

{ Rough Drafts }

By Lara Levitan

Dear Steve, I wanted to get raped. Maybe you'd think that sounds stupid or immature, but it's true. The rape features in *Cosmo* are always the best. The young victims, who of course became survivors, got raped by their boyfriends, step dads or strangers. They developed trust issues and grappled with guilt and shame. Sometimes they turned to alcohol or starvation. But then they recovered. They got cured by a wonderful counselor, who become a life-long friend. Then they gave speaking tours at high schools across the country. And then their smiling pictures are in *Cosmo*, and they look so pretty and thin. And then their lives have purpose. My life has no purpose. At least not yet.

Last night, I decided to sneak out at three o'clock in the morning. I figured that if I'm ever going to get raped, it's gonna be in the middle of the night. So before I left, I put on black eyeliner and red lipstick, which is sort of cliché as far as make up is concerned, but I'm one of those girls who actually looks good in red lipstick. I decided to wear my army green tank top with the words "Hot Lips" on it. It makes my boobs look like perfect, medium cantaloupes. The thing about being kind of fat is that you get boobs, and a girl has to work with what she's got. I wore my short black shorts, because everyone knows that black minimizes hippy-ness on pear-shaped bodies. Maybe this is too much information—but I didn't bother with underwear.

Just for the record, I know that rape isn't about attraction. I know it's all about power, so it doesn't really matter if I'm sexy or not. I know all that stuff, believe me. But it can't hurt to look good, at least as good as possible. It's not like I think I'm *sooo* hot and can get a guy to want me so bad he has to violate me. I've never even had a boyfriend. At school, Kevin Nicholls said my legs are like the drumsticks of a chicken on steroids. My hair can't decide if it's light brown or dark blonde, wavy or straight, and sometimes I can't control how bad my breath is, even with gum. So I'm nowhere near being full of myself. I'm nothing like the girls at school who walk around the halls like they're running for mayor, but they're only running for mayor of the boys.

But anyway. Back to last night. At three in the morning, I left through the back door, through the gangway, and into the warm spring night. It

wasn't hard. I looked up at one single burning streetlight and felt like the only person alive. The houses I know so well were like dreamy versions of themselves. I kept seeing things in the corner of my eye—shapes and shadows that always ended up being nothing, like chimes hanging on someone's porch. I know I sound crazy, but I was sort of disappointed each time the shadow was nothing.

I walked up Henderson Street toward Shabbona Park, right next to St. Priscilla's, which is where I went to elementary school. No one was out. I felt like a different person. Like the kind of kid who comes from a broken home, who ran away, got into meth or prostitution, and so they roam the streets at night, witnessing things that sheltered little angels don't witness. Probably the kind of stuff you witness a lot.

I knew where I was headed without really having to think about it—that secret alcove surrounded by trees, right behind the park house. Obviously you know the spot. Where all the girls got molested in the '70s, before I even existed. You probably know the story, about Chester the Molester? He was supposedly pretty young, actually, only in his 20s. He used to ride around the park on his rusty old Schwinn, and then lure little St. Priscilla girls having recess in Shabbona away from the other kids. Of course this story was major for me, because I was once a little St. Priscilla girl.

In that secret alcove, he would pull down their underwear, touch them, and leave them with a candy bar. It happened to, like, five girls before he finally got caught. To this day, Chester the Molester is a legend in this neighborhood. Everyone makes up stories about him—like he was raised by Satanists, kept frozen cat corpses in his refrigerator, went to day camp with Jeffrey Dahmer—that kind of thing. My friend Jackie told me that now, he's actually this one retarded bagger at Dominick's. That being in prison for all those molestations actually made him mentally handicapped.

Who knows. And really, who cares? I was always more interested in those girls. I wonder if they all told each other about what it was like, getting molested like that, right in the middle of their happy little school day. I used to sit in Miss Quinn's boring history class and imagine that I'd just gotten molested. I would will a burning sensation in my crotch, the result of Chester's big monkey hand down my pants. And I would look around at all the other girls in class and think, *if you only knew*.

When I got to Shabbona Park it was completely deserted. I stood in the middle of the soccer field and waited, thinking that maybe a man would show up. Something touched my shoulder and I jumped and turned around. But it was nothing, which was embarrassing even with no one

around. From where I stood I could see the trees surrounding the alcove. My heart started beating fast, but I had to go there. So I walked. And walked. It seemed like I walked forever through the thick dark air.

And that's when I saw you, lying on the grass of the alcove. At first I couldn't tell if you were alive or dead. You were just a grey lump, like someone left an old garbage bag in the middle of the lot. And then I thought of Chester the Molester of course, but he rode a bike, and I felt certain that if you were Chester, you'd have that rusty old Schwinn with you. So I held my breath and walked closer—I felt like I was creeping through a narrow tunnel, like suddenly the park collapsed in on me—and you didn't move the whole time. When I got close enough, I saw the half-empty bottle of Wild Turkey in your left hand. You were passed out drunk. Not only that, but you were wearing a bathrobe. A green and blue striped bathrobe. At that point I couldn't tell if you wore anything underneath, because you were lying on your stomach, your left arm stretched out before you like you were reaching for something, only you couldn't grab it because of the whiskey bottle.

I stared at you for a while, wondering if you would wake up. You were old, probably in your 40s, with a small nose and very large, round eyelids. Bushy eyebrows just like a rapist would have. When I realized you wouldn't wake up—that you were so stone-cold out I could go through your pockets and snatch your bottle without you ever knowing—I stood up straight and smiled. I don't know why, but this feeling of freedom came over me. You didn't know who I was. You didn't even know I was there. And if you did, you would assume things about me that weren't true. Maybe you'd think I was a young whore. A runaway who became a prostitute in order to support her heroin addiction.

I stood above you with my hands on my hips, looked at the trees surrounding us, and felt like an explorer who just discovered a treasure. The heart inside my body was a tiny, glowing ruby. Anyone could have happened upon that scene and made their own guesses. But I got there first. And you were so unconscious that it was all up to me.

I felt a puff of hot air on my ankle and jumped when I realized it was your breath. When I was sure you wouldn't wake up again, I squatted down next to your face.

"Mister?"

You didn't answer. I put my face closer to yours—your breath smelled like whiskey and vomit—and looked at your teeth. They were large, boxy, and outlined in grey. A person's teeth are sort of like a fingerprint, aren't

they? When you first meet someone, like first glance, you think they're a certain way. And then they smile, they show their teeth, their face crumples up, and it's like you see how messed up they are. Usually you see how imperfect and out-of-order they are. You might have thought they were one way, but their teeth tell you that you're wrong. They weren't how you thought at all. But this time I was seeing your teeth before I even *really* saw your face. It's like I could see your true identity first.

I decided that it was okay to sit—my thighs were beginning to burn from squatting. I sat next to your head, close enough to feel your breath on my thigh. The grass tickled my skin inside my shorts. I looked at my watch—3:41 a.m. I didn't feel tired at all.

At 4:04 a.m. you turned on your back. It made me jump. You just turned out of nowhere, and the amazing thing was, you kept your whiskey bottle perfectly upright. Nothing spilled. With you on your back, I could see that you weren't wearing anything underneath.

The other thing that happened was, after you flopped over, I could see your penis. You probably guessed that I've never seen a real live penis before, and you're right. Like I said, I've never even had a boyfriend, and I don't watch porn or anything. The front of the robe was open just enough for me to see the side of it. At first I looked away because it felt so wrong. Like, if I stared at your penis I would be violating you. So I didn't look at it for the longest time. I tried looking at other things—like the silver strands in your dark hair or your nostrils—but the whole time I felt the pull of your penis. I just had to look. I wanted to open the front of your robe completely, and stare at it for a very long time. Eventually I couldn't resist. I reached down. Moved your robe to the side a little. Exposed it.

Not to be rude, but it looked like it was sleeping. You might hate me for saying this, but it was small, soft and fat. Like a penis puddle. I felt sorry for it. Like it was all curled up in its little furry bed of warm pubic hair, and I was making it cold. There was no way you could rape me with that thing.

After a second you groaned and shifted, maybe from feeling a draft on your crotch. I quickly covered you up, got to my feet so I could sprint if you opened your eyes. But you didn't. Your face was all twisted up like you were stressed out, having a bad dream, maybe. And for some reason I wanted to stay with you.

At least until the sun came up. I got up and sat on the other side of you so I could feel your breath on my thigh again. I guess I just liked the way it felt. And then I saw a piece of paper in your robe pocket. It was like with your penis. I wanted to look at the paper, but it felt wrong. I could see

writing on it. Paper with handwriting on it, like a very private note. But after a few minutes, I couldn't resist that either. I'm sorry. I yanked it out of your pocket so swiftly that nothing moved or changed. The paper was so thin that I could feel the writing on the other side, like Braille. It was warm and wrinkled. Like maybe you'd wanted to ball it up and throw it away. And this is what the paper said:

Dear Denise, I wish you never met me. I wish you would pack your suitcases and go. I don't deserve you, and Waffles never deserved to die. You know I didn't mean to kill him. I hope you do. That dog was a damned pain and what kind of name is Waffles anyway, but he was your dog and sometimes I felt—I really felt—like I could actually open my heart enough to love him. But he'd start yapping and—FORGET IT! I don't want to get into it. I wish I'd never seen the face of an angel like yourself, because I could never deserve someone like you. I'm a damned fool and I want you to leave me, please. This is the hardest thing for me to say, which is why I have to write it here on this lousy Dominick's receipt. I am not good enough for you and I never will be. I have a problem, Denise. Denise, how can I say I'm sorry? How can I possibly make you hurt hard enough to leave me? If I hurt you it will do you good, because maybe you'll leave. Do you understand what I mean, do you—

There was more, the writing went all the way to the bottom, but I had to stop. My heart was beating so fast. I looked at you, disgusted. No offense. But how would Denise ever get this note if you kept it in your pocket? Why was I reading it instead of her? I looked up at the sky, which was turning that phosphorescent shade of blue it does just before the sun comes up. I looked at my watch. 5:03 a.m. I scanned the bottom of the note just so I could find your name. It was signed "Very Truly Yours, Steve." Steve. I looked at your face, more relaxed this time than it was before, and suddenly I felt so disappointed. Why did you have that note? Why didn't Denise have it if you love her so much? I thought of shaking you, making you wake up and run to her. But I knew that probably wasn't very realistic.

For some reason all of it seemed so familiar. Maybe it's all the TV I watch or all the magazines I read or all the horrible stories I hear about people and the things that happen to them. Grown-up things that happen to people who aren't grown up. Like Chester's girls. Or the pretty Cosmo rape survivors. I imagined Denise. I imagined her as the kind of tired-looking but beautiful older woman who you could tell has been through a lot. The kind of woman I want to be like. The kind of woman whose boyfriend writes her important letters and never gives them to her. The kind of woman whose boyfriend is like you, a pathetic alcoholic who killed her dog. I can't wait for my life to start. I'm so tired of being this protected

little girl that nothing happens to. That no one pays attention to. I looked over at you and said something out loud.

"You were supposed to be my rapist."

And then I felt a wave of sadness so thick and blue that all I could do was take that bottle of Wild Turkey and swig. It burned all the way down and then blossomed in my chest. The birds were beginning to chirp. I would have to get home soon, but I didn't care. I laid down in the grass and let the whiskey course through me, just like you did. I let it trickle down into my fingertips, my legs, and up into my eyelids growing heavy. I closed my eyes and fell asleep with the bottle of Wild Turkey still in my hand.

And that's how I found myself this morning, still all alone in the alcove. Untouched. Isn't that the saddest thing you ever heard? So I'm writing you this letter to ask you one thing. When you woke up, before you left, did you stop to look at me? Did you study my body the way I studied yours, and wonder where I came from? Did you think about touching me? Honestly, Steve, I wouldn't mind if you did. I promise I wouldn't have told.

I'm going to leave this letter in the little alcove, under a rock somewhere. I don't care who finds it, but hopefully it will be you. I don't really believe you will. But I'll keep on looking for you, Steve. I know I'll find you somewhere, even if you're someone else.

Yours, Julia