

Audible Originals presents:

Say You're Sorry

Hosted by Lux Alptraum

Episode 7: I'm Sorry If...

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

Lux Alptraum:

When I was 21, I got out of an abusive relationship. After three years of being belittled, and gaslit, and manipulated, one simple thing kickstarted my healing process: I realized that I had been right.

My ex had spent our entire relationship convincing me that my pain wasn't real, that my anger was an overreaction. And I could finally see that he had been lying to me that whole entire time.

For many abuse and assault survivors, that recognition is a crucial part of healing. And it's found in many ways; through speaking out, through feeling heard, through being believed by our communities. But I've learned that it can also come through an apology.

I'm Lux Alptraum, and this is *Say You're Sorry*, a show about public apologies. In this episode, we're taking a look at what it means to hear the words "I'm sorry" after you've been abused — especially when that apology comes after a public accusation.

Just so you're prepared, the following story involves sexual harassment and assault.

In the summer of 1991, Frederique Giffard got an exciting job offer.

Frederique Giffard:

They offered for me to come to Gloucester for the summer to be the au pair there.

Lux Alptraum:

Frederique was 16, living in Paris, and eager to visit America — even if it meant she had to spend her summer babysitting. She liked the kids, and their dad, Israel Horovitz, seemed nice enough.

But when she arrived in Massachusetts, things immediately felt off.

Frederique Giffard:

My private space was actually a mezzanine in the children's bedroom. And Israel was always in his children's bedroom when I was trying to get dressed in the

morning, so I ended up getting dressed under the blankets in my bed to avoid, you know, doing a show for him, really.

Lux Alptraum:

And then there was her bathroom. Frederique was shocked to discover that the door didn't lock and the shower was totally exposed.

Frederique Giffard:

The shower was the three walls, cabin open, covered with plastic bags. And, well, he would come in the room when I was there. Once can be, you know, bad luck. And twice, and thrice, and he would systematically come in and say, "Oh! Sorry," but then stay, you know, just long enough to have a glance and then... Yes.

Lux Alptraum:

And the job wasn't what she'd expected, either. In France, she'd been responsible for entertaining the kids when their parents were out. In Gloucester, their schedules were already packed with painting classes and trips to the beach. She learned that her main responsibility was supposed to be driving them to all of this stuff. But Frederique couldn't drive.

Frederique Giffard:

And I ended up, in a very small time, spending my day at home with Israel.

Lux Alptraum:

To some people, that would have been a dream. After all her boss, Israel Horovitz, was a world-renowned playwright and co-founder of The Gloucester Stage Company — not to mention the father of Beastie Boy Ad-Rock. But Frederique didn't care about the theater world. All she knew was that she was thousands of miles from home, trapped in a house with a man old enough to be her father, and that man was treating her like his personal plaything.

Frederique Giffard:

He took me out as if I was his mistress, telling me which dress to wear, and he would take me out.

Lux Alptraum:

Within just a couple of days, Israel was parading Frederique around town. One evening, he took her to the ballet. Another time, he brought her to a fancy party where all the important people of Gloucester had gathered for an evening together. When they arrived, he was holding her hand.

Frederique Giffard:

We were like a couple, except that I wasn't his mistress and I didn't want to be his mistress. It was so embarrassing.

Lux Alptraum:

Then there was the time that Israel took Frederique with him to his own theater. The actresses lined up to greet Israel, and he kissed them, one after the other — horrible, wet kisses, she says. She felt bad for them. And she quickly discovered that the feeling was mutual. That night at the theater, Frederique unwittingly stumbled into the Gloucester Stage Company’s whisper network.

Frederique Giffard:

The women there told me not to stay with him on his own. And I just had the time, I think, to say, “Well, I’m the au pair. I’m at home with him.”

[light piano music plays in the background]

Lux Alptraum:

Frederique realized that as long as she was working in the Horovitz home, there was no way to escape her boss.

Frederique Giffard:

Every time I was in the car with him, there was a fear, and I think the fear grew day after day. I couldn’t really analyze what was going on. I wasn’t sure... I could feel that he wanted me, but I wasn’t sure whether I had done something wrong, whether, you know, it was... I was confused.

Lux Alptraum:

After less than a week in Gloucester, Frederique knew she needed to go home to Paris.

Frederique Giffard:

I feared his reaction, so I didn’t say, “I want to run away because I want to run away from you.” I said, “I want to run away because I don’t feel good.”

Lux Alptraum:

But Israel wasn’t going to let her get away that easily.

Frederique Giffard:

He wrote to my mother, a number of faxes that I kept, in which he said that I was a whimsical teenager, that he did have a daughter so he knew that sometimes girls of that age need to be kicked in the ass. It was really... In French, we say *machiavélique*. Does that exist in English? I’m not sure. Very manipulative, something like that

Lux Alptraum:

Thankfully, Frederique’s mom wasn’t swayed by Israel’s faxes. If her daughter wanted to come home, she was going to come home. So ten days after she’d

landed in America, Frederique was headed back to France. But Israel managed to make the end of her trip the worst part of all.

Frederique Giffard:

The most difficult moment was the long, really long way in the car to the airport where he kissed me, touched me, rubbed himself with my hand, and all kinds of things. He said, "You know you will have to kiss me properly at the airport." And well, he did at the airport. He, you know... he hugged me and imposed me a really long, disgusting kiss, and that was just in front of the police or, you know, the customs officers or something.

And I... Well, I took it because I knew that I could go away just the second after that. So, for some reason, you know, I ran to the bathroom, brush my mouth and my teeth and everything for a very, very long time. I think that was the longest toothbrush ever. And then I went home.

[frantic piano crescendos and fades out]

Lux Alptraum:

Back in France, Frederique was free from Israel's prying eyes and roaming hands. But not everybody could book a plane ticket home to escape. Those women from the theater, the ones who warned her about him? They knew exactly what Frederique was going through because some of them were experiencing it themselves.

Laura Crook Waxdal:

I remember saying that Israel was kind of like a vampire in that you never knew when his teeth were going to come out. Like, sometimes he was not... he was fine. And then other times his teeth came out. He attacked.

[single piano notes ringing throughout]

Lux Alptraum:

That's Laura Crook Waxdal. And this is Kim Senko:

Kim Senko:

When I was in my 20s, I knew of at least 27 or 28 women who he had accosted. I knew them personally.

Lux Alptraum:

In the early 1990s, Kim was the technical director at the Gloucester Stage Company and Laura was one of the actresses. Israel's behavior meant that the women at the theatre were constantly on alert. Whenever he was around, Kim and Laura also functioned as unofficial bodyguards, working to keep the women of the theatre

safe. One time, Laura caught Kim's attention right as Israel was pulling her into a private meeting.

Kim Senko:

We had this pact. We were never going to leave anybody alone. But he had to give her notes and there was no reason for me to be there. So I just kept thinking of reasons that I thought were clever to go back there and just check on them and make sure that nothing untoward was happening. And I would go back and I'd be like, "I need my hammer," but I would walk out with a screwdriver, or I would go back and, you know, "Hey, how's it going? Oh, I forgot you guys were back here."

Laura Crook Waxdal:

Kim is not an actor, so it was hilarious. And she knew that. She's going, [somewhat robotically] "I wonder where the shop vac is, I need to find it," and was just, like, super loud, and coming in and, like, banging shit around, and just like, "Ah, here it is," and she's holding a wrench; just kind of slowly walked out parading this wrench. And she must have come in three or four times claiming to look for something, finding something, like just vamping.

Kim Senko:

I looked like a lunatic. And I remember his face. I remember him being pissed, looking at me like I was insane and angry. And I don't know if it was because he knew what I was doing or if he was just pissed that I was interrupting. I was like, "I can't leave her alone! She's my friend."

Lux Alptraum:

They used any tool they could as a weapon against Israel's advances. Even makeup managed to become a kind of armor.

Laura Crook Waxdal:

We figured out he didn't like lipstick, like red lipstick. I still have the red lipstick that I kept in my dressing table box. All the women knew, "Go and put that one on." He did not like it. And so... it was probably an old lipstick that didn't smell great and we were like, "Yeah, okay. Whatever."

Lux Alptraum:

Some of them tried to report Israel. They told other actors and their bosses about his behavior. But nothing ever seemed to change; this was the early 1990s when phrases like "sexual harassment" were still relatively uncommon. And Kim and Laura only had to turn on the news to be reminded of that. When talking about why they weren't screaming about Israel from the rooftops, both Laura and Kim brought up the same name: Anita Hill.

[clips from CBS:]

"This morning on Nightwatch, public opinion on Thomas and Hill."

"Americans think that both of them are mostly telling the truth, but also hiding something about their past relationship. But when forced to choose between the two of them, Clarence Thomas is seen as the more believable of the two."

"The situation is now so muddled and so confused after three days of lurid, inconclusive testimony that nobody is sure of anything except that the whole process has been distasteful."

Kim Senko:

There was a lot of evidence that nobody would be believed, and that you would be punished for coming forward, and that it was in some way your fault.

Lux Alptraum:

Whether you were an actress, a lawyer, or a teenager, you got the same responses when you reported sexual harassment: You must have misunderstood; Maybe you asked for it; Was it really that bad? Plus, Israel had a reputation as a thoughtful, sensitive man, one wrote plays about rape survivors confronting their assailants.

The actors didn't know what to do. The board didn't seem to care. But there had to be someone out there who could help. And in an act of desperation, one of the women sent an anonymous plea to a local theater critic.

Bill Marx:

It was something like, "Israel Horovitz is essentially groping and badgering women at the theater. We've made attempts to stop him. Can you help us?"

Lux Alptraum:

This is Bill Marx, and in 1993 he was a reporter at the *Boston Phoenix*, an arts weekly. Bill covered the theater scene, and he knew Israel Horovitz's work well. He once called Israel "the Bard of Gloucester." Sexual assault wasn't his beat, but he knew theater.

Bill Marx:

I knew some of the players, I knew some of the women... the actresses who were being molested and felt that, you know, I might be the person to help.

Lux Alptraum:

Bill wasn't sure, at first, how to handle a request like this, but he says he'll never forget that letter. And he was determined to answer it, to help them like they asked.

Bill Marx:

It was almost like a moral crusade. I mean, I was a reporter, but I'll tell you that the

last line saying, “Can you help us?” Even when I say that now, I still feel something in my body, like, “Yeah, can I help you?”

Lux Alptraum:

Eventually, Bill found ten women who were willing to share their stories anonymously. Most of them were from the Gloucester Stage Company, but there were also three childcare workers — women like Frederique who’d worked in the Horovitz home, taking care of Israel’s youngest children.

And on August 6th, 1993, Bill published his exposé. “SEXUAL HARASSMENT: Trouble at the Gloucester Stage Company,” the headline read. At the top of the story, there was a photo of Israel smiling, his Hawaiian shirt unbuttoned to show his chest. Israel refused to participate in the piece, but privately, he let Bill know exactly what he thought of the story.

Bill Marx:

When I spoke to Horovitz on the phone, he was essentially embattled and wanted to know why I was out to get him and deny, deny, deny, deny. So it was deny, deny, deny. The *Boston Globe* and other media outlets were only too willing to let Horovitz deny, deny, deny.

Lux Alptraum:

The *Boston Globe* even allowed Israel to issue a rebuttal. In his statement, he emphatically denied the accusations, insisting that the anonymous accounts amounted to a character assassination. After five paragraphs spent ripping his victims to shreds, Israel tacked on a quick apology: “If I have unknowingly offended any woman, I deeply and sincerely apologize.”

Laura Crook Waxdal:

When he does offer any sort of apology, he does use the wonderful little ‘if’.

Kim Senko:

I remember when I read it thinking that it was a brilliant twist to make himself a victim.

Lux Alptraum:

When you start an apology with ‘if’, you’re already suggesting there’s a chance you didn’t actually do anything wrong. That is not taking responsibility for your actions. And if you don’t do that, it isn’t really an apology.

Israel also insisted it was unfair that his accusers had the shield of anonymity. If he didn’t know who was accusing him of harassment, how could he properly refute their claims?

But Laura and Kim didn't buy that reasoning. Though their names weren't included in the piece, there were certain details in the Phoenix story that made them easy to identify if Israel cared to figure out who they were.

Kim Senko:

If you knew anything about the theater at that time, there was no way you couldn't have figured out that it was me in the article. And yet, I don't think he knew. And I remember thinking, "How can he not know it was me?" And then I just chalked it up to arrogance, like he's just so arrogant he has no idea who works for him or, you know, he's done this to so many women so often that he can't keep us straight.

Lux Alptraum:

And it wasn't just the people of Gloucester who were reading this story. The news even reached France. A friend in America sent Frederique a clipping of the article in the mail. Reading through the story, she felt a strange sense of relief. Seeing those eerily familiar experiences laid out in print made her feel less alone.

Frederique Giffard:

If it had happened to so many people and, you know, so many girls had lived really the same kinds of things, you know. Yeah, it meant that it wasn't my fault, and that was... yeah, that was very precious to me.

Lux Alptraum:

Even though Bill's story didn't lead to a proper apology, Israel's victims did get this sense of recognition. And they thought, "Okay, at least now the world knows. And now that the truth is out there, he won't do it again."

[solo piano music in background]

In 2009, more than 15 years after Frederique left Massachusetts, she was watching TV in her Paris flat. By now, she was 34 and a practicing lawyer. And as she flipped through the channels, she came across something that sent a shock through her body: Israel Horovitz presenting an award.

Frederique Giffard:

Even before recognizing him, my body had started, you know, shaking, and sweating, and crying. So I thought, okay, there's something that needs action there because it means that it's not over for you.

Lux Alptraum:

A lot of people might have just changed the channel. But Frederique had been trying to ignore Israel for over 15 years, and it hadn't worked. So she decided she needed to confront him. Face to face.

Frederique Giffard:

I really felt a need, you know? Sometimes you feel a need, you know it's not going to be easy, but you have to do it.

Lux Alptraum:

They met at the Café de Flore.

[ambient sounds of people chattering with piano music]

Frederique Giffard:

It's a beautiful Parisian café, you know, with nice china cups and... Yeah, you know, it's the place where Hemingway and Henry Miller would go. I wasn't scared. I mean, nothing could really happen, you know, nothing really bad could happen to me in this café. But nervous, yeah. Yes, I was really nervous.

Lux Alptraum:

Israel greeted her with a smile like they were old friends catching up. But Frederique was having none of it. She approached him stone-faced and grim, doing her best to make sure he understood just how angry she was.

Frederique Giffard:

I told him the whole thing; the whole thing as I could remember it. And I told him that it was particularly disgusting, in my view, because he was pretending to be a nice guy.

Lux Alptraum:

Frederique wasn't going to let Israel walk away from the Café de Flore thinking he was a nice guy, so she laid it all out on the table.

Frederique Giffard:

"You're hiding everything. You pretend to be something else. And that is disgusting."

Lux Alptraum:

Frederique was expecting Israel to get angry with her. But instead, he seemed to kind of wilt away.

Frederique Giffard:

He was diminishing. He was going deeper, and deeper, and deeper in his armchair. Yeah, I think he wanted it to end, but he was polite enough to wait for the end of it.

[piano and ambient chatter fade down]

Lux Alptraum:

But when the end came, Israel didn't seem to have learned much. Just like with his

letter to the *Globe*, he chalked Frederique's trauma up to simple miscommunication.

Frederique Giffard:

I couldn't quote it, but I think he said something like, "I wasn't aware that I did you some harm," or something like that. What he implied is that, "I thought you were okay with all this."

Lux Alptraum:

The most she got was a modest recognition.

Frederique Giffard:

He did say a very short and weak sentence of apology, and then we left, and then I never talk to him again.

[single piano notes ringing throughout]

Lux Alptraum:

And that was it. And while it might not seem like much, while it might not have *been* much, it still changed her life. Frederique had been prepared for Israel to deny everything. Instead, he tacitly accepted that he had hurt her. And that simple act of recognizing her pain lifted a tremendous weight from her shoulders.

Prior to that meeting at the Café de Flore, she'd been struggling with the physical symptoms of trauma.

Frederique Giffard:

I had several panic attacks in airports. I had unexplained bursts of tears, but many were about claustrophobia, which are maybe linked to this feeling of, you know... feeling like a kind of prisoner, first in the house and then in the car. But after talking to him, I felt immediately better, immediately lighter.

Lux Alptraum:

Frederique no longer panics in airports. She's no longer reminded of his wet kiss when she goes through customs. She's freed from him, at least in some ways.

And this is part of what I mean when I talk about the transformative power of apology. When you've carried a burden for years, having the person who saddled you with it stop denying what you've experienced can release you, somehow.

And there was another silver lining to having confronted Israel.

Frederique Giffard:

I thought, "Okay, well, he will stop now."

Lux Alptraum:

Frederique was convinced that now that Israel had been forced to look into one of his victims' eyes and see her pain, he would change his behavior. She felt sure that this was a turning point. But it wasn't.

[provocative transitional music plays; goes quiet]

Around the same time that Frederique Giffard was confronting Israel Horovitz, Maia Sage Ermansons was an adolescent girl just getting to know him. Maia is a New Yorker who grew up within walking distance of Israel's West Village apartment. She was always interested in dancing and acting. And from a young age, Israel played a special role in her life.

Maia Ermansons:

He's extremely kind, and charismatic, and you know, he has this kind of importance around him. And to me specifically, he was like a grandfather.

Lux Alptraum:

Maia first met Israel in 2007, when she was 11, cast as a performer in one of his short plays. She was the only kid in the show, so everyone paid a ton of attention to her. Even the world-renowned playwright Israel Horovitz.

Maia Ermansons:

There was this running thing, like anyone who cursed had to give me a Toblerone. So I got a lot of chocolate.

Lux Alptraum:

Over the years, Israel continued to mentor Maia, helping her out from time to time — even agreeing to be the graduation speaker at her performing arts middle school. He was always willing to help her and always seemed to know what she needed.

As she got older, Maia fell out of the theater world. By the time she was 21, she was feeling adrift and confused, unsure of who she wanted to be, or what her next steps were. And in this moment of uncertainty, Israel knew exactly what to do.

Maia Ermansons:

He was incredible how he honed in on exactly the right thing to say to me and exactly the thing that I would, you know, light up at. He offered to gift me any of his short plays. I can choose however many I want to produce and put up.

And he was like, "You're going to choose the plays. You're going to get your buddies, some of your friends, your actors, your director friends. And you guys are going to put this on and this is going to focus you."

Lux Alptraum:

Maia was ecstatic and determined to use this chance to prove her talents to Israel. He was an award-winning playwright whose work was celebrated around the world. She wasn't going to take this for granted.

Maia Ermansons:

I wanted to show him I was being proactive, and I was taking this seriously, and I wasn't just like a little puppy waiting for the next order from him.

Lux Alptraum:

She took a few weeks to assemble her team and figure out her vision. And when she felt confident in herself, she told Israel she was ready to meet and discuss moving forward.

Israel insisted they meet at Maia's place, rather than a café, which she thought was kind of weird but didn't dwell on. Then he showed up about 45 minutes early.

Maia Ermansons:

It was immediately really weird and I kind of remember wanting to cry almost immediately.

Lux Alptraum:

But Maia was determined to be professional, so she shook off her discomfort and welcomed him in.

[ominous electronic and piano music plays in background]

Maia Ermansons:

I opened the door. And... God, it happened really quickly. Suddenly he was all over me. I got out of his grasp, and from there it... It just became this comedic game, I guess, of... I mean, obviously not comedic, but him coming on to me, grabbing my ass, grabbing my boobs, my breasts, grinding against me, and me just slithering out of his grasp and just kind of flusteredly trying to talk about the plays.

[music stops]

Lux Alptraum:

At first, Maia tried to justify what was happening. She told herself that Israel was old and probably confused — he was in his 70s; maybe he was senile? But then, as she began to talk about the plays, the situation became clear.

Maia Ermansons:

He says, "Maia, Maia, Maia, before we start talking about the plays, I just have to

tell you, I have known you for so long, since you were 11, and your breasts have become so big and so beautiful.”

Lux Alptraum:

This wasn't a confused old man who didn't know what he was doing. This was her surrogate grandfather, a man she'd known since childhood, sexually assaulting her.

For the rest of their time together, she dodged his advances, doing her best to escape his grasp. Maia figured that if she could just keep putting him off, Israel would eventually have to leave. And he did, but not before getting in one last shot.

Maia Ermansons:

He pulls me to him again... I mean, it's just always the pulling, and he grabs your jaw at the side of your head really hard. And his boner's just mashed up against you and he won't let you move. And he tells me, "Maia, no great woman ever became great by being a good girl."

[single piano notes ringing throughout]

Lux Alptraum:

Maia says that during the assault, she'd felt passive and childlike, desperate to evade her assailant without making him mad. But as the door closed behind Israel, something shifted inside her.

Maia Ermansons:

I could feel a chemical rush in my brain the second he left. Like, all these things I was just naturally keeping at bay while the situation was happening, just boom, flooded out. So I punched a wall. I'm not a wall puncher. I've never done that before and I haven't done it since.

Lux Alptraum:

She also found her phone, and immediately called a handful of people to tell them all the details of everything that had just happened — including her mother.

Maia Ermansons:

Within, I don't know, like an hour, I got an email from her of all of these really obscurely-hidden-on-the-internet articles from 1993, and I was like, "Holy fuck."

Lux Alptraum:

Maia was shocked. These other women's stories offered a glimpse into a whole other world, one where Israel Horovitz wasn't a kindly grandfather and mentor, but a serial predator who'd been terrorizing women for decades.

Maia Ermansons:

It flipped my life upside down. It was wild.

Lux Alptraum:

Maia didn't go public about what happened with Israel for a few months. She told friends, and family, and through a whisper network of theater connections, quietly linked up with other women in New York who'd had similarly bad experiences with Israel. She even reached out to a theater that was currently collaborating with him to warn them. But they didn't do anything.

Beyond that, she didn't know what else she could do.

Then, in September of 2016, she saw an Instagram post promoting one of Israel's productions — posted by the very same theater she'd just warned about his behavior. For Maia, this was the final straw. She logged onto Facebook and shared her story in full detail.

Maia Ermansons:

"It hurts me that even though some people do know what he does, it doesn't seem to matter. And there will be more. And some of them may be a lot tougher than me, but some of them will surely be a lot less tough. We've got to protect each other, especially when it would be so easy for a woman to feel this was her fault."

Lux Alptraum:

Initially, Maia left Israel's name out. But a few weeks later, the day after Donald Trump was elected, she decided to reveal it in the comments. And eventually, this made its way to Israel himself.

[clip from voicemail]

Israel Horovitz: Maia, this is Israel calling. I'm so upset.

Lux Alptraum:

This is a voicemail that Israel left for Maia after reading her Facebook post. Once again, Israel's abuses had been revealed. And just like the other times, he used the language of apology to avoid accountability and shift the blame to his victim.

[clip from voicemail]

Israel Horovitz: I don't know what to say. I had no idea. It's a terrible, terrible misunderstanding. It was a terrible mix... mixed signals. And I didn't know you were upset. And I love you, Maia. And I never, never would hurt you that way. Never, never, never. Please, you've got to believe me. Oh, my god. I'm just shaking. Somebody just wrote to me and told me about it.

I don't know what to say. I'm so sorry and I love you, and I would never, never, never hurt you that way. That was such a missed signal and such a... oh my god. Please call me and talk to me. You must never compare me to Donald Trump. Oh, my god, I'm really your friend and I really care about you. I'm just devastated.

Lux Alptraum:

Maia never called him back.

Maia Ermansons:

I was like, "This is not an apology." This is something weirder or different. He does say 'I'm sorry', at some point at the very, very end, but it kind of is, like, "I'm so sorry for the misunderstanding."

Lux Alptraum:

At this point, Israel Horovitz had been a broken record for almost three decades. Once again, he was framing an assault as a misunderstanding, insisting that he couldn't possibly have known that his advances were unwanted. He'd deployed this logic in the pages of the *Boston Globe*, apologizing for any *unintentional* offenses. He'd used it with Frederique, expressing shock at the idea that a 16-year-old girl would feel uncomfortable having a grown man walk in on her in the shower.

And here it was again, in this message to Maia: an insistence that he would never do the very thing he had absolutely done. He may have been saying the words 'I'm sorry', but over and over again he was shifting the accountability from himself to his victims.

But there was one reason that Maia was grateful for that voicemail.

Maia Ermansons:

He's essentially given me a confession.

[piano music plays in background]

Lux Alptraum:

Maia's Facebook post didn't have any hashtags attached, but it reads a lot like a #MeToo story. And a year later, Tarana Burke's #MeToo movement picked up steam as the news was taken over by stories of other abusers. For Israel's victims, it felt like another chance to see justice.

Laura Crook Waxdal:

I remember googling Israel because I was like, "How soon is this story going to come back? What am I going to... I need to be prepared for that. And what am I going to do? And how am I going to manage it?" And blah, blah, blah, blah, the hamster wheel was really firing.

And somehow I found Maia's post on Facebook. And then I got a message from this actress from '93 saying that Jessica Bennett was investigating the *New York Times* allegations and apparently they had never stopped.

Lux Alptraum:

That last bit hit Laura really hard. She hadn't been impressed with Israel's apology, but she'd still assumed that he'd stopped assaulting women in the wake of the *Boston Phoenix's* exposé.

Laura Crook Waxdal:

And I... The only way I describe it is, I went a little dark for a few days after that. I was so... Angry. And so, like, overwhelmed with grief.

Lux Alptraum:

Over the next few weeks, the same whisper network that women had used to protect one another kicked back into action. And once again, they wound up talking to a journalist about Israel Horovitz. But this time, it wasn't a local story. It was national news.

And on November 30th, 2017, the *New York Times* published their story, detailing allegations that feel shockingly similar to the ones that Bill Marx covered in 1993. But this time, the way Israel and the people around him responded was different. His son, Ad-Rock, came out on the side of the women, saying, "I believe the allegations against my father are true and I stand behind the women that made them."

This time, Israel didn't write a half-page response smearing his accusers or painting himself as the victim. Instead, he issued a brief statement to the *New York Times* saying, "I apologize with all my heart to any woman who has ever felt compromised by my actions."

It was a subtle shift, but a notable one all the same. Israel had spent years pretending his serial abuse was just a collection of misunderstandings. Now, he was apologizing for his actions.

Kim Senko:

That's a very different apology. I don't know that it's any more sincere, but I do think it reflects a change in our culture and in our society.

Lux Alptraum:

That's Kim Senko again, the former Gloucester Stage Company technical director who was one of the victims in the 1993 stories. And she has a theory on why Israel suddenly changed his tune.

Kim Senko:

I think he was acknowledging that shift in society. Whether or not he agreed with it, we'll never know. But he was acknowledging that there was a change. It's a small change, but I think it's important.

Lux Alptraum:

Israel Horovitz wasn't the only man to issue an apology that year.

[clips from various [news shows](#)]

"Award-winning actor Morgan Freeman has apologized to anyone who felt, quote, 'uncomfortable or disrespected' by his past behavior."

"Tonight on Capitol Hill, no sign of Al Franken. Today, he apologized."

"Oscar-winning actor Kevin Spacey is apologizing after another actor accused him of an unwanted sexual advance."

Apologies became so common that fall that they generated an entire spectator sport devoted to dissecting men's statements of remorse and analyzing where they'd succeeded, or, more often, failed.

But whatever letter grade a bystander might be tempted to give an abuser's apology, victims and survivors have their own, complicated, personal relationship to these statements of regret.

Laura Crook Waxdal:

It's the 'if'. I can't get past it. It's this, "*If I ever did that, if I ever did this.*" You *did* ever. You clearly did.

[single piano notes ringing throughout]

Maia Ermansons:

It's kind of a little bit more salt in the wound for the immediate women involved.

Frederique Giffard:

You know, I'm not sure the apology was completely sincere, and I think he just wanted to get rid of me. But I mean, as a whole, yes, it did have a very positive impact for me. Yes.

Kim Senko:

There's no apology he could offer. The only thing that he could have done would have been to take action that demonstrated he felt regret.

Lux Alptraum:

Every survivor I spoke to about Israel had a different idea of what true amends might look like, of what he might have done to make things right. But they all agreed on one thing: Israel may have publicly apologized to his victims as a whole. He may have privately apologized to a handful of victims as well. But he still hadn't done enough.

Kim Senko:

There's no way to undo what he's done. There's no way to make it better for the women that he's harmed.

Laura Crook Waxdal:

Well, let's see. For easy math, let's say he was assaulting women for 40 years. Then for 40 years, you have to not assault them, and apologize to all of them individually, and be accountable.

Kim Senko:

There was certainly a path to redemption for him, one that he unequivocally rejected.

Lux Alptraum:

That's one of the hard things about these kinds of stories — there's no one answer, no universal fix that will make every person whole again; especially in a situation where the abuse has gone on for decades and survivors probably number in the dozens. You can't just apologize and call it a day. You have to be willing to engage with everyone you harmed and take things on their terms, not yours.

But Israel Horovitz will never do that, because while we were reporting this piece, he died.

[solo piano music in background]

So much time is spent analyzing what these apologies say about the abusers who issue them that we often lose sight of the people who matter the most: the survivors. Each of Israel's targets had a different relationship to his apologies: for Frederique, a face-to-face meeting offered tremendous relief; for Maia, a voicemail served as a confession, not an apology. Laura and Kim never got personal apologies and were left to wrestle with the meaning of Israel's vague, insufficient public statements. And then there are the other survivors: at least five who've publicly accused Israel, and many others whose names we don't even know. Each of them has their own story and their own struggle.

Not every survivor wants or needs an apology. And apologies aren't the only way to find healing after abuse. But when an abuser admits that what they did was wrong, it creates an opportunity for transformation.

Frederique Giffard:

There is no hiatus between what you think, what you feel, what people say. There aren't any more, you know, five different versions of what happened to you.

Lux Alptraum:

And that resolution — that healing of the cognitive dissonance between what you experienced and what your abuser claims happened — it can set you free. It can give you strength.

[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 produced by Siona Peterous. Editing by Julia Furlan. Sound design and mixing by Ariana Martinez, who is sorry for eating the last sour gummy worm. Our intro music is by Michael Aquino. Episode art by Augusto Zambonato.

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