

Three Way

Stacy Walsh

Content Warning: Topics, including rape, sexual assault, sexism, and abortion are focal points of the following story. Reader discretion is advised.

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**Dedicated to my fellow Gen Xers, I hope you
feel seen.**

Waking up with a pounding head,
A cottonmouth and gut of dread.
Confusion sets in, then a sinking heart,
What has gone wrong, and what was her part?
It doesn't feel clear or entirely right,
She didn't say yes, but she didn't fight.
Is it really that blurry? Is it really that bent?
The line between rape and consent?

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Prologue

Birth is significant. An energy surrounds it, and just like the vibration of a gong rung in a small room, that energy can be felt. It's felt so strongly by the inhabitants of that room, while much less and smaller as it expands out.

It's instinctual. Animals know that new energy changes things. A new soul has entered the realm, and a different vibration has entered the atmosphere. What will happen next?

Will that energy coexist, will it disrupt, will it be loud, or will it be so quiet no one even notices it has arrived? It's exciting and disquieting all at once. It's here; now what?

In the end, all life, old and new, is about perception—how others may perceive us, for sure, but mainly how we perceive ourselves. We often fail to see our strengths because we constantly measure ourselves by what is around us.

It is in this quiet competition that we become vulnerable. We become energy that can be exploited by countries, religions, and even those around us. We can get caught in the lie that our energy, our being, is not enough unless it is attached to something more powerful than ourselves.

But what if our true power lies in understanding how important each of us is to the world by just existing? What if we suddenly understood that we didn't have to win? How much brighter would our lights shine if we could lay that burden down? New energy has arrived, and new souls are here. How will we treat them, and what will we help them become?

Katy James Bales 07-20-1976
Trent Michael Swanson 02-15-1976
Ellen Michelle Stevens 04-18-1976

Chapter 1: Katy: Present Day; *The Magician*

I'm disappearing; I can feel it, the magic trick that happens to all women when we become a certain age. Where once I would enter a room and see heads swing my way, now I enter a room, and there is no impact; it's like I didn't even arrive. It's as though no one can actually see me.

But hey, it's to be expected, right? I once lived a life of the young and pretty and privileged, at least to a point. I didn't grow up with wealth or the right kind of family connections to succeed despite effort; I wasn't lucky enough to have *that* kind of privilege. But I did grow up with a pretty face, and that can pollute your mind just as much as any other privilege out there, in my opinion.

It certainly didn't help my psyche either that I was always eager to please everyone around me when I was younger. I was always happy to be whatever those around me wanted me to be. When you get older, and you stop pleasing, when you set boundaries, and when you stop worrying that you might anger others, you tend to lose some folks.

But if you leave this world with everyone liking you, I think you've done something wrong. I certainly will not leave this world with every inhabitant sad that I'm gone. Not that I intend to leave this world anytime soon. Now that I'm invisible, the world may well get a lot more fun for me.

Where once there was a girl who was so scared of displeasing others, she made sacrifice after sacrifice, there now stands a woman that many in this world would just pass over anyway; I might as well use that to my advantage. I might as well start speaking up a little louder

now, as it doesn't matter as much who I piss off; they're busy ignoring me anyway.

My visitor today has got me lost in my thoughts and my past. Why did he come to see me? Why did he bring it all back? I'm sure the "me too" movement scared many grown men who were once naive adolescent boys from my time. But was it just that fear of getting caught now, or does he really want to be absolved? Does he genuinely feel like what he did was wrong now? He sure didn't seem to back then.

Of course, I did nothing to help him see it. I simply let his narrative of what happened become my own; it was easier that way. It was easier to accept that it was likely me that was the cause of it all, not society, not alcohol, and certainly not him.

At least he had the courage to come see me face to face. The other villain in my memory from that awful night sure wouldn't do that. She likely still feels justified in her awfulness. I almost hated her more than him back then, maybe even still now, which doesn't totally make sense either. I was much more willing to show my hurt and hate to her than to him; that's at least one truth I will admit to myself.

The woman I am now empathizes with my younger self, but she also wants to smack her a little. *Wake up and claim your power!* I want to scream it at her and shake her. I want to tell her to quit being a doormat! But to be fair, to get where I am now takes time, it takes living, and she had neither of those luxuries in abundance that night.

I need to forgive her; I do. I'm not sure if that means I must also forgive him. We were both, and still are, products of our environment, products of our families, our friends. However, that doesn't mean we didn't have our own will, and his will overpowered mine that night. At the time, he seemed to think he was entitled to that. That he was entitled to getting his needs met, no matter the vessel

in which those needs were to be fulfilled, what I truly wanted took a back seat.

You didn't say no. That's all I heard that night when I started crying after it was over, and that's all that played through my mind for many nights after that. *You didn't say no! How was I supposed to know you wanted to stop?*

Like a verbal "no" is the only way to say it. I said "no" with my eyes, with the terror in them. I said "no" with my hands whenever I pushed him away. I said "no" with my body, holding it rigid and uncomfortable throughout the whole thing. My body had to be radiating no, didn't it? How did he not feel that?

Maybe I'm making excuses for myself, but I know my mind was screaming **NO**, even while my body may have been too accustomed to accommodating others to make that be heard loud and clear. My people-pleasing behavior radiated out to the point that I was willing to be used rather than risk displeasing another human being.

Maybe I will accept his offer to talk more at some point. To see how his memory has changed it. To see how his mind has jumped and swayed to make sense of what really happened, all while protecting that squishy presence we all have inside; our ego. Surely, his mind had its own narration after it was all over, after we went back to school, and it felt like I got assaulted all over again.

For now, I'll just remember. Remember a time when I could not have been more visible. A time when I was more visible than I even wanted to be, thanks to a certain someone who was holding a Polaroid camera that would be used to victimize me once more.

While I sit here disappearing, I'll remember a time when I would have liked to do just that. But only once the act started, I certainly didn't enter that party as a person that didn't want to get noticed. I went into that party all but screaming, *look at me! Over here everyone, I'm dying for*

your attention! But isn't that part of the problem? We always end up blaming ourselves. *I must have invited it by my mere presence* being the loud internal narrative. It's all bullshit.

It's as though the world would rather have you believe that a woman wanting to be noticed equals asking for more than that somehow. As though everyone would rather be disappearing just like me, as if everyone doesn't want to occasionally get noticed, be desired, and have attention sometimes.

Maybe disappearing really is the best magic trick of all. At least then, I'll have less chance of being hurt like that again. Surely you can't hurt what you can't see, right?

Chapter 2: Katy: Spring of 1994; *Let's Party*

“I look hot!” I cover my mouth to stifle my surprised giggle at my not-so-modest outburst. I hardly ever compliment myself, even in private thoughts, so the fact that I just blurted that out loud to no one while standing in front of my mirror in my room makes me feel a little embarrassed. Thank god no one was around to hear me!

I straighten my tank top and fluff my hair as I stare at my reflection in the full-length mirror in my bedroom, watching the red color of embarrassment at my own self-confidence slowly recede from my face. I do feel like I look pretty good though, I'll admit it to myself, somewhat hesitantly.

I finally convinced my mom to buy me the baggy overalls I have been begging for ever since seeing them become a popular outfit staple everywhere I look. The girls at school are wearing them now, women on T.V. are sporting them, it's commonplace in the magazines I read, it's becoming a real trend. I decided to pair them with my crop tank top and I put my hair up in half pigtails, I look the part of the laid back casual cool girl, exactly what I was going for!

I do one last turn in the mirror and smirk! I can't wait to show up to Trent Swanson's house tonight! My friends and I knew we would be included in the exclusive invite even though we are just Juniors, not Seniors like Trent and his buddies. My friends and I just happen to be popular enough at school, so we figured we would be included.

It's really my friend Ginger that is the popular one in all honesty. But me, Melissa and Heather are popular by default because we're all best friends, and have been since

elementary school. We just always kind-of got each other, even at a young age. It was just one of those moments when we all ended up in Mrs. Catwell's fourth-grade class, we saw a kindred spirit in each other, and we gravitated towards it and instantly bonded.

And while Ginger is stunning with jet black hair and a figure that belongs on a Victoria's Secret model, the rest of us are decent-looking enough even if we don't exactly embody the ultimate beauty standard of today. While Ginger is strikingly beautiful, the rest of us are cute and embody more of the "girl next door" vibe. It's enough to get us noticed at least with Ginger by our sides.

There are things I like about myself and things I despise, it seems to fall into those two extreme categories about pretty much everything regarding my appearance. I love my hair, it's long and soft and falls in perfect waves down my back, even if it is just a dirty blonde and has to be chemically treated to generate the highlights that I usually sport. I absolutely hate my legs! My legs are thick and bulky and muscular, not long and skinny like the models I see on the runway. What I wouldn't give to trade in my stubby strong legs for sleek long legs that belong in short skirts and heels, instead of baggy jeans. But I got what I got.

That's just another reason that I particularly love the new baggy jean look as it is the perfect way to hide this painful part of my body. So tonight, with my cute hair and baggy overalls, I feel pretty good about myself!

I also happen to have the flattest stomach out of all my friends. Trust me, we know, we've all compared each and every part of ourselves, rather covertly or obvious. Stomachs, legs, boobs, face; you name it, we've measured ourselves against one another about it to decide which one of us wins "the best". It's kind of stupid and vain but none of us take the results too personally. We have the kind of friendship that can handle a little competition every so

often. And what other way are girls encouraged to compete besides how they measure up by appearance?

Tonight, I am positive I'll get some attention from the senior guys at the party, maybe even some attention from Trent himself. Wouldn't that be something? Trent, the reigning prince of Easton High School. A higher than average public school that resides in a higher than average income suburb outside of Kansas City, the latter being true for at least a few of its residents, but definitely not all of them.

My status would fall a little below that average. Living in a single-parent household with two older siblings who have moved on and out of the house puts me squarely in the *below* average category. Having my older siblings gone certainly frees up some money and space, but it also makes my existence a little lonelier, even if my sisters and I have never been particularly close.

Trent falls into the upper-crust status of this quaint suburban town. He's the star quarterback, homecoming king every year, and a nice guy, at least from what I can tell by my limited interactions with him. He seems genuinely nice despite his many blessings. He has movie star good looks, he's an exceptional athlete, he's smart, and to top it all off, his parents are loaded. It's like God decided to give all his gifts to just one person and let everyone else just fend for themselves.

The party I'm heading to tonight is at his house on the other side of town, where all the larger, more impressive homes are. His parents are out of town, so he decided to throw a massive jam to blow out the end of his Senior year before he undoubtedly goes off to play football for one of the major colleges surrounding our city.

Luckily a few of us juniors got the privilege of being invited. I know a lot of the senior guys notice my friend group so I'm not totally surprised, but there is still something that boosts the ego just a bit by being included.

After one last outfit, hair and makeup check it's time to rally the girls and head to Trent's house, the party should be well on its way now. I blow a kiss to my mom who is quietly reading on our sofa and yell bye before heading out the door. "Be home by midnight!" my mom yells at my retreating back.

Two hours into the party and I am starting to feel that slightly swimmy feeling that comes with drinking beer just a little too fast. It helps my nerves when I'm around a big group to have a little alcohol, but there is a muted alarm going off in my brain that I need to slow down on the drinking or I might be in danger of not remembering this night at all.

It's not helping that I'm also a little high on the fact that I got so much attention from Trent and his friends when I walked in with my crew. I could feel the eyes on me as soon as we crossed the threshold. I tried to subtly glance in the direction of Trent and his friends huddled in the living room, checking out everyone that walked through the door.

I saw Trent mouth "Damn!" to his best friend Jimmy after he checked me out. Something about those appreciative stares went straight to my head. I could feel the heat of being desired build up inside of me.

If I am being completely honest I could also feel that slight feeling of power and control that you get when someone is admiring you. It's not something I would admit out loud, but I felt it and it has made me all that much more giddy on top of the three beers I just drank way too quickly.

Along with the ogling eyes came the mocking sneers from the "smart" senior girls gathered in a cluster by the guys. No doubt hoping one of said guys would notice them the way they noticed me when I walked in. Not a chance! That group of superiority driven cunts would

never stoop so low as to dress with any part of their precious bodies showing.

Standing in a circle, dressed in smart jeans and fully buttoned up sweaters, those girls just don't know what it takes to get a guy like Trent or his friends to notice them. Their bitch leader Ellen being the most uptight of them all. She practically spit at me, *nice overalls farmer Joe* when I walked in.

Obviously she's just jealous that I am daring enough to show off the new trend and she isn't. She's too uptight to try something daring when it comes to clothes.

Besides, my outfit choice is clearly paying off, Trent and his friends have been following me and my girls around all night. They are obediently getting us drinks then wanting to grind on us on the dance floor, Trent actually blatantly grabbed my ass when I passed him earlier. I didn't mind though, I think he knew I kind-of wanted him to.

He gave me that confident smile of his and a little wink as I passed. I really need to slow down the drinking, because that ass grab kind of turned me on a little if I'm really being honest. I could feel a wave of heat directly between my legs as soon as his hand squeezed me so brazenly.

Four hours into the party and my promise to slow down has clearly gone out the window. I'm not falling down or slurring drunk yet, but I can tell my reflexes and inhibitions have considerably lowered. I need to get some water.

After wandering the house for what felt like hours but was likely only minutes in my hyper-buzzed state, I finally found this somewhat quiet room off the living room. I happily clasp my water and sink onto the rich cream sofa pushed up against the wall in this small room.

I'll just close my eyes for a minute and stay in the quiet to try and sober up a little. I wonder what the hell this room is anyway? It's not the living room that's where the music is blaring from. There's no T.V. pushed up against a wall, just a couch and a couple of chairs and bookshelves. Loads of bookshelves really, lining most of the walls from floor to ceiling. It must be a study or a library or something. How rich do you have to be to have a room for just books?

I giggle a little while I take in the absurdity of my surroundings. At least I have the book room to myself. I giggle a little more at that thought. Okay, seriously I'm getting slap-happy, no more beers! I start to lean my head back when I hear footsteps enter my secret hiding room.

I open my eyes and notice that it takes me a second too long to focus on who is coming in to join me. My heart skips a beat when I notice that it's Trent. He's staring at me all sexy looking, I hope I don't look like a total drunken monster.

I try to straighten up and seem at least a little sober. "Hey," I miraculously am able to croak out without slurring. Best to just leave it at that one word then I think.

"Mind if I join you?" Trent asks while clearly knowing the answer as he is already heading to me. Duh! Of course the hottest guy in school can join me. I nod my head and try to smile coyly as he makes his way to the couch.

Before I have much time to react to his presence, he's kissing me. His hands are clasping the back of my head and his fingers twist into my hair, his tongue is roaming my mouth. I can hardly believe this is happening! I'm making out with Trent Swanson!

My brain is screaming at me that I'm likely screwing it up. I mean, it's Trent! He's likely kissed a million girls. He seems to want to keep kissing me though, so I must not totally suck at it.

Suddenly I feel his hand inside my overalls cupping my modest breasts. I try to swipe his hand away, partly from embarrassment that I'm not stacked and partly because this is moving too fast. It's like time is on fast-forward.

Trent's hand is back on my boob now, but under my shirt already. He's starting to kiss me with enough pressure to push me onto my back on the couch. I manage a small squeak and try to sit back up but he keeps pushing me down.

I finally just lay down, I don't want to piss him off, and it seems easier to just go with the flow than make a big scene. He'll stop when I'm ready to, I'm sure of it. I mean we're not even in a bedroom, there's no lock to this room, just a wide entryway, anyone could walk in.

"Slow down okay," it comes out breathier than I mean for it to.

"Don't worry, no one comes in here," He responds as he continues to kiss me and fondle my breast. *It's okay; I'll just go along with it for a few more minutes, then I'll ask him to stop, he'll understand, I'm sure of it.*

I keep telling myself that asinine thought up to the very last moment of the whole ordeal. I think to myself ***he'll stop*** when he unbuckles my brand-new overalls, but he doesn't. I think ***he'll stop*** when I ask him to slow down one more time, but he doesn't.

Eventually I start to realize that what has begun as just a make-out session is now barreling ahead regardless of what I feel like I'm trying to express. So I resign myself just to lie as still as possible and take what he's doing to me as inevitable. It's probably my fault anyway. Why did I drink so much? Why did I start kissing him in the first place? Why did I think I could make out just a little and not go all the way?

It hurts as he pushes himself into me. I hear myself involuntarily moan at the pain. A moan I will later analyze over and over alone in my room for many days, weeks, months and years after as it seemed to be misinterpreted as delight, and not disgust, from Trent.

I stare at the ceiling as he continues to move inside of me and grunt with satisfaction, unaware that the sounds I'm making are not sounds of pleasure but sounds of pain.

Tears start to gather and fall down my cheeks. My face becomes hot with shame and embarrassment as I hear giggles and a commotion at the entryway of this stupid book room.

That's when I felt the sharpest pain of fear yet. A dagger of apprehension shoots through me and leaves just as quickly as it came. A fear that will get lost in my mind initially. Lost in a mind that will be too crowded with regret and confusion after tonight but will resurface later when the full picture develops. A fear that I just witnessed the unmistakable flash of a camera going off.

Chapter 3: Trent: Spring of 1994; *Let's get it on*

Trent knows he's seen by his peers as the guy who has it all. Hell, he likely wouldn't even get in trouble for having this party if his parents walked in right now in the middle of it. Most of his friends would think that was so cool and be so jealous, but the truth is that Trent's parents rarely acknowledge his existence anymore. That is unless he is doing something that they deem important. They definitely spring to attention when he's doing things like making a big play on the football field, or dating the hottest girl in school. His parents will pay attention to things like that, but only for a short time. They are briefly interested in the highs of his life, and very uninterested in most everything else about him otherwise.

They know that he is on the way out of the house and off to college, likely with a free ride to play football. It's like they're relieved he'll be gone. What kind of parents do that? Not that he's ever had a great relationship with his parents, but it would be nice if they seemed the least bit interested in his everyday life now that he is on the cusp of adulthood.

Being an only child was lonely enough, but add apathetic and, at times, rigid parents to the mix, and it becomes a much more hurtful and, at times, oppressive environment. Not that he can complain about this to anyone. I mean, look at his house. Look at his life.

No one would want to hear a bullshit sob story coming from him. He would look like a total whiner douchebag if he showed any other emotion than thankfulness for his privileged life. His parents don't hesitate to remind him of that fact any time he voices any