



SPOTTING THE RED FLAGS

When a relationship turns abusive

NOX

*"Now you've got to make a decision;
One that you can choose to make once,
Or a million times throughout your life."*

"I told you not to call me anymore", you whimper into the phone. A part of you, a part which you knew was mistaken, had hoped that this would all be over in one go. However, you soon realise that saying you wanted it all to end was the least challenging aspect of your predicament.

A deadpan voice, devoid of emotion replies, "I am thinking of quitting my job."

"What?"

"I can't work. I can't concentrate."

"What do you want from me?!"

"I don't have any motivation left. Why are you doing this to me?"

"Stop! I'm not doing anything. Just stop."

Stop. Make it stop.

That's all you wanted. That's all that you've wanted for a long time now. You let yourself hope that this could end without catastrophe after that first phone call, when you finally called it off. He hadn't acted out. He hadn't yelled. He hadn't threatened you. In short, he hadn't been himself. And you had fallen for it. Only now do you realise that he hadn't let it sink in. He hadn't formulated his plan. Yet.

Well, now he has. He has formed the perfect plan of emotionally blackmailing you into submission. As you hold on to your phone, wondering what your next

words should be, and frightened to the core with the possibility of a person's future hanging in the balance, the crushing weight of your mistakes over the past year fall onto you in an avalanche.

How did you get here? How could there not have been any warnings that the person you had fallen so madly in love with was an utter psychopath? However, maybe there were signs; red flags that you over-looked while seeing your world through rose-tinted glasses.

SPARK:

You meet him at a friend's party. His sense of humour attracts you immediately. You feel the instant chemistry between you; it is delicious and addictive. You feel yourself falling just a bit.

ILLUSION:

You are deliriously happy. He showers you with affection, and you bask in the glory of being the sole source of comfort in his life. Sometimes his confessions of commitment make you a little uncomfortable, but you know you're in this for the long run. So what if he's a little more invested in the relationship than you right now? Some would say that's a good thing.

He opens up to you about all the hardships in his life. You love the feeling you get when you can make him smile through it all. You don't acknowledge it, but you're suffering from the saviour syndrome.

DENIAL:

"You look way too alluring in that dress. I want you to look this way only for me."

You smile. His possessiveness is so

cute. You try to make a joke of how you'd like to see him protecting you from everyone who tries to attack you. He's not amused. You can see it in his eyes. You don't want the situation escalating. It's just a change of clothes. But the demands don't stop.

"Where were you? You need to tell me where you go all the time. I worry about you."

He worries about you. He loves you so much. Keeping him updated about where you are is the least you can do.

"You know I don't like him. Why do you insist on hanging out with him?"

You know your friend is just that: a friend. Then again, your relationship is important to you, and it's just easier to distance yourself a little from your friend to avoid arguments.

BOUNDARIES:

He wants to know your Facebook password. It's not a request; it's an order. You're exasperated at his paranoia, and you hand it over because there's nothing suspicious and you want to prove to him that you love him alone.

You notice that he likes to test your limits. Every time you say no, he teases the line just a little. Not enough to make you yell, but enough to hurt you; enough for you to call him out on it. Then he's upset.

"I'm sorry I did that. I just love you so much, I can't control myself. I'm just a terrible human being," he says.

And then it's you feeling guilty, and it's you apologizing and you can't quite figure out how it happened, but the line

you drew has been wiped clean.

REALISATION:

The first time he swears at you, it hits you like a brick. You knew he had a temper, but you never expected him to direct those words at you. You've been walking on eggshells for a while now, but a question has been nagging you endlessly.

"Honey, you would never hit me right?"

"Of course I'd never even dream of hitting you if you didn't do anything to deserve it."

That answer finally sends those warning bells in your head on overdrive. You've got to get out. But you don't know if you can anymore. He's the only one who loves you. He's the only one who will have you. He's made sure you believe those words to their core. So you stay.

STRENGTH:

You stay. For the first time, and the second time, and each consecutive time till you finally crack. The tiny part of your own self which still remains, which he hasn't yet managed to kill, demands that you respect yourself and break free. If he's the only one who will ever love you, then you can learn to live without love. You can no longer be with a person who is only happy when you are miserable. You make the call.

And that's how you got here, holding the phone, standing alone in the face of an impossible situation. Now you've got to make a decision; one that you can choose to make once, or a million times throughout your life. It's your decision: you or him?