


5-2018

“there’s twenty-four letters in the alphabet, and i couldn’t find two”

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Recommended Citation

Campisi, Jen (2018) "“there’s twenty-four letters in the alphabet, and i couldn’t find two”," *New and Dangerous Ideas*: Vol. 1 , Article 13. Available at: <https://docs.rwu.edu/nadi/vol1/iss1/13>

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I had a friend in high school. We went to two different schools yet still managed to keep in touch, but we did not talk much as we drifted apart to move away to college. She emailed me one night, and I thought that was unusual because she could have texted me or called me. I didn't know why she had emailed. The first two words were, "I'm sorry." What could she have been sorry for? We hadn't caught up in months. In the email, she told me that something had happened at a party that she "couldn't go back and undo." After carefully reading into it, she not only suffered from a traumatizing sexual assault but her friends who had brought her to that party in the first place had not only left without her, they never bothered to check on her, and then blamed her for the assault that occurred. I still to this day do not know why she reached out to me, but I'm glad she did.

We emailed back and forth, because she felt most comfortable that way. She told me she was sorry several times. It didn't really strike me until later on, when I had heard that a girl I knew who is still currently in high school suffered something similar. I attempted to reach out, and she didn't want to talk at first, which I completely understood and respected her wishes. However, she began to open up to more people, like her brother, some friends of hers, and the guy she liked at the time who was not aware of the incident. When she described what happened in detail, it felt like I was reading something out of a graphic teen novel. It made me uncomfortable, like I was there, witnessing it, and I wished I hadn't.

She continued to depict the scene, but something hit me out of nowhere. She continually kept saying sorry. She said she was sorry for "bothering me", for "wasting my time", for writing too much, for ranting too much, for being "annoying," all of which was not true on my end. I mentally connected the "sorries" from Lacie and Paige's stories and inspiration took over. I realized that even though they were both victims, they both felt sorry for themselves, and sorry for the "burden" that they seemed to feel like they were putting on others, when they had nothing to be sorry about. They didn't choose this. They don't have to apologize for being assaulted.

One night before bed, I wrote a little poem that later expanded. I sent it to each of them; they were overcome with emotions both joyful and raw. Around that same time period I began compiling my poems together and considering publishing my own book. However, I was unaware of the extensive process that might take, and the poems remained in my Google Docs for months without being touched. With all of the #MeToo and sexual assault allegations appearing out of nowhere in the media these days, it gave me a flashback of my two friends who had felt this fear first-hand. I dedicated the poem/prose to them, for they have made a comeback and continue to live their lives as if nothing was holding them back, which is incredibly courageous despite everything they have gone through. This is for them.

in this generation it goes far unnoticed. it's talked about. but never really settled. well, maybe now. now that people realize how unfortunately common it is. the moment when your eyes are barely open and your tongue can barely stay in your mouth and a larger-than-life figure swoops you up over his shoulder with one of his muscular friends and carries you—like a princess to her tower—upstairs to the loft where it is quiet but deadly. you find comfort in the cushions of the mattress, assuming maybe you'll get some rest. but you're so drunk out of your mind with blurred vision and slurred speech that you can't even put a name to the face that climbs on top of you. or many faces. there were a few more. were there? you couldn't do a thing. your arms were weak and the treacherous "they" seemed to be sober. you felt half-dead on the bed and couldn't remember a thing but your pounding head and burning body could produce enough evidence to prove you had been in the wrong place at the right time. society calls it rape culture. why is there a culture about this at all for christ's sake? doesn't anyone get it? they say they do, but have they lived it? society says that you just gotta say no. be demanding. be forceful. and you tried. you did. your mind was full of thoughts and you were mad as hell. but you were mute. your tongue was tied and your lips were sealed but not by choice. poor girl. poor you. you were so young and vulnerable. you heard the word over and over in your head. victim. victim. victim. you didn't even bother to fight back. you couldn't do a thing. two strong arms held down your legs as you tried to kick—but once you were knocked out cold there was no way to mutter a syllable past your beer-stained lips and liquor-soaked cheeks and saliva-covered mouth. don't you feel dirty? don't you feel regretful? when all you had to do was just say no? and what if you couldn't? you were completely possessed when they had you undressed. you were fully intoxicated by the alcoholic demons taking over your body and your mouth was sewn shut and you were rendered wordless when greasy hands had taken over your skin. so what are you to think? that you were to blame for the crime? that this is all--gasp--your fault?
no no no. no. there—look, you said it! no!

see, i tried to break the silence. i opened my mouth to
scream and not a sound came out. i was inebriated and they
controlled my systems when i was half-passed-out.
i felt brain-dead, so why am i the only one feeling sorry?

"there's twenty-four letters in the alphabet, and i couldn't find two"

for lacie,
i'm sorry
but you weren't the one that needed to hear this.

not like "sorry" would have helped much anyway.

for paige,

i'm sorry

but you weren't the one that needed to hear this.

i hope one day you can walk home in the dark

without continually looking over your shoulder.