

# SPECTRUM

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## On receiving a joke from god

Every once in a while, and particularly when my sense of humour has worn a little thin, I find myself the recipient of a joke from god. Like most of the other worldly jokes I have been the butt of, this one was especially well executed.

Some background. Over the past several weeks and without my knowing it, my typical unrealistically optimistic view of women's issues and feminism had darkened considerably. I am usually the idiot who, in a group of women, will rave on and on about how things are getting better. "Just look at how much has changed," say I, and my women friends cradle their heads in their hands, close their eyes and press their knuckles against their temples, and say, "yeah, sure." Some of my kinder women friends say that as I am a survivor of nearly ten years of domestic terrorism, it is entirely understandable that my outlook is a little warped. My less kinder women friends, who also happen to know me better, make note of the fact that I am able to dupe myself into believing almost anything. Even I must admit that for me, "hope" is like a demon seed; it is the only thing that has kept me going all these years, but it has also been the very thing that has kept me persevering in situations long after it has been healthy to do so.

This uncharacteristic lapse into despair began in early December when I went by train to Montreal to see the candles in the snow at Ecole Polytechnique and to reflect on the meaning of December 06. Of course, it didn't help that in the weeks that followed it seemed that every conversation managed, artfully, to revolve around poverty, the recession, unemployment and the direct and indirect effects of same on women and their children. Belts tighten and male rage grows in direct proportion. The women I know seem either to cower, fight back, work harder or leave. Whichever way you approach it, the bills come due.

And it didn't help in the interim to learn the identities of two more highly placed "respectable" model citizens on campus who are also closet wife batterers in their spare time. Like many other women on this campus, I am tired of pretending to have to pretend I don't know. I am tired of keeping their dirty little secrets so as to protect their battered partners. The irony is that the partners are never protected anyway. I have lost track of the cups of tea and the phone calls spent ruminating

with an assortment of women friends on the advantages and disadvantages of "outing" men who batter. Add to this a painful attempt to explain, over cheesecake and hot chocolate, why battered women stay with their abusive partners (sometimes against all logic) to a confused 11 year old who has just found out that the reason she has been unable to reach her mother was because her mother had been hospitalized after her umpteenth beating at the hands of a boyfriend. And then there's all the hype over the Mike Tyson rape case — I am still trying to understand the logistics involved in a 220+ lb man performing oral sex on his 18 year old 108 lb. victim by lifting her up by the ankles. It's hard to hold on to hope in times like these. I try to laugh but find I can't and wonder what I am missing.

Suffice it to say that there have been periods in my life when I have been a much happier camper. As December bled into January, the feminist ire was awash inside me and my fuse had grown short; it was a dangerous combination. At work, I battled over job and pay equity, sexist material in the workplace, and the perils of sexual harassment. At home, I fought valiantly to the point of hairsplitting at times for complete equity in the division of household tasks, and over the definition of pornography. I lectured my teenaged daughter long distance about the importance of girls and women participating in math and science and calculated for her the odds of

her turning out to be the head of a single parent family based on whether or not she manages to pass this term's math. I guess you could say I was fairly well primed for an infusion of divine humour when I found I had lowered myself into arguing for three heated hours over whether or not the naming of Toronto's Bare Naked Ladies was or was not sexist. And then, just as I was about to throw myself on a sharp stick, it happened.

In the blackest of moods and while ready to strangle any male foolish enough to cross me, I ventured into Head Hall to pick up some work. Classes done for the day, the building was nearly empty. I always feel uncomfortable in this building - the only one which can be prefixed by the phrase "gimnee. . ." at least according to contributors of ERTW. I always feel a little unsafe and unwelcome, visible and yet invisible, and more than a little paranoid. On this day like all others, I headed down a narrow hallway off a particular stairwell and ran smack into two large, well built engineering students, each leaning against opposite walls and blocking the hallway with their feet. "Excuse me," I said, but neither made an attempt to move; as I stepped over their feet, they continued talking as if I did not exist. One said to the other in an oddly self-congratulatory tone: "So how do I look?" A strange question except that I had taken a good look at him on my way by. He looked bleary eyed but cu-

## Arrogance lives!

In the process of walking over to Dr. Know's place the other day, I was reflecting on my rapidly diminishing tolerance for stupidity. The thought occurred to me, "What makes you think you're so damned smart and what makes you feel as though you're usually right?"

This fleeting brush with humility must have been similar to the emotions the comedian/philosopher/director/actor/writer Woody Allen must have felt just before he wrote the screenplay for his movie *Sleeper*. Those of you who believe there were movies before *Freddy &* the rest of the so-called scary stuff or the explicit "hump films" with no mystery and romance as well as the total lack of subtlety in our humor, you've seen this classic. Anyway, Allen plays the character who falls asleep and

wakes up in the future to find many of the "truths we hold to be self-evident" are bogus. In particular, the line about refined white sugar actually being good for you and vitamins, protein, etc. have been determined to be false concepts and now they are basically out. Not that I consider myself in anyway Allen's intellectual equivalent, but sometimes I do feel a bit frustrated. Upon, reaching Dr. Know's S/he poured me a cup of coffee and bade me to sit down. "What's the problem D.J., you look quite forlorn. Have you lost your best *Who* album or your favorite Stephen King novel?" "Nah, Dr. K., I was thinking about Woody Allen's *Sleeper* and I began to wonder if one hundred years from now, basically all the tenets "thinking people" hold dear will be rendered obsolete." Dr.

## The Wimmin's Room by Flame

riously untired; unshaven, glazed and rumped as if he had slept in his clothes, or else hadn't made it back to his apartment for a change of clothes since the weekend, some three days earlier. He looked slightly manic, positively victorious, drunk on his own virility and obviously high as a kite on unfathomable levels of testosterone. "Pig" I thought, imagining him naked, sweaty, squirming and tangled for days at a time in the sheets of some young woman's bed.

I stiffened as I heard his friend say, "So, how was it?" They both laughed an evil sort of Yo-Baby male conspiratorial laugh. My heart beating and my blood pressure on the rise, I quickened my pace down the hall. I wanted to get away from them; I didn't want to hear about it. But their voices carried down the hall after me. "It was incredible!" the first voice boomed. "It went on and on and on all night and I thought it was never gonna end." "Braggart", thought I, and isn't this is just great - why not share all the gory details? - men are such sluts. Unwilling to walk away and say nothing even one more time and buy into my own invisibility, and ready to come to the defense of some woman I would never know

and who would undoubtedly avow herself not to be a feminist, I turned on them ready to attack.

"It happened in the morning," he said. "... 8 lbs. something. A big guy. The whole thing was incredible. I was there for all of it. I been on the phone constantly and haven't had much sleep since then which is how come I look like this." And they laughed again, this time more genuinely without all the yo-baby macho-dirty-dancing body language. It took a few seconds for their words to make it all the way through the circuits.

The friend wanted to know how the new mother was faring and what the baby looked like and whether the grandparents had seen him. While I stood there open-mouthed with my gender gap showing, these two New Age guys stood smiling at each other, gabbing excitedly about childbirth and breast feeding. The high of testosterone was not the by-product of a sex crazed weekend, but was in fact the euphoria of a new father.

I left the building in the quiet of January dusk and with snow drifting down like feathers, I sat down on the worn sandstone steps and laughed.

## Well, this is what I think by D. J. Eckenrode

Know was no help. S/he said that it was not only possible, but likely. Then to my dismay, S/he proffered a list of, if not horrifying, distinctly curious possibilities:

1. Food is not only not supposed to be nutritious, but it will be considered to be bad to have some sort of variety in flavors. Witness the proliferation of McDonalds, Beaver Foods, and the bland tasteless food served at restaurants here in Fredericton, such as O'Toole's and Luna Pizza.

2. Winter driving behavior will require people to spin tires furiously, jam on brakes, and plod along so slowly that traffic is

backed up so far in the morning that you actually pass yourself on the way home in the evening.

3. Reading of books is almost already out. In the future, the idiot box will be replaced by a chip inserted into your brain which makes all of us have the same information, obviating anything as outmoded as an imagination.

4. Some lowest common denominator of behavior (and thought) will be determined for all people by the government and we will all adhere to that standard for all our living days on earth.

5. It will be proper and even

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