My Power is in My Feet

Shelby Dill*

*Iowa State University

Copyright ©2017 by the authors. Sketch is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).
http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch
My Power is in My Feet

By Shelby Dill

Before I was even born, Michelle Pfeifer zipped up her black leather suit, put on her cat ears, and strutted the streets of Gotham in the movie Batman Returns. Catwoman wrestled on rooftops with Bruce Wayne before I was even a thought in my mother’s mind. My preexistent self had no notion the dangers of being born a girl, but as Pfeifer was flung out the window by Christopher Walken, she knew.

She knew as she lifted her butt in the air while villain Oswald Cobblepot groaned at the sight of her. She slowly looked down at her curved body, exposing powdered on dark eye shadow.

“The thought of busting Batman makes me feel all...dirty,” she said. “Maybe I’ll just give myself a bath right here.”

As she licked her arm up and down, Oswald gazed on, knowing he’ll do just about anything she asks of him. But perhaps the most poignant of all was the kiss that killed the evil Max Shrek. Her literally electrifying kiss had sparks flying as it burned Christopher Walken to the bone.

That would be the last time Catwoman was on screen for about twelve years. Two years after the electrifying kiss, I would be born. Eight years after that, I would be the one girl in my neighborhood, playing kickball against all the boys. I was a fierce
little thing and still unaware of the danger that came with being a girl. While my kicking skills may not have been up to par, I could outrun all the boys with ease. I was confident in my skills. But my confidence wasn’t what those neighbor boys noticed. They saw my short blonde hair, green eyes, and freckled cheeks. As they pronounced their innocent crushes on me, I would bat my lashes, giggle, and run away. Even then, I knew my value lied somewhere else—not in my capabilities but in the pursuit of me.

The redheaded neighbor boys would announce a game of hide and seek. I was always the main target. My regular hiding spots under the wooden deck, behind the evergreen tree, two rows into the cornfield, and behind the septic tank were sought out instantly.

“Nah na na na nah, now you have to kiss me,” sang Chase.

His puffy red curls bouncing in the air. Rolling my eyes, I would jump on my feet and start out in a dead sprint.

“You have to catch me first,” I’d reply. It was my quickness that I loved the most about myself.

While I was still outrunning boys, Halle Berry stared in the 2004 film, Catwoman. She dressed in more of a Halloween costume than a suit – a black leather bra, ears, and ripped pants. In a club, she thrashed her whip and took center stage. As the fluorescent lights flashed from red to blue, she moved her hips without skipping a beat, connecting eyes with the villain she came for. Placing one heel directly in front of the other, her feet walked slowly towards him with purpose and strength. Whip in hand she separated the crowds one swoop at a
time. The man drew her in for a kiss, but that’s not what Catwoman had in mind. Pushing him out the back door, she pounced on top of him.

“What’s wrong?” she smirked. “Cat got your tongue?”

While Catwoman’s strong feet moved with purpose toward the villain of her choice, I was out on the playground kicking woodchips underneath my shoes. I giggled while Ben would give me a push on the swings, jumping off midflight to run up the slide. He chased closely behind.

In the fourth grade classroom, Matt would naively say I was his girlfriend. I’d ignore him like my mom told me to, but with my nose in the air and a slight smirk on my face. Like many 10 year olds, I had many innocent boyfriends. All of which declared me theirs without my consent.

As I entered middle school, everything was changing—my body and my confidence. And like all children at this age, I wanted no one to notice. The days of pushing each other on the swings were long gone, at recess we would huddle in cliques on the dark asphalt. We’d chatter about who kissed who, who held whose hand, which guy was too cute for the girl he was dating. However, one thing stayed the same—my feet.

After school, I joined our coed cross-country team. We would run laps around the neighborhood surrounding our school. My feet knew every inch of that cement sidewalk. They moved with purpose, as I would swiftly pass the eighth grade boy ahead of me.

This obsession over running continued into high school, but by the time I was a senior, I was worn
out. Catwoman wasn’t though. She entered the screen once more in The Dark Knight Rises. This time Anne Hathaway suited up, equipped with martial arts skills that could quickly harm anyone that got in her way. Caught in the act of stealing Bruce Wayne’s pearls, she back flipped out the window, hopping into the backseat of a senator’s car.

“Can I have a ride?” she asks coyly, tilting her head down and brushing her hand against her cheek. “You read my mind,” says the senator smiling.

Later, dressed head to toe in her leather spandex ensemble she sneaks around the mansion of a man that did her wrong.

“Can we get some girls in here?” the man announces to his assistant. Revealing herself from the corner of the room, she attacks the man from behind.

“Careful what you wish for,” Catwoman says as she pins the man against the wall with her stiletto heals. “Nice outfit. Those heels make it tough to walk?” asks the assistant.

“I don’t know,” She says stabbing the other heel into his side. “Do they?”

Catwoman’s motivation was lost on me by the time of graduation. I walked down the hall of my high school after retrieving my belongings from my locker, pretending not to notice my friend Blake trailing closely behind. We’d been friends growing up. Blake was a tall lanky boy who was often seen as a misfit. It was through this similarity that we bonded. Over the years I had watched him try to compensate for his oddities. In choir, he would join in when the rest of the
men’s section would secretly rate the alto section then the sopranos. I was a solid “7 out of 10” he said. As I walked down the white walled hallway, I could hear his long strides behind me squeaking against the tile floor. At arm’s length away, he swiftly slaps my butt. As I turn around to tell him to fuck off, he picks my petite body off the ground and carries me on his side. I merely role my eyes after he sets me down. Ignore him, I think. You only have to put up with immature boys for a little longer. Again, I was ignorant to the danger that awaited me.

I entered college with the high hopes, but it quickly faded. Two weeks into college, I attend my first party. Standing outside the bathroom, waiting for my friends to return, I start chatting to what seems like a nice guy. A text pops up on my screen, and I swipe right to read it. In the mean time, his beer-intoxicated lips make their way to my neck. I slap him a way and run into the bathroom. My strong and swift feet supported my limp body. The danger I once was blissfully ignorant of encompassed my psyche.

Like Catwoman, I now know the danger of being born a woman. Catwoman uses her sexuality, her body, her lips, her tongue, her kiss, but what happens when our bodies are prizes, objectified, and taken without permission? My power comes from my feet: their firm hold to the ground beneath, and their ability to push off in a mere second and move forward, away. My power is in their callused heels that are neither pretty nor alluring, but built up over years of barefoot sprints in the neighbor’s backyard. My body, my sexuality is mine to use as I please, but my strength is in my toes as they push me forward, never looking back.
Work Cited

