

The Atlantic



Najeebah Al-Ghadban / Getty

'I MOVED ON HER VERY HEAVILY'

‘I MOVED ON HER VERY HEAVILY’: PART 1

Fifteen years ago, the writer Natasha Stoyneff went to Mar-a-Lago to interview Donald and Melania Trump on the occasion of their first anniversary.

By E. Jean Carroll

AUGUST 26, 2020

In her 2019 memoir, What Do We Need Men For?, E. Jean Carroll accused Donald Trump of rape, in a Bergdorf's dressing room in the mid-1990s. After the president denied ever meeting her and dismissed her story as a Democratic plot, she sued him for defamation. Carroll was not, of course, the first woman to say that Trump had sexually harassed or assaulted her, but unlike so many other powerful men, the president has remained unscathed by the #MeToo reckoning. Which might seem surprising, until you remember Trump's modus operandi: He escapes the consequences of one outrage by turning our focus to another, in perpetuity. So in the run-up to the November 3 election, Carroll is interviewing other women

who alleged that Trump suddenly and without consent “moved on” them, to cite his locution in the Access Hollywood tape. “I’m automatically attracted to beautiful—I just start kissing them, it’s like a magnet ... And when you’re a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. Grab ’em by the pussy.”

Who are the people who came forward to say that Trump treated them exactly as he described: as fungible collections of body parts to paw at whenever it suited his purposes? Why did the women decide to tell their stories, and what has life been

like since? Carroll's lawsuit remains in progress; the president has denied all of the women's allegations, and the White House declined to comment for this story.

Natasha Stoyanoff, the subject of this first installment, likens herself and her fellow accusers to the proverbial canaries in the coal mine: among the first to warn the world about the essential nature of the 45th president of the United States. Read [Part 2](#) and [Part 3](#) here.



1

NORMAN MAILER IS SO AMAZED at how hard Natasha can hit that whenever she stays with him and his wife, Norris, in Provincetown, she and Norman put on the gloves and they spar on the back porch. Each new boxing trainer tells Natasha that she should turn professional. Her punch is between hospitalization and murder. Her nickname is Boom Boom. *Boom Boom?* One can imagine the rest.

So when Natasha flies down to Mar-a-Lago to interview Donald Trump and his wife, Melania, for *People* magazine and its 3,734,536 readers in 2005, and Trump says that he wants to “show her something” and she follows him into a room off the patio and Trump shuts the door and bangs her up against the

Natasha Stoyanova



Jamie Campbell

wall and shoves his tongue down her throat, we all know what happens next. Trump lunges at her again, and Natasha delivers a sweet little uppercut that lands just under his heart, and as he emits a comical “Ooof,” she buffs his jaw with her trademark “powder puff”—a punch so hard that Trump slides to the floor and flops on the marble before being carried away by the butler. Okay, I grant you. That is only what Natasha says she *wishes* she’d done. Trump *does* shovel his tongue down her throat, but Natasha doesn’t slug him. It is, however, a blow that Natasha and I love imagining. So, reader, are you ready to find out what really happens?

2

AROUND 2:30 P.M. ON December 27, 2005, the journalist Natasha Stoyanoff, who is tall and strong, 5 foot 11 in her Converse platforms, champagne-haired, jolly, with sly blue eyes and a golden-cream complexion, sits down on a couch on the patio near the Mar-a-Lago pool. She is here to interview Donald Trump and a seven-months-pregnant Melania on the occasion of the couple’s first anniversary and the coming birth of their child.

Alyssa Shelasky, who wrote about Natasha in *New York* magazine last year, when her story was part of *The Pussy Grabber Plays* at Manhattan’s Public Theater, says: “Stoyanoff was my mentor when I worked at *People* magazine,

about 10 years ago. She was the brilliant, hilarious, confident, and warm writer who got all the good assignments because Larry Hackett, the editor in chief at the time, knew she was the best.”



Natasha (*second from left*) at Mar-a-Lago on the day of the interview (Troy Word / *People*)

Fifteen minutes into the sit-down (“Trump is frustrating to interview,” Natasha says. “If all you need are sound bites, he’s easy. He’s got his one sentence ready for you. If you want something deeper, that’s a challenge. Because he doesn’t do deep”), Melania goes upstairs to change wardrobe and prepare for the next photo. Trump turns to Natasha. “He says he wants to show me a room—‘the beautiful, tremendous room’—or something in the room.”

“Natasha!” I cry.

She is in a cabin in the woods in the mountains of Quebec; I am in a cabin in the woods in the mountains of New York, and we are Zooming. “Woman!” I yell. “It didn’t occur to you that going into a room alone with Donald Trump was stupid?”

“No” (*taken aback*). “Not at all! I mean” (*laughing in disbelief*) “I just ... I mean, *no!*”

“It didn’t occur to me either,” I say. Indeed, I walked right into that Bergdorf’s dressing room like an idiot.

“And don’t forget,” Natasha says, “the wife is upstairs changing. *Nothing* led me to think he would do such a thing.”

So Natasha—who is intensely curious like all good journos—smiles and tells Trump, sure, she’d like to see the room. She stands up (black boots, black pants, black cotton crewneck sweater), and Trump leads her inside.

“I remember it being a dark room,” Natasha says. “But there are windows, so not too dark. We go in. I’m looking around, wondering what he wants to show me. I hear the door close.” She points behind herself. “I turn around. And—” She presses her hand to her chest. “He’s right at me, pushing me against the wall.”

“Did you hit your head?”

She looks off to the side and ponders.

“I don’t recall hitting my head.”

“Do you recall him grinding against you?”

Natasha frowns and leans into the Zoom screen.

“Riding?”

“*Grinding.*”

She leans back, repulsed. “Grinding.”

She closes her eyes.

“Oh God! That is a question I never thought I’d hear.”

“When he had *me* up against the wall in the dressing room,” I tell her, “I was aware of it.”

She tries again to picture the scene and shakes her head. “I think my hands went up immediately.” She demonstrates by holding her hands, palms out, at shoulder level. “So there wasn’t space.”

“I remember his weight,” I say. “He leans on you like an oversexed mastodon.”

“If he did, I can’t remember it,” she replies.

And I say: “Maybe you just didn’t feel it.”

Pause.

I raise my eyebrows.

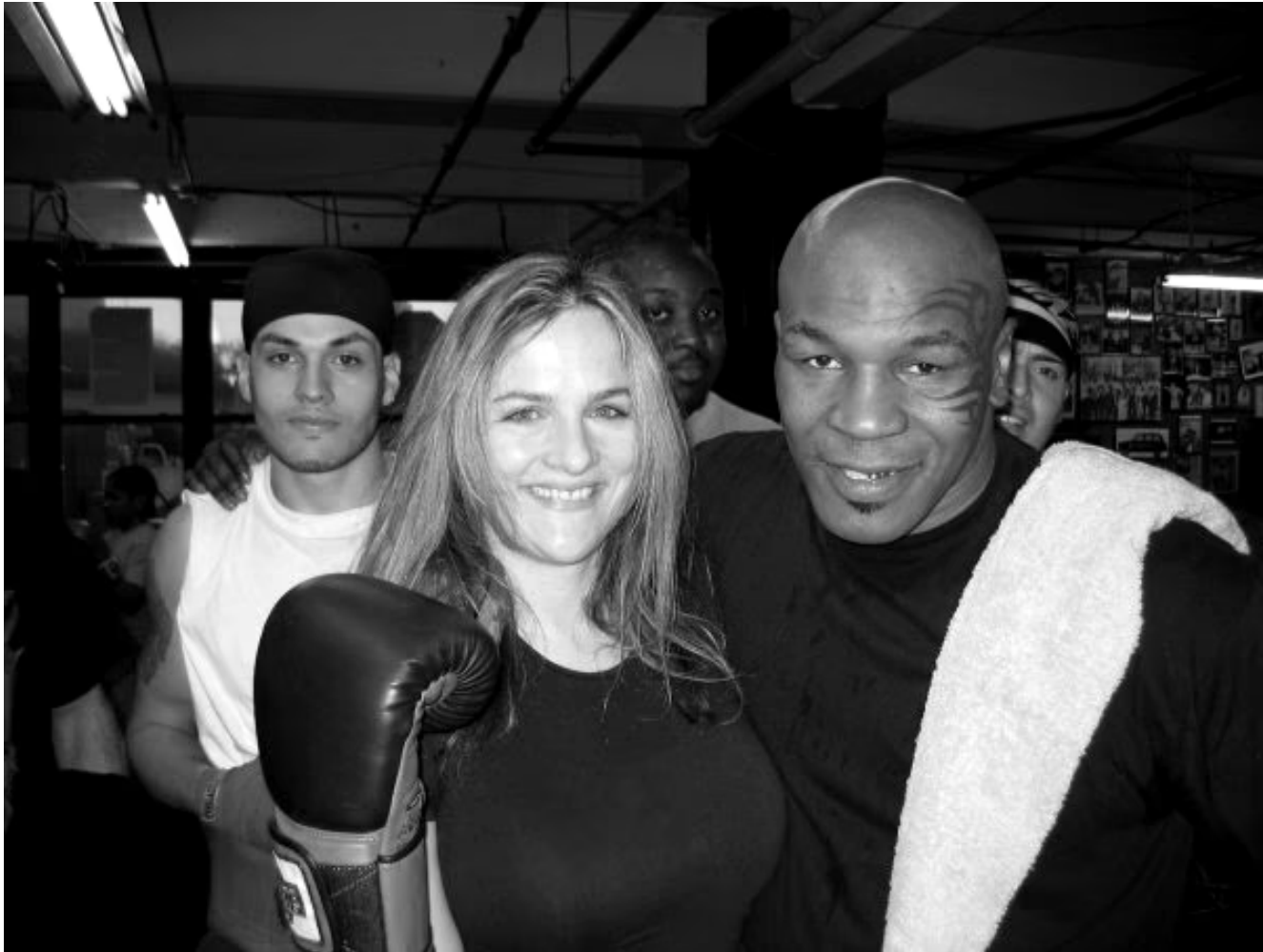
Natasha looks at me, tilting her head. It takes a moment. Then she falls forward and practically rolls on her Zoom table.

Oh yes, surprised reader, we accusers scream with laughter.

3

NINETEEN, OR 25, OR 43 women have come forward to accuse Trump of ogling, grabbing, groping, mauling, or raping them. The women say they dodged, ran, froze, ducked, resisted, or laughed at him; and we all stood up, spoke out, got dragged through the mud, belittled, and besmirched. Natasha calls us the “whistleblowers.” She wrote a blistering op-ed in The Washington Post last November pointing out how it is *women* who warned the world what to expect from Trump. (Mary Trump is just the latest.)

Freedom-fighting is in Natasha’s blood. She is “100 percent Eastern Bloc, honey!” Although she holds dual citizenship in Canada and America, Natasha’s mother is from Macedonia, and her father is the descendant of a 6-



Natasha, wearing her own gloves, with Mike Tyson in Gleason's Gym, circa 2004. She says she didn't hurt him "much." (Courtesy of Natasha Stoyanoff)

foot-7-inch Macedonian revolutionary—"my whole family are like giants"—who had his head whacked off and carried through town by the Greeks in 1913. But the main thing to remember about Natasha Stoyanoff, as I turn up

the sound on our Zoom and pour myself a glass, is this: Men are always shocked at how hard she can hit.

“I’m just getting my wine, Natasha,” I call offscreen.

“Absolutely.”

“Join me?”

“I’ve got to work ’til two this morning,” Natasha tells me. She now writes books and screenplays, including the best-selling *Captive: A Mother’s Crusade to Save Her Daughter From the Terrifying Cult Nxivm* (with the *Dynasty* actor Catherine Oxenberg), which was made into a Lifetime movie, and *The King of Con: How a Smooth-Talking Jersey Boy Made and Lost Billions, Baffled the FBI, Eluded the Mob, and Lived to Tell the Crooked Tale*, which is currently being developed for TV. “So if I drink now?” Natasha says. “Forget it.”

I raise a toast to the “accusers around the globe,” one of whom, Karen Virginia, left her husband’s dinner on the stove in New Jersey and balled the jack into Manhattan to drink vodka cocktails with Natasha and me one Sunday night last year about this time.

“So ...” I say, settling behind my computer again, “the butler comes in the room when Trump is shoving his tongue ...”

“And the butler says, ‘Melania’s on her way down,’” Natasha says, “and he leads us outside back to our original positions on the couch on the patio. And after we sit down and the butler leaves, Trump says”—she lowers her voice—“‘You know we’re going to have an affair.’”

“Lord!”

“And he says we gotta go have steak at Peter Luger’s. That’s his big thing. He says it to me a couple of times. ‘You ever been to Peter Luger’s?’ And what was the second wife’s name? Marla! He says, ‘Well, you know what Marla said, the cover of the *New York Post*, best sex she ever had.’ And bear in mind, I’m here to write a story about their happy one-year anniversary! I’ve been asking questions about how happy they are, how excited they are about the baby, and meanwhile he’s telling me we’re going to have an affair. And then Melania sits down and I start asking questions, and it is a complete lie. I mean, everything he is saying now in the interview I *know* is a complete lie.”

WHEN NATASHA IS A KID, 16, 17, she bribes a doorman at the Toronto Four Seasons Hotel with her homemade chocolate-chip cookies and asks him to

alert her when Madonna shows up. The cookies are so amusing, the doorman can't help himself. He squeals on Bono, Beatty, and Bowie.

Because who can say no to a shy, gawky, street-hockey-playing kid in a white jumpsuit, her hair fixed in a “long Marilyn,” giggling and batting her eyes and holding up her little Sure Shot camera, saying, “Please, Mr. Nicholson, may I take your picture?”

“They'd be like, ‘Okay! Okay!’ So by the time I'm 18, I'm getting all these shots none of the other photographers could get. They think they're giving a shot to a nice kid. And then I rush down to the *Toronto Star*. ‘Here's my film!’ And I get paid for it! And it's on the front page the next day!”

The kid, who looks like she's coming to paint your garage on account of the ever-present white jumpsuit, soon starts asking Duran Duran, the Cars, and Huey Lewis questions. She writes up the interviews, publishes them in her school paper, goes to Ryerson University, studies journalism, works as a writer at the *Toronto Star*, then has her own column at the *Toronto Sun*, and wham-bam-bing in 1997 finds herself living in a giant loft with a wood-burning fireplace in Manhattan, a block from Bloomingdale's, going to cocktail things, throwing big dinners (“I'm Slavic—I like feeding people”), writing about the actors and directors she's admired her whole life, and walking to work at

People magazine in the Time & Life Building, across from Radio City Music Hall.

This is during the heyday of *People's* “Sexiest Man Alive” and “Most Beautiful People,” and by heyday, I mean just after Nora Ephron says she could get on a plane with her *People* magazine, buckle her seat belt, and read it start to finish before her flight took off, and just *before* Ephron says she is no longer able to identify a single celebrity in it. It is one of America's most-read magazines, and by 2004, Natasha (who would eventually be named one of the “Most Intriguing People of 2016”) has become *People's* Trump person. She attends Donald and Melania's wedding reception, covers all the *Apprentice* stuff, and wants to do her best with the anniversary story.

NATASHA TELLS HER Ryerson journalism professor Paul McLaughlin about the incident with Trump the evening it happens, and a decade later, her professor gives an interview to Lawrence O'Donnell about it. Altogether, six people corroborate her story.

In a broad denial refuting several accusers (the man is so busy insulting women, he can't seem to differentiate among us), Trump says that he never met Natasha. Natasha and *People* eventually respond by publishing a photo of Natasha and Trump at Mar-a-Lago.

Natasha says that “for an instant,” she fantasized about filing a story describing exactly what Trump did to her. “But,” she says, “it was never a realistic option, because that’s not the kind of story *People* publishes. Except for very rare occasions, the reporter is fly-on-the-wall invisible.”

When the first *People* colleague whom Natasha tells suggests that they go together to inform the editor, Larry Hackett, about what Trump did, Natasha remembers that her reaction was “*No, no, no*. I couldn’t fathom it. I was embarrassed and ashamed by what happened. I wanted the whole awful incident to go away. I didn’t want to cause problems.”

In a strange coincidence of fantasies, when Natasha came forward and wrote about what really occurred in an October 12, 2016, *People* story, Hackett bared his ink-stained soul two days later in a *Washington Post* op-ed, picturing what he would have done if Natasha had told him at the time.

For a second there, I imagined a scene of Ben Bradlee–esque outrage, calling out the swine for his behavior and striking a blow for reporters everywhere. But in reality, I would probably have simply killed the story that Stoyloff had gone to Palm Beach to report. I would have then called Trump’s public relations operatives, told them about their boss’s bad behavior and agreed to a truce of mutual silence. In the

end, few people would have learned of the event, we'd have had to fill a few more pages in the next issue, and Trump would have avoided any public embarrassment.

BEFORE SHE ARRIVES AT Mar-a-Lago, Natasha, who played on the basketball team, the volleyball team, and the field-hockey team as a girl, and who, like many athletes, suffers neck and shoulder aches, calls for an appointment with the Mar-a-Lago spa's masseuse. No dice. However, during her interview with the newlyweds, Trump suggests that Natasha visit the spa. Natasha replies that the masseuse is all booked up.

"Before I knew it," Natasha tells me, "Trump goes and comes back and says, 'I spoke to the guy. You're in at 8 a.m. tomorrow. He's gonna come in an extra hour early for you. The top guy!'

"I did *not* want Trump to do that for me. And I just knew there was no way I could get there at eight in the morning. I'm not a morning person. So the morning comes and I race to get there. I'm always late. Everybody in my family is late. My grandfather missed the Titanic because he was 10 minutes late. And that morning, I'm 20 minutes late. The massage guy is panicked. I assume it's because I'm late. So I say, 'Look, I'm sorry! I'll pay for the whole hour. Don't worry about it!'"

But the masseuse, by now a heap of shattered nerves, replies: “No, it’s not that. *Mr. Trump was here waiting for you.*”

Read [Part 2](#) of this series.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

E. Jean Carroll

[E. Jean Carroll](#) is a journalist and former advice columnist for *Elle* magazine.
