

Ask Her

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I wish you would've asked me
I would have told you
I wanted to tell you

I would have told you how he was killing me
slowly, not softly
with his hands, his words, his body
not with his song
it was right in front of your eyes, all along

you asked me so many questions
like how many people I've had sex with
men, women, or both?
anal, oral, or vaginal?

but you didn't ask me if I consented to your exam,
or if I consented to his hands . . .
the hands of the man who necessitated the exam

you asked me if I wanted to be tested for syphilis
and if I was majoring in French or English
you asked me so many questions
so many good, and necessary, questions
but you didn't ask the ones that, to me, mattered most
the ones I needed you to ask
because I was too scared to disclose

I wanted you to ask if I was safe
and if I'd ever been raped
or screamed at, or hit, or kicked
or dragged around by the wrist

I wanted you to ask me
because I didn't know how to tell you
and I didn't know what you'd think
and I didn't know if you had the time
and what if he got charged with a crime?
would he *actually* do time?
or would I just be wasting mine . . .

and what if you judged me,
or shamed me?
or, even worse, blamed me . . .

and most of all,
apart from the shame and the blame,
would you ever look at me the same?

Doc, I wanted to tell you everything
but I needed you to take the first step,
because all I could focus on
was taking my next breath.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Written in awareness of domestic violence, sexual assault, and the need for increased screening; dedicated to my fellow survivors and those still suffering in silence.