

## **Doe Re Mi: The Unsung Reality of ‘Doe’ Nomenclature**

By Mercedes De Los Santos

**ABSTRACT.** This two-person spoken word piece was written and performed at the University of California, Santa Barbara during the UCSB Womxn’s Ensemble Theatre Troupe’s 2020 production of *One Night Stand: A Collection of Feminist Bedtime Stories* (a non-profit production of feminist theatre). It is dedicated to Chanel Miller, and all of our fellow survivors everywhere--yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

### **Preface:**

In September 2019, UCSB alum Chanel Miller came forward as the ‘Emily Doe’ from the 2016 *People v. Turner* case. Her memoir, *Know My Name*, quickly became known as a reclamation of her narrative as a survivor, as well as an exposé of the harsh realities of navigating the American judicial system as a victim of sexual trauma(s). In many trials of this nature - including my own, from October 2019 - the anonymity attached to the use of “Doe” nomenclature (as in Jane Doe, Emily Doe, etc) can be a powerful tool for a survivor of trauma in any form - however, this protection also possesses potential to be harmful. While intended as a preventative measure to protect a victim’s identity via obscurity in the courtroom, legal documents, and the public eye, the resulting erasure of a victim’s identity and agency is an unspoken collateral damage, unintentionally reinforcing and in fact, deepening the initial trauma through this dehumanizing process. Inspired by Miller, I conducted research on what I have dubbed, “The Jane Doe Phenomenon”, using my own participant observation and data from *People v. Turner*, as well as Miller’s memoir, to compare the lasting effects of what once being a ‘Doe’ has on our psyches and livelihoods.

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### **Doe Re Mi: Theatre as Advocacy**

**[Two women are sitting in chairs, back to back but fanned out towards an unseen audience. They are unaware of each other’s presence, yet their speech flows as if there is only one speaker.]**

**Woman 1:** My name is Mercedes De Los Santos. Not like the car, but like the saint.

**Woman 2:** My name is Chanel Miller, derived from the Chinese name Zhang Xiao Xia - Little Summer.

**Woman 1:** But on that day, I was Jane Doe.

**Woman 2:** But on that day, I was Emily Doe.

**Woman 1:** He knew my name. He knew my favorite color, my favorite video game, my favorite snack...everything. He knew how to get me alone.

**Woman 2:** He didn't know anything about me. He didn't know why I went to the frat house, who I went with, if I ate dinner beforehand. He just knew that I was an intoxicated woman. He knew that I was vulnerable.

**Woman 1:** I tried really hard to embrace the survivor narrative. I had reported him, I went to trial, I got a verdict - statistically, I was one of the rare few to make it to the other side. I know I should feel victorious but, really...all I know is that I feel like I'm standing on the other side of this alone.

**BOTH:** I knew that his life would be valued more than my truth. They told me not to be angry. They told me to be quiet.

**Woman 1:** But rage is a political space **[stands]** and I will not be silenced.

**Woman 2:** Audre Lorde once said that you need to reach down and touch the thing that's boiling inside of you and make it somehow useful. **[Stands]** I placed my hand on my burning heart and screamed loud enough for everyone to hear, but no one would help me make it stop.

**Woman 1: [ Walks downstage right]** You have to understand that in a courtroom, it's no longer just you versus them. When you decide to report what happened, things get taken out of your hands. You become a witness of the state. I just wanted someone to help me, to be heard, to be believed - but the judicial system is just another oppressive space. They don't have time for the anger, the grief, the tears. They don't have time for you to fall apart. You become an empty vessel, stripped of your identity and your agency. A Jane Doe.

**Woman 2: [Walks downstage left]** And the most ridiculous part is that they have plenty of time. The defense can postpone hearing after hearing to give themselves more time to figure out how to pin the blame on you, how to manipulate the conversation to get the perpetrator off easily. Meanwhile you can't even move on with your life because once the investigation is over and the trial process begins, your life is put on pause.

**Woman 1:** You can't heal when your life is on pause. You can barely even be a person. So you just take all the feelings, shove them in a box, tape the box shut and put it on the highest shelf in the closet and shut the door behind you. You learn to survive as a blank slate, behind the blanket name they assign you.

**Woman 2:** You become an outsider looking in, except it's your own life. How do you go back to daily life after the intimate details are pried out of your head and into the courtroom as if you're not sitting right there? How are you supposed to have any sense of agency when you're barely even a person to them? You're barely even a victim, you're just another -

**Woman 1: [Walks stage left]** Jane Doe! Or Emily Doe. Or Mary Doe or one of the other stupid WHITE blanket names they drape over our shoulders and expect us to be able to leave in the

courtroom, but instead is tattppped on the back of my goddamn eyelids because I just can't forget the way that name makes me feel. **[Faces stage right]**

**Woman 2: [Walks stage right]** And with the current political climate, even within survivor-oriented movements, I don't feel like that space is for me. #MeToo means something different when you've been retraumatized by the system that was supposed to protect you. **[Faces stage left]**

**Woman 1:** People, organizations, even other feminists push and push for survivors to report abusers, for police intervention, for 'justice to be served'. But at what cost? Do they even realize what they are submitting us to? Just more places that will systematically abuse us. Why do WE have to suffer in the name of doing the right thing?

**Woman 2:** I don't even know what the right thing is anymore. It'd just be nice to be able to talk about this without being afraid, you know? I don't want to discourage other victims from speaking out, but I also want them to know that it's neither an easy nor a fast process. That the authorities are not always on our side. That if you're not ready for it, if you don't have the right resources and support, this process can do more harm than good. I wish someone would have told me.

**Woman 1: [Turns and faces forward]** I want to be able to use my experiences to help other survivors somehow. Maybe use my personal knowledge to help guide them through their own processes? Protect them from losing their sense of self, and shield them from the emptiness that the Doe nomenclature can bring.

**Woman 2: [Turns and faces forward]** I just. Don't want them to be alone.

**[The two women turn inward and stand face to face]**

**BOTH:** I was just another blank victim in the system. They didn't even know my name.

**[They reach outward and clasp hands, sharing a moment]**

**Both:** But *you* do.

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### **Shifting the Conversation: How Can We *Effectively* Support Survivors?**

My goal with Doe Re Mi was to utilize my privileges as a UC student to adapt a western theatre space (in this case, being UCSB's Campbell Hall) into a platform for survivor advocacy. Through the combination of a trial that had pervaded mainstream culture and my personal circumstances, the purpose of the piece was to bring awareness to the retraumatization that victims of sexual trauma(s) survive at the current mandate of the American judicial system through a non-traditional form of feminist activism. Viewed and assessed through a feminist lens, the shortcomings within the American judicial system and its effects on survivors can provide us with the opportunity to begin to learn how to *effectively* help survivors reclaim their agency and identity,

by pinpointing how and why they lost it, and replacing those deficiencies with methodologies that actively support them. Shifting from the current societal focus on the lives of perpetrators and the securement of their corporal punishment, present-day feminist and social justice movements could then create and introduce more survivor-centered rhetoric into their discourses and ideals, and accurately address issues such as the rise of campus sexual assaults, unfair rape trials, and the rates of post-traumatic stress syndrome, with the well-being of survivors now at the forefront of the cause.

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## References

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