

The Road to Damascus

Trigger Warning: This story contains the use of profanity and/or racial slurs.

By: Sharifa Thompson

Into the world of subtle variations of grey I walked into the greyish blue room, shivering. The room wasn't cold though. The guards walked in with a muscular guy who was around 5'10 with a warm cinnamon brown complexion. He must've been somewhere in his late 40's maybe early 50's.

The chains clanked as he placed his hands on the table.

I looked into his hard face. He looked like he had barely aged since the last time I saw him. His thick eyebrows, almost a unibrow at this point, relaxed on his face. I sat there waiting for him to start the conversation.

"Well, what did I deserve to get a visit from my estranged son?" his voice boomed in the empty room.

"I need answers."

"Answers, hmm. What type of answers?"

I looked blankly at him, unsure of what I wanted to say.

He pummeled through with more questions. "What, the cat got your tongue? Matter of face, how is your little boyfriend? Y'all still going around pretending to be a couple. You already know how I feel about that shit...disgusting."

"My girlfriend is doing well."

"Girlfriend? Hmm, well, oh me oh my. So you not...wait are you playing both sides of the field?"

My body tensed up. I took a death breath and attempted to proceed with my first question. "How come you never loved me?"

He ignored my question. "I always knew your ass was a little fruity, he chuckled. Your little punk ass was always out here doing the most."

I pressed. “Why didn’t you love me?”

“I blame your mother for that shit, always condoning it. I guess that’s why you’re a momma’s boy, because there’s no way you could’ve been a man’s man with all that. No sir”, he said nodding his head in disapproval.

“man I—”

I cut in. “Are you proud of yourself?”

“Excuse me?” I watched as his eyes narrowed. “Listen, he said as he pulled his chair closer to the table. Don’t come in here antagonizing me. Because best believe I will jump over this table and whip your ass. You must’ve forgotten who I was, but I will remind you real quick. Don’t do it.”

“All I did, everything that I did, was to make you love me. You never loved me despite all I did and I hated you for that. But I legit, don’t even care anymore. I just want to know why.”

He laughed to himself. “It’s crazy how you come up in here, trying to chastise me like I’m YOUR son. I literally gave up all I had to raise you and this is what I get. An entitled fruit loop that thinks he’s grown. Shit, life’s crazy.”

“Did what? You didn’t do shit. You always pushed me away whenever I tried to get love from you. And can you stop with that ish, I’m not even gay and I never been. “

“Could’ve fooled me. Talk about a wolf in sheep's clothing. Do you remember when I used to take you around the park when you were five?”

“Barely,” I responded.

“How about when I would take you to McDiddys after school every Friday?”, he chuckled to himself. Wait—this is a good one— how about when we would run around the track in Wingate on Sunday mornings.”

I fidgeted with my watch. Unwilling to make eye contact with him. I looked down and realized my shoes were untied. *How did that happen?* I wondered to myself. *I can't tie a shoelace to save my life.*

“It’s like you have selective memory. Isn’t that crazy. Who do you think was the one that took care of you while your mother was out here chasing her dreams like she was on some Disney shit?”

“You don’t get it, do you? I didn’t want you to buy me stuff. I wanted to feel loved by you. I wanted you to rub my back when I was sick. That’s all I wanted. I wanted you to love me.”

“Nigga, what this look like to you? Full House? Do I look like Uncle Jesse? Because I don’t know what you thought this was. Sorry, wrong family son. Wrong family.”

“You see things are always a joke to you. Ain’t it? I’m literally trying to express my emotions and this is how you react? Bet.”

“How the hell would I look, a grown man, out here kissing you up and whatnot. This the gay shit, I was talking about. I tried to prepare for this world but you weren’t learning. I was teaching you how to survive, out there. Because I knew I couldn’t always look out for you. But man, were you different. “

“Yeah, sounds like I was a disappointment.”

“You always do this shit.”

“What is the problem now?” I rolled my eyes.

“It’s you! Here you come to visit me to garner pity for yourself. Nigga, you had a good life. You were never hungry, never in danger, never not loved. So for you to come up here talking about, ‘I need answers’ get the hell outta here. Shit.”

“You don’t get it. YOU STILL DON’T FREAKING GET IT. I said as I slammed my hands against the table. The guards dropped their arms to their sides and looked at me like they were stunned. Perhaps they were shocked at the rage that seemed to be coming from such a “composed young man”, such a “respectable young man”. I guess I inherited his rage too. My dad just looked at me sternly.

I exhaled. “I needed you and you left. I needed someone to teach me how to tie a tie. Someone to show how to bag a girl. Someone to go fishing with me or some cheesy shit like that. I needed that from you and you was not there. And honestly, that shit broke me.”

His brown skin glistened in the evening light that shone through the small window to the left of our heads. He placed his hands over his head. I watched as he rubbed his eyes. He let out a few grunts and bowed his head while he covered his face with his hands.

“Dad.”

He looked up at me, almost in the same way he did when I was little and would come crying into his arms after getting injured. He of course, would tell me to shake it off. “Men don’t cry. Walk that shit out.” he would say. Still, I always had a sense that he was holding back. Like he wanted to love me but was unsure how to do so.

“Dad. Mom is dying and I’m scared.”

“SHIT!” He got up from his seat swiftly causing his chains to loudly bang against the table. The guards quickly moved towards him. “GIMME A MINUTE.” He screamed. The guards returned to their post by the door. He sat back down and pulled himself in towards the table. I didn’t break the silence because I knew that we needed a moment to recalibrate ourselves.

“I know I didn’t love you the way you needed to be loved but I tried. I swear I tried my best. I can’t even lie, I miss all of you. I made a mistake and I regret it. I regret it every day. If I

could I would take it back. “Man,” he said, rubbing his bald head, “I’m still trying to process what you said. Is it cancer?”

“Yea.”

“Dang, that’s wild. How long does she have to live?” Do you all know?”

“Nah, I don’t know. My eyes started to fill with water and my throat grew lumpy.

“Maybe less than a year.” I managed to let out.

“Listen, she’s strong and she's gonna beat it. And I’m not just saying that, because I’ve felt her slaps” he said slightly grinning. She’s a strong woman because she knows when to give up, give in, and get help. I ain’t never met someone like her ever in my life. Y’all gonna be ight. Trust and believe.”

“Yeah, I hope so.”

Time’s up the guards announced.

“Ight man, take care” I said as I stood up with him and gave him a bounce.

“Yeah, you too. “ He responded with a slight smile on his face.

I smiled back because I barely ever saw him smiling. He had a great smile, a smile that made you forget that he could knock you out in a second and walk away like nothing happened. A smile that sometimes slipped through when he realized he was safe and protected.