

Audible Originals presents:

Say You're Sorry

Hosted by Lux Alptraum

Episode 2: Too Good To Be True

[intro music; electronic, thoughtful crescendo with guitar notes]

Lux Alptraum:

Whenever a public figure apologizes, it seems like everyone wants to weigh in on how well they did. Did they actually use the words “I’m sorry?” Did they express an appropriate amount of regret? Did they even understand what they did wrong?

Most of the time, the answer to those questions is no. We get C+ apologies at best, and that’s when somebody actually seems to feel bad about what they did. More often than not, it’s more like an F-. So many apologies are given out of fear or obligation rather than any real remorse. And you can tell.

But what happens when someone releases a beautiful-sounding apology, one that actually hits all the important bases? Does an A+ apology statement make everything better?

I’m Lux Alptraum, and this is *Say You’re Sorry*, a show about public apologies. This episode, we’re taking a look at one of the most basic questions of all: What makes an apology good?

[music changes to ominous piano]

Last summer, a woman named Lacy Crawford received what felt like one of those rare, perfectly crafted apologies. And what happened after offered an important lesson on what it means to be truly sorry.

As a heads up, this story involves a sexual assault and its aftermath.

[music fades out]

It’s never easy to transfer to a new high school — I know that one from personal experience. But for Lacy Crawford, it didn’t just mean making friends or finding her locker, because the school she transferred to in the fall of 1989 wasn’t just any old school. It was St. Paul’s School, an exclusive Episcopalian boarding academy in Concord, New Hampshire. St. Paul’s is one of those super fancy schools you might see in a movie. The kind where wealthy teenagers live on a gorgeous campus with stunning old buildings full of ornate, expensive furniture. The kind of school that has a reading room in the library.

Lacy Crawford:

The reading room is this beautiful, quiet room with double glass doors, and bay windows, and deep carpets, and red leather chairs and couches, and wooden coffee tables, lined with bookcases and portraits of white men.

Lux Alptraum:

The list of famous alumni from St. Paul's school is *long* and includes names you definitely know.

Lacy Crawford:

John Kerry or Bob Mueller. You know, Astors and Rockefellers; you name it, they were there. So, you pretty quickly figure out that there are really quiet legacies of power if you just know where to look.

Lux Alptraum:

And for students at St. Paul's, there's a very clear message: You too could be one of these people.

Lacy Crawford:

You sort of think, "God, you know, I could do anything if I pull this off. If I can make myself seem like I belong here, then really the world might open up to me."

Lux Alptraum:

Lacy wasn't the only one hoping that St. Paul's could open doors for her. Here's her classmate Tommieka Texiera — or Tommie, for short.

Tommieka Texiera:

My mom is from Panama. She's an immigrant and, you know, she had an immigrant mentality, which is more like, "Opportunity, opportunity, opportunity." And that's how she viewed St. Paul's. For people who know about St. Paul's, it's totally about the prestige, and the excellent education, and access to the Ivy League.

Lux Alptraum:

Tommie remembers the school being super cliquy. The kind of place where everyone knew exactly where they were in the pecking order.

Tommieka Texiera:

It was like regular for you not to be welcomed in certain groups, you know, which is what it is and there wasn't really anything you could do about that. You know, very rigid lines and boundaries for the cliques that were there. So if you were a dancer, you were a dancer. If you were a creative, you hung out with the creatives, you know? It was that kind of thing.

Lux Alptraum:

And there was one group in particular that stood out.

Tommiëka Texiera:

The top of the St. Paul's social pyramid was the athletes; absolutely, the athletes. The top football players, the top hockey players, the top lacrosse players.

Lux Alptraum:

And on campus, you could always tell who those popular kids were. Unlike Lacy and Tommie, they never seemed to worry about whether they fit in at St. Paul's.

Tommiëka Texiera:

They were loud in the dining hall. They walked around the campus being loud. They partied. They came to the rectory smelling a little bit like liquor and Listerine.

Lux Alptraum:

And they often got away with even more extreme behavior like this St. Paul's ritual called 'ponding'.

Lacy Crawford:

The way this worked was the senior girls, the cool ones, would decide who the cockiest new girl was. And then senior boys would go to her dorm at 4:30 in the morning and pull her out of her bed in whatever she was wearing and throw her in the pond.

Lux Alptraum:

This was just one of the forms of hazing that went on at St. Paul's. And the message of all of it was clear to Lacy: If you could survive, you'd proved you belonged. And she wanted to belong, because if she could make it at St. Paul's, the world was her oyster.

[cheerful orchestral music]

And by the fall of 1990, Lacy started to feel like she had a pretty good handle on things.

Lacy Crawford:

I was on the varsity tennis team and I had my friends. I was making the choir groups that I wanted and I had done well academically. And so, I really had carved out the place for myself that had seemed impossible when I first arrived.

Lux Alptraum:

But just a month into her junior year, all of that unraveled.

[music becomes darker and fades out]

The story begins, as these stories often do, with a teenage boy — two teenage boys, actually. Both athletes.

Lacy Crawford:

They were the captains of their teams. They were a little bit mean, but also incredibly charming. They weren't necessarily handsome, but they were men when most of the other students were still boys.

Lux Alptraum:

Lacy refers to these men as Rick and Taz, but those aren't their real names. They were seniors, and she was a junior. And she was much younger than them: 15 to their 18, which is why she was surprised when Rick called her on the payphone in her dorm. When he called, Rick sounded like he was crying and he told Lacy that he needed help. At first, she assumed that "help" must mean math tutoring, but Rick went on to say that something had happened with his mom.

[foreboding piano and thoughtful electronic music throughout]

St. Paul's had a really strict curfew. Under no circumstances was Lacy to leave her dorm this late. But Rick was persuasive and he convinced Lacy to break the rules.

Lacy Crawford:

I snuck out, and I tiptoed across campus, and kept out of the streetlights, and got to his room. And I heard him whispering to me, and he pulled me up through the window and I was immediately on a bed. It was dark in there, and I saw that he wasn't the only person in there, that his roommate was in there, and they weren't clothed. And I still didn't understand what was going on.

Lux Alptraum:

But it didn't take long for Lacy to piece things together. Rick hadn't called her because something had happened with his mom.

Lacy Crawford:

I was a virgin at the time. I had not had intercourse. So I said, "Just don't have sex with me. Just whatever you do, don't have sex with me," because I thought that I wouldn't get pregnant and I wouldn't get AIDS, and those were the only two things I knew to worry about because of my health class.

Lux Alptraum:

We're not going to go into detail, but in that dark, small dorm room, Rick and Taz brutally assaulted Lacy. The one piece of information that's important to this story is that Lacy was orally assaulted.

At the time Lacy assumed that as long as she didn't tell anyone what Rick and Taz did to her, she could pretend it had never happened. Everything would go back to normal.

Unfortunately, it didn't.

Lacy Crawford:

The next day at seated meal, which was this formal dinner that we all went to, girls in dresses and boys in coat and tie, there were all these athletes looking at me from across the room and one of them said, "Threesome?"

Lux Alptraum:

Gossip spreads fast at a school like St. Paul's, where your classmates are also your dormmates and everyone is constantly in each other's business. It didn't take long for the whole school to hear about what happened in that dark room. Other students tormented her, teachers humiliated her — and then even her body turned on her. Her throat swelled up and she started having trouble swallowing.

Lacy assumed it was probably a case of strep throat so she went to the St. Paul's infirmary and got checked out. The staff there said everything looked fine and sent her back to class.

Lacy Crawford:

But my throat kept getting worse. And then in the morning I woke up, and when I swallowed, I felt scabs, and I tasted blood, and I couldn't eat.

Lux Alptraum:

This time, when she went back to the infirmary, St. Paul's sent her to an ear, nose, and throat specialist nearby who realized that the blood she was tasting was coming from herpes sores deep in her throat. He wrote his diagnosis in her chart and he passed his assessment on to the St. Paul's infirmary. But no one told Lacy or her family that she had herpes. And her parents were freaking out.

Lacy Crawford:

They were thinking, you know, "Is it some horrible autoimmune disease that she's attacking her own mucous membranes? Could this be the onset of lupus? Is this a leukemia?" You know, I mean, there were all of the... you know, some sort of ulterior presentation of Crohn's or something. All these things that they were worried about. And St. Paul's knew and didn't tell them.

Lux Alptraum:

Lacy spent her junior year in agony; physically, mentally, and emotionally. And after seven months of guilt-ridden silence, she just couldn't do it anymore. So she called her mom on her dorm payphone — the very same payphone Rick had called her on

that night. And she told her what happened. Her mother, in turn, called the school's chaplain and spent two hours on the phone with him, sobbing as she asked for solace and support.

Lacy's mother may have thought that that call would spur St. Paul's to action. And it did — but not in the way you might expect. Instead of rushing to support Lacy's family, the school launched a full-court press to do damage control.

Lacy Crawford:

They concluded that what had happened between me and the boys was consensual. This is legally impossible because they were both 18 and I was 15. It was a statutory felonious assault. So even if I had written them glitter-covered letters begging them to do this, you know, it was still like... you know, consent was a moot point.

Lux Alptraum:

What that also meant was that Lacy was a victim of child abuse. And in New Hampshire, as in every state, educators are legally required to report child abuse to the state. St. Paul's, for whatever reason, did not do that.

Without the support of the school, Lacy's parents decided that their next step was the criminal justice system. From a legal standpoint, it was all very straightforward. There was clinical evidence of sexual activity. Lacy was 15, too young to legally consent.

But this sexual assault didn't happen just anywhere; it happened at St. Paul's, a school full of incredibly powerful, incredibly well-connected people who wanted to make this disappear.

Lacy Crawford:

The school met with their lawyers, and then they called my father and they said, "Lacy's not invited to come back for senior year." And my dad said, "What are you talking about?" And they said, you know, "Look, if she testifies against the boys, this is what we're going to say. She's a drug dealer. She's been dealing her drugs to other students and endangering them..." that she's promiscuous, and a danger to other students because of that. I mean, many things. And my dad came into my room. He had written down the things they had said, and he said, "Lacy, they're going to ruin you. They're going to ruin you."

Lux Alptraum:

In that moment, Lacy had two choices. She could testify and watch her future at St. Paul's go up in smoke. Or she could stay silent, go back to school, and use her St. Paul's degree to go on to better things. And after a lot of thinking, she opted to keep her mouth shut, finish her degree, and move on with her life.

Lacy Crawford:

And the boys who assaulted me were allowed to graduate. One of them won the top athletic prize. They left the state, and that was that.

Lux Alptraum:

And for over two decades, she tried her best to forget about St. Paul's School. But completely walking away turned out to be harder than she thought.

[clip from [Weekend Edition](#)] "St. Paul's is the elite boarding school in New Hampshire that educated Secretary of State John Kerry and many other prominent alumni. And that school is now at the center of a rape trial."]

In 2015, 23 years after Lacy graduated, a high-profile rape case drew attention to St. Paul's. And it sparked more survivors to come forward.

[clip from [Radio Boston](#)] "A new investigation into allegations of sexual abuse at St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire, finds this.

'Put simply but starkly, several former faculty and staff sexually abused children in their care in a variety of ways, from clear boundary violations to repeated sexual relationships to rape.'

Lux Alptraum:

New Hampshire began a criminal investigation of St. Paul's in July 2017. But just like before, nothing really came of it. St. Paul's got off with a slap on the wrist after agreeing to a settlement with the state.

But this time, Lacy wasn't going to stay quiet.

Lacy Crawford:

I realized that I had been silenced by a bunch of men when I was 15. I had been literally... I mean, the metaphor is a bit too on-the-nose, frankly. You know, I had been literally silenced by men who put their dicks down my throat, right? And then I had been silenced effectively by the administration of my boarding school, who said, "She can't come back. We're going to ruin her life if she doesn't drop these charges." And then they were doing it to me again. And I thought, "No. No."

Lux Alptraum:

While working with the investigation, she had learned about a number of documents that mapped out everything St. Paul's had done to her. She used those documents as the basis of a memoir called *Notes on a Silencing*. When it debuted in July 2020, the book made a major splash. *Vanity Fair* ran an excerpt; the *New York Times* profiled Lacy; NPR's *Weekend Edition* invited her on to talk about her experience at St. Paul's.

[clip from [Weekend Edition](#)] “As people continue to come forward with their stories of assault and violence, what would you say to someone who is trying to navigate this kind of violation and the systemic protections that seem to still snap into place when something like this happens?”

Lacy Crawford:

I would like to say, “Don’t be afraid.” And I would like to say, “Don’t be ashamed.” But I think for a long time, we’ve tried to help survivors of violence of all kinds by asking them to change how they feel about themselves. What we’ve been missing – or at least I was missing – is to show them the forces that are arrayed against them and that are, in fact, asking them to carry that responsibility and carry that shame.

I want all of the girls and women who have ever been made to carry the blame for the aggression of men, the aggression of others... I wanted them to see that they were intended to carry that blame and that it was never theirs.

Lux Alptraum:

And then, a month after her book was published, Lacy received a message from the board of St. Paul’s she wasn’t expecting. An apology.

Lacy Crawford:

“On behalf of the Board of Trustees of St. Paul’s School, I most sincerely apologize to you for the manner in which you and your parents were treated by the school, particularly for the silencing that was forced on you and the experience you endured. We apologize as well for the lack of a proper investigation of facts, the failure to report properly to authorities, and the improper release of medical records. You were treated as badly as one could imagine.”

The first thing this letter did was it made me feel that I had been heard. What happened to me was allowed to matter to them. They did not issue the apology in a public format. They sent it to me and they said, “You can do with this whatever you wish.”

Lux Alptraum:

And on top of all of that, it seemed like St. Paul’s was making some real changes. In July of 2019, the school hired Kathy Giles to be the first female rector in St. Paul’s history.

Lacy Crawford:

The only reason we’re here, rather than me, like, Zooming with you from a private island that I bought with the money I extracted from St. Paul’s School, is because individuals like Kathy Giles were like, “Tell me what happened, and tell me what you want to do with this.”

Lux Alptraum:

Then there was Jeff Maher, a former police officer who New Hampshire had appointed to monitor how St. Paul's responded to cases of sexual misconduct.

Lacy Crawford:

He was professional, authentic, kind. He was absolutely fantastic, fully transparent, you know; available.

Lux Alptraum:

Even Archie Cox, the president of the school's board of trustees, reached out to offer his own attempt to smooth things over.

Lacy Crawford:

He emailed me, on the same day, a private apology from him to me, which is not on letterhead and it's not formatted, you know, and he just basically said, "I can't believe this shit." You know, he was like, "I can't believe they did this to you. I'm racking my brains. I can't figure it out."

[music transitions to ethereal, soft orchestral]

Lux Alptraum:

After getting the apology, Lacy experienced a kind of hope that she hadn't felt in a long time. She even publicly shared portions of the letter on Twitter, saying, "The apology is brilliant. (Yes, color me shocked.) Institutions can learn from it."

Lacy wasn't the only one who was thrilled by the apology. Behind the scenes, a number of St. Paul's alums had been petitioning the school to apologize to Lacy. Here's Tommie again.

Tommieka Texiera:

My form-mates were calling the school. Like, everyone was calling the school to speak to the leadership there, to speak to the president of the board, Archie Cox, and our rector, our new first female rector, Kathy Giles. And you know, it was looking a little shaky for a while, like there wasn't going to be an apology.

Lux Alptraum:

But they kept pushing and started speaking out about their own experiences at the school with everything from sexism, to racism, to homophobia. And while St. Paul's didn't apologize publicly for everything, they did eventually offer that apology to Lacy.

Tommieka Texiera:

Finally, we did get the apology. And I think we were all happy that, you know, we did receive the apology.

Lux Alptraum:

And you didn't have to be a St. Paul's alum to feel excited. I thought this could be the perfect example of an apology gone right; of what you can hope for when you believe in apologies!

But sometimes, that hope is premature.

In December of 2020, I connected with Lacy for a second interview.

Lux Alptraum (in-call):

So how are you feeling today about the apology you got from St. Paul's?

Lacy Crawford:

Uh, duped.

[music transitions back to foreboding piano and thoughtful electronic]

Lux Alptraum (mono):

In the seven-and-a-half weeks between our interviews, all the hope and joy and promise Lacy had felt about the apology had disappeared. It started with little things. Like when Lacy shared a *Boston Globe* article about the apology with Kathy Giles.

Lacy Crawford:

And she forwarded it to her communications team and left me on copy and said, "I guess the apology landed well." And I'm not sure if that was an accident or if that's just a moment of wit. I don't know. But I thought, "Huh. I hope this is real."

Lux Alptraum:

Then she heard from a fellow alum that Archie Cox, the board president whose personal apology had meant so much to her, had referred to her book as a "PR danger."

Lacy Crawford:

I asked him quite openly on a phone call. I said, "I heard you said this." And he said, "I really regret my choice of words. I choose words poorly often, and that was an example of it, and I really regret it, and I'm sorry." But if you say that in the first place, there's a point at which sorry doesn't mean anything anymore, right?

Lux Alptraum:

And then, Jeff Maher, the state-appointed compliance officer she'd trusted to monitor St. Paul's response to assaults, resigned.

And he didn't just leave. In his resignation letter, he called St. Paul's an "intolerable working environment," even going so far as to accuse the administration of intentionally obstructing his work.

Lacy Crawford:

I was enraged. I was enraged. I don't see that there's a way back from that. I really don't.

Lux Alptraum:

It's crushing for a sexual assault survivor to watch their school fail other survivors again and again. But Tommie points out that there's an added layer of pain when your school is a place like St. Paul's. Because it's not just the place where you went to high school. When you're a student at St. Paul's, it's also your home. The place where you eat, sleep, hang out with friends, have crushes, and come of age.

Tommieka Texiera:

You dream in St. Paul's. Like, when you first get there, your dreams are back home where you grew up. And then over time, like, your dreams are about the community. And that's how deeply embedded and into your subconscious and unconscious, I guess, of being there so often because you only go home like three times a year.

Lux Alptraum:

And for many students, that creates a deep, unshakeable feeling of loyalty.

[music transitions to ethereal, soft orchestral]

Tommieka Texiera:

I definitely feel like there are a good number of us that have Stockholm syndrome, that we just don't want the school to be erased because that's where we went to high school.

Lux Alptraum:

It's hard to walk away from a place that has that deep a hold on you. When she first got the apology, Lacy had felt a sense of camaraderie with the leadership of St. Paul's. But when it all fell apart, it was like she was 15 all over again, struggling to navigate this cloistered world of powerful people.

Lacy Crawford:

It's embarrassing, a little bit, to admit that I had, sort of, grafted onto these people, the possibility of partnership.

Lux Alptraum (in-call):

How does that feel?

Lacy Crawford:

It feels like growing up again and again, and again, and again, and again. I feel like I'm in a middle-grade novel and I keep having to reread it. Like, "This is the part where you realize you alone, Pippi, are not going to change the world."

Lux Alptraum:

Part of what made all of this so crushing was that, for Lacy, that letter from St. Paul's had been *the* apology. The one she wanted. The one with the power to make her feel like real change was possible.

Lux Alptraum (in-call):

Do you have any desire to get an apology from the boys?

Lacy Crawford:

No. I don't care. I mean, it would be nice, because that's nice, right? But I don't... I don't wish to owe them the acceptance of an apology, either. I don't want to interact with them at all.

Lux Alptraum:

Lacy's memoir is called *Notes on a Silencing* for a reason. It was St. Paul's who had silenced her most, and it was St. Paul's who she wanted to hear a real apology from. And maybe that's part of why she was so eager to accept it as sincere. But maybe one of the many lessons here is that you can't celebrate an apology too soon, even if it seems like a good one.

Lacy Crawford:

I have to say, I think the actual words "I'm sorry" are like a check that's written to you, and it's lovely to have in your hand. But if you cannot cash that in the form of an altered relationship, either between you and the person who did the apology, made the apology, or the person who apologized in his or her own actions, then, you know, it's PR.

Lux Alptraum:

And yet, perhaps surprisingly, Lacy has no regrets. Because as Tommie points out, leadership like Kathy Giles and Archie Cox aren't the only people who get to define what St. Paul's stands for.

Tommieka Texiera:

It honestly is our school. Our names are, like, etched on the walls of the dining hall; my name is in Lower, the lower dining hall. And as such, it's our school. *We* live there, you know? And so therefore, we will hopefully be able to come together and stand in the gap for this school and say, "We're sorry for what happened to all the students there."

[quiet chorus of “I’m sorry” over church bells]

[soft electronic background music]

Lux Alptraum:

Sometimes it’s your peers who are the ones who come through for you when an institution can’t. And there was another apology that she received after writing *Notes on a Silencing* that Lacy still thinks about to this day. One from a former classmate.

Lacy Crawford:

He was a hockey star, he was built like the side of a house, and I didn’t know him at all. And he wrote to me after he read my book and he said, “I know exactly who your attackers were. They were my roommates, teammates, dining hall buddies, friends. I did not understand what had been done to you. I failed to stop it or to help you, and I am so sorry.” That right there... That’s the real deal, I think. Because I don’t know him. He’s not implicated. I would never have contacted him, right? And he reached out with that.

Lux Alptraum:

So, was St. Paul’s letter to Lacy a good apology? It was technically very beautiful, hitting all the right notes. But at the end of the day, it was a check nobody could cash.

Instead, the work of alumni like Tommie and Lacy created a new kind of currency — one of community support and care.

Maybe, in the end, the beauty in St. Paul’s apology wasn’t about some transformation in the school’s leaders. Maybe it was about a transformation within the larger community of students and alumni who advocated for St. Paul’s to issue an apology, and sometimes even apologized to Lacy themselves.

In many ways, St. Paul’s is still the same school that silenced Lacy all those years ago. But maybe over time, the advocacy that sparked St. Paul’s to own up to their actions will push them to live up to the promise of that apology.

Lacy Crawford:

I want to live in a world where we can change. I turned out to be wrong, but I don’t regret that I tried.

[outro music; uptempo electronic percussion with guitar]

Say You’re Sorry was created by me, Lux Alptraum. This episode was written and hosted by Lux Alptraum and Siona Peterous and produced by Julia Llinas Goodman.

Editing by Julia Furlan, who is sorry to any white man who asks her for free advice. Sound design and mixing by Ariana Martinez. Our theme music is by Michael Aquino. Episode art by Augusto Zambonato. Archival audio courtesy of WBUR's Radio Boston.

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