldn't be easier to drop charges and forget the whole thing as soon as possible. You'll be afraid the degrading experience of the assault will be compounded by the hearing itself.

For the protection of other women who might become victims of the man if he is permitted to go free and repeat his behavior, press charges. He is dangerous. He needs help with his problems. Unless you go through with it, some other woman will be his next prey.

Again, most men will never become rapists. They want only willing partners; they don't want to force themselves upon a woman. It's not necessary to see, in every man you meet, a potential rapist.

What is necessary, and important, is to put the responsibility where it belongs. That's not on the woman who's the victim. That's directly upon the man who is the aggressor.

Even if a girl is "asking for it", that gives no man the right to "hand it out" -- without the girl's consent.