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To: Melanie Spinella

If you have ever experienced sexual assault or harassment, you know that one of the cruellest things about these acts is the way that they entangle, and attempt to contaminate, all of the best things about you. If you're sweet and friendly, you'll think that it's your fault for accommodating the situation. If you're tough, well, you might as well decide that it's no big deal. If you're a gentle person, then he knew you were weak. If you're talented, he thought of you as an equal. If you're ambitious, you wanted it. If you're savvy, you knew it was coming. If you're affectionate, you seemed like you were asking for it all along. If you make dirty jokes or have a good time at parties, then why get moralistic? If you're smart, there's got to be some way to rationalize this.

When you are a young woman, and you believe in your own worth and personhood and agency, it can be hard, despite the clichés that govern this situation, to understand that an older man who takes an interest in you does not necessarily share these beliefs. And, of course, young women are not the only victims of such crimes. But this is a basic and familiar pattern: a powerful man sees you, a woman who is young and who thinks she might be talented, a person who conveniently exists in a female body, and he understands that he can tie your potential to your female body, and threaten the latter, and you will never be quite as sure of the former again.

Afterward, you are rarely presented with even a single good option. Stay silent and you have acquiesced to whatever happened. Tell a friend and nothing much will be done. Come forward to an authority figure and you'll face unfair consequences: people will be uncomfortable around you, perceiving ulterior motives; people will look for reasons that this happened to you, specifically; maybe you simply won't be believed. There will be retribution—the power dynamic in these situations makes it a foregone conclusion. Men like Harvey Weinstein prey on women who are inexperienced enough that they can be penalized if they say no and implicated if they give in.

In Ronan Farrow's account of Weinstein's alleged decades-long pattern of cold, angry, vicious, sexually predatory behavior, this side of sexual victimization is particularly palpable in the actress Asia Argento's story. Argento alleges that, in 1997, she was told she was attending a Miramax party but was brought to a hotel room that was empty except for Weinstein. He complimented her work, and then came out of the bathroom wearing just a robe, carrying lotion. When she reluctantly agreed to give him a massage, he pulled up her skirt and forcibly performed oral sex on her as she pleaded with him to stop. "It was a nightmare," she told Farrow. Eventually, she says, she stopped protesting and feigned pleasure to make the encounter end faster. During the event and after, she says, she felt guilty for not physically fighting off his big naked body. Later on, she yielded to his pursuit and had consensual sex with him on multiple occasions.

In the story, it is clear that Weinstein, through this initial encounter, immediately and permanently altered Argento's life and self-perception. She told Farrow that oral sex is "ruined" for her, and she described herself as "damaged." "I am a fucking fool," she said. The most crushing thing, reading the account, is that Argento seems to speak with such a minimum of rancor. In fact, most of the women who have spoken up about Weinstein—a group that includes, among many others, Mira Sorvino, Rosanna Arquette, Ashley Judd, Rose McGowan <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/05/us/harvey-weinstein-harassment-allegations.html>>, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Angelina Jolie <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/10/us/gwyneth-paltrow-angelina-jolie-harvey-weinstein.html?ribbon-ad-idx=2&src=trending&module=3DRibbon&version=origin®ion=Header&action=click&contentCollection=Trending&pgtype=article&_r=0>—have spoken with a tone that many women find familiar: a muted sadness, a long-kept knowledge of diminishment, a sense of undeserved yet inescapable remorse.

There are stories like theirs within every industry. But, on the rare occasions when such stories are publicly told, many crucial factors are often left out, or obscured: the complex dynamics that kick in during the incident; the deadening calculus that follows right after; the long, uneven, unpredictable aftermath. In Weinstein's case, these factors are uniquely visible: he is a celebrity, many of his accusers are celebrities, and the business of Hollywood is partly conducted in public—the power matrix in the story is unusually clear. There are also, already, so many women accusing Weinstein, all speaking of such similar incidents, which occurred at such similar places within their respective careers, that the comet trail of each act contributes to a collective pattern. The case has illuminated the very ordinary reality of being a young woman with a desire to succeed, perform, and please others, who is sexually targeted by a powerful man in her field—a man who aims to use his position in a way that will affect her career and her selfhood whether she relents or escapes. These, too, are open secrets among women: what that moment feels like, what you think about when you consider your options, why you carry this stuff with you for so long.

no good exit <<https://twitter.com/yashar/status/918163984309784576>> from a hotel room with Harvey Weinstein. I am not prone to self-doubt, or even to taking things personally, but the slightest brushes I've had with men who bait-and-switched their interest in my work and my body have left me feeling that I am, as Argento felt she was, a fucking fool. The sense of diminishment, even if it's slight or temporary, which it often is not, is exacerbated by the fact that men like Weinstein do not show themselves, spiritually or literally, to women above a certain point in the hierarchy of power, and they generally hide the worst of their behavior from other men. This makes for a false but often convincing narrative—you are prey only when you are not good enough, and so you must not have been good enough if you were prey.

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