

Ashamed for men

I saw him approach this young girl in the café. She was listening to music and reading, generally minding her own business, and he invaded her space, sitting at her table, and started talking to her. I couldn't hear what he was saying, but I could tell she was uncomfortable. She took one of her earplugs off, and said something to the man. He replied, and she shook her head. Then, he leant closer, and that's when I decided to intervene. I sat down at her table, in front of the man, and said;

- Hi guys, what are you talking about?

-None of your goddamn business – he said. The girl just looked down, clearly embarrassed about the situation.

- Why? Are you guys family or something? – I said.

- No, we are not – said the girl, looking at me in the eyes for the first time.

- Do you feel comfortable with this man? – I asked her

-Listen prick, I would stay away from other people's business unless you want to get hurt – said the guy, getting worked up, and red. I ignored him, and kept looking at her. The girl, slowly, shook her head.

- Alright dude – I said to the man, looking at him now – I think it's time for you to leave. You are bringing shame to all of us males.

His face went even redder, and he replied loudly – Do not tell me what to do motherfucker.

I said nothing, just looking at him calmly, while trying to think of something to say. The girl was wide eyed, looking at us both in turns. The other three people in the café were all staring at us, and the waitress had her phone in her hand.

The guy didn't like the silence, and said – Alright, you want me to leave? You're gonna have to make me. Outside. Now. – He said, while standing up and leaning closer to me over the table.

- I don't want to fight you, but if that's what it's going to take for you to leave, then let's go – I took off my glasses and put them on the table, then stood up. The girl was in shock, and said to me – You don't have to do this...
- I know – I replied

I walked out of the café, followed closely by the man and by the stares of everyone. The waitress was now holding her phone to her ear, waiting for an answer to her call. I thought to myself "I've never been in a fight before. This guy is really going to hurt me" but weirdly, I didn't feel afraid, I was calm, just acknowledging that I didn't care. I turned in the walkway, and looked at the man.

He stood in front of me, couple meters away, and started cracking his knuckles. He was taller than me, and slightly more muscular. He wore jeans, and an open jacket, and had short, black hair. His eyes were angry, and he spoke;

- I'm going to enjoy breaking your face, pretty boy
- I'm not angry, you know – I said
- What, getting scared, pussy? – he said, smiling
- Not really. I just feel ashamed for you. – I replied

His eyes widened, and almost immediately narrowed into a scowl. His body tensed, and his knees flexed. Then he raised his hands, closing them into fists.

I took it as a signal to get ready, so I lowered my center of gravity, placing my feet wide apart, and flexing my knees much lower than him, bringing me down to about the height of his chest. I raised my hands, but kept them open, and got ready to react quickly. I didn't have a plan, so I just focused on my breathing, and on him.

He suddenly closed the distance between us, and threw a right hook towards my face. I jumped to the side, evading him, and punched him in his right kidney. He grunted, but brought his hand back quickly, and backhanded me across the face before I could move away.

Stunned, I took a step back, and went on the defensive while he threw a flurry of blows. I found a window to throw a couple of punches of my own, but they didn't seem to affect him much. Then, he tried to punch me in the face again, and I ducked. I saw that his legs were left in a bad position after missing his punch, and I kicked him in the side of the knee. He screamed and fell down to one knee, the one I kicked. I took the chance to slam *my* knee into his kidney again. He moaned in pain, and I took a few steps back.

- Did you have enough? – I asked him, breathing deeply, but steady. My cheek throbbed, and I felt a few bruises forming in my arms and chest.

The man looked up at me, and I saw hatred in his eyes, but also tears.

- Fuck you – He said, and then, in a burst of speed, he slammed into me with his arms wrapping around mine.

I fell, unable to stop myself, and then he sat on top of me and began punching. I managed to cover my head with both arms, and I heard screams coming from the café door. With an effort, I managed to wriggle my body and throw him out of balance. I grabbed him by the jacket, and threw him to the side. I got up on my feet as fast as I could, and faced him as he did the same. Then, we slammed into each other again, but this time I was ready, and managed to hold *his* arms. In a sort of embrace, I squeezed him as hard as I could, pressing my head into his chest so he couldn't headbutt me. He tried kicking me, but we were too close for it to be effective.

He wriggled, and tried to get free of my embrace, but I held on tightly

- I know how you feel – I burst out, the side of my face still pressed against his chest. He went suddenly still. – All that anger. It's burning you. And it isn't really about me, is it?

I heard him exhale loudly, but he didn't answer.

- I was taught that anger sometimes it's really sadness wearing a disguise. I want you to know that it's ok. It's ok to feel it.

He began heaving, silent sobs wracking his body. I reduced the pressure of my clinching, but still held on tight.

- It's ok. It's ok... - I said softly
- I'm sorry... - he whispered, his voice quivering. I decided then to relax my embrace, letting his arms free.
- I forgive you – I said. He hugged me, my arms still around his chest, and began crying into my shoulder. I held him tight, my eyes closed, and we stayed like that for a while. It couldn't have been more than two minutes, but felt a lot longer. Finally, he stopped sobbing, and began to breathe deeply, getting his emotions under control, like all men are taught to do. I put my hands on his shoulders and extended my arms, separating us and looking into his eyes. They were red, and his face was streaked with tears.
- You have to let yourself feel this – I said to him – Otherwise your emotions will keep exploding beyond your control.

His eyes looked anguished, and more tears started falling while he nodded to me. Then he closed his eyes and breathed deeply and slowly, and while he exhaled he started cleaning his face with his sleeves, clearly self-conscious about the tears. I let him go, and waited. He opened his eyes and said – I'm sorry. That was really stupid. I shouldn't have bothered her.

- I know. But you shouldn't apologize to me – I said, while looking at the café. Everyone was outside now, staring at us. The waitress had her phone held away from her ear, the call forgotten. And the young girl was covering her mouth with both hands, her eyes teary.

The man took another deep breath and walked towards the girl, limping slightly. The waitress took a step forward, protective, and the guy stopped. He looked at the girl and said;

- I'm really sorry. I don't know why I did that.

The girl just nodded, wide eyed.

- I'm gonna leave now. – said the man.
- That would be for the best – said the waitress, but there was no resentment in her voice.

The man nodded, and turned around. He began walking towards me, his limp getting better.

- I'm sorry about your knee – I said
- Don't be. It was a good move – he replied

I smiled, and he smiled back at me.

- Goodbye. And... thanks... - he said

I nodded once, blinking slowly, and said – Bye – still smiling.

He nodded back, and began walking away. I watched him go, took a deep breath, and let it go slowly, processing everything that had just happened.