

I Called Him Temptation Day 1

Pop up Guy. He's always where you're not looking for him. Formerly known as, that one dude from high school, A.K.A. Tino. After releasing me from his embrace, I told him I'd see him around. No need to chase after a dead dream, even if that dead dream's standing right in front of you. Besides, he has a girlfriend, I have a boyfriend, and he'd never be serious about me.

"Do you smell weed?" That was the first thing he asked me the first time I met him years ago.

I was walking to class before the bell when the halls were still empty, and he insisted on walking with me. Ever since, I've seen him here and there. I didn't learn his name until my senior year of high school.

"Where are you going?" He asks.

"Home. I just got done with class and there's nothing else here for me to do."

"Home?? Can't you stay a little longer, come in here with me?"

"I'm good. I'd really rather go home." I look toward the exit, pressing my lips together.

"Really? So you don't even want to talk to me?"

"I never said that!"

"You're coming with me."

Before I knew what was happening, he was grabbing me by my shoulders and pushing me into Student Life. Nervously, I smiled at the 2 other people that I already knew and said 'hi.'

"Boy, what are you doing with her?" The front desk girl asked. Little did she know, I was wondering the same thing.

"This is my girlfriend." He wraps his arms around me and lays his head on my shoulder.

"No, he's not." I laugh and try pushing him off of me unsuccessfully. I know he's playing, he did this in high school, but what if they don't know that? Does it matter? Part of me wishes it could be true, but I shake the thought from my mind.

"This is my girlfriend. You're my girlfriend."

"No." I shake my head quickly. "Anyways, what are y'all talking about in here?" I ask, attempting to dilute the growing awkwardness.

"She told me she's started working out and was asking me for tips." Tino says

"Yeah, and I told him that it's different for guys than girls because guys can eat more and have better workouts." She says.

It turned into this debate between them about workouts and diets and all this other stuff that sounded like a foreign language to me. So, I just nod and glance outside the office, imagining sneaking out of those doors and to my car. I don't know why he dragged me in here.

“What do you think, Mage?”

“Hm?”

“He’s skinny, right? But he keeps saying he has curves and I don’t see no curves!”

“Oh, yeah, I guess he is skinny.” I observe him thoughtfully. He’s not a big guy by any stretch and he’s short. But he’s got a nice body.

“No, I’m a curvy man. If I took my shirt off you could see what I’m talking about.”

Heat rises in my face. I can’t let myself watch him take his shirt off. Before doing anything, more students come in to talk to our front desk friend. He came back over to me and stood next to me. I ask him what he’s even doing at my school.

“I go here.”

“No you don’t.”

“Ok. I was visiting friends. I come up here every now and then to see old friends and talk to people.”

“Aww, that’s nice.”

We walk outside the office and continue talking. We don’t get far before he asks me if I want to hang out with him. Right now. I think he’s talking about at the school and agree. Only, he’s not talking about at school. He wants me to ride on his motorcycle to the place of my choice. My anxiety rises as I think of every possible thing that could go wrong. For one, I might know him, but no way do I know him well enough to just ride off

with him into the sunset without any question. Besides, I have a boyfriend, I can't be doing anything like that.

Instead of giving him an answer, I ask several questions. Why did he want to hang out? Why with me? Doesn't he have other things to do? What about his friends? What about me barely knowing him? He answers most of them, but I'm still hesitant. He's not taking 'no' for an answer.

"When was the last time you did something spontaneous?" He asks.

Thinking for a moment, the best response I can offer is a quiet "I don't know."

"Do you trust me?"

I look at him up and down from head to toe. "I don't know you."

He feigns hurt, and there's a brief silence before he brings up his bike again.

"I'm not gonna ride on your bike. If anything, I'd rather drive to wherever it is we're going. I'd feel...safer." I say.

My subconscious gnaws at me. *Wouldn't this be considered cheating? Me going somewhere with a strange man? Then again, this is ok, he's like an old friend. Kinda. I mean, wouldn't I regret it later if I said no. Ok, I did say no several times, but I would like to do something at least almost fun for once. Oh my gosh, it's been so long since I did anything fun. Oh, what the hell, Mage, just do it!*

I eventually give in and agree to going to the nearest mall with him. In my car. The only other person who I've driven in my car is my mom. Before unlocking the doors, I

hesitate, still uncertain about letting this guy in my car. More than that, I worry about everything he might do. I glance over as he stuffs his hat in his bag. What if he rapes or murders me right in my car? He could have a knife or a gun in there! *What if he doesn't, though?*

Getting in my car, I feel my heart in my throat as I worry about my basic radio and what we'd listen to—also, where is the nearest mall? I check my Maps app, and luckily, the mall I'm most familiar with how to get to is closest. I would hate to have a wreck finding my way anywhere else. Just that quickly, I'm not worried about him permanently injuring me.

“Ok, so just a heads up, I'm not all that great at driving. So, don't judge me!” I warned before starting the car.

“Uh oh. You're not gonna get me killed with your driving, are you?” He gripped his seatbelt tighter.

As I drove, we talked, which was a pleasant surprise. I've gotten so used to the strained silences with the people who do spend time with me, I've come to expect it. He even asked me about things no one ever asks me about anymore. What do you write about? What do you want to write about? What are your dreams? What's your favorite thing to do? Why did I choose my major? Do I want to have a family someday? Then he told me more about himself and what he's been doing in the past year since I last saw him at Walmart. I appreciated the clear roads and clear skies as I listened to his voice and the soft beat of whatever song played on the radio.

With each admirable thing he said, I felt more and more like crying. I mean, he has a job, is aspiring to more, and actually has a plan on getting there. He's working at some factory now and makes decent money, but he wants to be a nursing assistant. He's looking to enroll in a school to get his training and everything and is already talking with an admissions counselor about what he needs to get done beforehand.

"I'm so happy for you!" I said as genuine as I could muster. I am happy for him, I really am, I just wish this wouldn't be the last time I see him because I know it will be. Mixed in his stories and getting to know him, I got to know more about his girlfriend. Well, *ex-fiancée*, actually. He tells me what sounds like the perfect love story gone sour.

"What? Why'd y'all break up? When did y'all break up?"

"2 months ago. She put me through a bunch of shit and I did nothing but love her."

I park my car close to the entrance of the mall and turn to him, offering supportive words. Wow, fresh out of a breakup that could have been a marriage, what can I possibly say to that? Honestly, every time he mentions her, I feel a little uncomfortable because I can tell he still loves her. In his voice, in his eyes. Even though he denies it, those feelings may fade, but when its that deep, they never go away.

Inside the empty mall, which happens to be my favorite place to meet up with strangers I meet online and other people I don't know that well (like Tino), he lets me lead the way. He buys us sodas from one of the shops—orange for me, Sprite for him—and we walk around and talk.

“Do you have kids? How old are your babies?”

I look at him like he’s crazy because I have no idea where this came from. “I don’t have kids.”

“I thought you told me you had babies?”

“Since you keep asking me that, do you have kids?” I take a sip of my soda, observing the contrast of his beard and baby dreads. “I bet you do.”

He went from he does have kids to he doesn’t to just nieces and nephews. Rinse and repeat. I decided it didn’t matter because it didn’t affect me anyway. Yet, he kept asking me if I had kids, which was kinda weird, I’ll admit. Was he insinuating something?

Probably.

“I like that dress.” I point to a short, shiny black dress with silver accents.

“Me too.”

“I bet your curves would look great in it. Since you’re a curvy man.” I tease. Seeing I’m able to make him laugh makes me smile more than it should.

For lunch, we eat ice cream. Checking the time, I can’t believe I’ve passed over an hour with this strange man.

“How much time do you have?” He asks. I take another look at my watch—1:35—and make up a time that works for me. The sooner I get home, the better.

“Till 2:30. So another hour.” I say. I don’t want him to feel like I’m rushing him. Besides, I’m really enjoying doing something different than the usual.

A man walking around with business cards passes by. I ignore him, but Tino doesn’t. He speaks to the man and he comes over to us and asks if he’s looking for a haircut, if so, he could hook him up. Instantly, he regrets it. It’s the third time he’s been asked about a haircut because his starter dreads are, I guess, looking like the struggle. I swallow my laughter, shaking my head instead.

Pouring the rest of my soda in my ice cream, he gives me a weird look.

“What? It’s really good this way! Stop looking at me like that.” I say, shoving another spoonful into my mouth.

“What does your mom think of you being here? Does she know you’re here with me?”

I shake my head, confused once again. “Does it matter? I’m sure she’d care, but I’m staying late at school for all she knows.”

“What does your dad think? Your sister? Your brother? What would they say?”

“I don’t know, wh—”

“What would your boyfriend say about you being here?” He asks with the same lightness as the previous questions, and I know I don’t have to say anything.

I freeze and look into my cup, then at him.

“Wait, you have a boyfriend? Why are you here with me?”

“I’m sure he’d be pretty mad, but at the same time, I don’t know. I mean he’s all the way in this other town and it’s like...you kept asking me and wouldn’t take no, so you know why I’m here.”

“Is he gonna come here and whoop my ass?”

Suddenly, I turned our conversation in a serious direction. I couldn’t help it, it had been bothering me so much and he was being such a great listener. Besides, I knew he didn’t see me in a sexual way anyway. What did I have to lose? I twirled my spoon around and looked into his eyes.

“Can I tell you something?” Then I tried backtracking. “I don’t even know if I should be telling you this.” *Because I shouldn’t.*

In the next hour $\frac{1}{2}$, he gave me his number, promised me one date, and to treat me like a queen in that duration. I told him he really didn’t have to. I insisted he not, but he insisted harder. Before skating off on his skateboard, he told me if I don’t hear from him by Tuesday, text him what I want to do on Saturday.

For the first time in weeks, months even, I was happy.