

[This article was originally published in Chinese (“性侵案后，她喊出了自己的名字”)in the “One World” department November 2020 issue of Portrait(RenWu) Magazine. [LINK](#). I tried my best to translate the article without revising the structure nor the content.]

Chanel Miller described her life after age 22 as getting on a train, a nonstop one that she was unable to get off of. Appearing unexpectedly, the train roared in her world and took her away from the track she was previously on, deviating further and further from her normal life.

She didn't know why she was on this train. It all started on a morning in January 2015, when she woke up and found herself on a hospital bed. Before she could figure out what was going on, a detective came in and told her that she was discovered lying behind a dumpster near the house of Stanford's Kappa Alpha fraternity — unconscious and half-naked — and that there was a possibility of a sexual assault.

She remembered none of this. The last thing she recalled was having fun at a party, after which her memories went completely blank.

Chanel had no choice but to try to fill in this gap in her memory using information retrieved from the news articles, the evidence presented to the court, the descriptions by the police and the words of the detective and the attorneys. Little by little, she pieced the fragments together: She learned that her phone, belongings and clothes were scattered all over the place behind the dumpster; she learned that a 19-year-old Stanford student-athlete named Brock Turner was on top of her while she was unconscious; thankfully, she also learned that two Swedish graduate students, Peter Lars Jonsson and Carl-Fredrik Arndt, discovered them and confronted Turner. With the help of a bystander, the two graduate students chased and kept Turner down until the Stanford campus police arrived and arrested the perpetrator.

Marked by an “Uh, yes” that she said in a phone call responding to the detective’s question “Would you like to press charges,” Chanel’s five-year nightmare began. With a brand-new name “Emily Doe,” she set off for her arduous journey in court.

Suddenly, flooded with unfamiliar phrases like “preliminary hearing” and “trial,” Chanel’s world changed completely. She could no longer just nod or shake her head, but instead had to say “yes” or “no” out loud; she could still cry, but only with the condition of “not being overly emotional;” she felt isolated and lonely, for she was no longer allowed to speak to her little sister Tiffany to “prevent conspiring;” however, at the same time, she had no privacy: everything, every picture she posted and every word she uttered would go on record and become evidence for the court.

“I think of it as being thrown into a new universe. I woke up inside a new universe,” Chanel said to Portrait, “All the rules are different — the way you speak, the way you present yourself, the

people you are now afraid of, the people you have to fear, the people you have to listen to — all of this has been restructured and is no longer my normal life.”

She was forced into playing this character named Emily Doe, a character who was half-naked, unconscious, assaulted, saved, so vulnerable that she would sob on the court, but at the same time so strong that she would never give up.

To embrace the agony, to leave the unpleasant past behind, to protect those who have gone through similar things, and to thank those who had “lifted her out of darkness,” Chanel decided to take her own voice back, in her own name.

In 2019, with the publication of her memoir “Know My Name,” Chanel Miller — no longer Emily Doe — shouted out her name to the whole world.

“This is my only life, and I don't want to spend it hiding just in hopes that I'm a little bit safer,” she said, explaining the motive behind her decision, “At the end of the day, you can't control what people are gonna do or think. I have to live authentically, and I just couldn't let other people keep dictating what my life looked like.”

“When I announced myself, I'm setting myself free — I'm deciding who I'm going to be,” she was determined.

And now, in 2020, the high-speed train Chanel was on still shows no sign of slowing down — when the publisher told her that “Know My Name” is going to be translated into Chinese and published in China, where her mom is from, she thought it was a huge “milestone” for her to understand her identity more.

Chanel was perfectly aware that once she revealed her true name, there was no turning back for this train, the one that carried her family, her boyfriend, her friends, her life and her everything.

“I hope that it would take us to a better place,” she smiled.

1

At 7 a.m. on a morning in May 2016, after an all-nighter, Chanel finally stopped typing.

For the past nine hours, her face was illuminated by the light from the laptop screen. She repeatedly got up, walked in circles, and then threw herself back again in front of the table. After countless rounds of whispering, screaming, eyes blurred with tears and face scrunching up, she wrote 28 full pages of words.

Those 28 pages, which would later shock the whole world in a month, were the first draft of Chanel's Victim Impact Statement. Putting grammar and syntax aside, she typed out everything she had been through and felt during the past year. In her memoir, she described those pages as "incoherent," that they were the result of her letting "nasty things crawl out."

For the next few days, she would wake up and rush to her table without even brushing her teeth. Over and over again, she read it, revised it, yelled it out loud, to prepare for the sentencing that would happen on June 2, 2016.

Chanel's district attorney told her that the statement is usually two to three pages long, and should be addressed directly to the judge, which was not what Chanel did. On the day of the sentencing, the 28 incoherent pages she had written turned into 7000 words of logic, reasoning, courage and strength, directly addressing the defendant. Holding her statement paper and feeling the warmth of her district attorney's palm pressed against her back, she stopped trembling and stood firmly.

"You don't know me, but you've been inside me," she started reading, word by word, "and that's why we're here today."

As she read, her voice became louder and steadier. In the end, she was almost yelling in the court, yelling at Brock Turner, who had been charged with three felony counts three months prior to the sentencing that added up to a maximum of 14 years in prison. The 20-year-old defendant sat there motionlessly, stared at the floor and showed nothing to Chanel but his "stoic profile."

Eighteen months ago, in January 2015, Brock Turner was not the sexual predator who not once had the courage to look at Chanel in court, but a seemingly successful 19-year-old young swimmer who went to Stanford and had a pretty resume, before he assaulted Chanel when she was unconscious behind the dumpster near a Fraternity house on his campus.

Because of the school's big name, "the Stanford sexual assault case" captured society's attention, and Chanel, then only known in the press as Emily Doe, became the center of the blame — he was a talented rising star who raced in the Olympic Trials and had a bright future ahead, while she was just a 22-year-old college graduate working nine to five, so ordinary that being at the party with her sister who then went to Stanford seemed like a mistake; he was the protagonist of the news stories that everyone felt sorry for, but she was just someone who shouldn't even be on the campus, the victim that was briefly mentioned.

"Emily Doe" became a shell for Chanel, in which she hid, looked at the pictures of herself unconsciously lying on the ground and watched those pictures being presented in court. Under

the gaze of the judge and the press, she learned to doubt herself, and her world decomposed into pieces of evidence.

In court, she was almost drowning in the overwhelming amount of questions: “What did you eat that night? Did you have a drink? Did you really just drink water? Are you sure? What did you wear? Cardigan? What color was it...” To play the character Emily Doe well, Chanel tried hard to piece together the character’s experience and to feel the character’s pain. She wanted to tell her own story and explain her feelings, but the fragmented and detailed questions made her narrative, one that was supposed to be complete and coherent, fall apart.

Chanel felt like she was “reading off of a script of Emily Doe.” However, even the script-reading was only five percent of the whole trial procedure: “I wasn’t a witness, so I wasn’t allowed to sit in the courtroom for 95% of the trial time, which I don’t think most people knew.”

As far as she knew, while she was shut outside of the courtroom, the pictures of her — divided up by grids and marked by numbers — were projected and magnified on the big screen, in front of which sat Turner, Turner’s dad and brothers, reporters and other strangers.

The sentencing on June 2, 2016, was supposed to be where the story stopped.

Chanel thought the Victim Impact Statement could bring her nightmare to an end. In the memoir, she made it clear that the 7000 words she read in court were everything but “a sad journal entry about her feelings.” In the statement, after sharing her bodily experience in the past year and a half, she quoted Turner’s statement and challenged him line by line. “You said,” “You cannot,” “You should have never,” “You are guilty,” instead of being hysterical, she stayed calm and listed all of the accusations against Turner. At the end of these 7000 words, she thanked everyone who helped her, and told all the girls around the world, “I am with you.”

However, what followed the 7000 words and Chanel’s struggle during a year and a half, was “six months in county jail” for Turner, who ended up serving only three months due to good behavior.

“I felt very small and very embarrassed,” she told Portrait, “I had just read my statement. I had just poured my guts onto the floor. I had just made this deep confession. Hearing the judge saying ‘six months,’ I asked myself, why did I just tell everyone about my private life?” On that day, her notebook was covered with her handwriting — “I deserve more than three months.”

It was the world outside of court that gave her the courage to carry on. The next afternoon, BuzzFeed published the full text of “Emily Doe’s Victim Impact Statement.” Within only a few hours, the views hit one million, which turned into 15 million in a week.

Her statement caused huge waves on the internet — the 7000 words were soon translated into many languages, including sign language. People from all over the world started to write to Emily Doe: “I heard your pain,” some comforted her; “Your voice moved me,” others encouraged her; “I was once an Emily Doe,” some even empathized with her. Among the letters, there was one from Joe Biden, then the vice president, saying that she has “given them the strength they need to fight.”

In 2016, Emily Doe was named a Woman of the Year by Glamour magazine. People respected Emily for her courage and thanked Emily for her persistence — but as for the real person behind Emily Doe, nobody knew her name.

2

Three years later, in 2019, Chanel typed out the very last word of her memoir and hit the enter key. “The real moment was when I sent off the manuscript,” she said, “now I can’t change anything.” The book was going to print, and the world was about to know her name.

Before 2019, everything she had been through didn’t belong to Chanel Miller, nor her Chinese name Xiaoxia Zhang — in the “Stanford Sexual Assault Case,” there was no one but Emily Doe.

Before long, Chanel felt like she was living a separate life from Emily Doe. Chanel was leading a simple but wonderful life, in which there was fresh salmon, long phone calls with her boyfriend, a cycling trip with her dad... She would make cards for her colleagues, doodle all the time, and enjoy her coffee sip by sip.

Emily was different. “Emily lived inside a tiny world, narrow and confined,” Chanel wrote in the book, “she didn’t have any friends, appeared only occasionally to go to the courthouse, police station, or make calls in the stairwell.”

Sometimes in Chanel’s mind, she would rehearse the way of striding down the hallway leading to the courtroom, the door of which she would open with her back straight and head lifted. However, the moment she passed the security frame of the courthouse, Chanel became Emily, who “ducked into the bathroom and squatted in the corner of the handicapped stall.” Picturing the courtroom and the judge’s face, she rolled up her papers into a scroll and whispered to herself to hold it together.

Chanel hated Emily for her pain and fragility, for her quiet voice and her uncontrollable tears.

However, as time went on, she was confused. The line between Emily and Chanel blurred, and she couldn’t figure out who she was anymore. Emily followed her, reminding her that the sweet

life she had belonged to Chanel in the past, that she already became Emily, a “go-nowhere, do-nothing, victim.”

Chanel would read about Emily in the news, where Emily was described as the girl who blacked out, gave emotional testimony and cried before she could say anything in court. “Everything felt flattened and simplified,” Chanel realized that if she continued to pretend that Emily didn’t exist in her life, then Emily — part of Chanel — would forever be fragile.

“I felt like I was hiding under a little blanket named Emily, and anyone could threaten to pull it up on every court date,” she said, “I was holding it down so hard, but the media would poke at it.”

Chanel left all the pain — her life in a mess after the assault, challenges piling up and future full of uncertainties — to Emily, who she tried to “un-become” in her daily life.

Chanel carried on. She would still post food pictures on her social media to show how simple and sweet her life was, and got 32 likes; her friends, not knowing Chanel was the Emily in the news, would never give her sympathetic looks, and Chanel was thankful that their conversations stayed normal; she would seek help anonymously and bring her story to the therapist, only to be suggested that she should “go read Emily Doe’s Victim Impact Statement”; she would ask her boss for a day off for a non-existent physical check-up, then become Emily on her way driving to the court.

She was done with hiding under the blanket, but letting go of it took a long time. For months, Chanel and her family went back and forth because “it was terrifying.” Gradually, she started to realize that Emily and Chanel co-existed in her, that she could cry in front of the judge as Emily, but also enjoy a wonderful life as Chanel.

When the shell named Emily Doe eventually faded, she felt nothing but relieved.

That was the result of her putting up a courageous fight in the universe. The fight was a tough one, but Chanel was not alone: She thanked her family for always being by her side, as well as her sister Tiffany, her boyfriend Lucas and the two Swedish students who were there.

She was well aware that the vast majority of survivors would not report to the police due to a lack of evidence, but her case was different — she had two kind-hearted witnesses. “I was the one who had enough resources to move forward, and that’s an incredible thing,” she said. “I knew that I would be able to put myself into a larger context, which definitely solidified the mission.”

Emily was not buried into oblivion — Chanel opened her arms to embrace Emily. Carrying Emily's pain and struggle, Chanel Miller shouted:

"I'm Chanel Miller. I was a victim, but I'm never only a victim," the first page of her memoir reads.

3

On Sep. 4, 2019, many people learned the name Chanel Miller for the first time through New York Times's "You Know Emily Doe's Story. Now Learn Her Name." Twenty days after that, on Sep. 24, her memoir "Know My Name" came out — Chanel officially said goodbye to the blanket named Emily.

In her memoir, the readers didn't read about the Chanel who played the role of Emily, instead, they read about a complete Chanel, a confident and powerful woman who showed the world that she was so much more than just a victim.

As for those who questioned her, hurt her and made her tremble, Chanel turned all of them into characters and weaved them into her narrative. "I love the feeling of converting people in real life," she told Portrait, "I get to choose how to describe the defense attorneys, I get to choose how much time they get to spend speaking, I can make them leave the scene if I want to, I can write a fantasy scene about polarizing someone if I want to — And that's fun for me."

Chanel said in the book that those people's identities are not important. She wouldn't even mention the real names of those characters, who exist in the book only because of their commonality and the way they "enabled a broken system."

"I believe we are all multidimensional beings," she wrote, "and in court, it felt harmful being flattened, characterized, mislabeled, and vilified, so I will not do the same to them."

Chanel loved writing. "Writing is an incredible way of cementing my version of the story," she said, "it doesn't matter if people argue with my story and it doesn't matter if they try and dismiss it. At the end of the day, all I ask is for my version to exist and to have an equal chance at being evaluated with all the other perspectives."

"It's not trying to dominate a singular story. It's to have a seat at the table," she said to Portrait.

The story that Chanel told was not only about the court, nor just one single sexual assault case. "This is not the ultimate truth, but it is mine, told to the best of my ability," reads the first

paragraph of her memoir, “If you want it through my eyes and ears, to know what it felt like inside my chest, what it’s like to hide in the bathroom during trial, this is what I provide.”

She depicted her life in great detail: from the midnight cereal bowls and the page-turning sound before bedtime to her quivering fingers during the sentencing; from her dog “Mogu” that kept her company when she wrote to two purple chocolate bars that an Irish lady mailed her after reading her statement. In her version of the story, Chanel orchestrated everything she had seen and felt.

This is Chanel Miller’s memoir. The five years affected by the sexual assault case were indeed important, but her whole life was so much more than those years. Through her words, the readers would enjoy the sunshine in California with her, go to drawing school in Rhode Island with her, revisit the memories of college life with her, be the fragile Emily with her, and see the growth of Chanel Miller with her.

After the publication of the memoir, 27-year-old Chanel looked back at her journey over the past five years and felt proud of herself. “It has made me more confident than I would have otherwise been,” she said, “It accelerated my growth, but the cost of that lesson was very high.”

The accelerated version of Chanel received media training, gave interviews, and never tired of telling her story. After facing countless media outlets, journalists, voice recorders and cameras, Chanel kept on speaking, gently and patiently.

“It's a preventable adversity that young women don't have to go through,” she said, “and that's why I'm working so hard to keep telling the story because I know in the future it's possible to not have stories like mine.”

Chanel’s mom is also a writer. Chanel remembered her mom’s book event that she had been to when they went back to China many years ago. “Watching people line up to shake her hand, I just feel blessed to have a new entryway into her universe,” she thought it was precious.

Her mom had taught the way to express to the little Chanel, who grew up to become the one who empowered others through her words and story.

It seemed like the dust had settled, but only Chanel knew that something had changed forever — her daily life would never be the same as when she was 22 years old.

She added a detail: Even though those stressful days of being forced to get ready at any second to answer questions on the court were long gone, she still felt like whatever she did, her district attorney and the defense attorney would turn into two little figures that live on her shoulders and

murmur questions nonstop to her ears. “You learn to scrutinize each little detail, it changes the way you look at a scene,” she said, “suddenly, every scene I step into, I am aware of how many people are there, where the exit is and what I’m wearing.”

Now, she is still writing, doing illustrations, being a wonderful daughter and big sister. However, the hyperawareness of the environment — something the case left her with — has stripped the carefree mindset from her.

She misses the Chanel that would go skinny-dipping in college with her friends, with the greatest fear being the water was going to be too cold. “There was only the expanse of sky, open sea, and a circle of pure, white moon,” she writes.

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