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Justice deferred

A little-used Illinois law gives rape victims another way to hold their attackers accountable. *By Claire Bushey. Photograph by Joe Wigdahl.*



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YOU ATE.

Suzanne Alton sat next to her attorney at a long, low table at the front of a courtroom on Harrison Street, more terrified than she'd ever been. She gazed straight ahead, determined not to look at the man sitting 15 feet away at an identical table, a man she'd last seen the night he raped her. Disappointed by the criminal justice system and left to sue her attacker under a little-known Illinois law, finally, after two and a half years, Alton, 27, was about to get her day in court.

It started with a phone call. Then 24, Alton was working as a paralegal at a downtown law firm when she received a call from a former client whose arbitration case she'd worked on a year earlier. He said he was coming into town on business and wanted recommendations of things to do. He responded to her suggestions with an invitation to dinner. Thinking he might prove a valuable professional contact, Alton agreed. "At the time," she says, "it seemed like an innocent enough request."

They met at a Rosemont steakhouse on March 8, 2008, a Saturday, and after dinner headed into the city to hit a couple of nightclubs. Alton doesn't remember returning to the man's suburban hotel room. What she does remember, according to police and court records, is waking up from an unconscious state to him raping her before she passed out again.

When Alton woke the next morning, she grabbed her clothes, drove to her parents' house where she was living at the time, and hid in her room all day, crying. On Monday, she showed up for work as usual. "After you're raped, you don't know what to do, so you do what you always do," she says. She sat down at her desk, turned on her computer and thought, Oh, God, I can't do this. She dialed her human resources director and said, "I don't know how to tell you this, but I've just been raped. ...I have to go see my doctor." Her HR director agreed to drive her to her gynecologist, who then referred her to Northwestern Hospital. Listening to Alton's story in the car, the director asked whether Alton had given consent but just forgot about it the next day. "She meant well," Alton says. "You don't have to be a villain to say nasty things."

A doctor in the emergency room collected a rape kit. Then, a police officer and detective arrived; the interview that followed was decidedly unlike *Law & Order: SVU*. The detective couldn't understand how her attacker, who held a doctorate in economics, could be a "Dr." without a medical degree, Alton recalls. Then, as Alton named the clubs they'd visited, the detective and the officer glibly chimed in, saying they'd been to the same spots.

As the week blurred by, the detective left a voice mail saying he'd interviewed her attacker and there had been "discrepancies" between her story and his. From the detective's tone she got the impression he didn't believe her. Maybe I'd heal faster if I let the whole thing go,

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posted at 10:00am

Rahm's quick landslide catches Chicago TV stations by surprise

posted at 12:24am

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