

## **My Body Belongs To Me**

**November, 2019**

I've suppressed all the pain deep enough for the memory of what it was like to suffer to be a distant feeling, as if it was never experienced at all.

My smile beams most days, only the kindest of words roll off my tongue. My mind quiets down when I tell it to, and those who surround me hold lovingly over my body. My world is a perfectionist's dream; there is nothing they would feel the need to fix.

Positive energy radiates throughout the crowded room as the audience applauds cast members standing on stage, accepting their approval for how we did on the school play we had previously performed. I've already walked off of the claustrophobically small stage, as I got distracted while speaking to some of my closest friends. I remove my costume while I speak, in desperation to detach myself from the uncomfortable material like I didn't care about the performance, though I begged my drama teacher for weeks to get the role.

My friends and I part ways once I catch sight of my family across the room who came to support me. I race over to them, pushing between strangers and smiling widely, reassured by their looks of contentment that they enjoyed the play. After congratulating me, my father and I walk alongside each other through the old chipped doors of my elementary school that desperately need to be replaced, our shoes now crunching in the freshly fallen snow while we search the sea of vehicles for our black car.

I sigh in relief after finally walking in the front door of my home, feeling the warmth of the heat compared to the cold November breeze I had just pushed myself to walk in. My dry, cracked winter lips form into a smile, seeing my little white dog greet me at the door enthusiastically.

"I need to talk to you. Can you come sit down?" My father asks quietly from across our living room. I gaze up at him while petting my dog's scruffy fur and nod in agreement. I happily sink into our light brown couch that he's waiting on, adjusting myself and killing time by scrolling through my phone. My father speaks again, breaking the overwhelming silence within the room. "The police called today." He chokes up and pauses before finishing his sentence. My eyes widened

in surprise and confusion, unsure of what this had to do with me. "They explained people are speaking out about sexual abuse they had experienced at the daycare, the one we sent you to when you were younger. Please tell me nothing happened to you?" concern and worry build up in his darkened eyes. My stomach suddenly drops, tears well up in my widened eyes, his piercing through mine. A sharp pain crosses through my body that I haven't felt in years, and my lungs capture a deep breath without allowing it to escape. I sit in silence for a moment too long. I have no response. My mind is blank.

### **January, 2020**

Our black sports car seems to be out of its element as it halts to a stop after an uncomfortably slow drive to the local police station. We are in a no-parking zone carelessly while my mother and I remain in an awkward silence for what feels to be eternal. She's waiting for my cue to let her know that I'm ready to pull myself unwillingly into the building, in an effort to explain to strangers the discomfoting truth that I've refused to allow anyone to hear. There might as well be gates and a pit of fire surrounding the characterless building, but even then, it wouldn't make walking in any harder than it already is.

I sit in the passenger seat, holding my breath. My mind wanders and I become aware of my surroundings, trying to distract myself from what I'm about to do. Our car smells of artificial cherries because of my mother buying another air freshener that must've been on sale for a very obvious reason; I cringe as the scent fills my sensitive nose. Warm air flows from the heating system in our car. It defrosts the icy windows in a restoring way. The thick sheets of glass begin to clear and become warm to the touch, they begin serving their purpose again. I feel the warmth of the heat climbing out onto my skin. It coats my rosy cheeks and the rest of my shivering body, but it restores nothing; my body continues feeling numb, and the warmth doesn't bring me any relief. The heat subsides almost instantly as the piercing coldness from outside seems to hug me much more intensely than the warmth will. I sit in annoyance while I have a failed attempt at trying to figure out the last time I felt warm and comfortable, watching a young girl walking with a man who looks to be her dad from outside my car door window. He keeps her walking on the part

of the sidewalk that is farthest from the traffic-filled road in protection. I want to feel safe. I begin to tear up and push open the heavy car door; it now feels easier than ever to go into the building. My mother follows behind me.

Only seconds after pulling the heavy doors open, a detective is already greeting me. She holds her hand out for me to shake it. She's making uncomfortable eye-contact with me and smiling widely like she's happy that I'm here to do this. I sigh in annoyance and shake her hand. I'm so tired of fake people like her acting like this is normal. If I hadn't confined myself, I would've just yelled at her to read the room and walked out of the doors sitting behind me. I smile back at her instead.

"Make yourself comfortable," the detective tells me while eyeing a grey chair that is propped against a blank wall. I sit in the stiff chair and see tissues on the stained table propped up in front of me, a security camera in the left corner that stands out more than they probably want it to, and a flickering light resting above the closed door. How does she expect for this to be a comforting space after leading me into the dullest, colourless room I've ever stepped foot in? My friends texted me earlier to ask why I didn't come back to school after the winter break. I just told them I was at home sick. I hadn't lied completely though; this is the only thing I've pulled myself out of bed to do in an undeniably long time.

She looks at me with pity eyes annoyingly whilst explaining what she wants me to tell her. She says I need to speak about my experience at the daycare, including every detail that I remember.

She speaks again after only seconds of silence, "So tell me, what happened?" I look up at the ceiling and count the tiles, unsure of where to start. "Everything was okay at first." I cut my sentence short unwillingly. I can't bring myself to say anything more. I have so much to say. I have so many words that I haven't yet spoken.

I've lost the sense of safety I felt when my mother and I would grasp onto each other every time we got the chance as if we would never be together again, I long for the protection of being held in my father's arms knowing nobody could hurt me even if they tried, I miss clinging to my sister and dancing with her like idiots in any open space we could find. Instead of feeling warmth, safety, or protection, my mind continuously slips away from me and I become the terrified and broken little girl I used to be. I may not have recollection in every

detail of what had happened, or many witnesses to stand with me. Therefore, my story will not be believed by every person who questions it, but I know what happened to me through the over-familiar sting of this aching pain I feel. I know what happened to me through the discomfort of being held lovingly, the anger and rage I feel towards myself for no given reason, and the constant feeling of being stuck in a body that feels as if all the unspeakable things that have happened to it is all it is, and all it'll ever be.

Tears flow uncontrollably out of my eyes, and my mind jumps back to a state of numbness until I've gone through the motions of walking out of the bland police station, slouching into the warm car while staying cold, arriving at home, and eventually being back in my messy and dim bedroom to lie glued to my bed. I stare at the ceiling, and I embarrassingly sob like an infant begging for someone to hear them within an empty home.

I lay here for a period of time that seems to be endless. I've forgotten who I am. Everything I once loved, I now find uninteresting. Everything that had made my world feel bright has become entirely dull.

## **October 2021**

Days have turned into months, months into years. I'm now fourteen laying in what feels to be a lifeless state, surrounded by white walls and locked windows. I've lost touch with every single one of my friends from school. I've been alone for weeks in a psychiatric ward. I have no hope that I'll be leaving again.

I still haven't exhaled the breath I breathed in years back. My lungs are collapsing after holding onto it for so long. I'm unsure if I'll ever feel relief. I have fear scattered across my mind, believing that there will be no strength left in me to push myself out of this. My life has crumbled, my legs lie limp, my eyes have grown tired. This body that I exist in is tearing into pieces like a shattered bottle; I can attempt to glue it all back together, but I'll never function the same way I did before I broke. I stare at the cloudy haze through the locked windows while my ocean eyes overflow. The world continues to live on while I drown in my hospital bed, accepting that I am no longer myself. How can I be myself again when it feels as if my body hasn't belonged to me for

all these years?

My doctor told me I didn't look well yesterday while I sat in front of him on a soft linen couch that was more comfortable than the bed they have me sleeping in. He stares in a disturbed way at my restless legs, my scarred body, and my lifeless expression. He asked me why I keep punishing myself. I just shrugged in response as the feeling of being kind to myself feels to be more of a punishment. I'm excruciatingly exhausted. I'm nothing more than what he did to me. I am nothing more than a used and abused body, and I can no longer bear the weight of carrying it.

### **January, 2024**

My eyes are drawn upward, staring at the blue sky above me. The horizon is painted like a canvas, with a light blue base, white streaks flowing over softly, and the luminous sun beaming down, leaving a glistening yellow tint upon my skin. I take a deep breath in and exhale after smelling the saltiness of the lake I'm walking towards and tasting a sense of freedom in the air.

For a brink of time I think back to the past few years. Somewhere between then and now, I realised my abuser and all the other men who have hurt me over the years cannot take who I am away. They do not have the power to shatter my heart, as it's filled with an immense amount of love and compassion. No amount of pain could fracture it. They no longer have the ability to dim my smile. My eyes will not continue to sink in and lay tired, my lips will not sit in a motionless expression any more. The happiness I feel is so extensive that I cannot help but to embody it for those around me to see. They'll never have the capability of holding me down where I've been hurt by them. My body has finally found peace with being safe, rather than finding comfort in the familiarity of the suffering they had caused me. They could never hold me back from pursuing my love of writing. I finally have a chance to free myself from their heavy hold that was placed over me, as each word I express weakens their grip over my life. I will not spend any more of my time living with fear of a man stealing a piece of my being, because I now understand that there is no possible way for them to do so. Their guilty hands can push and pry at my strong soul; they are the less fortunate ones who must live soullessly with the horrible

things they've done.

For all of these years I've spent an achingly long time suffering because I believed the men who have damaged me stole who I was. I believed there was no way to become myself again. I've been convinced that my body and soul have been stuck in all the places where heinous things have been done to me, but it is merely impossible for that to be the case. My body belongs to me, and I've finally learnt to breathe again.

I stare at the crystal blue water that is now inches away while my feet sink into the sand. I can't help but to notice that even though I now know that my body is only mine, everything hasn't just fallen back into place.

I still shiver while thinking about how my sentence will forever be longer than his. I will have to carry on after every bad day and teach myself how to breathe over and over again. I also will need reminders from time to time that I'm more than what happened to me to believe it. His only sentence was five years in prison.

My body belongs to me, but it still grieves while I think about the men who control the system that failed me. The grown men who were given life by a woman, marry women, and raise girls of their own, who still don't understand how my abuser wasn't the victim while being tempted by the toddler's innocent eyes.

My body belongs to me, but my heart aches while I think about the fact that I may have to spend the entirety of my life trying to prove it.