

## My Friend

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Feb. 14, 2020. Valentine's Day. A day dedicated for showing and giving love. A day to love and to be loved. This year, I gave. I gave and gave and gave until I had nothing left to give.

I did not receive.

For seven months, I made excuses for him. He was my friend. That didn't really happen. He's a good person. He's always been there for me. *He was my friend.*

But friends do not pin you down on the bed. Friends do not hit you when you refused to comply. They do not muffle your cries with their hands. They do not force your thighs apart to insert their fingers inside you. And they do not rape you.

The moment he thrust his dick inside me was the moment I stopped fighting. I didn't want to get hit again. He was 6'4 and weighed over 200 pounds. I was 5'3 and weighed 97 pounds. I do not remember much about that night. I remember shivering. Was I cold? In shock? Was I nearing a panic attack? I do not know.

I stopped fighting because I was scared. I had already fallen off the bed twice. Or maybe I fell because he hit me. I do not remember. I was screaming, pleading, bleeding inside. Only inside. I did not want to die.

The clearest memory was the immense relief I felt after he left. I was safe again. But I no longer felt like myself. I felt... *dirty*. Like I had this disgusting poison spreading throughout my body. I just felt *wrong*. Something was wrong. Inside me. With me. Everything felt *wrong*.

I took eight showers that night, trying to burn away the rot and shame he left behind. I did not cry. I did not feel. I did not blame him. My skin was scrubbed red and raw from the scalding water but I still felt nothing. I was nothing. Maybe it was my fault.

The next few days I functioned robotically. I didn't think. I didn't feel. I didn't shower. And for a while it was okay. Until I had to shower again.

I finally cried when I saw my naked body in the mirror of my bathroom. Who am I? What happened to me? I tried to repress the memories of that night -- whatever little I had left anyway -- but I couldn't. It was seared in my mind. His body crushing me. My stifled cries. His shushes of *don't worry just enjoy it*. His hands around my neck.

The next couple of weeks, I felt empty. A light had gone out of me. I had no energy. My eyes were dull. Lifeless. Bright fluorescent lights used to hurt my eyes. Loud traffic noises used to hurt my ears. But none of that mattered anymore. The world was muted and I was just a ghost.

I drifted in and out of sleep during those weeks, clinging to the warmth and safety of my bed. My clean sheets. I cried myself to sleep each night, taking sleeping pills and Xanax so I wouldn't have to think. I was constantly crying when I was awake. So I self-medicated during the day as well.

Every night, I gripped my blankets and whispered sorry sorry sorry for hurting you, thank you for being here for me, thank you for wiping my tears away, thank you for keeping me safe and warm. Thank you for not touching me without my permission.

The tears in my blanket have seen the world hurt me. They've seen me hurt myself. And they have felt me tugging and ripping its seams as if they were my veins.

He claims he had no memory of that night. He still texts me every now and then. And I respond. After all, he is my friend.

Every text from him was a reminder. Shame. Hurt. Guilt. Maybe I deserved this.

I keep thinking about what could have happened if I dressed less provocatively. Except I wasn't. I was wearing jeans and a sweater. Maybe I should have been wearing a potato sack and covered my face in mud instead of makeup. Then maybe he wouldn't have raped me.

After months of therapy and support from my boyfriend, friends, and my sister, I realized that I was not defined by what had happened to me. I was worth more than I knew. And I was loved. Unconditionally. Every single day.

Valentine's day is dedicated for loving and for being loved. But I know now that it is just another day. I am not broken or empty or lost. I love every day and I am loved every day. And I know now that he is definitely not my friend. He is only my rapist.