

Rosamund Urwin: Time to reclaim the streets from London's leches



Epic encounter: Eva Green stars in the equally violent sequel to 300

The road I live off — Acre Lane in Brixton — seems to host regular auditions for the Bad Boyfriend Club. Most days, a couple of men stand near the McDonald's uttering "Hey, sexy" and other Oscar Wilde-worthy witticisms at passing women. I'm pretty sure that the success rate of this strategy is lower than Lottery jackpot odds (ie, zero), that no woman has ever ripped off her knickers in response. Yet still they persist, day after day.

On Monday, though, as I entered Catcalling Central, a man tried a new approach. "I love you," he said. I didn't turn around. "F*** you, you bitch," he added, proving that for him the line between adulation and detestation really was fine. So I can now add "bitch" to the list of profanities I've had thrown my way for failing to smile at street harassers; I'd already crossed off "cow", "whore", "slut" and "c***".

More from Rosamund Urwin

Almost every woman I know has similar — or worse — stories. They've been sworn at. Hollered at. Leered at. Groped. These incidents occur on the street, in buses, trains, clubs and bars — regular

reminders that, as a woman, public spaces never quite belong to you. Just look at the Everyday Sexism blog for evidence of quite how common these experiences are.

As I write this, I imagine a few men will be frothing at the mouth to tell me that such comments are compliments, that I should revel in them. They do whenever street harassment is discussed. Some will add that a gorgon like me should be grateful for any attention I get — only the Rosie Huntington-Whiteleys of this world would get a whistle or a feel from them. As though that makes it OK.

But they misunderstand such behaviour. It isn't "men being men" — most would never behave this way. A compliment shouldn't make the recipient shudder, nor should it be followed up with abuse or aggression. And the female body doesn't exist to be ogled and rated by a lech on a power trip.

Sometimes I dream up the most scathing retort to such comments. But when they occur, I tend to suffer l'esprit de l'escalier, thinking of the killer comeback 10 seconds too late. And when I've been groped in the past, I've been so shocked that I could do little more than shout.

That's why I'm grateful there's a concerted campaign to stop this behaviour. Hollaback London, part of a global movement, has just signed up venues such as Ministry of Sound and Fabric to tackle harassment within their doors. The clubs and bars are instigating a zero-tolerance approach.

But we need to find ways to bring this movement to other public places too. Let's reclaim the streets from London's leches — starting with the charmers of Acre Lane.

Blood, guts and milking it

The new 300 film, Rise of An Empire, is an extreme illustration of Hollywood's sequel obsession. Apparently, it doesn't matter that almost the entire cast was wiped out in the first movie — the producers can still mine money from a follow-up.

Predictably, it's hugely derivative of its predecessor. There's a similar ab count, the same slow-spraying blood and Xerxes is still buying his outfits from a leather and latex shop in Vauxhall. It's really just 300-on-Sea, another extended and violent ad for gym membership.

It's easy to be sniffy about such films. But perhaps the sequel habit is indicative not just of film-makers' aversion to risk but the audience's too: we want to know what we're paying £12 for. In other words, I bet we get 300 mark 3.

The Tories get their revenge on the NHS

Jeremy Hunt — a man who believes banking bosses need qualifications but that a failed marmalade exporter is the man to run the NHS — has just won new powers to close hospitals. Under laws passed this week, the Health Secretary can shut a well-performing hospital if a neighbouring trust is

foundering financially. This is Hunt's revenge for his humiliation over Lewisham, where he was ruled to have acted illegally in trying to cut emergency and maternity services.

It is yet another example of the Government putting savings before the sick — no wonder the public distrust the Tories on the NHS. “No top-down reorganisation,” David Cameron promised, before enacting the biggest top-down reorganisation in its history. Likewise, he and Hunt have been ordered by the statistics watchdog to stop saying NHS spending is rising in real terms when it is actually falling. As the hospital closure clause proves, the NHS isn't safe in Hunt's hands. He should have stuck with marmalade, not medicine.

Obama is the coolest daddy

Barack Obama, the US's turkey-pardoner-in-chief, has managed a remarkable feat. Unfortunately, it isn't closing Guantánamo, but an appearance on a comedy skit with a star of The Hangover trilogy which doesn't make the viewer cringe. On Funny or Die's Between Two Ferns With Zach Galifianakis, Obama sent up the host (“If I ran a third time it would be sort of like doing a third Hangover movie. It didn't work out very well, did it?”) while plugging Obamacare.

Obama comes across as the kind of cool dad that every child wishes they had, except those who actually have them. Still, he should be praised for trying to reach the under-30s. Let's just hope it doesn't give David Cameron any ideas.

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