

<https://amibroken.buzzsprout.com/763742/15488615-s4-ep2-claire-i-ignored-it-and-i-believed-him-because-he-s-the-storyteller-neil-gaiman>

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TRANSCRIPTIONIST'S NOTE: This podcast focuses on the experiences of survivors and their therapeutic journeys toward recovery; it differs markedly from news or crime podcasts where the aim is to scrutinize the perpetrator and their potential guilt. Please read this transcript with that context in mind.

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(Short, somber musical cue)

CLAIRE (00:00:07): It's almost like I'd been conditioned to listen to him over listening to my own instincts, because I've been listening to him tell me stories since I was 11. Like I'd grown up -- his audiobooks, and... and then that same voice that told me those beautiful stories when I was a kid was telling me... the story that I was safe, and that we were friends, and that he wasn't a threat. And then -- in the end he told me what happened was my fault. Even though my body was telling me this entirely different story -- like, the opposite story! -- I ignored it and I believed him, because he's the storyteller.

(Musical cue repeats)

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:00:49): I'm Papillon DeBoer. My pronouns are they/them. I'm a licensed clinical mental health counselor specializing in sexual trauma. And this is *AM I BROKEN: SURVIVOR STORIES*.

(Musical cue)

We are about to hear from a survivor. Their story may include profanity and raw descriptions of abuse. Please take care of yourself and pause as needed, especially if you become overwhelmed, numb, or confused. If you find yourself in crisis, or need further support in the US, you can call the National Sexual Violence Hotline at 800-656-4673 or message them at rainn.org. That's R-A-I-N-N dot O-R-G.

(Musical cue)

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:01:51): Today we're here with "Claire", which is a pseudonym, and whose pronouns are she/her. Welcome to the podcast, Claire. Thanks a lot for doing this today.

CLAIRE (00:02:02): Thank you so much for having me.

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:02:05): Yeah, it's an honor and a pleasure. Today's episode is a little bit unusual in a few different ways. First is that we're going to be discussing an internationally renowned writer named Neil Gaiman. We also are gonna be including some excerpts from a therapy session that Claire had, where she discloses the story for the first time to her therapist.

And also a little bit unusual, perhaps, though common for sexualized violations, unfortunately... is that you approached me in June of 2022...? And had been speaking with some reporters at that time about coming forward. And they were basically like, "Oh, yeah, it's gross but it's not really a story." ...Which is kind of fucked up.

CLAIRE (00:02:53): Yeah. I mean, there are a few reasons why I'm coming forward now. And honestly, most of them have to do with how things went that first time that I tried. Um, that was back in 2019 that I first tried to share my story, and I reached out to a handful of journalists and I had several conversations off the record, but... Yeah, that message I got, across the board, was pretty much that what happened to me wasn't enough to establish a pattern of behavior. Because I was just one person, and back then everyone was looking for a serial rapist, right, like not one-off creeps. But – but he hadn't raped me. And at that point, no one else had come forward.

And... I know I could have kept trying after that, but... I think it was too soon for me. I was really -- still struggling with a lot of shame and self-blame around what had happened. And still pretty trapped in that narrative. Like, it's not like he raped me, is this even that big a deal? And... so all of that was going on in my mind, so when the journalists said, "what happened to you isn't enough to establish a pattern of behavior", what I heard, of course, was that "what happened to you wasn't enough", and I was really shaken by that experience.

So all of that was going on in my mind. So when the journalist said what happened to you isn't enough to establish a pattern of behavior, what I heard, of course, was that what happened to you wasn't enough. And I was really shaken by that experience.

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:04:07): Yeah. Ouch. I'm sorry that that happened. And, you know, it takes a lot of courage to come forward in the first place? Just with a regular everyday person. Compounded by the fact that he's rich and famous, which levels it up quite a bit.

So... kudos to you for trying several times, and I'm sorry that was the response, that it was dismissive. Which is often how people respond to a story, no matter if they're journalists or a friend or a colleague. Which is one of the reasons I'm doing this podcast, to help educate people on how to receive and believe survivors when they disclose.

So, thanks again for making your... third attempt? fourth attempt? to come forward. And maybe you could share with me and our listeners about what's inspiring you to share your story on the podcast at this time.

CLAIRE (00:05:07): It turns out – I wasn't the only one. Uh, three weeks ago from the date of this recording, uh, two other women came forward with allegations against him of rape and sexual assault. And one is – was in 2002, and the second in 2022. So my experience falls right

in the middle of that, in 2012, and – that's a pattern! So, I decided to come forward, and ... knowing what I know now, I – I wish I'd come forward sooner, like I – no – *(sigh)* it just – it broke my heart hearing how one of the victims, Scarlett, had been googling "neil gaiman sexual assault" when she was trying to piece together what had happened to her, because I did the same thing! For years!

I was – I felt so alone, back then, and I don't want any of his victims to feel that way ever again. So, I'm sharing my experience, in solidarity, to support those women who've come forward and the people who will, and the people who can't. And... I'm also doing this for myself, as a... continuation of my healing. And I've never told my story so completely before. And... I'm choosing to do that through this podcast, because in this space, unlike in most spaces, it's not about him. It's about *me*, and my story.

And outside of this podcast interview, it'll all go back to being about him, and his fame and his power, and his money and his stories, but... at least in here, it can be about me, and *my* healing, and *my* story and I *love* how you provide this for survivors without any... agenda, just offering them space where they can use their voice. I also really appreciated your understanding when I changed my mind the first time we talked about doing this, back in... 2022? I know I didn't really explain much about why I made that decision, at the time, but you were really understanding.

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:07:07): Yeah, of course. You know, I think it's important that people are ready. You know, I've had folks get all the way up to the line, and then decide they don't want the episode published. I've had folks who... it gets published and then it's really hard and scary for them and they ask me to take it down, and so I take it down.

I do remember at the time when you and I were talking about it, that you didn't feel... ready? You didn't have the energy for it at that time? You had already put a lot into talking with reporters, but... you said that if other survivors came forward, that you would join them. And so – yeah, I'm proud of you for following through.

CLAIRE (00:07:51): Thank you. *(upbeat tone)* Yeah, I was – pregnant, and... I had started having dreams about him, again, and... at that point I was just soooooo frustrated... *(laugh)* because here I was, at this incredible crossroads in my life, with all these beautiful and magical and exciting things happening to me, and he was there too! And he had no right to be there.

Um... so I ... felt like – OK, I – there's something I haven't done here. So I went down the list of things that I *had* done. I'd talked to therapists, and processed with my partner, and... EMDR, and journaling, and sharing my story, and... and so there were two things that I hadn't done. So I hadn't successfully gone public, and I hadn't spoken with him directly since 2014. And that was when I sent you that message, the initial message. And then I sent him a letter.

And... I don't know what I was expecting when I sent the letter. Maybe defensiveness, but... it certainly wasn't for him to apologize, but that's exactly what he did. He sent an email apology, and we set up a phone call, and... I felt a lot more prepared for the phone call. Like, it was still *the* most terrifying thing I had done, up unto that point. But I'm still more prepared than I had

been when I talked to those journalists, because back then I was still really affected by other people's assessment and... opinion of what had happened, and... when I spoke to the journalists back then, it felt like I had to convince them, right? Like, to prove – to prove it, to prove what had happened to me was real. So I shared pictures, and screencaps, and recordings, and letters, and – but this time felt *different*, because I felt ready, and I knew that what had happened to me was real, and I didn't have to prove myself to anyone, and I knew that... no matter what he said, and how defensive he got, or... how much he tried to distort the truth... I would not be shaken the way I had been with those reporters.

And I was... so ready! (*half laugh*) I was grounded, and he couldn't push me off balance, and ... I was *wrong*! (*laugh, sharp inhale*) I was wrong. His response, it caught me totally off guard. And when we spoke on the phone, he – his apology, it felt sooooo genuine! Like, he told me he had no idea. And he said he wished I had told him sooner. He said... that he was glad that I told him, and he wanted to be better, wanted to learn... so that something like this never happened again. And... I was not ready for an apology like that.

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:10:32): How did it affect you... to be suddenly faced with what felt like a genuine apology?

CLAIRE (00:10:40): So even though I was caught off guard, I said some things that I'm really proud of, and I took a lot of notes, because I just was – even as we were talking, I was like, "Yes! I'm saying it! I'm doing it! I'm using my voice!" and... (*laugh*) and... so he – at one point... at one point he... said that I kissed him first. And I said, "No! That's actually not true. You kissed me first. Ten minutes after meeting me."

And... then he brought his autism diagnosis into it, as... something of an... explanation for why he wasn't able to read my body language, and... I told him that's not an excuse, and that struggling with identifying sarcasm, and reading facial expressions, and social cues, that's entirely different – (*inhale*) – from continuing to grope an intoxicated fan when they are actively pushing you away! And... being autistic does not make you violate other people's boundaries. I'm certain that – that you know more about this than I do, but my understanding is that folks with autism are actually at a much higher risk of being victimized than the general population.

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:11:41): Correct.

CLAIRE (00:11:42): Yeah. So that... left a really bad taste in my mouth. But... aside from excuse-making and some defensiveness, he... he did everything right! Like, he said the right things, he let me talk, he said he was sorry. And... then he asked me what he could do to help. So I gave him the information of the rape crisis agency where I'd initially received counseling. And he said he would make a hefty donation. So... that was when I messaged you again, and I said I didn't feel like I needed to do the podcast anymore. I was getting closer to my due date, and honestly, talking with Neil had made me... had made me reassess. And maybe he wasn't... actually a predator. Maybe I really had been the only one.

And the things he said, it just made it sound like this had never happened before, and he was so committed to it never happening again. He sounded sooooo sincere, and I know I say that over and over, but... I think it's because I – there's some shame there, like, because it was the same as back in 2013 when he told me this was my fault, that I'd come on to him.

...He sounded so sincere, and I believed him. Just like I had back in 2013.

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:12:52): Yeah, he's a compelling storyteller. It's what he does.

CLAIRE (00:12:57): Yeah. It was so compelling, and... so when you sent me that message a few weeks later about how you had a dream that two women came forward, I was like... "Ehhhhhh, lay off the melatonin, Papi." *(laugh)* Do you remember that?

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:13:11): I do! I'm glad that you reminded me, and, uh... I went back and looked at the message thread. I may even read it during the summary at the end of the podcast, just for giggles.

But yeah, and... here we are in 2024, and two other women have come forward, and so... here you are. Ready to share.

CLAIRE (00:13:35): Yeah. There were a few other things in that phone call that – When those two women came forward, I realized that I'd been wrong. Like, my assessment of the situation had been wrong, and I believed that story that he told me, and ... I hadn't come forward, and someone else had gotten hurt, and... I know it wasn't my fault. But –

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:13:57): Yes. It wasn't your fault.

CLAIRE (00:13:59): I went back and I looked at my notes from the phone call, and something s... stood out to me in a way that it hadn't before, particularly a comment he had made about his fans. He said, "This is why I have always kept fans at arm's length." And I wrote that down initially because I found it really reassuring, right? Like, I took it as confirmation of what I'd been hoping for, which is that he'd never done this before with anyone else? But that was a lie. Because the first woman he had sexually assaulted – well, the first woman who's come forward – had been a fan who met him at a book signing, just like I had. So... yeah. That was just a lie.

In fact, he said that in his first email to me too, he said that this was the first time he'd ever done something like this before. And it makes me wonder if there are other women who've gotten that same email.

...Yeah, that commitment I made about coming forward if other people came forward? I knew I was gonna come forward, I just was not sure how to do it. And there's no rule book, right? There's no – what do you do? How do you come forward? *(strained laugh)*

But I know that I did not want it to come from a place of... urgency, or... like a triggered response, so I took time. I went out of town, and I touched grass, and I hiked, and I wrote, and

I... talked to friends. And then, once I was sure that this decision was coming from my values and not... just, uh... reactivity, I decided to do this podcast.

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:15:19): So... when did you first realize that this was a form of sexualized violation? ...What had happened to you?

CLAIRE (00:15:27): It wasn't really a realization. Like it was more kind of a gradual... gradually regaining access to the part of me [*sic*] already knew? So even in my first reaction, as star-struck as I was, there was uneasiness. Like, I was feeling uneasy. And setting physical boundaries in relationships wasn't really a challenge for me, and I never would have allowed myself to be kissed or groped by another man who was old enough to be my father, who I had no sexual or romantic attraction to. And I was already in a loving, committed relationship. But... you know that feeling when you put down a good book, and... a book that really sucked you in, and... there's a sense of "whoOOoooOooah", disorientation, like, who am I? What's real? And you're so immersed in this other person's world that you kind of forget yourself.

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:16:25): It's hypnotic.

CLAIRE (00:16:27): Yeah. Yeah, that was that. Hypnotic. That was me. The whole time. The sense of, like, unreality within reality. Does that make sense?

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:16:37): Yeah, absolutely. I think I wrote that when we were corresponding via message, that there's... it's like he was using a form of entrancement.

CLAIRE (00:16:50): Yeah. Yeah, I mean I call it denial, but that doesn't really... fit. It feels too mundane, like it's almost like I'd been conditioned to listen to him over listening to my own instincts, because I've been listening to him tell me stories since I was 11. Like I'd grown up – his audiobooks, and... and then that same voice that told me those beautiful stories when I was a kid was telling me... the story that I was safe, and that we were friends, and that he wasn't a threat. And then – in the end he told me what happened was my fault. Even though my body was telling me this entirely different story – like, the opposite story! – I ignored it and I believed him, because he's the storyteller. Not me.

...And it's interesting I still use that word, "storyteller". Because I think "liar" is a lot more accurate.

...Whew, that came out kind of... oof. It's true, though!

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:17:47): Yeah. It's appropriate. So... it sounds like it was a gradual... realization more than a single moment? Where you were aware from the very beginning that there was this comfort that in a way entered a trance-like state where we relate to someone with a lot more power than we have, especially being as young as you were. You were...

CLAIRE (00:18:18): I was (almost?) 22. Yeah. I mean – If there was, like a lightning bolt moment, it was when I heard my story in that... recording. Of the therapy session. Because... it was me listening to my story, not his. And... being able to recognize this is a sexualized

violation, that meant stepping away from his stories and coming back to reality, really. And that's what that recording allowed me to do.

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:18:46): That's really striking, that you were listening to your own story for the first time instead of his. And... this seems like a good point to move towards launching this recording that you made in that therapy session? Do you want to... say a little bit about it before we play it back for folks?

CLAIRE (00:19:07): Yeah. When I recorded that session... in 2019, I had been feeling so stuck. And you can hear it in the recording, just the... like, this... shame, and self-blame, it's keeping me so stuck, and I think that a lot of... trauma survivors feel this way. Like, you're frozen in time, right, and you're thinking of the moment like it's happening *right now*. And I thought that by allowing myself some perspective and listening to my story like I was listening to a close friend, I could start that clock again. And it worked. It worked!

I remember listening to it for the first time in... the car on my way to work, and just having to pull over and feel like I got punched in the chest. It was kinda violent, like oof! Something just cracked inside of me and all the emotions I had not been able to access before just came flooding in, like passion and sadness and grief and... because I hadn't listened to that recording like I was in a judge or jury, and I wasn't looking for evidence for court or language to make the story all "tidy" and neatly summarized, and... I was just listening to this girl who'd been deeply hurt by someone who absolutely knew better.

So... I'm looking forward to hearing – hearing myself then, and hearing myself now, and hearing... that growth and healing, I think this is gonna be really meaningful for me.

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:20:30): OK. So, here is a recording that Claire sent to me. It has been edited a little bit to remove some identifying information. And Claire's therapist has also consented to this being published. So, here we go...

(Bell dings)

CLAIRE (00:20:48): It sounds fucked up. All of it just sounds fucked up. And... it doesn't sound like rape, or... like it, I mean – He didn't rape me. It doesn't sound like sexual assault.

THERAPIST (00:21:00): When you shared it with me, you kind of were – it wasn't detailed.

CLAIRE (00:21:02): Mm-hmm (*affirmative*).

THERAPIST (00:21:03): Would it be helpful for you to tell me more, because I haven't—

CLAIRE (00:21:09): Yes. It would. And I wrote it all up in 2014... to process it. And it's pretty detailed.

So, I met him at a book signing. He was on tour with The Moth, which is a podcast, and it's a storytelling podcast that he was doing. He was telling stories, and they would go, and tell

stories, and it was a big thing, and... Afterwards he did a book signing. And... I really, really wanted to meet him, and so... um... one of the staff took me over to meet him, to the table, and it was like... a literal dream come true. Like, it was on my bucket list to get his signature, right? Like, I wanted his signature. I wanted to shake his hand. And that was like... I was t-totally transported into my old, like, little self. Like, little-kid self. It was great.

So, we started talking, and... he... took me to the back, where... the actors, where the people were, and he had everybody sign this little poster I had, and he signed the poster I had, and... it was like, kinda dark, and we were talking, and we started talking about his wife, Amanda. And I was just like congratulating him on getting – on the marriage, and then... and I don't remember *why* it was – this – why it turned into this. It was fucking weird.

But he, um... he started reenacting how they did the ceremony? And... so – and he was – he got really close to me? And he put his hands on my shoulders, and he was like, and then we, we um, kissed, like this. And then he kissed me, on my cheek. And... pulled back. And it was like, oh my god, Neil Gaiman's touching me! (*laugh*) Like it was like, "WHOAAAAAAAAA he's uh, he's acting like WHAT?!?!!" It – I totally short-circuited. Like, whatever, dahhhh.

And then he invited me to go to his next stop on this tour. So I went with a friend, um... afterwards we went to the back. There was some, like... he – he invited us to the afterparty, we drove to the afterparty, it... I – I drank a lot, um... and he, uh... after they... there was talking, and there were a bunch of people there, and he was kind of the center of attention and everybody was at a table and drinking and...

Um... and then after, he took me to... the laundry room. And he told me this story that he was gonna tell at the next stop of the tour, and I was like his guinea pig. I was like the first person who heard that story and it was a big deal, and dah dah dah.

(THERAPIST murmurs sympathetically in background)

CLAIRE (00:24:00): And then he told me that his wife, Amanda, had told him he needed to come out of his British shell a little bit? That's what he said? "Come out of my British shell." And would I be willing to ... take a picture of him, kissing me, on the cheek. Kinda playfully. Or like, like a – for her. To have a picture of him doing that. And... it was like, "oh my god, yeah, totally." Or something. (*sigh*)

Um... so we did, and took the picture, and it was like a pretend – we called it a pretend kiss. And it was sort of pretend? And then, afterwards, he... someone drove us back to my car, which was parked... just, at a parking lot and, um... there wasn't much room in the car, so I sat on his lap. And... he had an erection, and he... tried to – like, uh – feel up my dress, but – and it looked like a skirt and a top, but it was really a dress, and so you couldn't get in, to it. Um... and... so he was like touching me a lot, and it was really gross, but it was also great, 'cause I was with Neil Gaiman...

And then, we got to our car, and then he asked if we could drive him back to his hotel. So I got in the car. And drove him – she drove, my friend, 'cause I was still a little drunk – and drove him

back to the hotel. And then we were in the lobby, and then he said, "Can I have a few minutes with [REDACTED]?" and she was like, "OK." So then we went in the hall of the hotel and he pressed me up against the wall, and he started kissing me. And it was really gross... But I kissed him back! Because... I don't know. (*sadly*) Because it was Neil Gaiman.

And then he, like, put his tongue in my ear, and it was really gross, and I don't even like that, with anybody, but I did it anyway? (*sigh*) And then, that was over. And then we went back to the car, and he went to his room, and then we drove to Waffle House, my friend and I.

And he'd sent me this email that was really long, and it was about how he'd never done this before, and... (*sigh*) Um, he really liked me, he wanted to keep in touch with me... So, we drove home... and then after that, it was kind of – we just started exchanging emails. He Skyped me, which was incredible. And he showed me around his house a little bit.

And it was at night, and... um... it didn't feel like cheating, at all. 'Cause it was like a different world, almost? It felt so unreal. The *whole time*. It was like, ten months, while we were communicating on email and Skype and... and one time I had a really bad rape crisis call and... I told him, and he called me, and we had sort of a nice talk, and he was really sweet, and...

And he was always really sweet, and there was always something kinda sexual about the messages? Like, usually, like talking about the kiss, or how good a kisser I was, and how... um... next time he saw me... um, we could do that more. And... and I was like, yes, that'd be *great*, it was awesome, I had such a good time, can't wait to do that again, dah dah dah. Didn't mean any of it. Said it anyway, I don't know. ...'Cause I knew if I stopped then that he would stop? Talking to me? Like I knew that, really.

Um... So that. And... I sent him a picture at one point, and it wasn't a very– it was like, he wanted a topless picture, but I gave him, like, a picture of my stomach 'cause I didn't feel comfortable.

Um, uh, we tried to get me a job. He's – his friend – do you know Tori Amos, the singer? He and Tori are really close, and Tori apparently... does work rape crisis something or other, and has a foundation, and... when he found out what I did, he was like... maybe I can talk to her, she could get you, you know, get you in that way... but it wasn't what I did, so.

Um... he sent me a manuscript for her book that was coming out, before he... before it was released, like months before. That was amazing. Um, he sent me a short story that hadn't been published. Um, he sent me pictures of himself, and... um... one time we Skyped and he was, like, naked. And... it wasn't sexual, but he was like, just, changing, or something. (*sigh*, *then another sigh*)

And, um... at one point Neil– I didn't tell Neil I had a boyfriend, until... like a month in or so. And then he said he was really relieved, and to tell my boyfriend that he wasn't a threat. Which sounded weird, but it's like... it doesn't sound weird anymore, it's – makes sense. That language.

But... um, what else. So, he... was *really* sweet, and a *really* great writer, duh! The emails were really sweet. And there were like, dozens of emails. I still have all of them and I printed 'em all out, and... um... But I still— I didn't tell people about it. And that was — I, like, I was — it didn't feel like I had "nerd cred", 'cause I wasn't telling anybody. And it felt weird. And I didn't *wanna* tell people, 'cause it sounded just kind of weird, and he was like 50— what? I don't know, like 52? He's my dad's age. Um... so at the time, and it felt kind of wrong? But it didn't matter. Because it was Neil Gaiman, and I loved him. And my 11-year-old self loved him, but not Like That? And... (sigh)

Um... So I went to a tour, another tour... when he was touring for his book, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*. And...

THERAPIST (00:30:00): You shared that part with me, right?

CLAIRE (00:30:05): He was a — he invited me, yeah, and he gave me a VIP, a VIP pass, and... um... anyway, I went, and it was like I got special treatment, and I got to be in the room, the green room afterwards, and that was really cool...

Um... And then... I guess it was a couple months later, we um, had phone sex? But it was just... I told him I couldn't sleep, one night. He told me to call him — eugh, he said something else but it was too gross. I can't say it, it was so gross. Um... he told me to call him, so I called him, and then we had phone sex, and he said some *really* gross stuff, during it, but I didn't say anything.

THERAPIST (00:31:02): So *he* had phone sex.

CLAIRE (00:31:03): (sharp sigh)

THERAPIST (00:31:03): You — you didn't talk in the conversation.

CLAIRE (00:31:08): Hm-mm [*negative*]. But um... he was — said he would do it till it almost hurt, 'cause he's really big... (*hissing sigh*) Hm. Whatever. Um... And that was a few days before I went to Nashville. And Nashville was... the next stop on his tour, I guess. I think. Another stop on his tour.

Oh, and he'd invited me to his library, like to his house, and his library is, like, a famous library, and it's like in magazines, and... I used to, like, watch videos of it, because it's *beautiful*, and I would, like, dream about visiting one day! And I was, like, 15. And, he was like, I could go there and read all day.

Anyway. Um... and then, I didn't wanna go to Nashville anymore. 'Cause the phone sex had felt really weird. And I was worried... that if I went, that I would be pressured into doing something I didn't wanna do. (sigh) Um... and I think I told — I told him that. I said I didn't wanna have sex. But — and he said that... he told me that we wouldn't, and that there was no pressure. And he... regretted that we'd made things sexual, or something. And that — not to worry, and... I was under, like, it was like, he said, "no obligation to do anything" or something. And it's in emails and — stuff.

(*sigh*) So I went, and I didn't wanna go, and my friend at the last minute, she backed out. (*sigh*) And there were just, but there were these two other girls who needed a ride, so I felt like... I couldn't not go, 'cause I was gonna drive them. But... I drove them, and... I was freaked out, and then... there was the reading, and then the signing, but in the middle of the reading – no, before the reading, in between like, the opening act and the reading, um... he... asked me to come backstage, so I came backstage, and then... he started making out with me, and then he groped my butt, and it was gross, and I didn't wanna do it, but I did it anyway. And then, um, it was the reading.

And I don't– it was after the reading was over, and he wanted us to go to his tour bus, me and the other two girls. And he was doing the signing.

THERAPIST (00:33:37): Mm-hmm?

So me and the girls... we went around to the back. And I was crying. And I told them I was starting to get kinda scared, and... (*long pause*)

...Um... so... agh! (*voice breaks*) We, um – I told them... that I– we made up a hand signal.

THERAPIST (00:34:00): (*Sympathetic words, low and inaudible*)

CLAIRE (00:34:06): (*sniffles, sobs*) Sorry... I like – (*sobs*) Um... It's, I just want to make it fast so it's over. Um... I don't know how this makes me saddest – (*sniffle*) We made up a hand signal. If I did this, then we would get out, somehow. Like, make some excuse, or... And they would help me get out. And, um... I agreed!

And so we went to the bus. And there was whiskey, and we were drinking whiskey... And this is in Nashville. And we'd already been drinking a little bit. (*laugh*) So we went to the bus, and, we're just hangin' out, and then he came to the bus, and then he sat with us, and... he asked me to sit on his lap, so I sat on his lap. And then... he took me to the back of the bus and I did jazz hands, but they didn't do anything. 'Cause I think they were too drunk, or something. (*sobs*) I dunno, or they forgot. And –

(*sniffle*) And, um... so there's a bed in the back of the bus, and then – we um – we started kissing, and then we were on the bed, and he was on top of – m-me, and... um... but like, I was on top of him at times, I guess? And – um, he kept trying to feel under my dress and I kept moving his hands. And, um... hand was like straight up here, and, then... um...and I think at, uh, there was a point where I'd kind of... he said, he kept saying, "Kiss me like you mean it," um, "Kiss me like you'll never see me again," um... and then, uh... (*sigh*) At some point, I think he realized I wasn't gonna let him have sex with me, without him... being... *more* aggressive, I guess? So, he kinda flopped off, and... –s.

And I was trying to pretend like I was into it. (*sniffle*) Because I knew if I didn't then I would – never... see him again. And... that was – that idea was just so sad to me, even though, like, it was so gross and I didn't wanna be with him, I just still wanted to be, I don't know, I don't – I guess it doesn't sound like it makes sense. (*sniffle*)

He, um. So, this is so fucked up. And this is something that I am *not* making up. None of it I'm making up, but that – this sounds so made up. But he said to me, he said, "I'm a very wealthy man. And I'm used to getting what I want." It was like out of some kind of "Sex Predator for Dummies" kind of book. You know? A very wealthy man, I'm used to getting what I want. And I don't know what I said.

And then he said, "I'm really sad because I think I'm going to have to let you go." And that... was weird... And then I don't really remember how... I left, how we left, but I remember being in the park for the hotel. So kind of – not a blank spot, but I just... we just left, I guess. And then I was in the hotel and the two girls were asleep, and I was just *crying*, and...

THERAPIST (00:37:43): Mm.

CLAIRE (00:37:43): And they couldn't hear, and they didn't hear me, and... so I messaged [REDACTED] and I told him I thought I might have been sexually assaulted. And, um...

And I came home. And... Neil texted me at some point, asking if I made it home okay. (*sob*) And then... I just didn't... talk to Neil, for a while. And, and he sent me emails... like... on my birthday... (*sniffle*) saying happy birthday... and then... (*sniffle*) ahh... we moved, to a different house. ...And Neil... texted me, when we were at the different house, and I don't know the time frame, I don't remember. It's in emails and stuff, text messages.

(00:38:40) Aaand... he said... that he was going through his phone contacts and deleting people who he hadn't talked to in a while, and he wanted to see if we were still friends. And... it's all in my phone. (*scoff*) I don't remember, and it's just like, I was like, "yeah, we're friends." I thought you were, and he was like, I thought – No, I think I was like, "I thought you were mad at me, or something." And then he's – talking about how he felt like I – had only been with him 'cause I wanted to have sex with him... and... that he felt used... um... and he still wanted to be friends... (*sigh*) And then after all of that, I was so relieved. I was like, oh my god he's not mad at me!

(00:39:39) ...And then I wrote about it and I talked to my therapist about it and then... and then nothing. He emailed me maybe one more or two more times.

(*Bell dings again*)

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:39:53): So... one of the things that I noticed, in addition to feeling... an incredible amount of compassion and sadness and, uh, nausea, to be honest... is that you said a few times in a few different ways, "I didn't want to do it, but I did it anyway, because it was Neil Gaiman."

(00:40:04) ...It just really stands out to me, looking at the power that famous people have, that I don't know that they recognize. Or, if they do, they're not honest about it. Do you have thoughts on that?

CLAIRE (00:40:24): So, he had the ultimate leverage over me, as a fan, which was that spotlight of his attention, and – he... knew that. And I *know* he knew that, because of what he said when he was on top of me, in that tour bus. He said, "Kiss me like you mean it. Kiss me like you'll never see me again," because he knew that was a threat to me, and he knew I didn't mean it. And he thought that the threat of not seeing him again... would motivate me to pretend just enough for him to be able to justify his behavior to himself. To say it was consensual.

(00:41:06) But can you imagine saying that to *your* partner? Kiss me like you mean it? (*laugh*) When someone says that to someone else, during a sexual encounter, like what does that say, about what's going on there? Yuck. Yeah. He – he knew... I'm not sure how much you know about his fandom, but...

(00:41:23) So a few days ago I read his last text that he sent me, back in 2014, and... I was just – I was shocked, at how many – just, tactics that he managed to incorporate in only a few paragraphs. Uh... DARVO, gaslighting... uh, abuse of power...

(00:41:41) So in those texts, he said that my indecision had caused everyone stress that night, and he said he felt like I'd been using him for sex...? And he had been trying so hard to make time and space for me, "when all I'd wanted to do at that point in the tour was sleep." And I remember reading that one to my therapist and she literally said, "Hah! Sure." (*laugh*) "Suure."

(00:42:01) And – and then he called Nashville an "apotheosis of miscommunication". Yeah. So it has a double meaning. So he was using it to mean... the pinnacle, the highest point, of miscommunication. But there's another meaning, which is the deification of an individual. So the elevation of that person to a godlike status. So... in that sense, yes. This happened as the result of an apotheosis, but not... not a miscommunication.

(00:42:30) Because... the fandom, his fandom, has elevated him to a godlike status. But not like other celebrities, like, he's chronically online, and he's known to be very engaged with his fans, very accessible, and... and that's one of the things that make people feel so personally connected to him, and why... this news has been really devastating, for so many people, and... I feel sad for those fans. Well – the ones that believe victims, because... I know exactly what they're going through, right now, because they thought they knew him, and / thought I knew him.

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:43:08): I mean... I'm really disappointed. When you first reached out to me, I was like, "Oh God, not Neil too!"

CLAIRE (00:43:20): Yeah. I mean, we respected him, I respected him! I respected his activism, and his... commitment to representation in media, and he's known as this advocate for marginalized people, and... kind of a poster child of like, male integrity and feminism, and – and I looked up to him, for those things. So many people looked up to him for those things.

(00:43:41) And – and it took me years. To reconcile that, the Neil Gaiman I thought I knew, the one who donates to RAINN and says he believes women and... with that other person who had taken advantage of me, and... gaslit me into thinking it was my fault.

(00:43:55) And... it's a – it's a heartbreaking process. It's a very difficult process. And I think there's... a lot of integrity, in the way that many of his fans are doing that work right now. Believing victims, even when – the perpetrator is someone who they used to worship. It's hard. It's such hard work!

(00:44:11) And – and I also understand the people who are keeping their heads buried in the sand, because I did that too, at first! Because I could not handle that, I could not handle the reality of the situation. It was so much easier... to blame the victim, to blame... myself, than to... acknowledge that the person whose work had given me so much joy was... a predator.

(00:44:34) I felt... guilt. Like I should have come forward sooner. And I should've... blah blah blah. And you know, I should've – done something, that could've helped Scarlett, like if she – had googled it and I'd been there – she would have – wouldn't have felt so alone, and – but – That's his voice. That's his voice, telling me that it's – it's me, who has the control. Like it's *me* who has the power.

(00:44:53) And that's a strategy, right? Like, you make your victim feel like *they're* in control, like they're – *they* have the power. And that way, later, you can say "Well, it was, I mean, you know, *you* threw yourself at me! Like, I didn't, I was, I was just going along for the ride."

(00:45:05) He's a storyteller. It's what he does, and... the story he was telling me, in that phone call... and I know we talked about this earlier but it was – it was so convincing, Papi. Like I... It sounded like he was crying at one point, I was very – I didn't feel sorry for him, at any point in that call.

(00:45:21) And – so something that really... imprisoned me was, like in the beginning, and you can hear it in the recording about – like I was so fixated on language. Like, this wasn't rape. This wasn't sexual assault. And back then I did – I had very limited language for what had happened to me. I was *young*, and the language used at the time in popular culture was very black and white, right? Like "rape", "sexual assault", and... I'd been sooo fixated on that language that when I didn't see my... experience fitting – neatly into those categories, I felt – really lost. And... I didn't allow myself to heal, because – I'd convinced myself – mm [*negative*], *he'd* convinced me – that I hadn't actually been hurt to begin with. And... that was his voice in there.

(00:46:15) But – over time, and even with your messages, like my word bank for this got bigger. So, sexual coercion, and grooming, and... abuse of power, and... like, even – I learned a word even in that conversation with you, *DARVO*. Um... can you define that one really quick for folks?

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:46:25): Sure, yeah. Thanks for the invitation. And, you know, everybody has a first time with it. So, DARVO – D-A-R-V-O – is an acronym that stands for **D**eny, **A**ttack, **R**everse **V**ictim and **O**ffender. And it's a really, really common tactic for perpetrators to use. And for narcissists to use, to make *themselves* seem like the victim.

CLAIRE (00:47:01): Yeah. He said he felt like *I* had been using *him*. He said that *my* indecision had caused *everyone* stress.

(00:47:05) ...Yeah. So, the more words I learned around this, the more... grounded I felt? And... those words felt a lot more... congruent, to my experience. And that was one of the – kind of the gateways for me, into self-compassion, was... being able to – kind of allow myself more language than just "rape" and "sexual assault".

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:47:28): So, in addition to finding language that felt suitable and appropriate for your experiences, what else has been helpful in your healing journey?

CLAIRE (00:47:35): I think what was most useful ... was when I stopped trying to talk myself out of my trauma? And started just really listening to my body. Because he had turned my mind into this – unreliable narrator. But my body had been in reality the whole time. So I could invalidate, and lie to myself, all I wanted during the day, like "it's not that big a deal, it's not like he *raped* you..." But at night, my dreams... were showing me truths that I was not able to handle during the day.

(00:48:16) So I was – right back in the bedroom of that tour bus... underneath him, his weight, his body, his expectations – like over and over, I just hear that: "Kiss me like you mean it." "Kiss me like you'll never see me again." And those were trauma dreams. Of someone who'd been violated. Like they were raw, and real, and I was completely powerless in those dreams. And I'd wake up – crying, or yelling, or struggling to breathe, and... So, that information from my body. But even with that, I probably could've just ignored it, and invalidated, and victim-blamed myself forever. But... then I started telling friends.

(00:48:50) And... once I started doing that, it was like, all of a sudden there was this... shift. It went from being trapped in this "Neil's Funhouse of Smoke & Mirrors" to being surrounded by people who were reflecting back at me reality. And – validating how my body had responded, and naming the trauma responses in my actions, and – and that was kinda the first time I... was able to stop just being so caught up in shame and self-blame, and just let myself feel... hurt. And... it's, it's not that they influenced how I saw things, necessarily, they were just amplifying the parts of me that I'd shut down. Does that make sense?

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:49:35): Absolutely. Yeah, I'm really glad you had that network of validation and reflection. It's like another version of you, uh, listening to your own story in therapy. It's like you hearing and seeing your story that your friends are mirroring back to you in support.

CLAIRE (00:49:45): Mm-hmm [*affirmative*].

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:49:46): So... was there specific somatic work, or other kinds of therapy that you did, to work with the dream material, or work with the trauma?

CLAIRE (00:49:54): So in therapy, I did a lot of writing. And... in hindsight, it's interesting I did writing, 'cause that's his – you know, he's the writer, right? But that was... helpful for me. Just

trying to put language to what had happened, and... I wrote letters, to my – family, telling them what had happened. I never sent them, but... I wrote *him* letters – that I never sent.

(00:50:25) And... I wrote blog post after blog post, and – like, how would I come forward, how would I say this? And – I wrote a Reddit post, and – and I didn't post any of it. Like, last night I was looking at this Reddit post that I made and it just – eugh. It kinda broke my heart, a little bit.

(00:50:46) And it was – what it said was, like, "I don't know how to do this." Like, "I don't know how to come forward, because I need other people to come forward too, because I can't be the only one, because he didn't rape me! So how on earth do I find these people who he's hurt?! Where's, where is the spreadsheet? Like, where is the – the – the anonymous Reddit, like, subreddit? Or...? It just made me sad, reading that. 'Cause I was so desperate. I wanted to tell my story, so badly. And I just didn't... really know how.

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:51:09): What's been helpful for you is you really... ground into your courage, to come forward now. Uh... I imagine, and we've spoken a little bit, about just how much anxiety and panic and stress you've been experiencing, leading up to sharing your story here. What's been helpful?

CLAIRE (00:51:34): Finding the certainty in my body. And... I have – a friend who said that – like, even if it's not something... around this, that you feel certainty? Just some time period of your life. Some period in your life where you felt so certain about something, that this was the right thing to do, where you just, like, felt, your, your *power*. Like, find that in your body and just – just tap into it. And I feel that certainty close to – kind of in my upper chest.

(00:52:20) ...And I notice myself really – that certainty gets bigger when I start talking... about how – mm – when I start advocating, for myself and for other people. I find that certainty! That certainty is really powerful when I'm using my voice in advocating for others, but I'm also finding it to be powerful advocating for myself.

(00:52:41) ...So my friends, they... seeing their sadness, and their hurt, and their disgust when I shared my story, it gave me permission to feel those things too. Because I have just -- it's like they're opening up these doors that I'd closed, and I had locked, in an effort to keep myself safe. And that's one of the ways our minds respond to trauma, right? Like, locking up parts of us to keep us safe. To keep us from being totally... flooded.

(00:53:03) And... so for me, it had been keeping myself safe from the knowledge that someone who I thought had been my friend, and who I had trusted, implicitly, had... violated that trust. And... on top of that, kind of protecting me from... the grief that – came along with the – the loss of – the –

(00:53:24) Now this just makes me so sad! Like – there was so much magic and beauty that his books gave me, and they were such a refuge for me as a kid. And I was a pretty, was a pretty shy kid. I was pretty introverted. And – I took a lot of refuge in his books, and... I had memories of like, making gingerbread cookies of the Corinthian, which is a character in *The Sandman*, every year. For years! And... I had these *Absolute Sandman* editions that were – they were like

my treasures. And I had... (*sigh*) I cosplayed as Death at every DragonCon I went, I was just – it was so – it was – I have so many special memories... And those memories, they weren't *erased*, but they were *tainted*. Like I –

(00:54:14) And I used to believe that I was here because of him? And now it was like I was here – in spite of him. And that was such a painful reality.

(00:54:24) ...But, with the support of my friends, um, I was able to – to come back, to reality. But it's still sad.

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:54:28): So, how have things played out since connecting with him, years ago? And his apology? And now these new stories coming out?

CLAIRE (00:54:49): Yeah, so we have not spoken since... it would've been 2019. I'm sorry, 2022. And the irony of that date is... I think that phone call... was only a few months after... Scarlett... started doing those Google searches, about sexual assault. So it was the same year that he had Scarlett sign an NDA. Saying that she wouldn't talk, to anyone, about – what had happened – to her.

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:55:05): And... does that overlap with him telling you, "I've never done anything like this before"?

CLAIRE (00:55:12): So the fan who came forward was – those events were back in 2002, I believe. So... him saying I – "I've never done this before with a fan"... was several years after, many years after, he *had* done this before with a fan. And I actually, I believe Scarlett was a fan as well.

(00:55:28) ...Yuck.

(00:55:30) ...And it's just so sad. Like he truly is a god, to people. Truly. And... the power. He *knows*. He knows how much power he is! He's called, like uh, what is it, the "Prince of Stories", and the – "Nerd God", and like –

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:55:42): Yeah, he's like a tarot card, or an archetype.

CLAIRE (00:55:47): Yeah.

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:55:50): The Prince of Stories.

CLAIRE (00:55:51): So, there was one time, we were talking on Skype, and he said, "I don't know what I see in you. I am an award-winning, best-selling author and you are..." And he never finished that sentence, but... he didn't need to, right? Like I knew exactly who I was. I was a 22-year-old, unemployed, recent college graduate. I wasn't special. I was just another in a long line of... obsessed... opportunistic fans, craving his attention, and... willing to – do... *almost* anything to keep myself in his – orbit. I worshipped him! And the people I was closest to, at that time, we worshipped him.

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:56:43): So intense!

CLAIRE (00:56:46): I know. And I'm not saying that, like, consent was impossible, in the context of that god-worshipper power dynamic, but consent is *not* what happened between me and Neil. I was not... operating from my values, I was operating from – that hero worship, right? This fawn response.

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:56:58): Yeahhh... And almost like legally a teenager cannot consent, in many of our US states, because they are that young. They're still developing. It's almost... like a parallel, in a sense, that maybe... famous people, and people in positions of power, need to understand, is that fans are also incapable of true consent, because what they see is a projection. What the fans see is – is worship, as you put it, that they have. And maybe just due to the nature of that relationship, are incapable of just being in relationship with a real person, instead of Neil Gaiman, the Prince of Stories.

CLAIRE (00:57:50): Yeah. The way I think about that dynamic, now, is... I was like, uh... a deer in his headlights. So I shouldn't've been in the road, but... in the end, he was the only one who could stop the car, before anybody got hurt. He was the only one, who could stop it. Like he had the power. And... That ultimate leverage, his attention. Yeah. The, the responsibility was his. Like, as the person with a majority of the power, it was his responsibility to... open conversations about power dynamics with me, right? Like, cultivate – the space where I could say no and not worry about – his attention consequences.

(00:58:29) (*Small commotion in background*) ...OK my dog's tearing apart – (*finger snap*) (*directed away from mic*) Okay, lie down...

(00:58:44) (*back on mic*) ...And he did name the power dynamics, when he said, "I'm an award-winning, best-selling author," right? "I'm a very wealthy man, I get what I want." And that wasn't in an effort to build me up, though – like create that space where I could talk about my concerns. It was a way to keep me down, and remind me of my place.

(00:59:01) And... yeah. When I did set boundaries, he... didn't listen, he didn't check in. And not because of his autism, not because he... didn't *understand* how much power he had, but because... (*long pause*) I – I actually don't know! I don't know why he did that. I don't know why. Like, some messed-up cocktail of a value system where he felt – no he, he like truly believed – that he was owed – my body, and entitled to my consent. And that's so baked in, to that power structure, right? That sense of entitlement.

PAPILLON DEBOER (00:59:34): The responsibility was his, as you put it. And... I really hope that he, and others as a result of this, are getting education on how to have much more appropriate relationships.

CLAIRE (00:59:52): Mmhmm [*affirmative*]. Yeah, I mean most people in that position, where – those positions of power in their relationships, like maybe they're older, or celebrities, or... they have more money, or – Like, they don't – thankfully, don't want to hurt or abuse their partners, and -- and I hope they take away that, like, it's not an inevitability, but there *is* a much higher

risk. Right? Of, accidental boundary violations, and coercion, and abuse of power, and... I'm curious what you think about this, because I've – I've been thinking about this a lot, about, like – well, what do you do, right? (*laugh*) Like, what do you do when that power dynamic is present and, and you love each other? And you wanna have that, that space, where consent is possible?

(01:00:25) And I think ... it's not, like, to burn all your money, or quit your job, or give up your celebrity status, but to start those conversations. Those ongoing – conversations about consent. And to – name the power dynamics that might make that consent difficult, for your partner. And... just create a space where your partner is entirely comfortable with saying no, without fear of consequences.

PAPILLON DEBOER (01:00:56): And you move slowly. You don't immediately start dancing with a fan, and kissing them, and telling stories about your marriage, and reenacting it... Mm-mm [*negative*].

CLAIRE (01:01:08): Yeah! Yeah. That was so abrupt. Like, I was – and I think I said earlier, about how I never would have done that with somebody I'd – I'd only spent maybe ten minutes? in person with. But it was *him*. Like, he was allowed, to do that. He was – my boundaries just evaporated, around him.

PAPILLON DEBOER (01:01:31): So... are there ways that these traumatic experiences continue to impact you, and your life?

CLAIRE (01:01:42): Yes. And, ironically... I didn't think they had. Until – those two women came forward, I felt like I was in such a solid place. And... I was an entirely different person, and... and I think that's, that's fair, for me to think that. Because, like, in the aftermath of everything, the impact is really straightforward. Because I was having panic attacks whenever I heard a British accent. Or when I saw one of his books at a bookstore. And... I was depressed and having nightmares, and... I... stopped being friends with the people who – worshipped him, and... it... wasn't until I stopped being friends with those people that I really realized just how central to my identity being his fan had been? Like his books were always such a – source of comfort, to me. And when I was... going through one of the hardest periods of my life I didn't even have those books. I'd packed them away.

And, and *reading*. Like, reading was the challenge. It felt like every book that I enjoyed had an introduction, or a blurb from him on the cover, and... that was very triggering, for me. And... this isn't funny, but... It – it all became like a dark joke (*laugh*) between me and my partner, the – like everything I'd enjoyed before had his mark on it in some way. Everything.

(01:02:47) I got off Tumblr, I stopped going to conventions, and... I stopped going into bookstores... And – oh I wanted to share this, because – this almost changed the – my career path! Like I almost stopped volunteering, at the rape crisis center that I'd been volunteering at for years. I – so I went to the volunteer coordinator and I said look, I can't do this work

anymore. I'm a hypocrite, I let my boundaries be violated, and – how can I advocate for clients when I did not successfully advocate for myself?

And... the volunteer coordinator, I remember him just... gesturing around the offices, and saying, "Look. If all of us quit when our boundaries have been violated, these offices would be empty."

So I didn't quit.

Eugh, I got chills. *(laugh)* Like, that was such a powerful moment. Another one of those impacts is showing up right now, actually, I think. In the back of my head there's this voice, that's saying, like, "*Who are you* to be talking about *Neil Gaiman* like *this?! He's an award-winning, best-selling author, and you're a nobody!* He's a very wealthy man, he's gonna get what he wants! That is there, that is, that is talking right now... *(laugh)*

But no! I am not nobody! I am enough, and what happened to me is enough, and I'm allowed to advocate for myself against anyone who harms me. No matter how wealthy, or powerful, and – woof, and that's what I'm doing right now, right? I'm not gonna keep this a secret, I'm not gonna be ashamed, and... My experience might not have been a story to those journalists back then, but it happened and it hurt.

PAPILLON DEBOER (01:04:29): And you matter.

CLAIRE (01:04:30): I matter! And even more than that, okay, this is – this is kind of a lot, but I think – So I kind of wanna speak to that voice, because like, who are *you* to be talking about *me* like this, right? I am a survivor who has courage, and integrity, and... compassion, and – who are *you*? Right? *(laugh)* Who are *you*? You're a predator! *(sigh)* And it makes, it makes me sad, that his voice is still there, honestly. Like telling those stories about me. But this'll be familiar to you, like: with *perspective*, and *time*, and *processing*, I can see those stories... and I *name* them, and I *reconnect* with my *values* in the *present moment*.

PAPILLON DEBOER (01:05:20): And your voice.

CLAIRE (01:05:23): And my voice.

PAPILLON DEBOER (01:05:25): Yeah... In addition to your bravery and courage, and the healing you've done, what are you hoping that listeners will take away from your story today?

CLAIRE (01:05:38): So... something I've learned, through this, that I hope people can take away, particularly people who are healing from sexualized violations, is: our bodily sensations and our emotions, they are *morally neutral*. They're not good or bad, they are just *information*. They're not the absolute truth and they're not lies, and they're not – trying to hurt you. They're trying to help.

So... if your nervous system's capable of doing it, like you're not in a fight-flight-freeze-fawn trauma response where your body's shut down your capacity to – feel certain emotions and

sensations in order to protect you, the way it did for me, um... listen to all of it. Not just what the people around you are saying about your experience. And not even what your thoughts, and your judgments are saying. But listen to your body and your emotions and what they're telling you...

Your – sadness and your hope and your... unease, and... even that guilt, and that self-blame, it's all valuable information. And it's all gonna lead you back to... reality. And... making... wise, informed decisions. And that's why I'm... that's what led me here today. This is a wise decision. And... it's an integrated decision; all of the parts of me are here today.

PAPILLON DEBOER (01:06:54): So... Claire, given the name of the podcast... are you broken?

CLAIRE (01:07:03): I'm not broken. I'm... I'm sad. I'm sad for that – kid who lost her – hero, but... I am making meaning out of what happened to her. I... I – *(voice breaks)* Yeah, breathe, okay. *(Slow, measured exhale) (Long pause)*

...I feel like it's so important – I think a lot of my focus has been on, like, how I blamed myself, and it was my fault, and dah-dah-dah. And I don't think at any point I – I say like, no one who experiences abuse, or predation, or violation deserves that. Like nobody. *(sigh)* I really want to make that clear! Like this is not—Like what I was feeling, like he influenced that. That was a story *he* told me and it was *wrong*.

(Brief, somber musical cue)

PAPILLON DEBOER (01:07:42): ...Let's talk about power. Every perpetrator of sexualized violations has some form of intersectional power over the survivors. There are those who say that sexual abuse isn't about sex, it's about power. Personally, this doesn't ring true for me. I believe it's about sex *and* power. Otherwise we'd be looking at other forms of abuse, like physical, emotional, et cetera.

In Claire's story, there are clear indicators of power: money, fame, social capital, age, maturity, gender, eloquence, and *mythopoesis* (the creation of myths and stories). And a greater responsibility for shaping the boundaries of any relationship, especially an intimate one, is that of the person who holds and wields more power.

You can see as we explore with Claire that her healing was based on developing and asserting her own story about what had happened. Through telling her story in therapy, and to her friends, and to journaling, she worked to find her own certainty and the power within herself. This is a key exercise for trauma survivors, to reaccess their own power, their own center.

I'd like to outline a brief exercise that you can take with you and practice on your own, similar to what Claire describes. I use it with my own clients, and I call it "Safety Bubble". Basically, it involves being able to sit and get quiet, and bring a person, pet, or place to mind that gives you a feeling of safety and connection (not somebody who has died and will fill us with grief). Take your time when you practice; I'll just be sharing the bullet points here.

- Use all your senses: See the person, smell the pet, hear the sounds of the place, and so on. Take your time. Usually what happens is we will start to feel a tingle or some other sensation in our bodies in response to that person, place or pet, often in our chest, back of neck, or shoulders.
- Taking your time, slowly breathe into that sensation – not forcing it, but allowing it to grow until it fills your whole body. You may see it in your mind's eye as a color, or colors. There's no rush. Eventually, if you practice, it can fill you with a sense of safety and connection.
- Once that's established, allow the sensations to expand beyond your skin – out into a bubble, or egg shape, or polyhedron if you're a nerd like me, around you. Just a few inches or a few feet beyond your skin is good, not the whole room. Notice how good it feels to float in this bath of safety? Inside the protective skin of the bubble. We can feel safe and connected and open-hearted while still protected from others' negative words or attempts to invade our space. We can be open and still have boundaries.

So that's a brief overview of Safety Bubble. Claire describes using a similar exercise to find her certainty and her power. She also shared something that I haven't heard before, and I want to explore it a little bit. She said something like, "Feelings aren't moral; they're neutral."

I *love* this. Our bodies don't lie. We may not know how, or be able to interpret the sensations, but they *are* there, down in our sensory network. Our bodies give us information and we ignore it, or puzzle at it, or interpret it.

Early childhood abuse survivors often only have fragments of memory, or random bodily sensations and reactions, and usually worry that they're somehow "making it up", or falsifying something. If we can just give space for the sensations, without them being moral, or right or wrong, that's what they need. And often, if we're able to practice patience, willingness, and acceptance, the story they hold will emerge, as did Claire's.

(01:12:57) Claire struggled with some elements common to survivors. "It wasn't rape," she says. "It was gross, and I didn't like it, and I did it anyway." Which implies that somehow it was her responsibility, or her fault. This is called *rape culture*. I'd suggest exploring this topic more on your own. Rape culture asks, "What was she wearing?" and "How much was she drinking?" Rape culture says, "It's only locker room talk." Rape culture puts the burden of responsibility on the survivor – the person with far less power and agency in the interaction.

Sexualized violations are rarely black and white, rarely the nightmare of forcible rape in a back alley. They are far more often coercion and manipulation by someone who has more intersectional power than the other. She reports that he said, "I'm a wealthy man, and I get what I want," and "I may have to let you go." The root of Claire's experiences were overwhelm, fear, and disgust.

I want to read some of my reflections to Claire from our messages when she first reached out to me about the possibility of sharing her story, in 2022.

She sent me the clip of her therapy session, and I wrote back the following:

These behaviors were all predatory, and I'd have a really hard time believing that you were the only victim, especially given his, quote, "I'm rich and used to getting what I want and have to let you go now", end quote, comments.

He tested your boundaries first with the, quote, "wedding kiss". He was testing your entrancement susceptibility by spinning a tale about his wedding. He entrances people with magical stories, and he used that several times throughout.

During the phone sex, he didn't need you to talk. You were an object to him. Sorry to be so blunt.

He kept testing and pushing boundaries further and further to see what you would, quote, "consent" to.

It's also worth mentioning again on this podcast that the most commonly used drug in drug-facilitated sexual assaults is alcohol. Not roofies, or other pills you've heard of in news stories. It's alcohol. And it's worth considering that if someone has been drinking, they can't fully consent. You may have noticed that alcohol also played a heavy role in some of Claire's experiences. If you haven't seen it, I highly recommend watching the movie *Promising Young Woman*. It's intense, and worth understanding this issue more clearly.

And, just because I mentioned it earlier in the episode, here is what I also wrote during my text conversations with Claire in 2022, when she had decided not to share her story just yet:

I'm glad to hear that you got some closure. Last night in my dream I was communicating with him, and he admitted that there were two other young girls he had preyed upon, and I was challenging him to take some self-education and restorative justice steps.

Speaking of self-education and restorative justice steps, if you're listening to this podcast and you've hurt someone, I did an interview with a friend and colleague, Taylor Johnson, on his YouTube channel, Integrative Sexual Health for Men. It's called "If You've Hurt A Woman, This Is How To Repair", though it has useful information for any gender who has hurt any gender.

Sexualized violation is not unique to male perpetrators and female survivors. As you'll learn if you listen to more episodes of this podcast, about 1 in 6 men, 1 in 3 women, and 1 in 2 transgender folks report experiencing sexual violence. And, female perpetration is far more common than you would imagine.

Sexualized violation is a monumental and systemic problem in our culture, and *Am I Broken?* is just one little attempt to help normalize, validate, and educate, and hopefully be one voice in the chorus of singing a new way of being.

Thank you again to Claire, for your strength and humor and trust. And to your protector dogs (*laugh*), snoring away underneath you, and occasionally chewing things to bits.

And thanks to you, listeners, for holding witness to this story. Even if your perpetrator wasn't someone famous, your story matters. Even if you have no experiences of sexualized violation, your presence in this conversation matters. And I hope you've learned a little bit more on how to support survivors and change the conversation.

I don't get paid for this podcast, and I don't allow ads. It would be *super* weird to interrupt a story of abuse and healing with a song about your car's warranty. So, if you learned something, or feel moved by what you heard today, please consider throwing a few bucks my way at patreon.com/papillondeboer. The link is in the episode description.

The last episode outed a major player in the psychedelic healing industry, and I'm happy to report that he has been asked to step down from all advisory boards and positions of power, as far as I'm aware.

This episode today is my first one concerning someone who is world famous. Your support is welcome, and poisonous emails are not. Thanks for doing this work with me today. Take care of yourselves.

(Extended somber musical outro)

Thank you for listening. It is not only through the telling of the story, but through listening and believing, that we can work together to prevent more sexual violence in our communities. This podcast was made possible by the Agency of Change. In the immortal words of Octavia Butler, "All that you touch, you change. All that you change, changes you. The only lasting truth is change."

Papillon DeBoer is a licensed clinical mental health counselor at agencyofchange.net. *Am I Broken? Survivor Stories* was recorded, engineered, produced, and scored by Papillon DeBoer. Please share this podcast with others, and help end the epidemic of sexual violence.