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LETTER FROM AN IMMIGRANT WOMAN TO HER RAPIST

Leticia Soto*



Image of the author, Leticia Soto

Do you remember me? I am the invisible woman.

I am the woman you raped on that night nine years ago. I am that woman whose body you marked with your punches, scratches while you were raping me. I still walk through life with scars on my breasts where you bit me. Since that night I have lived with a wound in my soul that has yet to heal, with a body that still breathes the fear of that night.

Do you remember me? Before you took my body, a body that did not belong to you, I existed. You never knew who Leticia was and who she is, because you never saw me as a human being. I was a woman who had lived through triumphs and challenges. I am a single mother who worked in Mexico City to support her three children. I am a woman who would sacrifice everything for my children. One day, I decided to flee from the man that hurt me and, like many others, I looked towards “El Norte” (the North) for a better future. I naively believed that I would find the American Dream for me

* Leticia Soto is a female janitor who is a sexual assault survivor. She is a member of SEIU-USWW where she is an active member of the *Ya Basta!* (which translates to Enough is Enough!) campaign to end sexual harassment and assault of female janitors in the workplace.

and my children. And it was with this dream that I arrived at the building where you worked.

Do you remember me? I was that happy and hopeful woman who came to the building looking forward to working an honest job that would allow me to provide a decent life for my children. I remember my first day like it was yesterday: I felt happy and excited, I imagined myself singing down the halls of the prestigious skyscrapers of Los Angeles. I arrived on time with my uniform clean and ironed, ready to clean the offices and restrooms of the rich, highly educated and maybe even some famous people.

Do you remember me? Do you remember the first words out of your mouth when you first saw me? I do. You said, "Finally they sent me something good." And with those seven words, I felt the dream I held inside just shatter.

Do you remember me? I am the woman who always avoided you in the hallways. The woman that you stared at from head to toe with those evil eyes. I am that woman, the one you would sneak up on from behind and appear like a ghost, while I was cleaning the isolated areas of the building.

Do you remember me? Because I remember you. I remember that night you came to see me where I was cleaning and asked me, "Do you have a good social security number, Leticia? Are you an illegal?" In that moment I felt a chill run through my entire body and I knew that with those words, my life was about to change, but I resisted the thought. You kept on going with your intimidation and said to me, "Nobody here cares about illegals; they're nothing; they're trash. How many illegals wouldn't want to have what you have here?"

Do you remember me? It was there, in that instant, on a dark and cold night, when I finally knew that the day I had dreaded for so long had finally arrived. I remember your words and that evil look in your eyes as you said to me, "Today is the day that you are going to give me the best of you. I can't wait any longer to make you mine."

Do you remember me? You took off your pants. You lunged toward my breasts, tearing my uniform. I still remember the sound of the buttons as they broke off and fell to the floor. I was fighting against you while you were so determined to take off my bra. You almost broke my arm trying to take it off. Do you remember that bra? It was the kind that snaps in the front and you couldn't get it off of me. It seems absurd now, but at the time, as long as I still

had my bra on, I felt some small bit of hope that maybe this wasn't really happening, that it wasn't going to happen. But it did happen; you finally got your way. My bra snapped open and then hung over my left arm.

I covered my breasts with both hands and that's when you pulled me by the hair and threw me to the ground. I screamed, "NO! NO! NO!" but you kept going and even told me, "No one can hear you." You were on top of me, you were very heavy and I could not move. The more I fought back the more furious you got, first trying to force me to kiss you and then biting me. "If you just let go, you'll enjoy it and I'll let you keep working here and I will make sure that you always have your job. Now shut up," you said to me. You put your two hands over my mouth, but I kept fighting for my life and I bit you.

Do you remember me? "You bit me, you goddamn bitch!" is what you said to me and that's when the beating began. With your face and breath against my neck, you punched me in the head. And again. And again. By the third punch to my head, I could only see black. I remember the sound of my head hitting the floor. I felt pain all over my body but I couldn't move, I was frozen. I felt your hands pulling down my pants and then I felt you penetrating my body. I still remember the stench of your disgusting breath on my ear while you were taking what was not yours to take.

Do you remember me? As you dug your nails beneath my breasts with both hands, I felt those horrible scratches from the outside in. My body unable to move. Like a rabid dog you lowered your fetid mouth and bit my left breast with savage strength. I will never forget the violent force of your hands on my breasts; you were obsessed with them like a wild dog who had found food for the first time.

Do you remember me? Do you remember my cries? My screams that filled the empty corporate offices of the richest, the most highly educated, maybe even of someone famous, but nobody could hear my cries because they don't work in the middle of the night. The pain was unbearable. I could not distinguish between my cries and the pain.

When you were done and you finally pulled out of my body, and I was finally able to move, "You goddamn filthy man," I cried, "Why did you do this to me?" "Because bitches like you make men crave you," you said. And I told you, "I am going to report you to the police." You replied, "Oh yeah, here, call them now," handing me your cell phone. "You know what? Better yet, I'll call them and

tell them what you did to me. You're the one they'll deport, honey. Nobody is going to believe you."

Do you remember me? At that moment I was overcome by the urge to run out, to escape, but I was in the habit of being responsible and the only thing I could think about was the rule that I had to turn in my office keys. How ironic, don't you think? That while you violently forced yourself inside me, raped me, committed a crime, here I was worried about not breaking your rule?

Maybe it was my subconscious trying to protect what little dignity I had left. Maybe it's a sign of the fear and control that you had over me as my supervisor or perhaps I sensed that you would use any excuse to call the police to have me deported.

I remember I threw the keys at you with the little strength I had left and then ran out, trying to put my clothes back on. As I left in tears, your sweat and your smell were still on me. I only thought about my children, who were at home all alone.

When I finally reached the lobby, I just looked for the exit. I felt like the dirty person you had told me I was, like garbage that stinks, an illegal unwanted by anyone in this country.

I walked for a long time and finally got to the bus stop. I felt like a zombie. I remember getting off the bus at Wilshire and Alvarado. When I had been in route for almost an hour, almost back to my house, I noticed that a black car was following me very closely. Two men got out and threatened me, telling me to "stay quiet." They approached me violently and told me not to say a word and that if I ever did, they would look for me and kill me. Do you know them? Were they your relatives? Your cousins, maybe? To this day, I still wonder.

Do you remember me? You took what was not yours. I showered for several hours with hot water trying to wash off your scratches and the bite marks you left on my breasts, rubbing soap all over my body trying to get you out of me.

When I got out of the shower, my kids were awake, and I had to help them get ready for school. It was six in the morning. It is painful for me to remember one of them asking me, "What's wrong, mommy?" they asked me. "Nothing, sweethearts."

Do you remember me? I did not know what to do. Finally, trembling, I picked up the phone and called the company. I told the woman from human resources that you had attacked me and that

you had assaulted me. They told me they had never received a single complaint about you, that you were a good supervisor and that if I didn't want to go back to the same building working under you, there was no longer any work for me.

Do you remember me? I was left without a job. I fell into a depression that until today I struggle to overcome. I felt desperate, unable to feed my children, and my body felt destroyed inside and out.

Do you remember me? I reached a stage where every day I thought about suicide. But how could I leave without my children and leave them alone? Would I have the courage to take them with me?

Do you remember me? Unfortunately I remember you.

You harassed me.

You threatened me.

You groped me.

You forced yourself on me.

Your hurt me.

You punished me.

You beat me.

You penetrated me.

You marked me.

You raped me.

You almost killed me, but you didn't manage to do it.

And you did not break me.

I lived for nine years in silence.

And I didn't report you to the authorities.

I never went to hospital for fear that they would call the police.

I never went to the police for fear that they would call immigration.

And we all know what happens when they call immigration on you: separation from your children and deportation.

You never paid for your crime.

And I never had a day in court to read you this letter.

Unfortunately, I am not a student at a prestigious school.

I don't wear the uniform of a profession that is considered important.

I am still a janitor on the night shift.

I decided to break my silence because I have a daughter and if this were to happen to her, I want her to know that she is not trash. That she does not have to stay silent, that the world will listen to her and that they will believe her. That she has rights. With this letter I begin a journey to reclaim my life and to heal the wounds that will always be in me but that do not define who I am.

I am a brave woman. I am a promotora. I am an immigrant woman.

I am a survivor.

And on behalf of all the invisible women cleaning on the night shift,
today I say to you loud and clear:

YA BASTA! (Enough is Enough!)

**Humbly yours,
Leticia Soto**