

28 August 2024

TRANSCRIPTIONIST'S NOTES:

Testimony from "CLAIRE" is marked in **blue highlighted text**.

Recorded phone dialogue from NEIL GAIMAN is marked in **red text**.

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(Assorted algorithmic advertisements)

(Audio bumper cue for Tortoise Media)

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:01:13): Before we begin, I should warn you: this is a hard listen at times. This series contains graphic descriptions of sex and allegations of sexual abuse. This episode is intended to be listened to after the first five episodes, and all six are designed to be listened to in their entirety, because this is a story of conflicting accounts.

CLAIRE (00:01:38): *(very softly)* Hey. Okay. You can do it. You got this! This is easy!

(Sound like objects being placed on a table)

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:01:55): Claire has been steeling herself for this.

(Phone rings on other end of line)

NEIL GAIMAN (00:02:00): Hello!

CLAIRE (00:02:02): Hey!

NEIL GAIMAN (00:02:04): How are you? *(Scraping and bird noises in background)* Apart from probably very nervous about this call.

CLAIRE (00:02:09): *(brief chuckle)* Um... I'm doing well, I – *(inaudible, trails off in background)* ...my letter...

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:02:11): She is speaking with Neil Gaiman. She hasn't spoken to him in close to a decade. But she had sent him a letter to his house in Woodstock, New York state, weeks earlier, as there was unfinished business between them. For her, at least.

NEIL GAIMAN (00:02:28): ...reading your letter, I – if I'd known that – I'd took up that headspace...

CLAIRE (00:02:33): *(audible breath)* Heh...

NEIL GAIMAN (00:02:33): for you... I would've... I don't know! I would've – I definitely would've been reaching out a long – time ago! I... I... you know... I've never thought of you with anything other than fondness, and...

CLAIRE (00:02:48): Mm.

NEIL GAIMAN (00:02:48): *(overlapping)* – a little awkwardness, and... um... you know... have me feeling like I've got the wrong end of the stick, but I thought you were – terrific! And I – was heartbroken, seeing that I was giving you nightmares, and... *(heavy sighs)* So I'm *really* sorry!

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:03:14): It's 1:30pm on the 6th of July 2022, and the two of them are discussing what happened between 9 and 10 years earlier. Claire has been struggling with it ever since, and it seemed Neil Gaiman had too. In that call to Claire, he accepts that he damaged her, and he apologizes. But Neil Gaiman's account, provided to us now, two years after he spoke to Claire, is that he was surprised to hear that she'd been traumatized, because he thought that all their interactions were consensual, and when he realized they weren't, he stopped. But when he's talking to Claire back in July 2022, he puts a different spin on things.

NEIL GAIMAN (00:04:01): I ... don't think anything is gonna unwrite the bits that I've obviously fucked up on all this. And – and I'm trying to make up some of the damage.

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:04:14): Claire tells him that she's had a long stretch of therapy, one that's put financial strain on her family, and she expresses concern about how expensive the baby she's expecting is going to be. Neil Gaiman is quick to offer a solution.

NEIL GAIMAN (00:04:30): Would you like me to send you some money?

CLAIRE (00:04:32): I – again, the whole – like, putting a price tag on –

NEIL GAIMAN (00:04:35): I mean, I'm not – I'm not trying to put a price tag, I'm –

CLAIRE (00:04:37): *(nervous laugh)* ...yeah...

NEIL GAIMAN (00:04:38): like – just trying to – I'm – I'm not sure that I'm – reading you – I'm, I, I said that very bluntly, 'cause, uh – *(CLAIRE laughs)* Like – listen – you've got a baby on the way and I appreciate that five hundred – dollars a month...

CLAIRE (00:04:52): *(laugh)* Yeah.

NEIL GAIMAN (00:04:53): ...is, over a decade, is gonna stack up, and ... a lot of that must have been my fault.

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:05:02): The two end the call slightly awkwardly. Five days later, Neil Gaiman calls Claire again.

NEIL GAIMAN (00:05:08): So, I have a plan.

CLAIRE (00:05:10): Okay?

NEIL GAIMAN (00:05:11): And I wanted to run it by you... and see if it's acceptable for you. Um... and I've been doing a lot of thinking. A lot of – a lot of listening to what you were saying on the last call. Um... so... what you said about paying for your... therapy. (CLAIRE murmurs) I did the numbers and I went, "Well, that's 10 years... at \$500 a month," which I make comes out to about \$60,000.

Um... so what I would propose... is that I will give you 15 thousand dollars a year for four years. Which... is the – the top level of a tax-free gift.

CLAIRE (00:06:05): Mm.

NEIL GAIMAN (00:06:06): So I can gift it – I can gift you \$15,000 each year. And you do not have to pay that, pay any tax or anything on that. That is just a gift. Um... and then, I'm gonna make a hefty donation, to... to the place you sent me the link to.

CLAIRE (00:06:28): Mm-hmm (*affirmative*).

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:06:30): That place is a rape crisis center where Claire used to work.

NEIL GAIMAN (00:06:35): ...And that is my plan, if that is acceptable to you.

CLAIRE (00:06:39): That – is really generous! Um, and I appreciate your – um – *your* appreciation for the –

NEIL GAIMAN (00:06:47): ...You know, I did something so much shittier than I ever dreamed, that I – I didn't even realize I was doing something shitty. I did something *really* shitty.

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:06:57): Claire tells him that she doesn't want the payments to be spread over four years, as it would prolong her contact with him – something she wanted to end for good. He accepts that. On the 2nd of August 2022, Neil Gaiman sends Claire \$60,000 to cover the cost of her therapy.

It's not the first time Neil Gaiman has paid women he was involved with money. Two months earlier, he had sent some NZ\$13,000 (which is nearly US\$8,000) and a non-disclosure agreement to Scarlett after an allegedly abusive sexual relationship that lasted three weeks. And around 8 months before paying Claire, he had paid US\$275,000 and an NDA to Caroline Wallner after he allegedly coerced her into providing him with sex under the threat of evicting her and her three daughters from his property.

Neil Gaiman, who strenuously denied Scarlett and Caroline's allegations, paid all three women money in the space of just 8 months.

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:08:10): These payments raise questions: why was he making what looks like personal injury payments to three women? Is it just because, as *his* account of Claire says, he could offer help? Why would he promise to donate to a rape crisis center where Claire once worked, when his position is a denial of all allegations of non-consensual sex? And why is Claire, like all the women we've spoken to for this story, still struggling to come to terms with her involvement with Neil Gaiman?

CLAIRE (00:08:44): Even in the back of my mind right now, I'm like, what is this story? This wasn't rape. And that's something that really paralyzed me, in my healing. That fixation on language. This wasn't rape. The journalists fed into that. This isn't black and white. People will say it was consensual. So what happened, to me?

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:09:06): This is Claire's real voice, but she's using a pseudonym for this podcast. She's a licensed therapist now, and doesn't want her clients to change the way they relate to her because of her experience with Neil Gaiman. It's a scarring experience that tracks straight back to the theme of abusive behavior that takes place within some sort of consensual relationship. A pattern we've now heard about from four other women.

Neil Gaiman's account *strongly* denies any non-consensual sex with those women. As with Scarlett, Claire's account comes with detailed receipts: records of interactions that show affection, interest, even love. Neil Gaiman's account insists any suggestion of a pattern of behavior is confected and flimsy.

But the things the women who've spoken to us say he did to them were similar. The harm they say he caused them was similar. The vulnerable situations these women say they were in were similar. The power dynamic of a famous older man and a much younger female is similar. And now, as we're hearing from Claire, the pattern looks even less flimsy.

Like all the other women, Claire thought *she* was the only one. That's what Neil Gaiman led her to believe on their call in July 2022, and because the \$60,000 he paid her didn't come with an NDA.

CLAIRE (00:10:48): And I saw that as a sign of integrity, and it reassured me that he'd never done this before. (*wry voice*) Because surely somebody who was good at this would send an NDA!

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:10:57): Another thing Neil Gaiman *didn't* do is make a "hefty donation" to the rape crisis center where Claire used to work – either directly or through his bookkeeper or business manager. But Claire didn't know that – just like she didn't know that Neil Gaiman had asked *two* of the women we'd spoken to to sign NDAs.

Neil Gaiman's account is that he *believes* he made a donation to the center Claire pointed to on their call (and later in an email). But the center's executive director told us in an email:

MALE VOICE READING (00:11:30): “We’ve looked through our records, and do not have any record of receiving a donation from any of those three individuals you named.”

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:11:38): Neil Gaiman might have thought that the promise of a hefty donation and covering the costs of Claire’s therapy would be the end of *her* story.

CLAIRE (00:11:46): And I want to be clear: I would pay *more* than \$60,000 for this never to have happened to me. But it felt like he was at least... trying. And he felt remorse.

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:11:56): But what she really wanted to know was whether he’d mistreated women before, and that he wouldn’t do so again. She wanted to break the pattern.

I’m Rachel Johnson.

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:12:10): And I’m Paul Caruana Galizia. This is the Slow Newscast from Tortoise. You’re listening to *Master: the allegations against Neil Gaiman – episode 6: the phonecalls*.

(Somber musical chime)

CLAIRE (00:12:29): It felt like I was in a dream. And I was terrified, but – excited.

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:12:36): In the September 2012, Amanda Palmer, a singer and Neil Gaiman’s wife, was touring her second studio album, *Theatre Is Evil*. On Friday the 14th of September, she played the Cat’s Cradle venue in Carrboro, North Carolina. Claire, who thought Amanda Palmer was “kickass”, was there.

After the concert, Claire spoke to her. They were surrounded by other fans. Claire said that she’d be seeing Neil Gaiman at a talk at the Diana Wortham Theatre in Asheville, North Carolina in two days’ time. The event was to be hosted by Malaprop’s bookshop, which was organizing a book signing. Claire, a lifelong fan of Neil Gaiman’s writing, was going to be there. She volunteered to hold books open for him, some 500 of them, so that she could finally meet him.

CLAIRE (00:13:33): And... I asked if she wanted me to pass a message on, to him. And so she... put her arms around my neck, and she whispered, “Hello, Neil,” into my ear, and she said I had permission to “nibble his earlobe”, and that, “he’s British, so he’ll act all embarrassed, but he’ll secretly like it.” And I remember all the other fans going, “Ooooooooooh”, being so jealous, and...

And I, I didn’t have any intention, of nibbling his ear? Because I was 22. And he was 30 years older than me. And I was in a loving, committed relationship, and I had *no* sexual or romantic attraction to him. And... ear stuff grosses me out. But, I was excited to have another excuse – to actually talk to him.

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:14:17): On Sunday, the 16th of September, at Malaprop's, Claire was introduced to Neil Gaiman by the bookshop's staff.

CLAIRE (00:14:25): And I told him that I had a message for him from Amanda, and I asked him to stand up. And I still don't know where I got the courage to do that, (*almost laughs*) 'cause I was so terrified. But he stood up, and I gave him a big hug, and – as I was pulling away he kissed me on the cheek.

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:14:42): Claire says she never nibbled his earlobe as Amanda Palmer suggested she should, because she felt it would be too forward and, in any case, isn't into ears.

We've reached out to Amanda Palmer as we have multiple times before, but received no comment yet. But we *have* discovered that she and Neil Gaiman, though separated, are still married.

Neil Gaiman's account is that he recalls Claire nibbling his ear, which is why *his* account says he *may* have responded by kissing her on the cheek.

CLAIRE (00:15:18): And it was a little awkward, but I figured that was just a British thing. And after the hug was taken care of, I'm still really nervous, but – he was, he was very unassuming, and sweet, and we chatted a bit.

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:15:31): Neil Gaiman carried on signing books and finished up the show.

CLAIRE (00:15:34): So he took me to the back of the theatre, and it was really dark. But he had everyone sign a poster that I had, and he told me this really beautiful story about this flash mob wedding that he and Amanda had had. And he ended the story by saying, "And then we kissed, like this." And he put his hands on my shoulders and he kissed me on the cheek, again.

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:15:59): It was the *second* time that night Neil Gaiman had kissed Claire on the cheek, having only met her hours earlier.

CLAIRE (00:16:09): It wasn't weird, because it couldn't be weird, because it was Neil Gaiman. If I felt weird, then I was the weird one.

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:16:18): After it all, he invited her to his next event on the tour, which was in Charlotte, North Carolina on Tuesday, 18th of September.

CLAIRE (00:16:26): So I said yes. Of course I said yes.

(Very soft, somber music in background for a moment)

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:16:33): The next morning one of Claire's friends who helped organize the book signing messaged her. The friend told Claire that Neil Gaiman "adored her". Flattered

by this, Claire was excited to see Neil Gaiman at the event in Charlotte. She went with her friend, and they were both invited to an afterparty.

CLAIRE (00:16:52): And... I got pretty drunk. And I went inside to get some water, and I bumped into him, and he asked if we could take a picture of us, kissing, to prove to Amanda that he was “coming out of his British shell”. ‘Cause it drove her crazy, apparently, it drove her crazy. So he took me to the laundry room, and he had... what he called a “pretend kiss”. And I found the photo, the other day, and it’s – it does *not* look pretend.

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:17:23): The photo, which Claire has shared, shows her and Neil Gaiman kissing on the lips. Her eyes are closed, as are his. One of her arms is wrapped around him. The other is resting on his shoulder.

But afterwards, they both went back outside. Claire told Neil Gaiman she was an advocate at a rape crisis helpline. Neil Gaiman mentioned his friend, the singer Tori Amos, who cofounded RAINN, America’s largest anti-sexual-assault charity. Neil Gaiman told Claire that he could get her full-time work there.

CLAIRE (00:18:00): So at the end of the night, someone offered to drive us back to my car, which was parked downtown. And the car was packed, and I was the last one in, so I sat – on a couple different laps, but mostly Neil’s lap. And he had an erection. And a few minutes into the drive he started trying to put his hands up my dress. And at that point I was starting to sober up, and it felt *gross*, but I let him do it. And I didn’t help him – the dress was kind of tricky to get into, I didn’t *help* him. So... eventually he gave up, and just kept his hands on my legs.

I was really pliant, like, I just let it happen. And... and that was kind of the theme. I was – submitted, to it. Not because I wanted it but because it was *Neil Gaiman*. He was touching me, he was close to me, I was in his orbit!

So we made it to my car, and my friend drove him (‘cause I was still a little drunk) to his hotel, and when we got there I had to pee. So I went in the lobby, and... after I was done, he asked for a few minutes alone with me. He asked my friend for a few minutes alone with me. And when we were alone, he pressed me up against the wall of the hotel room and he kissed me, and I *hated it*. I hated – the feeling of his tongue, in my ear, and his hands in my hair, but – I didn’t say no. And it – it did not feel like an option.

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:19:34): Eventually, Claire and her friend left.

CLAIRE (00:19:37): And we went to Waffle House. And I received a *long* email from him. And he said he had never done this before, but he liked me, and he wanted to stay in touch with me. And I remember being *really* impressed by how long – how quickly he had written such a long email.

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:19:55): In his email, which Claire read at 5am on the 19th of September, Neil Gaiman appears bashful. The email is composed as if what happened was an unexpected and lovely one-off, and that she was the first and the only one. He writes:

This is fun and surprising and fun and exciting and really interesting and unexpected. Now I want to take you out for long walks and find out who you are and how you think and what you do. I know you're beautiful and funny and scary smart and I love that you do the flustered and bemused thing to cover both the scary smart and everything else, mostly because that's my default too. I really, really liked kissing you.

And then he adds, in brackets:

Because you are probably wondering, no, I've really not done this before, although Amanda has wanted me to for ages. You're it, and a nice funny "it", too.

He signs off his email with:

Love, slightly nervously, Neil

It's easy to forget that it's an email written by a man about to turn 52 years old. That it's an email from a world-famous author to a female fan 30 years younger, rather than the other way around.

Claire messaged another friend and told her all about it. She's shared the messages, and they read like two excitable teenagers' gossip. She keeps asking her friend not to judge her. Claire says he was "seriously gentle". They were both giddy with excitement over what Claire described in the hotel lobby, and discussed what her response to his email should be. Claire shares a draft with her friend, who tells her, "It's so cute."

Claire replies enthusiastically the next day, September 20th, thanking Neil Gaiman for "*a really great time*", and suggesting lots more things the pair can do together, such as hikes on the gorgeous mountain trails of Asheville. She closes with, "*I was also a fan of the kissing. If you don't mind, I'd very much like to kiss you again.*"

In another email that day, Claire writes to him: "*Your lap is extremely comfortable, especially when your hands are involved. I seriously regret my wardrobe choice, and that I didn't just wrap my arms around you and start making out with you shamelessly in the back of the car. That is also something I regret.*"

Over the next 6 to 9 months, Claire and Neil Gaiman would email and video call each other.

CLAIRE (00:22:41): I remember the adrenaline of getting an email from him, or a text – it was similar to – the adrenaline of anxiety, but it was also, just the adrenal – it was excitement, but confusion, too, because the only thing we had that came close to a relationship talk was when he sent me a link to... an article about his open marriage, with Amanda, and he told me at one point that it was an arrangement that he was able to take advantage of more than she was, because of how tired she got after concerts. And book tours were not nearly as tiring.

But regardless of what we called it, I had his attention, and... the possibility of losing that felt devastating. So even when I was uncomfortable, I was – I was willing to be uncomfortable.

And be pushed out of my comfort zone, in ways I never would have with anyone else, because he was my hero, and... I trusted that he'd never push too far.

And I told him that I had a boyfriend. And he told me that he was glad! And to tell my boyfriend that he wasn't a threat. Most of the time I felt like the luckiest fan in the world. There were so many other fans I could think of who would just kill to be in my shoes! And here I was, Skyping Neil Gaiman at 11 o'clock at night, and he was... showing me around his library! And introducing me to his dog...

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:24:09): Gradually, the exchanges became more explicit. On one call, Neil Gaiman appeared naked. The two would swap photos over email. In one, Neil Gaiman looks directly into the camera, topless, and with messy hair, as though he's just come out of the shower or bath.

In another, Claire sends him a photo of her looking sheepishly at the camera, and there's one of her standing in front of a mirror in her bra, looking anxious. Neil Gaiman replies to that photo with, *"You are very beautiful, and endearingly terrified."*

Sometimes, though, it would just be platonic. Like when Claire had had a tough day at work, they'd call, and he'd help her through it.

CLAIRE (00:24:57): It was a lot of groundwork that he was laying. Like, he was making me feel safe, he was creating this – persona, framework. Like "this is a friendship". They push and then they withdraw, and they push and they pull back and they push and they pull back and they test and they test.

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:25:11): Over time, the lines moved and blurred. Neil Gaiman's position is that he was corresponding with someone he'd kissed and had every reason to believe enjoyed it, and wished to do it again. But there was one call Claire remembers.

CLAIRE (00:25:28): It was maybe a few months in, and he told me, "I don't know what I see in you. I'm an award-winning, best-selling author, and you are..." And he never finished the sentence. But he didn't need to, 'cause I knew exactly who I was: I was a 22-year-old, broke, unemployed fan... in, um... an infinite line of obsessed fans, and I was a nobody and I was replaceable.

And that conversation stands out to me – back then, because of how terrible and small it made me feel, but it stands out to me now because like that's exactly what he was doing: he was doing it to keep me down, and to remind me of my place, and to remind me of the stakes if I didn't respond to him in the right way – I wasn't interesting enough, or flirty enough.

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:26:12): Claire says in their exchanges she was always clear she didn't want sex, and that he always agreed. She says she was in a loving, committed relationship at the time, with the man who's now her husband.

In his messages to Claire, he appears to have been skeptical of Neil Gaiman's interest in her. The messages suggest he thought Neil Gaiman wasn't *really* interested in friendship, but in something else.

On the 27th of September 2012, he asks Claire whether she's heard from Neil Gaiman lately. She replies, "Yes. *He does not want sex to happen either. It's all very exciting.*" She then adds, "*I never wanted to have sex with him,*" and, "*Not only would sex with Neil Gaiman be gross, I'd also be extremely ashamed about it.*" But still, Claire remained anxious.

In December 2012, she emailed him: "*Neil, I'm nervous and worried. I really, really like you, but right now, I'm extremely overwhelmed, and I genuinely think that any more flirting will make me explode. My conclusion is that I'm hopelessly out of my depth here and should probably head to shallower water.*" She signs off with "*Nervously,*" the same way he'd signed off his first email to her back in September.

The emails continued and, on the 22nd of June 2013, Claire attended one of Neil Gaiman's events at a bookshop in Georgia. She stayed near him backstage as he was signing books. His account is that she wrote to him effusively about the event.

And then, about a week later, the tone of their emails and calls shifted.

CLAIRE (00:28:06): And one night, I told him I couldn't sleep.

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:28:08): Neil Gaiman responded to her email with: "*You have fingers, and an imagination. And also, my phone number...*" Dot, dot, dot.

CLAIRE (00:28:18): And we'd had a few late-night phone calls at that point, where he'd show me around his house, and talk with me, and... But when I called that night, he – initiated phone sex, with me.

And he told me that I didn't need to talk, so I stayed quiet. So he talked about how he would – fuck me until it almost hurt, because of how big he was. *(pause)* And... he talked about how he would – flip me around, and fuck me from behind, and... Through all of that, I did not say a word. And it felt deeply, deeply weird.

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:28:56): Neil Gaiman's position doesn't accept Claire's description of this phone sex, saying the tone of their correspondence isn't congruent with it. Claire's description of this phone sex is similar to three other women's accounts of their phone sex with Neil Gaiman.

Still, the next day, Claire told him in an email, "*Last night was absolutely wonderful and completely unprecedented. Haven't ever gotten off with someone on the phone before.*"

CLAIRE (00:29:25): And I'd planned on going to one of his tour stops in Nashville, a couple days later.

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:29:29): The event was at Nashville's War Memorial Auditorium on the 10th of July 2013. It was for Neil Gaiman to talk about his book, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*.

CLAIRE (00:29:41): But after that phone call, I didn't want to go. To Nashville, anymore. It had made me feel extremely uncomfortable, and no matter what Neil was saying about how he didn't want to have sex, and we were just friends, I was worried that if I went, I would be pressured into doing something I didn't want to do.

It was definitely a shock. And there was part of me that – had been braced for impact for a while. And that was throughout all of this, it was like there was two parts of me, right? There was that kid, that 11-year-old, starry-eyed fan, and then there was that other part, that almost-adult (*pause*) – not almost-adult, that *adult* – who was like, "This is – listen to your body, girl, you are *not* safe!"

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:30:30): Sometimes, the starry-eyed fan won. She suggested, in an email in October 2013, that they could spend one of the nights on his tour together.

But sometimes, she thought the adult won. After the phone sex, she also reiterated on a Skype call that she had *no* desire to have intercourse with him.

CLAIRE (00:30:52): And he told me there was no pressure, and I was under no obligation to do anything. But... when we got to Nashville, the second we were alone, he started making out with me. And he groped my butt and I moved his hands, and I tried to keep my lower body away from his lower body...

So in Nashville... it was for *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*. He was doing readings. And there was a – performer, in the beginning, to open – like an opening act. And so he – asked me to come backstage, while he was getting ready for the opening act. And that was when I went backstage. And... we were alone... and that's when he started making out with me, and – he groped my butt, and I moved his hands, he kept coming back, and I kept moving his hands, and I tried to angle my body away, from his lower body, and... and then people came in.

I was signaling so much discomfort. It was unmistakable, what my body language was telling him. There was, there was no reason why he – might have misinterpreted that.

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:32:05): There were two other women with Claire that night on the 10th of July 2013. And when the reading was over –

CLAIRE (00:32:11): He told me and my friends to go to the tour bus and wait for him while he signed books. And I told the other women that I was starting to get – scared. And... we came up with a hand signal: jazz hands. That I could use if I needed help. And his assistant brought us whiskey, while we waited. Black Maple, I remember that. It was my first time in Nashville, and *none* of us were sober, at that point.

When he came back, he sat down, and he patted his – knee, to have me sit on his lap. And he had an erection, and I started to panic. And I did jazz hands to the other women, but they didn't – do anything. And I still don't know why, I think they may just have not – maybe they didn't see, or they were too drunk.

So he took me to the back of the bus, and he got on top of me, and he started kissing me, and groping under my dress and over my breasts. And he kept saying, "Kiss me like you mean it. Kiss me like you'll never see me again." (*voice tenses*) Because he *knew*! He knew, I didn't mean it. And he knew, that – the threat of not seeing him again was such a threat, to me. He didn't stop, and I felt so trapped. Under his body, his – and I knew if I stopped responding, I would never see him again. And in spite of everything, and how disgusted I felt and how wrong this felt, I – the thought of never seeing him again, it broke my heart!

So... yeah. I – my arms – felt really heavy, and everything was foggy, and... I must not've been pretending, enough, because he rolled off of me. And then he said – and this still *boggles* my mind, this language – he said, "I'm a very wealthy man and I'm used to getting what I want."

...And I didn't respond, because *how* do you respond to that? ...So then he said, "I'm really sad, because I think I'm going to have to let you go." And then it was over.

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:34:38): Neil Gaiman's account is that he invited Claire onto his tour bus because their correspondence suggested to him that she wanted intimate contact. His account is that he attempted to initiate a kiss with her while they were lying on a bed at the back of the bus talking, but he stopped when it became quickly apparent that she didn't want one. His account denies that he ever said, "I'm a very wealthy man and I'm used to getting what I want."

CLAIRE (00:35:08): And I don't remember... leaving the tour bus, I don't remember what that looked like. I just remember being – back at the hotel, and just crying and crying and crying...

And... I messaged my boyfriend, and told him I thought I'd been sexually assaulted and I wanted to go home.

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:35:25): Claire shared those messages with us. They chart her emotional journey that night. At 7:14pm she writes, "*I'm having a lot of fun,*" and, "*I shouldn't have dreaded this so much.*"

At 9:36pm she writes, "*So out of my comfort zone and there's nothing I can do about it.*" Less than half an hour later, she writes, "*I'm safe with my friends.*" 39 minutes later, "*I need to leave.*" Frustrated by her boyfriend being non-responsive, she writes, sarcastically, "*Wasn't sexually assaulted much, or extremely harassed, or touched too inappropriately. And I'm an idiot for even thinking I could just be friends with Neil Gaiman.*"

She also made a diary entry, in her round, careful handwriting: "*10th July 2013: Everything went to shit. When I hung out with Neil, I was really uncomfortable. When we were in the bus together, he pressured me. I think I was sexually assaulted.*"

Sexual assault can cause severe emotional distress, even if it doesn't involve violence, which is why its legal definition – in Tennessee and most jurisdictions – doesn't rest on the occurrence of a physical attack. And which is why Claire says she remembers so clearly how she felt that night, and how she continued to feel afterwards.

CLAIRE (00:37:06): I just felt so trapped and – I had so many dreams after that. Nightmares of him on top of me, and – I would wake up crying and screaming and pushing him away, and – like, that – feeling of being helpless, and trapped.

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:37:22): After that night, Claire stopped messaging Neil Gaiman. Some months later, he messaged her to ask if the two were still friends.

CLAIRE (00:37:31): And he told me that he regretted *us* making things sexual, and all of this had been nothing more than, he called it, “an apotheosis of miscommunication.” He said that my indecision had caused everyone stress that night.

And I believed him. Like, what else could I do? I'm so used to believing his stories, and – it didn't just feel natural, it felt – it was a *relief* to believe him, because it was so much easier to blame myself... than it was to ad– admit, to myself, that he had done that to me. In the aftermath of everything I was so confused and lost, so when Neil told me that, his version of what had happened, his... story became my story, and it took me years to piece together what had actually happened to me.

(Audio bumper cue for Tortoise Media)

(Assorted algorithmic advertisements)

(Audio bumper cue for Tortoise Media)

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:40:03): Over the following years, Claire would speak with friends about what had happened in those 9 or so months with Neil Gaiman, and they would all tell her the same thing:

CLAIRE (00:40:13): They reflected back at me... reality. That what happened to me was not OK, and it wasn't my fault.

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:40:24): She began googling “Neil Gaiman” and “sexual assault”, just as years later Scarlett would – but found nothing. And then, she began reaching out to journalists at major news organizations. She wanted them to know what Neil Gaiman had done to her, and that she was concerned he'd done it before, and would do it to another woman. She wanted them to know they're not alone, if they existed.

In 2017, she emailed *Jezebel*, a news website geared towards women. A journalist there told her what Neil Gaiman did *was* gross, but that she needed to hear from more women to do the story.

In 2018, she emailed *BuzzFeed* and got no response.

In 2019, she emailed a prominent freelance journalist and got no reply. That year, she also emailed the *Washington Post* and was told that no journalist there would follow up on her story. And she emailed [*New York* magazine's] *The Cut* and got no response.

In 2020, she emailed *Slate* and a famous journalist at the *New Yorker*. Neither responded.

This is all through the rise of #MeToo, when the allegations against Harvey Weinstein had been front and center of people's minds. When people began thinking seriously about sexual misconduct in its various forms. People including Neil Gaiman, who sent out tweets to his three million followers like: "*On a day like today, it's worth saying, 'I believe survivors. Men must not close our eyes and minds to what happens to women in this world.'*" ...And people including Claire.

CLAIRE (00:42:12): Well then I started to learn *new* language. Sexual coercion, and grooming, and abuse of power, and DARVO, and unwanted sexual experiences...

PAUL CARUANA GALIZIA (00:42:23): DARVO stands for **D**eny, **A**ttack, and **R**everse **V**ictim and **O**ffender.

CLAIRE (00:42:28): I felt so much more grounded in my story, with those words.

(Very faint string music in background)

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:42:35): By 2022, Claire was exhausted. And felt defeated because journalists had, in effect, told her that her story wasn't a story. Like Scarlett in 2022 and 2023 with the New Zealand police, her experience wasn't enough. But now she was pregnant, and began having nightmares about Neil Gaiman. She wanted to confront them.

Claire reached out to Papillon DeBoer, a therapist who hosts a podcast in which they interview survivors of sexual abuse. It's called *Am I Broken: Survivor Stories*. Papillon wanted to interview Claire, giving her the space to tell her story. But she decided to write to Neil Gaiman directly instead, and told Papillon that she'd do the interview if other women came forward about Neil Gaiman. And:

CLAIRE (00:43:31): So I just set up a Google alert for "neil gaiman sexual assault" and I let myself rest.

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:43:35): And then she turned to her letter to Neil Gaiman. In it, Claire describes a recent dream she says she had about him, a dream in which he apologized to her and recognized that, she wrote: "*The vast power imbalance that existed between us made my consent to any kind of physical or romantic relationship impossible.*"

Neil Gaiman responded to Claire's letter by email, then arranged a phone call with her. That was the call you heard at the beginning of this episode.

NEIL GAIMAN (00:44:09): (*pensive breath*) Mmh. I'm sorry –

CLAIRE (00:44:12) (*overlapping*) Yeah...

NEIL GAIMAN (00:44:13): I think I – Even my memories of it are obviously wrong.

CLAIRE (00:44:16): And I – I think – I think that's really telling, right? Like, this is something I've been thinking about for a long time, and this is something that's not – like, there's a lot of dust, for you. Because... it's – not been on your mind, in the same way. Um... (*inaudible*) um... (*trails off as NEIL GAIMAN speaks*)

NEIL GAIMAN (00:44:31): It hasn't. It's been – and it obviously has been with you.

CLAIRE (00:44:35): Yeah.

NEIL GAIMAN (00:44:36): Well *enormously* on your mind.

CLAIRE (00:44:37): Yeah. You've taken up a lot of real estate, in my brain.

NEIL GAIMAN (00:44:41): Aww, I'm so fuckin' sorry!

CLAIRE (00:44:50): I appreciate you saying that, and I'm sorry that – this is... Well no, I'm glad you don't remember it in this way, 'cause I think that would be even more upsetting, (*laugh and shaky inhale*) if you actually remembered it... like that. Um...

NEIL GAIMAN (00:45:00): I don't want you going through the rest of your life... seeing my name on things and feeling sick, or feeling angry, or feeling triggered, or whatever, I would – I just – you know. You're gonna be alive a lot longer than I am, and you will run into bits of me for the rest of your life whatever happens, 'cause I get around.

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:45:27): She'd expected him to be defensive on the call. Instead he was contrite, apologetic, and looked to make amends. Claire is neurodivergent and, because she was pregnant at the time, she was unable to take her prescription medicine. In this situation, she was worried she'd emotionally detach herself from the conversation, hearing it as one happening between two other people, so she recorded the call. She wanted a recording to be able to return to it at a later date; she never thought she'd use the recording beyond that.

But that's not the end.

Remember that Google alert Claire had set up? Two years later, when we published our investigation into the first sexual assault allegations against Neil Gaiman, Claire got an alert. And she got back in touch, as she said she would, with Papillon. Finally she got to tell her story on her terms. It was the moment that *his* story separated, at last, from hers. Because she says she saw what he told her in their last exchange of messages, and on their phone calls, was untrue.

Neil Gaiman's account is that if he'd been contacted in advance of Papillon's podcast, he'd have been able to provide material to show his side of the story. His account points out that Claire is now making further allegations which weren't presented in her interview with Papillon.

Claire approached *us* because she wanted her story to be reported in full, and for Neil Gaiman's claims to be investigated.

(pause)

Neil Gaiman had assured her that *she* was an exception:

NEIL GAIMAN (00:47:21): Because normally I keep all... *(frustrated short sigh, swallow)* I... I keep fans... at arm's length.

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:47:38): But we have heard sexual assault allegations against him from two former fans, including K, that span 2005 to 2007. That is years before he even *met* Claire. He told Claire:

NEIL GAIMAN (00:47:48): A few years ago, I was informed I was high-functioning autistic, which is a... interesting thing to learn about yourself, when you're old. Um... that did mean sort of like oh, okay, this is why... I sort of – sometimes find myself tiptoeing through human – relations, and sometimes getting them very wrong.

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:48:12): But people with autism are more likely to be victims of sexual abuse than perpetrators. Like anyone else, autistic people are capable of learning from negative experiences, and are not simply bound to repeat them. And they are usually *more* concerned about misreading situations and, so, *more* cautious.

He tried to tell Claire that *her* memory was faulty.

NEIL GAIMAN (00:48:35): I've been thinking about a lot in the last week.

CLAIRE (00:48:38): Mmkay?

NEIL GAIMAN (00:48:40): Um... Why did you kiss me? *(Inaudible vocalization from CLAIRE)* The first time, you said, "I have a message for you from your wife" –

CLAIRE (00:48:48): *(overlapping)* Ohhhh! *(half laugh)* Oh! I didn't think–

NEIL GAIMAN (00:48:48): *(overlapping)* —and then, and then, we were alone, and then – you – smooched? me, kind of passionately? And that was – I've – *(sigh)* I – I – I – I – that w–

CLAIRE (00:49:08): *(overlapping)* *(sigh)* Yeah... that's...mm...

NEIL GAIMAN (00:49:48): *(overlapping)* – I mean, I would *never* have made the first move, on anybody! I would be *terrified*, of that.

CLAIRE (00:49:17): Okay...

NEIL GAIMAN (00:49:18) And I thought that... I... *(sigh)*

CLAIRE (00:49:26): *(overlapping)* So...

NEIL GAIMAN (00:49:26): Wha, what happened there? 'Cause I thought that you... liked me and wanted me, and that you... I'm... I'm sorry!

CLAIRE (00:49:36): I hear what you're saying, I hear what you're saying, I'm gonna cut you off here, because I don't think this is a super productive way of having this conversation, in terms of

–

NEIL GAIMAN (00:49:41): *(overlapping)* OK. I'm, I'm sorry, I –

CLAIRE (00:49:44): *(overlapping)* And, no-no-no, and I do want to say that I didn't kiss you.

NEIL GAIMAN (00:49:42): You didn't?

CLAIRE (00:49:48): Nope! Um... *(laughs)*

(Phone dialogue fades out and soft, somber music begins)

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:49:50): But it's *his* memory that appears to be wrong. That he kissed her first is corroborated by contemporaneous chats she had with a friend and one of his own emails. And that he'd never have made the first move on anybody because he'd be terrified to is not supported by even his own account of Scarlett, which says that *he* invited *her* to take a bath with him the first time they met.

K says he propositioned her and her friend for sex the first evening they spent with him. Julia Hobsbawm says he aggressively jumped on her, unprompted, at her London flat in 1986. Caroline Wallner says he came onto her first at a sauna on his Woodstock property in 2017.

On the phone, Claire points out the age gap – that he is 30 years older than she is – and that it was inappropriate. He agrees. And Neil Gaiman also tells Claire:

NEIL GAIMAN (00:50:56): The me of 10 years ago might have done... the me of these days has learned a lot.

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:51:02): And yet... months earlier, Neil Gaiman had been with Scarlett, who was 40 years younger than him.

(Background music tenses and fades)

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:51:26): Over the course of this series, we've seen how Neil Gaiman uses his status, his wealth, and his fame to seduce, allegedly abuse, and then discard women.

We have heard the voices of five women. Since we published the first two women's stories in July 2024, Neil Gaiman has not made a public statement of any kind.

The movie of his book *Coraline* was rereleased as a 15th-anniversary special in late August and was an unexpected box-office smash, grossing more than \$20 million in its first weekend alone. But he was nowhere to be seen or heard at the premieres. He's been represented by PR advisers and lawyers over the reporting of this story.

The account we were given for this episode stated that Neil Gaiman's recollections of his physical interactions with Claire were consensual, that there is contemporaneous material in the form of messages to support this, and that he immediately stopped his physical advances on Claire on that tour bus when he saw they weren't reciprocated.

Since April 2024 when we first reach out to Neil Gaiman, he has declined repeated requests for an interview. But thanks to Claire's recordings, we have heard him, in his own voice, accept responsibility and apologize for his behavior in her case. It's an apparent contrast to the account we were given. The realization for these women that they were a commodity to a man they thought they were in a relationship or a friendship with, has taken some of them years to come to terms with. For them, this is not over.

(Long pause as music ends and new music track starts)

RACHEL JOHNSON (00:53:29): This series is reported by me, Rachel Johnson, and Paul Caruana Galizia. This episode is produced by Matt Russell. Sound design is by Dominic Delargy. Additional reporting is by Jess Swinburne. Artwork is by Jon Hill; the series editor is Matt Russell. The editor is Jasper Corbett.

(Tortoise Media audio cues)

(Assorted algorithmic advertisements)