

I Hope She Sleeps Better

By Georgina M. Cox

She said I deserved it. I think that was the part where my stomach finally stopped pretending to be a heart.

Not because I believed her. God, no.

Because there is something uniquely rotten about watching a woman hear another woman say, *he hurt me*, and searching her vocabulary for the cruellest possible way to answer

You deserved it.

And I hope she sleeps better.

I hope those words fluffed the pillows. I hope they tucked the blankets tight. I hope cruelty makes a lovely little sedative when denial isn't working at night.

She told me if her son ever wanted to rape someone, it wouldn't be me.

And Christ—

What do you even do with a sentence like that?

Where do you put it?

Do you hang it above the fireplace beside the photographs of her boy?

Do you embroider it?

Frame it?

Serve it with dinner on the good fucking china?

IF MY SON WERE A RAPIST, HE WOULD HAVE BETTER TASTE.

There. I fixed the wording because apparently violation requires attraction.

Apparently violence is a compliment. Apparently I should have thanked her for informing me I wasn't beautiful enough to qualify for what happened to my own body.

What a relief!

Call the doctors!

Burn the records!

Delete the messages!

His mother has decided I simply wasn't rapeable enough.

Case closed.

I hope she sleeps better.

I hope she sleeps beautifully.

I hope she dreams of spotless sons and hysterical women who materialise from nowhere with bruises, records, dates and inconvenient memories.

I had records.

I didn't tell her that.

There were things written down before she ever decided I was a liar.

Appointments. Symptoms. Bruising. Pieces of me documented by people who had no reason to love him or hate him or protect me or protect her.

Ink does not get jealous.

Dates do not stalk.

Medical notes do not wake up one morning and decide to ruin a man's life.

But I didn't show her.

Not all of it.

Because somehow, unbelievably, while she was cutting me open with her mouth.

I was still trying not to hurt her.

Isn't that disgusting?

I was standing there, being told I deserved abuse, and still thinking, *God, this is his mother.*

Still measuring my words. Still keeping certain horrors behind my teeth. Still watching her heaven turn slowly into hell and deciding she had seen enough fire for one night.

I could have opened every door. I could have brought receipts. I could have said, *Here.*

Here is what your son wrote. Here are the words he put in black and white. Here is the part where I didn't have to accuse him because he said enough himself. Here is the evidence that existed long before you ever learned my name as something to spit. Here are the things I never even told you. Here is the whole fucking house you think I burned down, and look—

The matches are still in his hands.

But I didn't.

I watched her heaven collapsing brick by brick, and I stopped. How kind of me. How embarrassingly kind.

She will never know how much mercy she received from the woman she called monstrous.

And I hope she sleeps better. I hope she wraps herself in every detail I spared her. I hope her ignorance is warm. I hope omission is soft. I hope the things I swallowed for her sake never develop teeth in the dark.

Because she said I stalked him, too. That was almost funny. Almost.

Apparently I was haunting a man who kept finding his way into my messages.
Apparently I was obsessed with someone whose name kept appearing where I had not invited it. Apparently I was chasing him while blocking doors behind me.

He watched my stories. He appeared in my DMs. I blocked him. And somehow the narrative came home wearing my face.

What an incredible magic trick. Put the man behind a curtain. Saw the woman in half. When the curtain lifts, she is the dangerous one.

Applause.

She stalked him.

She wanted him.

She wanted it.

She cannot let go.

She is jealous.

She is bitter.

She is crazy.

She is ugly.

She deserved it.

You can build a whole religion out of sentences like that. Women have been buried beneath them for centuries. And mothers have lit candles at the altar, praying their sons never have to answer for the bodies underneath.

I hope she sleeps better.

I hope the prayers work.

I hope God is taking appointments for mothers who need their sons rewritten.

Perhaps heaven has an editing department. Perhaps angels stand there with little white erasers, rubbing out every no, every freeze, every frightened silence, every message he shouldn't have sent, every admission, every record, every time a woman's body remembered something a family would rather forget.

Maybe that is heaven.

Maybe heaven is simply a place where men are forgiven before women finish speaking.

No wonder mine looked like hell to her.

She said I was willing.

Once.

That word again.

Willing.

Such a clean word. Such a tidy little word for something so filthy.

I was willing before; therefore I must always be willing.

Apparently, consent is inherited by every future version of a man.

Apparently, once you open the door, you are forbidden from ever closing it.

Apparently, love signs paperwork the body cannot revoke.

I loved him.

I will say that louder than she expects.

I loved him.

There.

Does that make her happy?

Does that make what happened less real?

I loved him, and I stayed, and I forgave things I should never have had to forgive.

And sometimes I returned to the same person who frightened me. This is not the contradiction she thinks it is.

Ask anyone who has ever loved a fire for its warmth, while learning what it does to the skin.

Love does not sterilise violence. Love does not turn fear into permission. Love does not climb inside a no and rearrange the letters until they spell yes.

But she needed it to.

So she took my love and sharpened it. Held it to my throat. *You loved him.*

Yes.

And?

I hope she sleeps better.

I hope that sentence does wonders for her conscience.

I hope that every time she remembers telling me I deserved abuse, another little angel leans over her bed and whispers,

Good mother.

Good mother.

Good mother.

Because perhaps if heaven applauds loudly enough, she will never hear me.

She will never hear all the things I chose not to say.

That is the part I think she should be grateful for. She heard the edited version. The merciful version. The version where I still cared enough about the woman hurting me to think: *She is his mother.*

I had more. God, I had more.

And every additional truth felt like another floor collapsing beneath her feet. So I stopped.

Because her heaven was turning into hell, and despite everything, I didn't want to be the one to shove her the rest of the way in.

She should remember that. If she remembers anything, she should remember that the woman she called evil showed restraint.

The woman she called obsessive walked away.

The woman she called a stalker blocked the door.

The woman she called a liar had evidence she never even saw.

The woman she said deserved abuse was still worried about hurting *her*.

There is your monster. Terrifying, isn't she?

Look at her, walking away with half her evidence folded inside of her.

Look at her, refusing to throw every grenade she owns.

Look at her, saying *Have a good life* when she could have said so much worse.

And I hope she does.

I hope she has a wonderful fucking life. I hope breakfast tastes normal. I hope birthdays are easy. I hope Christmas morning never smells faintly of the things she refused to believe. I hope family photographs never make her wonder. I hope she can look at her son's face and never once remember mine. Because doubt is a peculiar animal.

You can starve it.

Lock it away.

Call it crazy.

Tell everyone it does not exist.

But once it has been born, it scratches.

Quietly at first.

What if she was telling the truth?

Scratch.

What was in those records?

Scratch.

Why didn't she show me everything?

Scratch.

What else didn't I know?

Scratch.

I hope she sleeps better.

Really, I do.

Because if that animal ever gets out, it will eat the whole house.

And then maybe she will understand why I kept my mouth shut. Maybe she will understand why I spared her. Maybe she will finally realise I wasn't trying to drag her son into hell.

I was standing in it already, telling her how I got there.

And she looked down at me and said I deserved the flames.

So yes, I hope she sleeps better.

I hope every lie goes down smoothly. I hope every excuse slides easily past her tongue. I hope she swallows every perfect version of him she has ever needed to believe.

Whole.

Saintly.

Untouched.

Her beautiful boy.

Her innocent boy.

Her boy who could never.

Keep swallowing.

Keep swallowing until there is nothing left between her mouth and the truth.

And when she says again, "*My son would never*," I hope the bones of his body get stuck in her throat.

Not the flesh, or the blood. The bones. The structure of everything she has built her denial around.

Every rib a contradiction. Every vertebra an unanswered question. Every tooth one of his own words she cannot explain away.

I hope they catch there so she finally has to feel the shape of what she has been swallowing.

I hope every lie becomes difficult to breathe around.

I hope my name becomes impossible to spit.

I hope "*she deserved it*" rots on the tongue that formed it.

I hope "*she wanted it*" turns rancid.

I hope "*she stalked him*" comes back up with every message he sent first.

I hope "*he would never rape someone like you*" sounds exactly as disgusting to her one day as it sounded to me.

And if that day comes, when that day comes, I hope she remembers I could have made her night unbearable, because somehow, even after everything, I still knew there are some truths a mother can only survive one piece at a time.

So I gave her one piece. And she used it to cut me.

I hope she sleeps better.

I don't.

But perhaps that is the difference between us.

I have to sleep with what happened.

She only has to sleep with what she chose to believe.

