

Boy Meets Woman

Trigger Warning: Reader/Viewer discretion is advised. This story discusses sexual assault/ rape and contains the use of profanity and/or racial slurs.

By: Sharifa Thompson

At the time, I thought I should've placed her hands in her skirt before she had the chance to slide her hands down my pants. I shouldn't have struggled for the door. Any attempts to push her off felt wrong, as she aggressively groped and caressed my body. My muffled sounds of "stop" jived with whispers of hushed tones, suppressed by moans of pleasure, both hers and mine. I didn't know how to feel or at least I didn't fully accept my feelings for what they were. Something felt so wrong but I felt like it shouldn't have. The raced and gendered violence inflicted on my body created an assortment of trauma unimaginable, cataclysmically impossible for me to reckon with at the moment...

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"If it doesn't fit, you must acquit." I must've heard that statement a zillion times. I wanted to peel my ears off. This was the case of the decade. One of our biggest pride and joy was tried for a crime we were sure he didn't commit.

"Why was it whenever a black man had reached almost the pinnacle of success, something always happened," my mom said from inside the living room, as she packed her lunch pack to go to work. "A rape allegation, sexual assault, something that could potentially ruin his reputation for life. It's just not right. They always want to take us down." Somehow I knew she was just shaking her head and mumbling to herself as she listened to the news.

But as I questioned whether or not to watch another episode of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles on my little tv box, I couldn't help but think about Amy. I mean I should've been on cloud 9 after all. I had just smashed one of the hottest girls in high school. For some strange reason though, I couldn't shake that feeling of shame or guilt like I had done something wrong. I felt uncomfortable about it and I wasn't sure why. I was bugg'n, right?

Dang it, my two only viable options were Recess and Rugrats, both were great shows but they were in no way comparable to TMNT. The twins, Duane and Darien, busted into the room, being the heathens that they were. They pulled off my durag and ruffled my waves.

Darien was one-half of the twin duo and was fairly logical and easy to talk to. His warm cinnamon complexion complimented his ever so neat braided locs. He was the scholar of the family and he knew it. Duane was the opposite. He avoided schoolwork like it was the Black plague and although he shared the same complexion (and the same face) his hair always resembled that of a messy mop.

I screamed for backup. “Mom!”

“What a snitch!” Duane yelled.

“And you know what happens to snitches?.” Darien asked.

“They get stitches.” Duane snickered.

As she came in, they bolted out the room, like the guilty perps they were. She gave me a warm kiss on the cheek and a warm hug. “Sleep tight.” She said in a singy-songy voice, before flipping off the lights. I listened to her as she wished the twins good night as well, and stepped out to work her fourth night-shift of the week.

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The following week I caught a glimpse of her walking down the stairs to the cafeteria. The blue and red hall was littered with the usual “Say No to Drugs!” and “Always Do Your Best!” cheesy posters. Before I could call out to her, she almost instinctively turned around, surveying the premises around us. The hallway was dead empty..

“Hey!” She said all giggly,

“Hey.” I responded back.

“Do you wanna hang out again?”

She asked as she massaged her hands into the back of my neck. My Batman bag slipped off my shoulders, as she pulled me close to her and hugged me, pushing my face into her breasts. She was so close I could smell the green apple jolly ranchers in her mouth. I was tantalized, no paralyzed I suppose. My body couldn't move.

“Nnn noo” I finally managed to stammer out, admittedly a bit louder than I expected. I slowly pulled back from her.

“No, not right now, maybe later.”

She inched closely to me, still cautiously peering around us.

“What's wrong?” she asked, fiddling with my hair.

She reached out again, this time gliding her hand down my face and the other hand working its way down my chest. She attempted to unbutton my white polo shirt, but midway through she gave up and just settled on caressing my chest with her hands. Once again a wave of uncomfortable feelings arose, threatening to devour me— I rebelled against it.

When I was with her I felt older. She transformed me, even matured me. I didn't feel like a kid, I felt like hers'. Ever since 6th grade, I had always gotten attention from girls, from the close hugs, to the surprise kisses on the lips. I was a gentleman, never pushy but somehow I had found a way to get the girls to come to me . But this girl, no this woman—she was different. To be getting attention from an older girl, a much older girl felt like a prize. And the fact that she chose me, out of all the other guys she could've messed around with in school, she made me feel special. Perhaps, it was the thrill of it all, sneaking around school grounds to meet up and even sometimes making out in the janitor's closet during lunch. I just knew that no other girl could

give me the rush like she did. Still, something felt almost wrong. I was playing with the fools' gold.

Graduation was right around the corner for us and I was counting down the days. We never really talked much about it but I assumed she was going to stay in the state, maybe attend Illinois State and I would move up to Chi High. Perhaps she would get an apartment and I would move out of my mother's house to live with her until I graduated. I just knew that I wanted her in my life, I loved the way she loved me. I loved her touch.

"Listen Amy, I'm sorry I really have to go." I said as I brushed her hands off of me before running off. I ran down the stairs right through the back of the school exit. I don't know why I ran out like that. I ran like a runaway slave. Like I was seeking freedom.

* * *

It had been a while since I had seen Amy and being that my mom had refused to buy me a phone, running into her "randomly" was the only time we spent together. I had just gone out to get some water from the water fountain. I placed the hall monitor on the teachers desk as I entered the room, quickly spot checking my new Air Trainers. *Yup, still clean*, I said as I responded internally to myself.

It was social studies (or sleeper studies as my friends and I like to call it) and I swear there couldn't have been a more boring class. The class was so boring sometimes, that I would even see the principal dozing off when she came in to do the monthly evaluations. The class was drier than a popeyes biscuit without a bev and even she knew that. I slouched down into my chair, easing in just right to avoid that awful creaking sound. I watched as Ms. Robinson slammed down onto our desks, with her heavy unmanicured hands, a printed copy of a news

article. Its title read *CENTRAL PARK HORROR, WOLF PACKS PREY*. As we read through the article the new girl next to me raised her hand.

“Yes Jasmine.” Ms. Robinson responded.

She looked around the room shyly, leaving an awkward silence to fill the air.

Dammit girl, I thought to myself, *spit it out*.

“Um, Ms. Robinson. Why did they rape her? Also...could you explain what rape means again?”

“First off, they have been accused of rape not convicted meaning we don’t know if they actually did it. But I believe they were targeted because they’re black and because this country is racist as f–.”

The south side jumped out of her but she caught herself. The classroom grew really silent as we anticipated what she would say next.

“Oooooooooohhh, you almost cursed!”, a kid next to me blurted out, breaking the silence.

Every once in a while we would get the radical version of Ms. Robinson, who quite frankly made the class a tad less boring. The last time we saw that part of her was when the principal (a middle aged white woman) threatened to shorten the lessons on black history. She came to class, pissed and even recommended that we rally together and protest outside the school. Unfortunately nobody cared that much about social studies class, so that fell through. I appreciated her efforts though.

“Excuse me. I apologize for that. That was inappropriate.” She unscrewed the water bottle and took a sip. “I just meant to say that they were targeted for racial reasons and it's obviously very upsetting. Um, if I recall Jasmine I think your second question was about rape, right?”

“Yes.”

“Great, well I’m just going to give you all a flyby definition but if you all want me to clarify anything please let me know. I guess the best way to explain it, is that rape is when a person forces another person to have sex with them. And that could be because the person never consented or can’t...” And I zoned out.

The way she explained it, it reminded me of a conversation Duane and I had a bit earlier. He had said to me, “it’s our job to help them give it up and that if she left the crib bangin’ she gotta want it and she gotta have it.”

I remember during that summer, there was this girl down my block that always wore a pair of black shorts and a see through tank top. Her ass and boobs jiggled like a yo-yo as she walked, and every guy on the street gathered at the corner just to catch a glimpse of her. Now, I thought to myself at the time, if she didn’t want it, I knew I must’ve been trippin’. But she always rolled her eyes and scowled at the guys as they called out to her. I thought it must’ve been part of some game the guys and girls played.

This whole convo I had with Duane, did have me thinking, rather wondering if I was any less of a man. I was the one that had been convinced not the convincer. I wasn’t sure how to make sense of what I had heard.

“The victim can be anyone, although it usually is women...” Her voice faded back out of my mind.

Was I... a victim? Nah, never that. I wouldn’t have liked it if I were one. Besides, Amy was a good person, she wouldn’t have done anything to hurt me, I thought to myself. She wanted to do it with me, she wanted me because she loved me and I gave in because I loved her. Yeah, that must’ve been it, does that even make sense?

I battled with myself, desperate to convince myself of a different reality, one that was better in line with what was expected of me.

But I said stop. She didn't stop. I didn't stop. I didn't want to do it. But I think I enjoyed it? If I enjoyed it, I must've wanted it. If I didn't want it, then my body wouldn't have reacted that way...right? “UGHH” I groaned aloud, drawing a bit of attention from the kids around me.

The rest of the school day floated by as I engaged in the wildest mental gymnastics.

When I got home, I saw Darien. Laid aside on his bed was four different textbooks, his hands were fervently moving on his paper as his eyes scanned the book closest to him. I scanned his room as I waited for him to acknowledge my presence. A picture of 2Pac and Public Enemy was posted above his bed frame. While a copy of the periodic table stood above his nightstand next to a few books and a small football trophy. The All-American Boy.

I wasn't sure how to begin. I decided, however, to blurt it out..

“ So last week at school, I did it for the first time.” I said while slightly closing the door to his room.

“Did what?” he asked. “I did itttt” I made sure to emphasize the “it” so he would know what I was talking about.

He dapped me up. “My man.” he said, his face beaming with respect.

“Yeah but it was weird. I mean I was kinda unsure about it at first.” He stood up from his bed as I said that..

“I didn't really want to do it—at least not in the moment— but when she pushed me in the closet I was like why not. I kinda tried to push her off too, but she must've been really turned on because she pushed my hands away from the door. “

“Oh look at you man. I think I might need some pointers from you.”

“Cool, right?”

“Yeah man. Who did you do it with?”

“Amy.” I laughed.

His body tensed up, he looked down at the ground silently. For the first time in probably my whole life my brother was speechless.

“DUDE! She’s 18 and you’re 13! Broooo, that’s not it. Shittt, you definitely can’t see her anymore.”

“What! Why?” I asked.

“Bro, she’s a freaking adult and you’re a kid! And what you explained sounded like..” He paused, and started again, “.. that shit sounded like assault”.

“Nah, it wasn’t nothing like that, it was cool. I just allowed her to start things but I’m not mad or anything.”

“My nigga that shit is rape.” He screamed.

As soon as I heard the rustling in the kitchen, I silently prayed that it was my brother Duane or a really fat ass rat digging in the garbage. I looked at him and we froze. To our dismay, it was neither. It was my mom and I knew she had overheard us from the living room.

“James.” she called out. “Shit” I whispered under my breath, eyeing him as I left the room..

“What’s going on?” She asked in a don’t-you-dare-bullshit-me-type-of-way.

I sat down at the table, trying to avoid her eyes at all costs. “Nah nothing me and Darien was just joking around”. I could tell she wasn’t buying it. Her eyes dug into my soul, like a scalpel digging into a cold cadaver - forceful and intense. The dreaded silence surrounded us.

I broke..

“I had a thing with a girl at school.”

“What thing?”

“We got um, we.. we did it.” I could tell she was trying very hard to control her emotions.

The wrinkles on her face gave life to her concerned thoughts.

A lonely tear hang-glided down her face. “Did what.”

“We did the s-thing”. I was too ashamed to even say the word in front of her.

And like the straw that broke the camel back, the dam exploded. Tears, tears and buckets of tears slid down her face. I knew exactly what she was thinking, *not my baby boy*.

“When? Why? She asked in between wails. “How did this happen? Are you okay.”

I decided to strategically answer the last. “Yeah, I’m fine”.

“She was 18.”, Darien injected.

E tu Brutus, I thought.

“What the hell man?” I screamed. This is none of your business?” We were on opposite sides of the room at this point. My mom and Darien stood on the left side in the kitchen close to the back door while I was a few feet away in the living room.

“She raped you. Your a kid and she’s an adult that forced you to have sex, that’s rape.” He shouted.

“Stop saying that shit!” I yelled back at him and paced around with my hands on my head. I felt the heat rushing to my head and a headache forming.

“Baby”, my mom said, grabbing my hands. “I’m worried about you, I think we need t-to talk to someone and get help. This is not okay.”

“We?” I replied almost instantly. I jerked back from her, dropping her hands down mid air. “I’m not doing anything. I’m good..”

“But baby, I don’t think that you are. You can’t let her get away with this.” Her face was heavy with sadness, pity, pain and anger. Her voice was shakier than an old tree on a windy day.

“Listen, I don’t wanna hurt her. I like her.”

“James!” Her voice rose but as she looked at my face, she calmed down a bit. “What she did was wrong and she needs to be punished.”

“No, I already said I’m not doing that.” I said as I walked out slamming the door..

I didn’t know where I was going, but I just had to leave. I greeted a few friends and sat on the benches where I watched a terrible basketball game unfold in the dump of my school gym. But when I got up to get some water from the water fountain, I heard muffled sounds coming from the supply closet right next to the stairs. When I looked in, I saw in the corner Amy passionately kissing a guy, a guy that couldn’t have been any older than me. Her legs and arms wrapped around him. He seemed to be in a trance.

I walked out, quietly closing the door. My stomach groaned as the churning started to occur. My face twisted up into a mixture of disgust and shame. I felt unsafe, unwanted and unloved. Was I just another check on her to-do list. A toy that she could touch and grab and feel when she pleased? I felt gross. If this is what it felt to be a man, I thought to myself, I wanted no part of this. But at the same time I didn’t want to confront her, I didn’t want to embarrass her. I felt a strange need to protect her. Looking back I realized I was really protecting myself. Protecting myself from the truth. The truth being I was a scared 13 yr old boy that was coerced into having sex with an eighteen yr old adult. My brother was right.

I pushed the door open, realizing that no one had locked it when I left. My mom was back in the kitchen, her legs were swinging from the tall chair she sat at at the dining table. “James”, my name gently flowed out from her mouth, “please talk to me.” Her red eyes struggled to meet

mine as she spoke almost in a whisper. I looked at her, not even sure what to say. She got up from the chair, walked up to me and placed my head in her chest as she embraced me. Our tears intermingled. Our breaths collapsed into one rhythmic sound, our hearts murmured to each other sounds of comfort.

I came clean to my mom and confessed everything. A week later, I decided to come forward and press charges on Amy. Darien warmly embraced me as I walked out the door. My other brother Duane, just looked at me blankly. I knew that he was judging me, wishing that I would've let things rock and that I would be silent and tough it out like he did.

My mom walked me over to the precinct. The cops took my name but laughed in my face when I told them what had happened. They ignored my mother's plea to investigate my story further. They told me that, that was what happened when a nigger like me messed around with a white girl. As we walked out the precinct, I gripped my mom's hand tighter than I had ever had before. I reverted to the little boy I actually was.

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“Sometimes I think back to that day and wonder if I would have screamed stop louder or pushed her back with more force, if things would have ended differently. Years have passed, and with time more incidents of rape and sexual assault was revealed. I was one of many middle school aged children that had been sexually abused and assaulted by her. I battled with the idea of being a rape victim. Maybe it's because a part of me still feels responsible for what happened. I still feel the guilt.” I said, glancing down at the blue and grey tiled floor. The white room felt slightly more suffocating than before.

“James.” my therapist said as she sat opposite to me. “She was a grown adult and you were a boy. She used and abused you. You are the victim, not her. “Please repeat after me”, she requested, “I James, am loved, valued, and protected.”

“I James am loved”- and before I could even continue tears started to flow from my eyes. To be loved and protected as a black man sounded so radical to me. I felt myself retracting into a fetal position. I had never heard anyone tell me that - not even my own mother, who I knew loved me.

“Breathe through it,” she said as she looked at my very red and wet face. A makeshift, American flag I suppose, the blue missing but the white slowly being restored.

“You can do it, James. Try again.”

“I, James, am loved, valued, and protected.”