

## CAUGHT

*Our anatomy might not define us, but it informs how we use the toilet. Indeed, the King James Bible at several points refers to men as those “that pisseth against the wall.” Here, New York-based writer **Annie Choi** encounters one woman who pisseth upon a stall.*

Women tend to smile at each other in the bathroom. It’s just a quick acknowledgement to say, hello, fellow lady, we have something in common. We both have vaginas. We know what that little box in the stall is for. We’re in this together! From what I understand, men don’t do this. Possibly because they don’t have vaginas, though they do have other things in common. In the restroom, men avoid eye contact. They avoid communicating. Nothing else exists except the toilet, urinal and — hopefully — the sink. The atmosphere of a men’s bathroom seems a bit tense, not that I’m an expert. But in the women’s bathroom, there are actual conversations. There are comments, complaints, compliments. I’ve had informative conversations about lipstick and the trouble with bangs, and I’ve heard two-sentence summaries of entire marriages. (We got married young. He cheated.) So you might say that vaginas bring women together. Interesting to note that, in some cases, vaginas tear men and women apart.

But it only takes one person to ruin the easy company of a women’s bathroom. And that person is the lady who works at the marketing solutions agency in suite 601.

All the offices on our floor share the same bathrooms. For several years, this wasn’t a problem. Then, one day, it was. I walked into a stall in the women’s bathroom and, suddenly, I was standing in a lake of human urine. Someone had gone in there and pissed everywhere. Everywhere. The bathroom stall had been ruined. Destroyed. Annihilated. I’ve never seen anything like that, not even in the Port Authority bathrooms, where the toilets don’t even have seats.

Imagine, if you will, a hose spraying down a bathroom stall. Imagine that the hose sprays urine. Now, my friends, you have successfully imagined the bathroom.

Or imagine a dog marking her territory on every surface, every corner. The dog is sending a message. This message is something like, hey, this stall is mine, never will you use this again, and you should know that I just drank a trenta at Starbucks. I’m not sure if dogs like coffee, but let’s pretend that they do.

I had no idea so much pee could come out of one person. It just didn’t seem possible. Scientists say that the average human passes one to two liters of urine a day. Two things: Number one, science is weird. Number two, I would not like to have participated in that study. Polyuria is a medical condition usually defined by excessive urination, about 2.5 liters a day. It can be caused by diabetes or acclimation to high altitudes. (Our office is on the sixth floor.)

Perhaps what was the most disturbing and impressive was the urine's reach. It just covered so much area. This led me to believe that the culprit had two peeing holes, with one aimed at a forty-five-degree angle.

So, I gingerly stepped out of the stall and used the other one. Then I hoped someone would call cleaning services. Why didn't I call? That's a good question. We aren't going to find the answer to that one.

**“The note asks the ladies to be considerate of each other, to keep it clean... Then it changes to an angry tone, how it's so disgusting to use a bathroom doused with piss.”**

I know that some ladies hover over the seat as they do their business. This is because they don't want to touch the (dirty) seats with their (clean) asses. I get it, sure. Having a vagina rather than a penis means we must sit or levitate above the toilet. It is the curse of being female. But this is the office bathroom. It's supposed to be classy. Civilized. We share this with people we know. We use it every day, every few hours unless we're dehydrated. This isn't some roadside gas station or a Port-a-Potty at a St. Patrick's Day parade. This is the Flatiron district. The restaurant across the street charges twenty-five dollars for a plate of spaghetti. Spaghetti! Something you can get in a can! So you'd think one would spend eight seconds crafting a toilet seat cover out of toilet paper and just sit down, ensuring one's aim. You'd think that, yes. But finding a stall showered with urine has become a familiar experience — an extremely disturbing, unfortunate and familiar experience.

This bathroom has changed me. This is a problem only because I liked the way I was before. I was so happy then. Now I am sad. Now I brace myself whenever I

have to use the facilities. Opening a stall door is like looking behind door number one and either finding a perfectly normal office bathroom or a urine hurricane. I am filled with dread. So much dread. It is dreadfully.

Sometimes one stall is unavailable and the other stall is drenched in piss. What would you do? Do you

- A. Be a sweetie and wipe the seatie. Even though it means you might get someone else's pee on your hands.
- B. Wait for the other stall to be available, wasting valuable minutes that could be better spent at your desk browsing Zappos.com.
- C. Hover over the ocean spray and do your business and hold your breath and stand on your tiptoes so you don't ruin your shoes.
- D. Cry and shake your fists at humanity and the paradox of choice.

There is no right answer. It is funny how in life there are more wrong answers than correct ones.

It occurs to me that the offender in question probably has to use the bathroom multiple times a day. It is a natural part of being a mammal. So when this person returns to the bathroom later and steps in her own handiwork, what does she think? I don't know, but I'm going to guess not much.

One day I go into the bathroom and see a posted note. This note is anonymous. It is typed out, in Times New Roman 12, and neatly trimmed and taped to a stall door. It is about the Bathroom Situation. It asks the ladies to be considerate of each other, to keep it clean. It provides a few tips, such as wiping up any dribble. Then it changes to an angry tone, how it's so disgusting to use a bathroom doused with piss. Then the note pleads to reason: Do you pee all over your own bathroom at home? Then it explains how it's unfair for

Luis to come and clean this mess. The note is short, but covers a wide range of topics and social issues.

The note makes no difference because, several hours later, after drinking a large coffee, I discover a very sorry bathroom stall. The only thing sorrier is me.

Then one day I return to the bathroom. A lady is coming out of a stall. I smile at her. Acknowledge her existence. I say hello. She nods and smiles shyly. Occasionally I have seen her in the halls of the building. We've shared the elevator. She seems like a very normal lady. She is probably in her early forties. She has long blonde hair, slightly frizzy from the winter weather. She wears dark suits and practical sweaters and age-appropriate jewelry. Sometimes she wears sneakers, presumably before changing into pumps. I often see her with a thermos, hinting that she is conscious of the environment or perhaps commutes from Long Island or New Jersey or an outer borough. This lady is a very typical urban professional. Nothing stands out about her, save for one thing.

I go into the stall after her and it is a water theme park. Raging waters have sloshed all over the toilet seat and onto the floor. The smell of putrid ammonia burns my

nose — it feels as though my nose hairs have gonorrhoea. The situation is extreme. It is so extreme, in fact, that I expect a B.A.S.E. jumper to blow through the ceiling and then luge across the piss-stained tile floor.

I use my outdoor voice: Oh GOD, this is SO DISGUSTING. What the FUCK? GROSS! WHY WOULD YOU DO THIS? I wail and choke loudly to punctuate my displeasure.

I do this because I want this lady to hear me. I want her to know that I am onto her game. I want her to know that I do not approve of what she has done to the poor bathroom and I'm judging the shit out of her. I want her to feel deep shame and regret and sorrow. I want her to feel bad about everything she has ever done, ever, from the time she stole her best friend's locket in third grade to that meeting when she took credit for her co-worker's idea. I want her to know that she is no longer part of the bathroom camaraderie. She is off the team. The bathroom is for ladies, and she is no lady.

But my disapproval goes unnoticed. She has already left the bathroom.

She did not wash her hands.



Universal Experience. *Garvey Hall, Washburn University: Topeka, Kan., 2011.*