

BRADFORD WRITES!
Fall 2023

Had Faith in You

By Addie Neuman

Warning: This story contains descriptions of sexual violence.

Growing up Catholic instilled guilt and shame in me at an extremely young age; thus, being assaulted caused me to cower in the shame that engulfed me. My childhood memories are cast in various hues of cracked stained-glass windows. The sapphire blue shards casting shadow over my anguish, the fiery red shades intensifying my rage, the amber yellow tints illuminating my happiest days. In my childhood church, we had a large stained-glass window that depicted Jesus and his punctured, bleeding heart in a cascading, golden light. The piece overlooked the parish, with the glass Jesus keeping a watchful eye over his sheep. During communion, while praying on my wobbly knees, I used to fantasize about smashing the glass with a hammer. The blood would rush to my head as I imagined how simple it would be for me to deface the holy relic. How simple it would be to destroy something so fragile for my own amusement.

* * *

The stench of vomit, fruity liquors, and nicotine seeped into the dingy basement walls that surrounded me. I had just turned fourteen. I felt older and wiser, nursing a spiked lemonade in the corner, even though an hour before I had to beg my mother to let me skip Bible study for this Halloween party. I am not sure why, but I ended up wandering outside to the fire pit. Maybe I was searching for my friends, or possibly trying to find a place that did not reek of the latest pile of puke. Regardless of the reason, I was outside and so was he. I remember the way he lured me into his iron grip. How his sour breath hit my face in waves, and his eyes darkened as he

BRADFORD WRITES!

Fall 2023

tracked me with lust and danger. I remember trying to fight him away, the way my body writhed and squirmed under his touch. The way I screeched as his digits dove into me; their exit marked by the stains on my thighs. I remember I got away when he adjusted his body to pull off his pants. I had rolled off the beige outdoor seating and crawled to the side door. I remember finding a closet to hide in, the way I was shaking and rocking myself back and forth until I could breathe again. I remember the way my hands trembled as I made the sign of the cross and began to pray for safety. I remember calling my dad, I made up an excuse saying that there was drinking, and I felt unsafe. I refused to tell him the truth. The Catholic guilt already wrapped its hands around my throat, suffocating me while I spiraled, believing it was my fault I had been taken advantage of.

I was raised in the church; therefore, I was taught obedience and how to sit still in silence for hours. Silent and obedient, like a good dog, that is how I worshiped my God. I was a loyal and fierce protector for my God, I took burden upon burden and heaved those crosses over my shoulders for yearlong journeys. Despite all I had done to prove my devotion, I believed He had forsaken me; that my assault was some cruel punishment for one of my sins. I believed many things at fourteen, worst of all I believed that I deserved my assault.

God preyed upon me and my fragility for his amusement. He saw my wide, doe eyes and eagerness to please, and He licked his lips in anticipation while eyeing me up and down. He knew ravaging me whole would be an effortless task. He saw how devout I was and readied Himself for attack. God and my assailant have plenty in common, they both saw a young, weak girl and thought they could force me to worship them. They both believed I would carry their sins as my own. To them my body was an abandoned tomb, a place to house their anger and

BRADFORD WRITES!

Fall 2023

violence. I used to believe there was something sacred about tombs, instead they are simply caves housing the dead.

* * *

I had left the church officially, when I was fourteen. I had spent years wondering if my prayers were echoes, and that October night was the last piece of evidence I needed to form an answer. That October night made me realize many things, like the biblical rage I harbored for God. Then and there I decided if there were a God, not only did I despise Him, but I would make Him pay. I would bring God, Himself to his knees, force Him to repent, force Him to kiss my knuckles before socking Him in the jaw. I was angry at fourteen, I was vengeful. I was also drowning in shame and cowering in school bathrooms whenever I saw his face or heard his name.

* * *

Before officially leaving my church, I went to Confessional one last time. In the fifteen years I had spent as a member of the parish, this would be the first Confessional I did without looking my priest in the eyes. My head hung low as I glared, through teary eyes, at the black cloth dividing us. "A boy assaulted me," the statement left my lips in a hushed tone, and the words that followed shocked me, "and I blame God."

My body quivered with the wails that escaped my throat, as I plead with my priest to return my innocence. My body convulsed as I begged for forgiveness and my dignity, when I had not been the one to strip me of it. I remember the increased violence of the tremors whenever I asked my priest, "Why did He abandon me?"

In response, my priest simply told me to say four *Hail Marys* and five *Our Fathers*. For the last time I fell to my unstable knees and repented. Once I finished my penance, I dried my

BRADFORD WRITES!

Fall 2023

tears and examined the glass Jesus and His bleeding heart one last time. I no longer desired to demolish the window, for I knew exactly how it felt to be destroyed for one's amusement.

It had taken me eight months to go to that Confessional. It had taken him eight minutes to assault me. It had taken me three years to simply budge the stone that encased my tomb and call for my resurrection. I spent three years letting my assailant and my religion silence me. Now I will shout it from the mountains, rejoicing as if it is the Good News: I was assaulted, it was not my fault! My body and life are my own! I will no longer repent or pay for his sins! I am free now! I am out of that dark and eerie cave! I am no longer going to die as his victim!