

WOVEN: I Was Not Special, Only Vulnerable

written by Guest Contributor | September 22, 2021



WOVEN is an Entropy series and dedicated safe space for essays by persons who engage with #MeToo, sexual assault and harassment, and #DomesticViolence, as well as their intersections with mental illness, substance addiction, and legal failures and remedies. We believe you. If selected for the series, we want to provide the editorial and human support such that our conversation continues long after the stories and names have changed. You can view submission guidelines for WOVEN [here](#).

Reread the [archives](#), always.

Garnet wasn't the first man to hurt me, but he was the first that really knew me. I showed him my internal self through my writing, a study guide to cracking me open, and he used my vulnerability to twist what I was into what he wanted me to be, twisting and twisting until my insides were ropes and he rebraided me into someone new, a caricature of my real self; someone just for him. He weaponized my mind against me so thoroughly that bombs still detonate inside of me today.

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I should have known I wasn't mature for my age. God knows my brothers told me as much. I was sixteen, a sophomore in high school living with my parents, when Garnet and I first met online. He was twenty-four, a university graduate with an English Lit degree and a rough neck on an offshore Canadian oil rig. He was an adult. I was still just a child.

"Do you like to write?" I private messaged him, initiating our first conversation. He enjoyed roleplaying, writing elaborate dialogue within the context of his dark elf character in the online multiplayer video game,

EverQuest. I had seen his writing in the group chat, and I was intrigued. I discovered we liked the same fantasy authors. He claimed he was friends with R.A. Salvatore, my favorite author at the time. He mailed me an autographed copy of one of Salvatore's books that first Christmas, and Salvatore even indulged me in a brief phone conversation. I don't remember what was said between Salvatore and me, but the seeming irrefutable proof that Garnet was as influential as he said he was aided in my seduction. I was star-struck by proxy, even if, looking back, I understand the relationship between Garnet and R.A. Salvatore was more along the lines of a famous author that took the time to answer emails from super fans *and* did in person book signings with the occasional phone call to absent fans upon request.

Garnet and I's friendship progressed quickly from those early messages to emails and then to phone calls. We talked about books and creative writing. He read my early stories and provided feedback on them, possessing the air of an educated man from the world of academia that I longed for. I confessed to him my dreams of becoming a writer, of someday teaching writing to college students, to adding a "Dr." to the start of my name, and he was so supportive of my dreams I overlooked his overindulgent misogyny. *Of course you can do those things, you are intelligent and talented,* he said, *but wouldn't it make you happier to be at home with children?* He was honest about how he viewed women. He didn't read female authors – he enjoyed my writing, but I was the exception, of course – and he bluntly told me he tried to date a feminist once but she was terrible. He could never date a feminist, and I nodded along with him. *I was most certainly not a feminist,* I said. Please pick me, I may as well have said.

I learned to trust him rapidly and implicitly, submitting to his authority, his knowing that came with life experience. Soon I was writing erotic stories for him, stories about dragons and slave girls that improperly utilized candlesticks for their owner's amusement. The stories grew more specific over time: the dragon becoming a man and the slave becoming me.

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Our relationship wasn't a secret. An ex-girlfriend in his hometown called me "little miss Florida," his dad, stepmother, and sister knew about me, and, worst of all, his real-life friends who played EverQuest with us knew too. And those friends, at least, for sure knew how old I was because I told them. Once, a few months after we met, I reached out to one of those real-life friends, his former undergrad classmate, and he helped me pick out a birthday present to surprise Garnet with: a nice wool scarf from one of Garnet's favorite clothiers. When Garnet realized that I was speaking to his friend alone, even though virtually, he went to his friend's apartment and threatened him, despite the fact we both told him the truth of our conversation, spoiling the surprise. His friend reached out to me one last time via EverQuest and told me what happened and that our friendship wasn't worth the risk of getting punched in the face. We didn't speak again.

Garnet was clear when he confronted me, however, that it wasn't his friend who had done wrong. It was me. Even though I may not have intended to invite his friend into my life, Garnet claimed I was a creature made for men's pleasure. I couldn't help but be a whore just by merit of my sex, and he wouldn't tolerate me making a fool of him.

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He monopolized my time between and after my high school classes to make sure I wasn't spending time with any boys. I sent him my schedule each semester and he called during my breaks, which meant I had to hide somewhere to talk to him, as cellphones weren't allowed to be used at school. One day in the middle of our first year together, I was hiding under the cement staircase to the second floor during lunch when I first shyly whispered that I loved him. I had been so scared to admit this to him, coyly telling him "I adored him" instead. He laughed softly on the phone after my confession, low with a hint of enigma, that dismissive tone the side of me that burned for fictional villains loved so much. "I know," he said, perhaps thinking of himself as a Han Solo. Then he said he loved me too, sort of reluctantly, like admitting he had feelings for a dog even though the idea displeased him. I felt special, glowing even, radiating the rest of the day – the rest of several years – with the knowledge this man who so disliked women in general loved me specifically.

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He taught me how to touch myself while he listened, his words telling me what to do and say to make sure I pleased him. He forbade me masturbating alone; I wasn't allowed to cum unless he was listening, and I never broke that rule. I learned that I couldn't be trusted with my own sexuality. I needed him to guide me.

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In my junior year, about a year and a half after we met, I had to sit through abstinence only sex-ed in health class, coincidentally about a month before Garnet came to meet me in person for the first time. Against my will, I was selected for a demonstration at the front of the class. I was the first in a line of six people who stood side by side holding cups of clean water. I had to chew a cracker then spit it into my cup, then pour half of it into the cup of the boy next to me. He then poured it into the cup of the person next to

him, and so on, until the dirty crumbs of my sex were in the last person's cup.

"Reformed whore" Garnet called the instructor when I told him I wasn't ready to have sex. When he came down to Florida, I lost my virginity in the shower of the apartment my brother generously let him stay at; the apartment that once belonged to my grandmother; the shower that I took baths in as a younger child. A week later, he went back home, and I told him I regretted it and felt guilty. I had wanted it to be special and I just felt dirty. Shamed. He got angry and hung up, saying I was acting like a child. I sent pleading emails apologizing and when he resumed speaking to me, I didn't mention it again.

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My friends didn't approve of the relationship. My family didn't either, not really, just my father who gave reluctant acceptance based on, as he said, the fact it was easier to worry about one man's penis thousands of miles away than it was to worry about all the penises at school. Even my own father worried about a girl's nature to be a whore – but that wasn't unique to him. Variations of this joke are said from the first day a daughter is born.

Ah, you must worry about pregnancy with a girl. You must worry about a girl being promiscuous. Her precious reputation. You need to sit on the porch with a shot gun and protect her virginity. Her sacred virginity. Put thorned plants under her window so she can't sneak out to meet boys. She can't be trusted. As if sexual pleasure and pregnancy is the worst thing that can happen to a girl.

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The second time Garnet visited me in Florida, he once again stayed in my brother's apartment for a week, and he sent me to get food for him from the mall. My brother asked me to get him something too, and they both gave me money separately. On impulse, I chose to buy all our food on Garnet's card rather than in three separate purchases. From the moment I told my brother not to worry about paying Garnet back, Garnet spoke to my brother but not to me, ignoring the pleading texts I sent him from across the couch and then after I went home the texts I sent from my room, until the next day when I came back to my brother's apartment after he went to work and Garnet and I were alone. He was mad about the money, yes, but also he told me my brother had a crush on me. My brother!

I should have broken up with him then. Instead, I let him force me to the floor and trap me under his body and he raped my dry, unaroused body while I

whimpered into the carpet. He was punishing me, he said. And I believed I deserved it. I believed I was less than human, worthy and valuable only for sex, and that no man could be trusted near me because of who I was as a woman. Only him, just him, as he made me cry again and again in pain. Only he could save me from myself.

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The first time he visited me in Florida, I didn't reach an orgasm, which is not uncommon for women new to sex, even ones in healthy, trusting relationships. Every time he stuck his fingers or his cock in me, it hurt, because foreplay was beneath him, it was *submissive*, he would say, yet he kept telling me that it was my fault I wasn't cumming. He had always made his past girlfriends cum, he said, so something was clearly wrong with me.

When he came down to Florida the second time, immediately after we walked through the door of my brother's apartment after arriving from the airport, he pushed me over the couch for sex without any warm up. I faked an orgasm. He was so pleased with himself, I faked it every single other time too until the day came that he never got to touch me again. The only time I didn't fake it was when he wanted to hurt me. I didn't have to fake pain.

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Garnet broke up with me my first night in my empty dormitory in New Brunswick, Canada, one day before all the other students arrived. In his words, he didn't break up with me, he just wanted to "change the dynamic of our relationship." He was in law school at the college that shared its campus with mine, and I should have known he was ashamed of me – because there was something wrong, unhealthy with our relationship, and he knew it as he knew his law school buddies would know it – but I was so sick with love for him, so dependent on him for my self-worth that I ignored the warnings. Every single one of them.

He visited me once or twice a week for sex, and he prevented me from developing meaningful friendships with my classmates, even the women. The women were silly or dumb and the men all wanted to fuck me. Even my international student advisor, who I had formed a good relationship with in the months leading up to my arrival at the campus, was not immune to Garnet's jealousy. I signed off on an email with "I look forward to our meeting tomorrow" and Garnet, who read all my emails, accused me of flirting. Garnet never signed off his emails in such a way, he claimed. I obviously had a crush on this faculty member. As a guy, Garnet knew what this advisor was thinking, what he wanted from me, and I was making it so easy for this other guy to seduce me. I didn't make that meeting or any other. I never even

emailed the advisor again.

Neither the advisor – nor the college – ever attempted to make sure I was doing ok. I was barely out of high school, thousands of miles from home in a foreign country, and the faculty, the admin, and the older students all just assumed I was fine even after I ghosted my international advisor. My relationship with this much older grad student at the neighboring college was not a secret, not from my side, anyway. I would have lied, of course, but why did no one on campus besides my dorm roommate and a couple other freshman ever say a word against my boyfriend or even make sure I was safe?

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One by one, Garnet cut off my old friends and my trust in my family while also preventing me from developing new friendships or professional connections. He didn't introduce me to any of his friends or family, despite the fact I now lived in the same city as him. I was alone, utterly alone. And even when I discovered he had a girlfriend he was living with, I still forgave him and clung to him and let him have me. I asked him to move out of his apartment, away from this other girl. I bought a wedding band and asked him to marry me. He said no to both. Yet I stayed his.

He was all I had, just as he intended.

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“Do you want me to fuck you one more time before I go?” was one of the last things he ever said to me in person. It was our last meeting before I returned to Florida for the summer, and no, I didn't want him to fuck me again, I just wanted him to leave so this last goodbye was over with, and I could stop pretending to not be excited to go home, but, of course, I said yes. I always said yes because my no didn't matter.

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There were so many warning signs that our relationship wasn't healthy. He had hurt me so many different ways and convinced me every single time it was my fault, my lacking in some way that caused the punishment. I should have walked away sooner. I never should have given him three years of my life, my virginity, and my self-esteem. But I did. I was little more than a child then.

In the end, what saved me from him was George R.R. Martin's book *A Game of Thrones*.

"You don't have to lie," he said over the phone, his voice thick with mockery. He always argued with the intention of making his opponent feel dumb. He bragged that it was one of his law professor's critiques against him, his tendency to argue for blood rather than for clarity. It wasn't a good trait for a lawyer, but he was proud of it. "You didn't see the symbolism of the stag's horn killing the dire wolf," he continued. "It's ok, you can just admit it."

"It was obvious foreshadowing," I said.

Within this seemingly insignificant conversation, something changed inside of me. I was genuinely annoyed by him. Not meek and begging, or wanting and needy, or depressed and clingy, no, I was honest to God finished with the way he was speaking to me. I was, in that moment, beginning to realize my worth, my power, my independence from him. It was one of the first times I trusted my intelligence over his gaslighting.

Not long after, perhaps in some desperate freefall of his realization that I was not yielding so easily to his demands, Garnet accused me of having a crush on Martin's *fictional* character, Jon Snow. He didn't want me to continue reading the books.

Our relationship was over; I just didn't know it yet.

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Barely a month into being back in Florida, I told him I wasn't returning to New Brunswick. I was staying in Florida with my family. He was angry and accused me of many terrible things, but when I didn't yield or cry, he switched tactics to pleading. He said he would move to Florida, that we could get married like I wanted, he said he needed me to have children with, he claimed he wanted a family.

I had recently miscarried our baby. A baby he told me he didn't want "yet" and insisted I would have to abort. I was unmoved by his words.

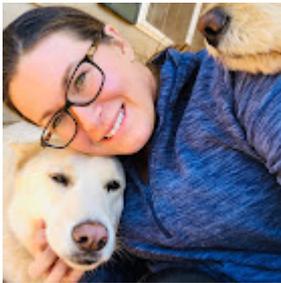
He finally asked me to meet him one more time when he finished on the oil rig. "For closure," he said. I refused. I didn't suspect I would yield to his influence in person, so much as I was scared he would hurt me or even kill me. He had done so much damage to me already while claiming he loved me, the idea of seeing him after I rejected him was just too dangerous.

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I let him borrow my phone for the summer while he was working on an oil rig in the wilderness of western Canada, and even after we broke up, I told him I would continue to pay the bill. He sent me money once, but it wasn't enough and I didn't bother to tell him as much. I didn't pay the bill and the line was cut off. He called me a few times from the satellite phone in the rig office, but I ignored him.

When he was back in civilization, he called me. He told another guy on the oil rig all about me and the two of them agreed that a "girl like me" was probably whoring it up now that I was single. He was upset about the phone, but he was unusually nice about it. He was isolated from friends and family, poor guy, and he was forced to agonize over the men he imagined I was fucking. I apologized but didn't mean it.

The only apology I owed was to myself.



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