

## **MY MOM CLAIMS I HAD A DRINK WITH MY RAPIST. I INVESTIGATE.**

*Emi Nietfeld*

*Winner of the 2019 Boulevard Nonfiction Contest for Emerging Writers*

### **The First Phone Call: September 8, 2018**

Eight years after I was raped in a hostel abroad, I worked up the courage to ask my mom, “What happened in Budapest?”

I heard her breathe on the other end. I called my mom three days after my attack, then we emailed back and forth. But we hadn’t discussed the ordeal since the embassy sent me home. “You took a shot of whiskey,” she said, “Then he forced you down and held you down.”

The specificity made the phone shake. I’d tried so hard to deny what happened when I was seventeen. But if my mom said it like that, I couldn’t.

“Thank you. I know this is tough,” I said. “I didn’t have a shot of whiskey, though.”

“You did,” she replied.

I said I had a beer at a movie theater that night. The men working at the hostel had offered me drinks, but I’d turned them down.

With conviction, she told me I’d accepted a shot. Maybe knocked back multiple rounds. “It was written somewhere.”

The emails flashed through my mind.

My mom started expounding on the dangers of alcohol, but I didn’t listen. I couldn’t remember specific details of the assault no matter how hard I tried—but I swore I didn’t accept a drink.

Yet my mom sounded so sure. I wondered if I was going crazy.

### **Backstory: June 28, 2010**

In the afternoon, I arrived in Budapest, checked into a hostel, and met the two employees. The older one, about thirty years old, seemed cute. After dropping off my stuff, I went to watch the film adaptation of Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (do not recommend) while drinking a beer and eating kettle corn. When I came back, I didn’t see any other guests. I sat

down with the men in the kitchen. They offered me beers and weed. The not-cute guy made me a coffee. “I’m going to buy cigarettes,” he said and left. I talked to the thirty-something-year-old for a bit. He said, “Kiss?” I took off my glasses and leaned across the table. My lips mashed into his stubble. I recoiled at his stench. Then he stood up, trapped me in the corner of the kitchen, and forced himself into my mouth.

For eight years, I tried to put it out of my mind. I went to college at Harvard and became a software engineer. I spent my days debugging software. At night, I combed over my memories from Budapest as if trying to crack the code of my attack.

Then, on April 1, 2018, I stumbled on the letters with my mom that I’d forgotten sending. They triggered floods of recollection. So when I called my mom, I wondered what else I was forgetting.

### **Reality Check: June 26, 2019**

I know it doesn’t matter if I had a drink. It doesn’t change what happened. It doesn’t make me culpable. “She had a drink!” is such a classic victim-blaming line.

But it matters a lot to my mom. She considers booze one of the world’s great evils. Thirty-something years ago, at a training for her job as a crime-scene photographer, she watched a video of two people each drinking a beer and then having a chat. Their banter did not impress her. “They said they were ‘sharing their souls!’” She hasn’t touched the stuff since.

Three decades of shooting corpses made my mom confident in her ability to evaluate evidence. Pair this with her incredible powers of recall—she claims her SAT score corresponds to an IQ of 138—and disagreements about the past quickly turn personal.

Our debates cut into the nature of reality. She’s evangelical; I’m an atheist. I call her a hoarder (part of why I high-tailed it abroad although I could only afford the cheapest cities and accommodations). My mom calls me “picky” and “spoiled” (which is part of why she let me go).

My mom also thinks I’m loose with the facts and loves to point out my errors: when she met my in-laws, she informed them that I messed up my birth weight on my college application essay. If I’d even considered leaving out the kiss or that I found my attacker handsome, I’m convinced she’d write a letter to the editor of this publication, asking them to issue a correction.

---

## *My Mom Claims I Had a Drink with My Rapist. I Investigate.*

If we can't agree on the drink, I wonder how I'll talk to her. Will she stop lavishing me with praise, calling me "her genius daughter"? It feels like our whole relationship hangs in the balance.

### **My Mom's Email: July 2, 2010 (Central Daylight Time)**

A few hours after I called her from a payphone in Budapest, my mom sent me this:

---

#### **I LOVE YOU!!!**

5 messages

Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 1:55 AM

I love you so much. Thank you for telling me about your awful experience. There are so many dimensions and it seems that betrayal looms very large and ugly. Someone you thought was a friend was really just interested in getting what they wanted and violated you.

If someone is truly interested in you they can come to the United States and meet your family (we may or may not bring our shotgun and shovel!). You are a rare, precious, valuable, talented, bright, and beautiful young woman. Given your age, what he did was probably against the law, but finding a caring cop who speaks English would be hard. And the Serb knew you wouldn't be able to stick around for a legal battle. You were just a kid who didn't know what to do.

Instead of being confused, make up your mind to say NO and walk away, loudly if necessary! Did I ever show you the book on self defense I got at the coop years ago. On the cover is an old woman on a bus holding someone's wrist. She yells, "Whose hand is this? I found it on my ass!" When I was in Greece, I asked an American whose was married to a Greek shopkeeper about the men because they were so annoying. She said you just had to say no very clearly and firmly, that they wouldn't actually rape you (they'd just dump you and look for someone more willing). I am not saying this was your fault. He clearly set you up and took advantage of you.

As Alan said about someone I told him about, "This is a very dangerous man." If you want to contact Alan, his email is [REDACTED]. You don't have to tell him the whole story, you could test him out, and see if you can trust him. It took me 10 months to really trust him because I was so hurt by Tom. To the best of my knowledge, Alan has never done anything to violate my trust. He is a kind, perceptive man, with a big shame eraser. I will tell him that I have given you his email address and you may contact him about something very important. [NB: Alan is my mom's therapist.]

I am committed to getting you the help you need to heal from this. The first step is sharing your story with someone safe. Thank you for trusting me and entrusting me with your pain. There is help (sometimes it is few and far between). And after you are healed, I am confident that your story, when the time is right, will help others. This certainly was a learning experience. Just today Alan quoted from "The Incredibles", "Stop acting that way. Remember who you are!" You are a gold portfolio winner, an Interlochen grad (should we look for Alums in countries you are visiting?), headed for Harvard. (And you could have had a world class modeling career.) You are an over comer. You will overcome this. Get your bearings and grit back. Take back your power and, as Marsha Linahan says, "Don't make it worse!"

Mom-ly advice:

1) Say no for now. Make someone prove their affection. If someone is truly interested in you they can come to the United States and meet your family (we may or may not bring our shotgun and shovel!). Do the bonding stages thoroughly. Enjoy holding hands.

Stop drinking. It does not help you get to sleep (try bread or bananas). It kills valuable brain cells. It impairs judgment, and keeps you from having your wits about you if you are in a dangerous situation and need to get out. Also, your liver (and brain) are not fully developed and it could be damaging them. The guy who wrote *The Hurried Child* says that a full blown alcohol addiction develops in 6 months in a 16 year old. It would take 3 years to develop in someone in their 20's. Alcohol can ruin your life. When you are older, safer, more in control, you can have your whole life to decide when to drink. At this point in your life it could ruin everything that you have worked so hard for. Just say "NO!". Delay gratification. You'll actually enjoy Europe a lot more. And no one will be able to ply you with alcohol.

If you are absolutely forced to drink, eat a lot of food, especially fatty food like cheese and crackers, before, during, and after drinking. A considerable amount of alcohol attaches to the food and goes down the toilet.

(That's the end.)

In the "Mom-ly advice" section, after giving up on numbering her bullet points, my mom advises, "Stop drinking."

That indicates that I drank something. But she could have been referring to the beer during *The Road*. It wouldn't be out of character for

my mom to think a single lager would leave her daughter wasted three hours later.

Or, my mom might have felt that the beer made me liable even after the effects wore off. Although she notes I was “set up,” “violated,” and “taken advantage of,” most of the email focuses on things I should have done—or not done—differently. Some of these suggestions, like “take him home to meet your family” (copy/pasted so it appears twice), are more outlandish than “never drink ever.” Supporting this “sober but guilty” interpretation, my mom waxes about the general harms of alcohol but provides no specific impact on the night of June 28.

Either way, I imagine myself standing at the payphone, my mom asking me, “Did you have a drink?” and me, through sobs, confessing that I nursed a cold one while watching a post-apocalyptic death march with Hungarian subtitles.

Inconclusive.

## My Reply: July 1, 2010 (Central European Summer Time)



Emi Nietfeld <emi.yorkie@gmail.com>

---

I LOVE YOU!!!

Thu, Jul 1, 2010 at 4:18 PM

Mom,  
I love you. No, your email is fine. I don't expect you (or your email) to be perfect. Just marginally above average. (haha-joking! Haven't lost my sense of humor!)  
I believe everything you say about "just say no" loudly and vocally. I've always thought I was the kind of person who could and would do that given the situation. I don't think the alcohol impaired my judgement nearly as much as loneliness did. And I really, really, liked him, even when I was sober. To me, it just makes it worse that he was charming and sweet, the kind of guy you would probably love. And he said all of these things (okay, they were really clichéd, give me a week and we'll laugh about them) that would contradict him being so aggressive.  
I went to this lecture at Harvard called, "Rape or Sex with a Buzz." There were two speakers: one talked about the actual versus perceived effects of alcohol and the other one, a former prosecutor, talked about the constitutionality of sex under the influence. Since one thought on the matter is that sex with a buzz is always rape, people kept asking "could two people rape each other?" The prosecutor said that was possible but unprosecutable, but that for all intents and purposes someone loses and someone wins. "The constitution says nothing about losing your erection," she said, versus the alternative of losing your free will over your body.  
She talked about the different ways in which alcohol is used- whereas we tend to reduce the blame on men who have been drinking, a lot of men drink to give them courage to do things they wouldn't otherwise do. And also because they know they won't be blamed as much. Women who are seen drinking are considered more guilty and, thus, more "promiscuous."

I just keep trying to figure out how he went from being so sweet to such a jerk and back again. I really, really wanted to kiss him- I thought about it all through the movie and I knew something was going to happen, and so when I drank I drank to make whatever that was easier. I think my real mistake wasn't the drink, but to mention it.  
And I think the alcohol helped him become such a jerk. I just had no way of knowing what he would do. I had no clue how awful it could be or how much someone could get off on seeing me suffer.

My lesson has obviously been learned and, without any intellectual effort on my part I'll wait until I trust someone. Even saying that is hard, though, because after I felt so sad, especially that first day, I really wanted comfort. And who can give it to me? (Obviously, the thermal springs!) But I just feel so acutely that I'm 1/3 of the way around the world, with horrible internet connections, a time difference and, btw, the age of consent here is 14.

God, I hate thinking about how old he was or how charming. Then I get so angry! If any reasonable guy saw what he did to me, they would want to kill him. The little intellectual I am, I went on wikipedia and found the history of "irrumatio." "Fellatio" describes actually given oral sex, while "irrumatio" is "face-fcking." The romans considered it the worst form of

---

## *My Mom Claims I Had a Drink with My Rapist. I Investigate.*

humiliation besides castration. Reading that made me feel a lot better! Like maybe I'm not just a hysterical, immature seventeen year old.

Goddamn that Serbian bastard! I don't even know his name so that detail is vary important.

Em!

[Quoted text hidden]

About my drinking, I wrote, “I don’t think the alcohol impaired my judgment nearly as much as loneliness did. And I really, really liked him, even when I was sober.”

“Even when I was sober” implies that I was drunk, which suggests I had more than just the beer. I certainly felt sober. But who knows? My experience consisted of sips of Guinness before my dad left when I was ten, limoncello with my grandma, two shots of Rubinoff during a hard-partying night with a friend already in college, and then local ales with meals in Europe. Maybe I foolishly thought I was impaired three hours after the film. Maybe I was trashed and didn’t even know it. Maybe I was just parroting back my mom’s perception of my intoxication.

Later in the email, I say, “I think my real mistake wasn’t the drink, but to mention it.” That indicates to me that I had one drink (“the drink”) and it happened before returning to the hostel.

I remember that when the employees offered me drinks, I said, “No thanks, I already had a beer.” Like a little goody-two-shoes: one beer per night, that’s enough. (My innocence then makes me shiver with grief—when the rapist stood over me, I pleaded that I was a virgin.) It seems plausible I’d assume mentioning a single drink would be “my real mistake.”

In all my correspondence, those are the only mentions of booze.

The later emails make it sound like my mom understood how the rapist brutalized me. “What he did was illegal, and a lot worse,” she writes. She uses boldface to emphasize, “You did not consent.” She calls him “the perpetrator.” She calls me “his victim.”

I tell her, “He got semen on my sweater.” She tells me to go to the police, then warns me they might hurt me, then suggests the embassy. I tell her how I could hardly speak the morning after, how I’m still in pain days later.

“There may be physical damage to your throat. This is called assault.” She writes, “I’m glad you are alive.”

The love rushed from the screen onto me as I read them. How could I ever challenge that?

### **Follow-Up Phone Call: November, 2018**

I called my mom again, looking for clues in the words I used at the payphone.

“Last time, you said something really specific, so I’m wondering if maybe you were repeating me.” I had to cover my face to utter it. “You said, ‘He forced you down and held you down.’”

My mom cut in, “I never said that.”

“You did.” I remembered how the world fell away around me when she said it. “I wrote it down.”

“No, I never would have said that. That’s not what happened at all. You agreed. You just didn’t like it when he got aggressive.”

Rage flared through me. How did I agree? I thought of my face twisted in terror as the rapist yelled at me, words I couldn’t register. But was terror a fact? We weren’t considering feelings here. Even the epithets he used didn’t seem to matter if I couldn’t remember them.

The sparks of anger turned into embers of shame: maybe I agreed and just didn’t realize it.

It was like my mom was an omnipotent narrator. No matter what horrors the film contained, and how badly her commentary contradicted it, I couldn’t help but listen.

When my mom launched into her firewater diatribe, I let her go on and on. I never questioned what experience, what emotions, might gird her conviction.

I focused on her arguments, refuting them one by one. But I learned nothing new about alcohol.

### **Reconstructing the Scene: October 2018**

After the “you agreed” conversation, I redoubled my effort to figure out the truth.

If I said I had a drink, I thought it wouldn’t be a big deal. One drink, one thousand drinks—assault is assault.

But if I denied having a drink, and my mom could prove otherwise, it would look suspicious, like I was hiding something, implicitly guilty. Like I really *did* just regret sucking a dirty dick in a hostel kitchen.

Given those options, I decided that the emails were reasonable evidence that I had, in fact, consumed a drink.

My only problem was that I had no memory of it. None.

---

***My Mom Claims I Had a Drink with My Rapist. I Investigate.***

When I shut my eyes and visualize the kitchen, I remember so many objects: the pack of cigarettes next to the rapist's green beer bottle, my hideous glasses with transition lenses on the table, the tea kettle on the stove, the instant coffee packet (with milk and sugar) on the counter. If you gave me an Ikea catalog, I could point out all the furniture and dishware. But there's no bottles of liquor on the counter, no shot glass on the table.

I racked my mind trying to reconstruct it. Nothing.

**Epiphany: December 15, 2018**

As the months went on, I slept less and less. The obsession deepened. Details snuck up on me during the day, making it harder and harder to do my job. I had to go on leave from work.

I started therapy. On my third session, I had to inventory my fears in order to confront them in ascending difficulty.

My photographs from Europe scared me the most, followed by *The Road*, then a Hungarian liquor called "Unicum." (Seriously.)

As soon as I choked out the name, I remembered that I'd tried it. The dark liquid swirled. It smelled of cinnamon and anais. Bitter on my tongue, it burned as it went down. I sipped it, somewhere. But I couldn't recall where.

Then I realized: if the employees had offered me a taste of the local speciality, I think I would have said yes.

I still didn't remember, but it was plausible.

I felt at peace. I had a drink. My mom and I could agree. I bought tickets back to Minnesota to talk about the rest face-to-face.

**In-Person Interview: January 20, 2019**

Me: Let me ask you about this . . . will you tell me what your understanding is about the situation in Europe?

Mom: I was at work and you told me you'd been sexually assaulted by this Armenian. And so of course you didn't feel safe. You were emotionally distraught. And I kept telling you, "You're an American citizen, you should not be treated this way." I think at one point you said, "I'm a goddamn Harvard student, I shouldn't be treated this way." So I encouraged you to go to the embassy. Dan called me, he was really nice. And he said, 'We've got your

daughter here and we'll take her to the doctor tonight, we'll put her up in a hotel, then we'll put her on a plane tomorrow.' He explained to me how the laws are in those countries. If you wanted to press charges, you'd have to stay in the country until the case settled. It might be three years. If you left they'd throw out the case. I hope you did something on social media, black-balled that hostel. [Five minute tangent about how another hostel double-charged me. We refuted the charges but still lost out on \$137.]

Me: Do you remember the words I used on the phone? I think I used "sexually assaulted."

Mom: Yeah.

Me: I found our emails back and forth. It was really, really clear that you love me and believe in me. Some things that were really helpful. Other things that ended up being harmful. There was a lot of stuff about, "Just say no . . . If you just say no loudly and clearly, most people won't actually rape you."

Mom: That's what they told me in Greece. [Where my mom traveled in her twenties.]

Me: But I think you can see how that's very, very confusing to hear and very harmful to hear in that situation.

Mom: Well, you said you'd taken a good stiff drink to kind of steel you for what was ahead.

Me: But what does that mean when you think about it? "Steel me for what was ahead?" Like, what?

Mom: Those were your words.

Me: I don't, I . . . I would never use those words.

Mom: You wrote it. You wrote it. It was something you wrote.

Me: I said that I did have a drink but I think that, like, I don't . . . like they were offering me drinks. Eventually I had a drink. Right? Um. A small drink. I was very much sober. But that was another thing . . . I don't even understand why it's really relevant.

Mom: You've heard the story about the experiment where they put the two strangers in a room and they give them conversations? And after one small alcoholic drink—one can of beer, one four-ounce glass of wine—and when they videoed them, they weren't really talking to each other. They were interrupting each other, they were talking past each other. When they left, at the exit interview,



————— *My Mom Claims I Had a Drink with My Rapist. I Investigate.*

they said that they were sharing their souls. Well, I haven't had a drink since.

Me: But do you think that situation is really relevant?

Mom: Well, a lot of times people will ply you with alcohol. And your judgement is impaired. It was in something you wrote. You said you'd taken the drink because you planned to do something, but you were apprehensive about it. That it was going to give you the courage to do this. Or the dullness to do this. I don't know.

Me: It's just really upsetting to me that I told you I was assaulted and that this focus on the drink places this responsibility on me because I had a drink.

Mom: No, I wasn't trying to place responsibility on you. I think it was something you wrote. You were apprehensive, so you had a drink, not really to calm your nerves, but . . .

Me: But to calm my nerves before being assaulted? That doesn't really make sense.

Mom: You didn't know you were going to be assaulted. You thought you were going to willingly participate in something that was sweet and nice and gentle and kind. It just really turned into something that was rough and violent and selfish. I remember at some point you said you were a virgin and he was like, "Well, then we can do other things, can't we?" and I thought, "She made it through Interlochen a virgin! YES." I didn't mean that the drink puts it on your shoulders. I think you had a totally different image of what was going to happen.

Me: Yeah, I did not expect that to happen.

Mom: You expected it to be nice.

Me: I mean, I expected him to listen to "no."

Mom: Right. Well, and he knew the laws in that country. You're not going to have any credibility and if you do try to take him to court, if you had had evidence collected on you, you still wouldn't win in court because you couldn't stay in the country that long. And you're probably not the first one.

Me: I think it was very, very . . . the emphasis on . . . look, I know that you hate drinking. Right? You hate drinking all the time, with anyone . . .

Mom: Well, I just don't drink myself. And I try to avoid people who've

been drinking. [Tangent into my cousin's housewarming, where they had a keg but she went anyway.]

Me: It's a big part of the emails, back and forth, is the drinking. I've touched on it a few times and the drink is always the first thing to come up. That has been very harmful. The problem was not a problem with my judgement. It was not a problem with my drinking. It was like, a drink I had, where it's legal to have it.

Mom: The other thing is, your weight—it may have had more of an effect on you than you thought.

Me: I was very sober. I was very sober. But it doesn't really matter. It doesn't matter if you have no drinks or lots of drinks, it's still assault.

Mom: Like I said, a lot of times predators will use alcohol to ply their victims.

Me: That doesn't make it the victim's fault.

Mom: No. No.

Me: Yeah.

Mom: No. I didn't know I put that much emphasis on the drink.

Me: Other thing . . . the idea of just say no. In the first email, you say it four times. That gave me the impression that I was misunderstood. When in reality, it was very, very clear I did not want this to happen. A lot of the things that have been hurting me are things you said.

Mom: I told you to go to the embassy.

Me: [laughs] That was good advice.

“You told me you'd been sexually assaulted by this Armenian . . .” she started. He was Serbian, but I didn't correct her. Instead, I said it hurt how she told me to “just say no,” as if the problem was I hadn't said the magic word loudly and clearly.

She replied, “Well, you said you'd taken a good stiff drink to, kind of, steel you for what was ahead.”

Defeat washed over me. After going through all this effort to decide I had a drink I couldn't recall, suddenly it was a “good stiff drink” to “steel myself.”

I unclenched my fists and my jaw. “But what does that mean when you think about it? ‘Steel me for what was ahead?’”

“Those were your words.”

“I don’t, I . . . I would never use those words.”

“You wrote it,” she said. “You wrote it. It was something you wrote.”

She went into the experiment she’d seen of the two people who’d had a drink and then sub-par conversation.

I pushed back. Was the study relevant? Would it make sense that I’d try to “calm my nerves” before being assaulted, as if I’d known what was happening and could have stopped it, but simply chose not to?

My mom claimed this wasn’t about blame—it was about facts. It’s just that my mom zeroed in on facts that implied my culpability.

“I didn’t mean that the drink puts it on your shoulders,” she said. For an instant, I relaxed, as if “I didn’t mean...” negates what follows. Then I realized it was like a line from her initial email: “I’m not saying this is your fault” doesn’t *technically* mean “this is your fault.” In practice, “I’m not saying this is your fault” means “this is your fault.”

Yet, to my mom, this was a discussion of technicalities. Each time I tried to tell her how I felt, she steered back to my actions.

I’d played along, an amateur sleuth harping on specifics. But by the time we hugged goodbye and thanked her for listening to me, “listening to me,” felt like a lie. In the car, I kept staring at my phone. I wondered if it held our final conversation.

## **The Scene in My Mind**

In the movie version, my mom and I stand silhouetted on a hill. Rain crashes down. My mom wears a jacket with the hood pulled over her head. I’m skinny like I was as a teenager, 5’10” and 120 pounds. Water soaks my ratty cardigan, my jeans, my zebra print Converse.

I fall to my knees. I grab my mother’s hand. The camera zooms in on my face, chin pocked with zits, just like when I entered the hostel and sat down on the Ikea STEFAN chair.

Thunder booms. I scream just like I was supposed to back in Budapest when no one would have heard me. Instead of “no,” I scream “Mom!”

Tears streak down my cheeks, just how the accomplice saw me when he returned to the kitchen at the end, as if on cue. The ceiling fan chopped the light into frames.

“Mom,” I plead. “Mom. Let me go. Say it wasn’t my fault. Say it. Please.”

I drop her hand. I grab the hem of her raincoat and tug. Mud coats my calves, sprays up my thighs. I unroot the grass beneath me.

“I’m sorry,” I cry, “I’m sorry. I messed up. I’m an idiot. I’ll do anything. Just forgive me.”

She stands there, solemn. Finally, she speaks. She says, “You had a drink.”

### **Plot Twist: February 22, 2019**

After I suffered my way through trying to procure Unicum and sobbed my way through *The Road*, my therapy homework arrived on my photographs.

I found this shot from my final night in Hungary: July 2, 2010. On the bedside table of my hotel, a bottle of Unicum sits next to a telephone.



The bottle’s seal is broken.

If I sipped the national liquor alone in my hotel room, did that suggest I didn’t have any at the hostel? Had I fabricated the clink of a shot glass against a beer bottle, had I conjured giddy warmth rushing over me, all to placate my mom?

Meanwhile, she’d ghosted me. No calls, no texts, no emails. I agonized over each week without contact, wanting to relent, although I wasn’t sure what my false confession would include. “Yes, I had a good stiff drink to steel myself”?

## Revisiting the Evidence: June 27, 2019

On the eve of the anniversary, I scour the emails spread out on my dining room table. I find this: “I thought about it all through the movie and I knew something was going to happen, and so when I drank I drank to make whatever that was easier.”

“When I drank” sounds like “during *The Road*.”

My answer.

But I feel no relief. Instead, nausea crashes over me. “I knew something was going to happen”: that’s where my mom got “to steel yourself.” From my email.

I feel guilty for not calling my mom, for vowing not to say “I love you” first when she started texting started again. I want to apologize for giving her the wrong idea.

Something holds me back.

## My Google Drive: August 27, 2010

The “you agreed” conversation pops into my mind. I cover my face with shame. The pressure builds behind my eyes. I swear that she said, “he forced you down.” I swear that I wrote it down.

It occurs to me to check:

The screenshot shows a Google Drive search interface. At the top, a search bar contains the text "forced you down". Below the search bar, there are several icons for search actions: a link icon, a share icon, a refresh icon, a trash icon, a folder icon, a vertical ellipsis, and a grid icon. The search results are displayed in a table with the following columns: Name, Owner, Last modified, and Size. The results are as follows:

Name	Owner	Last modified	Size
Torn out ending 4/10	me	Apr 14, 2019	—
Notes on Fact Checking	me	Sep 10, 2018	—
My Four Months as a Therapy Research Subject	me	Jul 30, 2019	—
Shit I ripped out of the ending	me	Nov 8, 2018	—
The Perils of Being a "Success Story"/My Eternal, Unc...	me	Jan 27, 2019	—

At the bottom of the screenshot, the breadcrumb navigation path is visible: My Drive > # Pitches / Instant Gratification Era Drafts > Notes on Fact Checking

“Forced you down” appears in twenty documents.

In a file called “Notes on Fact Checking,” last edited two days after I called my mom, I describe my inability to trust my memory. I say I spend an hour a day transcribing conversations to cross-reference them later.

## I check the version history:

September 9, 2018, 9:15 PM

Restore this version

100% ▾

Total: 2 edits

I put off the emails, but I didn't talk to anyone about them. Yesterday, I called my mom and my mentor, both of whom were there.

My mentor knew. "Your mom called. She didn't sound particularly upset." She said, "You told me how horrible it was for you."

I asked my mom what I told her. "You said you were a virgin," she said. The waves of anxiety crashed over me again and again and again I was going to puke I was going to evaporate. "Then he said other kinds of sex were okay," something I don't want to have happened, don't want to be true.

"You said you took a shot of whiskey then he forced you down and held you down." Uncanny, uncanny similarity.

I hang up and I wish it wasn't true. What was I hoping for? I don't know if I wanted it to be true or not. It haunted me for a few hours but then I felt a new acceptance. It happened, it happened. And if I could handle this happening, could handle talking to my mom the way I did, then I could handle literally anything. It held up. I was better at this than I knew.

"He forced you down and held you down." The exact words.

My mom's not disagreeing. She's not sticking to the facts or searching for the truth. She's gaslighting me.

I curl in on myself, noticing how my mom brought up that I said I was a virgin, as if that exchange constitutes consent. The rapist's reply—"Then we'll do other things," as I recall—was a taunt. He turned my plea against me to justify the way he violated me. It's a common torture technique: make the victim feel like they're hurting themselves. The rapist did that to me in multiple ways. My mom does it now, almost a decade later.

Did I have to spell it out? How, exactly, the rapist "got semen on my sweater"? What it means to "get off on seeing me suffer"? Why? So that she can take my words and twist them?

If my mom asked, I would tell her what happened. But I don't think she wants to know. She already has an alternative explanation: I thought it would be sweet and gentle and nice, as if fantasizing about kissing a cute guy compelled him to come on my clothes.

The night of June 28, 2010 splits my life into before and after. But I don't think anything changed for my mom. It's simple. Her daughter had a drink. Her daughter faced the consequences.

I could call and tell her off but I'll never convince her. All that I can do is disengage. My jaw unclenches. My arms fall to my sides. The loop

————— ***My Mom Claims I Had a Drink with My Rapist. I Investigate.***

of my questioning ceases. In its place, I hear the sweetest silence: the *click* of a phone as it hangs up.