



THE SMELL OF MY SIN, THE MELANIN IN MY SKIN

Boss had promised me that he would never hit me again, 2 weeks after we moved into our apartment, he broke that promise. Here's why. I had a client, an Indian guy, late 20's. I had been massaging now for about 2 months a few days a week, nothing big. However, when Nay stopped coming around I had to take clients much more frequently.

So, I'm nearing the end of the massage and the guy asked me about the 'happy ending' he requested. I'm dumbfounded because I never had a request like that and I was not even sure if I knew exactly what he meant by that but I had a pretty good idea. Turns out, I was right.

The guy wanted to be fulfilled after his massage and I was totally against it. Boss always told me to text him if I ever have any problems with any one and so far I hadn't had to but this was most definitely a problem for me. I'm texting him that he needs to have a talk with his client because obviously there's a misunderstanding.

There was no misunderstanding. Boss knew exactly what he had done and what he had set me up to do. Again, confused he spoke to the Indian guy like there was some sort of miscommunication but his response to me was different and totally unexpected. Boss casually asks me what happened and I tell him.

I expected him to be upset at the guy coming at me on that type of thing but he didn't seem to care. He actually seemed to be a little irritated, more than anything. Then he says, "how much money do we got?" I tell him, I'm not sure. I mean, the money for the massages goes into a dresser drawer that he puts into an ac-

count for bills and operating expenses, that's what he told me anyway. I would have no idea of knowing.

Then he starts yelling out of nowhere, "you know we just moved over here and that cost us everything. When I was with Nay, she made sure shit was held down and she not finna turn down no money, especially when we need it. I told you that she wasn't going to be around anymore and it was all you now and you making me spend more money than you bringing in. Next time somebody tell you that gotta check for you, you betta do what you gotta do to get it. Forreal."

I'm sure the look on my face was priceless, because he had to be out of his mind. I probably forgot about the fact that he had already slapped the daylights out of me before because I started going off, without a thought.

"Are you seriously asking me to do what I think you are? Look I've accepted too much bullshit from you already, you basically tried to

cheat on me in my face, you lie to me, I forgave you for putting your hands on me, helped with the business and respected the house you allowed me to stay in but I'm not doing this."

"No, fuck that. I'll go back to my dad's house, I already had a job lined up at Dollar Tree and you made me miss it, remember? You're asking for too much, I'm just about to call my dad and have him pick me and Leah up, I really appreciate you letting us stay here but I just can't deal with this." Next thing I know, my phone was out of my hand and flying across the room and he was in my face. Just there, not saying anything.

The longer I knew him, the more it felt that almost everything that came out of his mouth had an intimidating or eerie feel to it. It was a distinct type of scary, the kind that freaks you out when you think about it. Then he opened his mouth to speak again and this time, it was much more direct and unapologetic. "say something else bitch and I'll knock yo ass out."

I was out of thoughts and options sitting in the same room with him and the tears started to come down. I was slowly breaking down and I had no idea. I had let him access the part of my brain that retained trauma, the part that left an indentation on who you are.

When he realized that I had started to cry something in him changed but not for the good. He told me, as if he was my father to "fix my face". I didn't and not because I didn't want to but because I literally could not. I was emotionally distraught. He told me that he was going to leave and then asked if I would have any problems? I knew that he was talking about with the clients. I didn't know what he was up to but I had a horrible feeling about what was to follow.

I didn't take anymore clients that day but the next day the same problem reared it's head. After the argument with Boss, I started to wonder if maybe that guy was just a fluke. Maybe I was over reacting, or just overthinking again.

I am a Virgo, so I do that. Just when I started to think that though, the very next client, the very next day comes to me with the same thing and now I'm convinced that Boss is setting this up himself. I refused and this time the guy was really upset. He yelled at Boss but it didn't phase him at all. He had this new look today. A glare in his eyes that had a spark of evil in them.

The apology phase had passed. There were no more I'm sorries after the first time, there were no more tears, just pure rage, impulse and intent. He wasted no time coming straight for me, grabbing me and throwing me into the wall. I fought back a little this time. I didn't have much experience fighting so it was mostly me flailing my arms around with my eyes closed but it had the same effect on him.

He got angrier and slapped me as hard as he could, I fell into the bed, he got on top of me and said, "I will fucking hurt you, bitch do

you understand me?" I just stared back at him, partly in shock, partly in defiance.

I was terrified but I couldn't let him feel like he had broke me, I wasn't going to submit to him. I still had a family I could go to and I was holding onto that, then I tried to run away for the first time. I had noticed that when he put his hands on me, he never stayed the night, so I expected him to go to Nay's house later. I waited around and tried to act as normal as possible. I fixed dinner, cleaned the house, got Leah ready for bed while listening to slow jams on the speaker, I wanted to appear like nothing was wrong.

After I got ready for bed around 12, he stuck around a little longer but eventually around 2 am he finally left for the night. I jumped up quick, grabbed my duffel bag and some clothes for myself. I headed into Leah's room and threw some clothes in the bag for her and a few of her toys.

Then I woke her up. I had called one of my best friends Zo, we had been friends since I was a teenager and explained that I just really needed him to come get me and he was on the way. I'm not entirely stupid though, so I didn't give him the address.

I asked him to meet me at the McDonald's about a mile and a half away. I dreaded the walk we would have to make there so early in the morning. Leah was 4 at the time, so her patience for walking was 0 but we were going to have to make that trip. I locked up the house, we got ourselves together and started walking.

We lived pretty deep in the complex, so it would be a 20 minute walk almost to get out the complex itself. I thought it might be safer to walk through some apartments if we could, to stay off the main street.

We were almost to the beginning of the complex when the truck pulled in. I tried not to make any sudden movements, it was really dark outside so I thought if we stood out of

the way until he rode past that he wouldn't see us. We moved closer into a darker area, Leah has no idea what's going on, so I'm trying to ease her mind with talks of a super adventure with Mommy. I'm breathing shallow with a million different thoughts and on the side street leading to a corner of the complex, the truck is coming our way.

I stood frozen in fear watching Leah as she stared back at me. He was furious getting out of the car, he simply walked up to me as close as he could and told me to get Leah and get back in the car. I silently did what he asked, wondering what was going to happen now that he had found me. It wasn't a hard guess, that night he slapped, punched, and kicked me.

He did as much as he could to show me, what he was capable of and he did. I was exhausted and crying at the thought of my daughter listening to me scream from the other end of the door. It was horrible and painful and it solidified my fear. I was having major

second thoughts about trying to run away again any time soon.

This particular night though, Boss did something that he had never done before. He probably beat up on me for about 30 mins and ended up leaving again, but this time before he left he decided to take my phone. I was out of communication. In that moment I felt like no one was coming for me, I hadn't even told anyone what was going on.

There was something in me that stopped me from wanting to tell anyone and it had to be pride. I was ashamed at what was happening to me. I felt like a bad mother for putting myself into a situation that could negatively affect my child.

Laying in the bed, in the fetal position with my eyes closed, I'm talking to God asking for guidance, and I realized then how long it had been since I had talked to him. Reaching out to God provide a bit of comfort but I was in physical pain, I didn't know where I was mentally.

I think it was this same night that I gave in-
to the terror that Boss was inflicting upon me,
and became numb to what was happening.

I didn't want to be hurt and it seemed that
the best way to avoid that was to comply with
what he asked and inside I started to die a little
at a time.

It was then that I thought things couldn't
get worse. That's another funny thing about
life. There is no actual reality. Things can al-
ways get better, no matter how good you think
something is. Equally, things can get worse; no
matter how bad you think something already
is. Looking back on the situation now, I believe
that Boss himself was a life lesson for me. The
older I'm getting I'm really starting to get the
saying "everything happens for a reason."

As I'm laying in the bed that night, I haven't
quite conquered that concept. This being my
second relationship and one that violence had
presented itself the moral of the stories were
parallel. Sometimes, I wished I could have took

a peek into my own future and been able to stop the downward spiral that I was heading.

It was a deep trap, a trap that didn't enter my mind when I thought about moving to the big city and starting a better life. I wish I could have been afraid of more than the beatings, maybe I could have gotten out sooner. I was about to be pushed into a world that would swallow me up and spit me out. A place that wasn't meant for children. A place that only had one entrance and one exit.

Boss was giving me a way one ticket to the underworld that I could not refuse, and it wasn't negotiable.

Welcome to Atlanta.

DRAFT