

# on rape narratives



Photo by Jilbert Ebrahimi on Unsplash.

I was a senior in high school when two male classmates tried to rape me.

It was the year after my serious boyfriend and I broke up. He left for college and I was stuck with one more year of school. I missed him terribly, and alcohol made me miss him less. I was also insecure, which in retrospect was definitely a theme among my mostly privileged, affluent, white classmates. There were lots of parties in big houses, with some hooking up, and some bad, drunk dancing. There were also old rumors of “non-consensual” sex from past years, but there was no condemnation or outrage. These stories were brought up as part of a list of possible outcomes.

The night of this particular party, I drank too much. I danced with friends, and we jumped in the pool. We ate junk food

until very late at night, and as people started fading—either falling asleep or partying elsewhere—I tripped my way around the house looking for an empty room where I could sleep. I found a bedroom, but I didn't make it to a bed. Instead, I curled up on the floor.

I remember voices. Men's voices. I remember hearing laughing. I remember someone tugging at my pants. I remember whispered giggling and more pulling. Laces, zippers, buttons releasing. I remember serious, lower whispers, and another yank of clothing. It was at this point that I remember my brain telling my mouth to speak, but I couldn't. I was too weak to move. I also remember thinking this isn't really going to happen. They'll stop. It's not actually going to happen.

And it didn't happen, because moments later the lights went on in the room and I heard a woman's voice, but I couldn't understand her. I felt hands release my body and there was shuffling and footsteps. I remember a blanket resting on my skin with a safe, heavy weight. I felt enclosed and concealed. And I fell back asleep.

I woke up the next morning—only a few hours later—with none of my clothes on, but the blanket still wrapped around my body. My underwear was around my ankles; my shirt, bra and pants were in a pile. I didn't immediately remember what had happened, but as I dressed, I remembered the woman's voice. And then the rest came back.

I left the house without talking to anyone. I went home, showered, and went back to sleep.

I woke up with a start, and a tightness in my chest that left me gasping for air. I let out a sob as I relived the night. They hated me so much that they wanted to rape me. And now they would be disappointed that they hadn't, which would make them hate me more. I was trash. Garbage. The kind of woman that men don't love. I would never be loved.

It wasn't until the following Monday that I heard from a friend that everyone was talking about me. The two men had boasted about it to their friends on the soccer team. They told everyone what they almost did. And that the mother of the host of the party had stopped them. There was no embarrassment or shame that they had tried to rape me. They were proud and were telling everyone. Their only embarrassment was that they hadn't succeeded.

I never said or did anything about it. I just held my breath until the rumors ended. At home I couldn't speak without sobbing so I hid in my room watching television shows that I hoped, desperately, would transport me away.

Things became worse. I was the blindsided recipient of new, character-shattering labels. I was called a slut; I became a guilty, albeit unwitting, actor in their assassination of my identity. There was no shelter, no mask, no protection from an emotional and psychological assault that eventually usurped the actual, attempted sexual assault. In my class year book, I kid you not, I was voted "most likely to sleep with Bill Clinton." I'm sure on a scorecard of unkindness that has to count as incalculable.

And yet, I, we, persist. We do not yield to the cruelty entirely. We struggle and strain against it; we find moments of clarity and we lie down in the sweet comfort of knowing that there might be another narrative. There are people who see us, entirely, and at first we do not trust their kindness. It feels foreign and we are hesitant, perhaps weary of its permanence. Eventually, through years of work, we learn to love and trust. We also look back and think of that young girl. She's so tender-hearted and scared. I want to say to her, "Oh, honey. You are so brave. You can stand, even all alone."

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Rape stories, especially in schools, leak into the cracks of the walls and settle on the dust in the floor boards. These insidious reiterations enter the victim's marrow like cancer. They become embedded in the subconsciousness of cliques and teams, clubs and carpools. They even make it to the teachers and administrators who know, but don't want to know. And this culture doesn't just condone the behavior, it acquiesces to a level of fear and a desire for stasis that relegates women to the sidelines as victims of "alleged" rape narratives. Women, crawling on their hands and knees—waiting for a hand to pull them up and into the arms of being known, are cast aside. We are told there is a "bigger" narrative. We are not a part of it.

Here is my wish. The mother rescues the girl, then softly says, "Come here, sweet girl. We will never let this happen again." And the boys apologize, maybe even twenty years later. And they teach their sons about the sanctity of bodies and choices. And my daughter, and hers—they never have to wake up in silence.

***This short essay originally appeared on Agatha's blog where you can read more of her work, [www.twoships.blog](http://www.twoships.blog).***