

# 'I can't describe the fear when I thought he would kill me'

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● IN her first interview, the victim of the brutal Brixton sexual attack and kidnapping talks about the ordeal and its effect on her life. This week, her attacker, Anthony Ferrira, was jailed for 20 years.

THE world is mostly full of good, kind and thoughtful people. Miss X smiles as she says this, and emphasises how lucky she is. She says she loves her friends and family. She expresses her intense gratitude. And she explains how every day feels like a plus. "I love my life," she says, "that's why I fought so hard for it."

Last February Miss X was snatched off the street by a convicted killer, brutally attacked, sexually assaulted, mutilated, and left for dead, trapped in a burning room. She was inflicted with 10 wounds, some near-fatal, lost half her blood and needed 100 stitches.

On Wednesday at the Old Bailey, her assailant, Anthony Ferrira, was jailed for 20 years. "He could have cancelled my life, callously hurting my friends and family. I don't believe he deserves to live, I won't ever forgive him," says this courageous and remarkable woman.

Miss X, a 28-year-old buyer with a London store, has a lovely and expressive face. She is beautifully turned out and well-spoken. She talks in a calm, self-assured way.

She was approached at 7.15am in the street by a stranger. He lured her into his Brixton squat by pretending his pregnant girlfriend needed help. When she resisted, he produced a knife.

"I can't describe the fear when I realised there was nobody else in the room and I thought he was going to kill me."

He tried to strangle her and attacked her with a knife, cheese-wire and a broken bottle. "The sexual acts were repulsive, humiliating and degrading - but I thought I'd do anything to stay alive. Then this crazed violence started. I fought to stop him killing me."

"I wanted to lose consciousness. I wanted it to stop, just to stop the pain, even if it meant dying. Then there was this profound agony, which I presume was unconsciousness. I tried not to breathe so that he'd think I was dead, but the fire he'd started began burning my leg so I had to move. He began pounding my neck again."

Eventually he left and she tried to escape the flames, but couldn't. "I hoped I'd die before the flames got

By CAROLINE PHILLIPS

to me." She was rescued by a neighbour who heard her screams.

In hospital, fear overwhelmed her. "Ferrira had the contents of my bag and my name, I was scared even to go to the toilet alone. My sister and best friend slept with me every night. We were pretty rowdy and drank lots of champagne. I would never want to become morose about this. There's so much worth laughing about."

She has an independent, sociable, optimistic personality and a wide circle of good friends and close family. She needed plastic surgery and now has scars, but she doesn't hide them. "I was shocked and horrified when I first saw myself." She has just regained the use of one of her hands. After hospital, she went to stay with family in Spain. "I couldn't



JAILED: Anthony Ferrira

live in this country until he was behind bars." Now she lives with her sister.

Although she didn't have a partner at the time of the crime, she has had boyfriends since. Has the attack traumatised her sexually? "I didn't know if I could have a normal relationship, but I'm lucky, I don't think of Ferrira as a man. He had nothing to do with my life. A partner in a loving relationship is very different. This hasn't made me prejudiced against blacks either."

Her greatest difficulty is being alone. "It isn't as frightening now, but I won't go anywhere without a mobile phone. The company gave me a car. I always check before I get in then lock myself in. If nobody's at home, I ring someone from the car and they talk me through going into the house."

After three months off work, she went back part-time. She had a happy childhood and a close family, although her mother died when she was seven and her father died three

years ago. "I believe they were there looking after me when I was being attacked. To be honest, my father's death was far worse than any of this."

She has a faith, partly born of a convent education, and a belief in God. "I'm here for a purpose. I don't know whether for something good. But my time obviously wasn't up."

"I think I've been very lucky that I haven't been haunted with the memories. Of course I go over what happened. I had never faced physical violence before. But I don't have nightmares. I don't think, 'if only...' I've never taken it personally. I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. You can't stop things like this happening."

"I've only had two sessions of counselling, but I hadn't felt I needed it, I don't feel any guilt or shame about what happened. I didn't ask for this. I'm not trying to put a brave face on it. I'm frightened that other people will think I'm cold-hearted, but this is just my way of getting through it."

"I actually think it's been harder for other people. I've felt for a long time that people were waiting for me to break down. That might still happen, but I don't think so."

SHE recites a touching credit roll of those people she feels indebted to. "If Ferrira's girlfriends hadn't been brave enough to come forward he might never have been arrested." The police "particularly WPC Holding who was with me right from casualty onwards" and the firemen were "superb". "The firemen who rescued me are receiving counselling. I went to see them for tea and to laugh. I've managed to get over this, and I don't want anyone else to be scarred."

Miss X found the trial difficult. She had to give evidence, although she just wanted her statement read out. Then there was "frightening" discussion over whether she could be screened from Ferrira's gaze. Fortunately she was. "In the end I saw him briefly and was surprised I felt nothing. He looked a pathetic character." Now she doesn't feel elated. "He's behind bars, but I still have to cope."

She knows her troubles are not over. But she's articulate, strong and looks well. "I'm so lucky. I should have died. Now I feel today is the first day of the rest of my life."

"I can't explain how I've got off so lightly without the mental scars. Thank God I have."

QUIET COURAGE: Miss X is determined she can cope and put the nightmare experience behind

